



Province of Alberta

The 25th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

April 9, 2001 to November 29, 2001
and Index

The Honourable Kenneth R. Kowalski, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 9, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/09

[The Mace was on a cushion below the table]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated March 21, 2001, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

THE CLERK: Please be seated.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! All rise, please.
Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois E. Hole, CM, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Would everyone please be seated.

MR. HANCOCK (Provincial Secretary): Hon. members, I am commanded by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to inform you that she does not see fit to declare the causes of the summoning of the present Legislature of this province until a Speaker of this Assembly shall have been chosen according to law.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Premier left the Chamber]

THE CLERK: Please be seated.

Election of a Speaker

THE CLERK: Hon. members, pursuant to the Lieutenant Governor's direction and section 16(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act nominations are invited for the Office of Speaker of this Assembly for the 25th Legislature. Ms Haley.

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. I can't tell you how pleased I am to be able to rise in this Assembly to participate in the Speaker's election process, a process that here in Alberta we are already taking for granted but which is so rare on a global basis as to almost be nonexistent, and I say global because even though we rarely think about it, we are in fact part of a network of parliaments, a system that is rooted in over 800 years of history.

I am so proud to be able to nominate this gentleman for the position of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. On April 14, 1997, when I nominated him the first time, I believed that his knowledge of the parliamentary system, his sense of history, and his work as an MLA as well as his pride in being a parliamentarian would serve us all well, and I believe the same holds true today. I believe that our Assembly has been enhanced by his ability to make this marvelous building a place not just for us as MLAs but for all the people.

He has initiated many things for the people of Alberta, such as Mr.

Speaker's Youth Parliament, which just concluded last week, School at the Legislature, the display of the Famous Five, the choirs that now come here at Christmastime, and moments such as the Holocaust memorial service, which serve as reminders to us and to all Albertans that this building belongs to all the people of this province. One of the projects he is currently working on will see a series of plaques that will correspond to each of the elections in the province of Alberta, leaving a reminder to future generations of the role that elected people from 1905 onward have played in the history of our province.

As a historian he has a keen sense of the role parliamentarians play on a global basis. All of us are in fact parliamentarians. He has encouraged many of us to be participants at various times in different parliamentary meetings, whether it is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the European Partnership of Parliaments, the Francophone parliamentary association, or as participants in the National Association of State Legislators in the U.S.A. By encouraging us to participate, we not only learn about situations in other countries but pass on what we have learned here in Alberta to others around the world. The purpose, of course, is to remind all of us that we are part of something larger than one constituency or one province and that the more we learn, the better we will do right here in our own Assembly on behalf of Albertans. The more barriers we remove globally, the stronger democracy will be.

I believe that he wants each of us to be proud of who and what we are and that he has tried to instill a sense of dignity and honour into our daily Routine and into our role as legislators. Each MLA, regardless of party, is important here.

When I was first elected in 1993, I was sitting upstairs in my office one day when he appeared at my door. He was just doing a walk-around to say hello to some of the new MLAs in the building. He told me that day that if I ever needed any help or advice not to hesitate to call him. Well, I kind of laughed, Mr. Clerk, because at the time he was Deputy Premier, he was a minister, and he had a number of areas of responsibility not just to one constituency but to the whole province. I really didn't think he'd have time.

Strangely enough, several months later I did have a problem and no comprehension of how to deal with it. I called him, and sure enough, he set aside what he was doing to talk to me. He took the time to listen to the issue and give me his best advice. I truly appreciated it, and since that time I have seen him do the same thing for many in this Chamber. He set an example for me that day, and it's an example that I try really hard to aspire to, not only to be the best MLA in the province of Alberta but to be there for my colleagues when they have a problem.

When I nominated him four years ago, I said that he believes that all MLAs play a fundamental role in our democracy, that this Legislature is truly our home away from home, and that it should be a Chamber of respect, of honour, and of integrity. In fact, it must be an environment in which all of us can function freely on behalf of our constituents. The Speaker has a vital role to play in ensuring that that is what happens here.

It is a privilege for me to once again nominate Ken Kowalski, the Member for Barrhead-Westlock, to the position of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

THE CLERK: Thank you, Ms Haley.

Mr. Kowalski, do you wish to accept the nomination?

MR. KOWALSKI: Mr. Clerk, I'd be honoured to accept the nomination.

THE CLERK: Are there further nominations? If there are no further nominations, I declare the nominations closed, and accordingly I

declare that Mr. Ken Kowalski, MLA for Barrhead-Westlock, is elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the 25th Legislature. [applause]

[The Speaker, with apparent reluctance, was escorted to the chair by Mr. Klein and Dr. Nicol]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, let me at the outset very humbly say thank you very, very much. I know that the tradition of Speaker dates back to 1381 in the British parliamentary form of governance. This Assembly is the continuation of that, and what we do here is important. This is democracy. This is the highest court in the province of Alberta. This is a place of dignity. This is a place of decorum. This is a place where honourable men and women come together and debate policies and exchange their views on issues. It is a place that can bring great pride to all of the citizens of Alberta and will continue to bring great pride to all of the citizens of Alberta.

You honour me today with the greatest of honours, and I thank you very, very humbly. To the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, thank you so much for the very kind words. They're very much appreciated.

Hon. members, I'm very, very proud to be among you. I'm very, very proud to be one of you. I will not let you down. Thank you very much.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms placed the Mace on the table]

Prayers

THE SPEAKER: I would now like to invite everyone to stand for the prayer.

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

Please be seated.

Election of a Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 17(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act and Standing Order 55(1)(a) nominations are invited for the Office of Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of this Assembly for the 25th Legislature. I now open nominations. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to stand in this Assembly to nominate the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Highwood. This member was first elected to the Legislature in 1989. He was re-elected in 1993, 1997, and in 2001. On August 30, 1993, he became the first elected Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. He was re-elected to this position on April 14, 1997.

The Member for Highwood is indeed, in my opinion, an experienced, fair-minded, honourable, courteous, and firm member of this Assembly. So it is my honour to present this member for election to be the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Highwood, would you accept the nomination?

MR. TANNAS: It's with honour that I would accept this, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, would there be additional nominations? It's my pleasure to declare that Mr. Don Tannas, the MLA for Highwood, is elected Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the 25th Legislature.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first would like to offer congratulations to you on being re-elected to the chair, and I would like to express my appreciation to the hon. Member for St. Albert for her kind words and to thank all hon. members for this honour. I will do my best to uphold the centuries-old tradition of this office.

Election of a Deputy Chairman of Committees

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 17(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act and Standing Order 55(1)(b) nominations are invited for the Office of Deputy Chairman of Committees for the 25th Legislature. The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure and honour to rise today and nominate the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall for the position of Deputy Chairman of Committees. During the mandate of the 24th Legislature the hon. member fulfilled the duties of Deputy Chairman of Committees on countless occasions on a voluntary basis. He demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the House rules and respect for the parliamentary process. Knowing him personally and professionally, I am certain that he will be fair and impartial and that he will be an excellent addition to the highly dignified and esteemed team of Speaker and Deputy Speaker. Therefore, I nominate the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, will you accept the nomination?

MR. SHARIFF: With honour I accept.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, are there further nominations? There being none, then it's my pleasure to declare that Mr. Shiraz Shariff, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, is hereby declared the elected Deputy Chairman of Committees for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the 25th Legislature.

The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to begin by first thanking each and every one of you for entrusting me with this responsibility. I would also like to congratulate you on your election to the position of Speaker, and I would also like to congratulate the Deputy Speaker on his election. Friends, I look forward to serving you, and I will not let you down.

Thank you.

[At 1:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 3 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 10, 2001**

3:00 p.m.

Date: 01/04/10

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Welcome.

Father, on this day of a new beginning we ask for Your guidance in the responsibility we have undertaken and Your help in fulfilling our duties. As Members of this Legislative Assembly may we faithfully serve all Albertans and, in serving them, serve You. Amen.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join us in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, while awaiting the arrival of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, I'd like to share some information about the 83 members that make up the 25th Legislature of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. These 83 members, 23 of whom were first elected on March 12, bring a vast wealth of experience and expertise to this Chamber. Many have had experience in more than one occupation.

Sixty-eight have a business and entrepreneurial history. Twenty-four were educators for a period of time. Sixteen are or were involved in the farming and agricultural industry. Thirteen have accounting/financial management experience. Eight have oil field experience. Five have experience in computer technology. Five are lawyers. Five have experience in the real estate field. Four have experience in the construction field. Four are professional authors. We have two members each with experience in police force services, nursing, and the forest industry. We have a single member in each of the medical, floral, television and radio reporting, and social services fields. One is a pastor with the Faith Covenant Church, one is a deacon and elder with the Christian Reformed Church, and one is a bishop with the Church of Latter Day Saints.

Public service by your MLAs can be summarized as follows: 24 are past councillors and/or reeves, 12 are former councillors and/or aldermen, seven are former mayors, and five are former school trustees.

This great province of ours is a fascinating mosaic of nationalities and cultures as well, and it's indeed gratifying that this diversity is

reflected in the makeup of the current Legislature. Based on the information provided, 56 MLAs were born in Alberta and 19 were born outside of this province, representing eight different provinces and territories in Canada. Another eight members were born outside of Canada in the countries of Lebanon, Vietnam, Scotland, Poland, India, Tanzania, and the United States.

Fifty-one years is the average age of our members, and there is an age span of 35 years between our youngest member and our most senior.

For at least two of our members politics seems to run in the family. We have with us in the current Legislature the son of the distinguished former Member for Lac Ste. Anne and Barrhead from 1967 to 1979. We also have the daughter-in-law of the also distinguished former Member for Cardston and Cardston-Chief Mountain from 1986 to 1997.

I would not want to forget to mention that a former executive assistant to a former cabinet minister of the early 1980s has returned to the Legislature Building as one of the 23 recently elected MLAs.

We are indeed fortunate to have members, men and women of integrity, character, and dignity, who will serve the province of Alberta with distinction.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois E. Hole, CM, and Mr. Hole, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Would everyone please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly have elected me as their Speaker, though I am but little able to fulfill the important duties thus assigned to me. If in the performance of those duties I should at any time fall into error, I pray that the fault may be imputed to me and not the Assembly, whose servant I am and who through me, the better to enable them to discharge their duties to their Queen and province, hereby claim all their undoubted rights and privileges, especially that they may have freedom of speech in their debates, access to your person at all seasonable times, and that their proceedings may receive from you the most favourable construction.

MR. HANCOCK (Provincial Secretary): Mr. Speaker, I am commanded by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to declare to you that she freely confides in the duty and attachment of this Assembly to Her Majesty's person and government, and not doubting that the proceedings will be conducted with wisdom, temperance, and prudence, she grants and upon all occasions will recognize and allow the Assembly's constitutional privileges.

I am commanded also to assure you that the Assembly shall have

ready access to Her Honour upon all suitable occasions and that all proceedings as well as your words and actions will constantly receive from her the most favourable construction.

HER HONOUR: Mr. Premier, ministers, very distinguished guests, many friends, lots of friends, great friends, to the loyal opposition, to all of you, this is a great time. To you our Speaker, I can think only that you are to be congratulated and that you will do a very, very great job.

May I say before I start the Speech from the Throne that Ted and I were extremely fortunate to get invited to a very special Mass. It was a Mass that was held at St. Thomas More Roman Catholic Church. It was called the Red Mass. Many of you who are Roman Catholic may know what I am speaking of. For those of you that are Roman Catholic and don't know, I will tell you. For the Protestants who really don't know, I will tell you.

We were very fortunate to be invited to this Red Mass. It was very lovely. If any of you ever get that opportunity, don't miss it. It was a beautiful event, but we did not know what it was all about. We discovered that lawyers and judges come to the Mass wearing red robes, and the rest of us pray for them. We prayed quite hard.

It was a beautiful time. His Grace Archbishop MacNeil, who had just retired, was there, a very, very special gentleman, a very nice man, I might add. I just enjoyed him so much. Very Scottish and very proud of his Scottish heritage. He told us a story, and the story goes like this. A woman's son went to college, and this woman decided that she'd better go and see her son, so she went to the college to see her son. He'd been there about three months. She asked him how everything was going. He said, "Fine." She said, "How is it with your two roommates?" He said: "Well, it's not so good at night. The one that sleeps in the cot to the left of me screams half the night. The one that sleeps in the cot to the right of me bangs his head up against the wall half the night." The mother said, "And what do you do?" He said, "I just keep playing my bagpipes." You must remember that His Grace is Scottish. He told the story, and I thought it was very interesting.

head: **Speech from the Throne**

HER HONOUR: Fellow Albertans, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the First Session of the 25th Alberta Legislature. Once again I have the privilege of delivering the Speech from the Throne.

Today begins a new legislative session with a new group of legislators who have been chosen by Albertans to represent them in this Chamber. Some are returning members; others are new. All have been given a solemn responsibility and a duty to honour the trust that has been placed upon them. As the business of this Assembly is conducted, I urge all members to respect the charge that has been placed upon them, to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the importance of their undertaking, and to remember that they are here in service to the people of this province.

It was only two months ago that I laid out the government's vision for Alberta's future. It was a vision of low taxes, no provincial debt, a strong economy, new jobs for our young people, sound infrastructure, good health care and education systems, stable agricultural communities, safe streets, and reliable social programs. During the course of the provincial election campaign Albertans learned more about that vision and the government's plan to achieve it. They talked about it with others, they thought about it, and on March 12 they endorsed it with their votes.

That plan still stands. I'm not going to repeat it today because Albertans already know what the plan is. It's the plan they voted for, and it's the plan the government will now carry out, aided by a

new configuration of ministries to address priority areas. Today this Assembly begins the work of making that vision a reality.

A Strong Economy

That work begins with maintaining and building on a strong economic base. This government recognizes that a strong economy is not an end in itself. Rather it is a means to achieve the things that matter most to Albertans. A growing and diversified economy supports investments to make our health and education systems the best they can be. It creates good jobs that allow people to provide for their families. It sustains the arts and cultural communities that add so much to our quality of life.

A strong economy begins with a solid fiscal plan. The government pledges that it will stay the course of its fiscal plan, a plan that has brought Alberta away from deficit and debt and into the security and prosperity the province now enjoys. It's a plan to keep taxes the lowest in Canada, ensure that spending is responsible and affordable, and eliminate the debt. It's a plan that will give Alberta's children a gift we all hope to be able to bestow: a future with limitless possibilities.

A foundation of Alberta's economy will continue to be its modern transportation infrastructure. The government will make strategic investments to improve the safety and efficiency of Alberta's roads and highways. This year an additional 35 kilometres of the north/south trade corridor will be twinned, bringing the total number of twinned kilometres to 860 of the 1,200 that will in time make up the corridor. When completed in 2007, the corridor will link Alberta to a continental trade and tourism route through the western United States and Mexico.

The government will continue to provide business and investment programs, especially in conjunction with the 2001 World Championships in Athletics. These programs will focus on the strategic benefits of investing in Alberta and demonstrate the province's diverse and world-class energy, petrochemical, forest and building products, agriculture and food, tourism, and information and communications technology sectors.

Alberta benefits tremendously from its participation in a free energy market. At the same time, the government will take steps to ensure a reliable, ample, and affordable energy supply within the province. Legislation will be introduced this session to put into law a commitment to help protect Albertans from high natural gas prices. This bill will ensure that Alberta consumers have a competitive natural gas service that maintains the Alberta advantage.

The government will work to reduce and stabilize electricity prices by streamlining the approval process to bring new generation projects onstream. The government will continue to address electricity price concerns and other consumer issues with the advice of the newly created government Advisory Council on Electricity.

Stable Agricultural Communities

Maintaining the viability of farms and rural communities continues to be a priority for this government. Recent events like outbreaks of disease and severe weather serve as reminders that safe, affordable food production cannot be taken for granted. Efforts to develop a long-term strategy for the health, sustainability, and growth of Alberta's agriculture industry will be accelerated based on the insights of Ag Summit 2000. Key among those efforts will be the introduction of a new policy dealing with intensive livestock operations and a renewal of efforts to provide Alberta farmers with marketing choice for their wheat and barley. The government stands by its commitment to support Alberta farmers in times of need.

A Clean Environment

Albertans recognize that a high quality of life also depends on a healthy environment. Our province is blessed with clear air, clean water, and a breathtaking landscape that supports a rich abundance of plants and wildlife. The government of Alberta will strengthen its reputation as a leader in environmental issues with a number of new initiatives to enhance environmental stewardship and ensure that economic growth is responsible and sustainable.

A Responsive Health Care System

As important as a clean environment in maintaining human health is a responsive health care system. Albertans are strongly committed to the publicly funded health care system, and the government of Alberta shares this commitment. The government's priorities for health care in the next year will focus on access to health services, illness prevention, and effective regional governance. The government will provide Albertans with a stronger voice in health system management. This fall Albertans will elect two-thirds of the board members of the 17 regional health authorities.

A Lifelong Learning System

Like health care, education continues to be a top priority of this government. Albertans need and deserve a lifelong learning system that provides the best possible start in the early grades, an accessible postsecondary system, and opportunities for job training and retraining throughout one's career.

The government will increase funding to school boards to help improve student learning. Boards may use these dollars to reduce class sizes, enhance literacy programs, or introduce other initiatives so that learning, particularly at the earliest grade levels, can be enhanced. There will also be more dollars for teacher salaries to ensure that Alberta can continue to attract and retain Canada's best teachers. Work will continue on the government's \$1 billion, three-year commitment to build new schools and modernize existing ones so our students have a safe, healthy environment in which to learn.

Supports for postsecondary students will be augmented. The number of heritage scholarships will be increased to meet the demand, athletic scholarships will be boosted, the Jason Lang scholarship will be expanded to students in their third and fourth years, and a new scholarship will be introduced for graduate students. Automatic student loan forgiveness and a more user-focused student finance system will also be introduced to make the postsecondary learning system more affordable.

Safe, Strong Communities

Another priority of the government will be to make Alberta communities as safe, strong, and self-reliant as they can be. The fight against crime remains a top priority for this government. This year community groups will receive more than \$550,000 in grants for crime prevention initiatives. The Victims of Crime Act will be amended to better support and serve victims of crime by ensuring equitable award decisions and simplifying the appeal process.

Albertans value a caring society where children, seniors, and others who are vulnerable receive the support they need. The government is committed to providing this support, beginning with giving children a strong start in life, particularly those that are most at risk. This year a new pilot program will be implemented in which mobile community teams respond to crisis situations involving children, youth, and families in government care or at risk of coming into care. Another new program will be introduced to provide mentoring to youth leaving child welfare to ease their transition to adulthood.

Support for low-income Albertans will continue to be provided. The government will review income support programs to determine whether they continue to meet clients' needs.

Arts and culture play a vital role in sustaining the high quality of life Albertans enjoy. Recognizing this, the government will extend the Alberta film development grant program to encourage the continued development of film arts in the province.

A Pledge

The government's plan for Alberta's future reflects the values of Albertans themselves, values of community and family, hard work and caring for others, creativity, confidence and innovation, and excellence in all endeavours. These are the values that have guided Albertans throughout the province's history, and they are the values that will continue to guide this government.

These values will shape Alberta's future, beginning with a Future Summit being held this fall where Albertans will help chart a course for the province's debt-free future. The summit will give all Albertans a voice in crafting the vision that will carry this province forward into the future.

The government will ask the Alberta Economic Development Authority to work with the ministers of Economic Development, Finance, and Revenue to plan and facilitate this event. The Community Development minister will also be part of the leadership team in recognition of the fact that the opportunities created by freedom from debt are not only about simple economics. Rather they are about quality of life. They are about the kind of province we want to live in and the kind of province we want for our children and grandchildren.

It is to our children and grandchildren that the government pledges to honour the trust that has been placed in it by Albertans. It will stay the course of debt reduction, fiscal accountability, and continued tax reform. It vows to build an Alberta that provides opportunities for all citizens to share in the province's prosperity and optimism, opportunities that will become limitless once the province becomes free of debt. This goal, once only a tiny pinpoint of light far in the distance, is now firmly in view thanks to the sacrifice and hard work of all Albertans.

It promises to maintain a strong economy and stable agricultural communities, foster science and research, keep our environment clean, support excellent health and education systems that meet all Albertans' needs, and help build caring, safe, strong communities.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and God bless you all.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're honoured today to have in our presence the mother of a current member whose father once served in this Assembly. The current member is the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and from 1967 to 1979 this hon. member's father served as the MLA for the constituency of Lac

Ste. Anne and the constituency of Barrhead. In the Speaker's gallery today is the widow of the former member, Hugh Macarthur Horner, and mother of the current Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. I would like this lady to rise and receive the warm welcome: Mrs. Jean Horner.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

Bill 1 Natural Gas Price Protection Act

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act.

Mr. Speaker, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act would put into law our government's commitment to protect Albertans from unexpected spikes in the volatile price of natural gas. On February 6 I announced that the government would offer price protection if needed beyond April 30, when current natural gas rebate programs end. Designating this bill as Bill 1 emphasizes the importance our government places on delivering on its commitments to Albertans. Further details of this made-in-Alberta protection program will be made public in the days and weeks ahead after a thorough analysis of gas prices expected for 2001 has been completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Tablings

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have the honour to table a copy of the speech graciously given by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

Certificates of Election

THE CLERK: Mr. Speaker, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta pursuant to the Election Act a report containing results of the general election conducted on the 12th day of March 2001, which states that an election was conducted in the following electoral divisions, and the said report further shows that the following members were duly elected.

[The Clerk read the election returns]

Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the speech of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration tomorrow.

[Motion carried]

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Votes and Proceedings of this Assembly be printed after first having been perused by Mr. Speaker and that he do appoint the printing thereof and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

[Motion carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I move that the select standing

committees for the present session of the Legislative Assembly be appointed for the following purposes:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund,
- (2) Law and Regulations,
- (3) Legislative Offices,
- (4) Private Bills,
- (5) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing,
- (6) Public Accounts, and
- (7) Public Affairs.

In addition thereto, I move that there be appointed for the duration of the present Legislature a Special Standing Committee on Members' Services.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request the Assembly's unanimous consent to waive Standing Orders 49(1) and (3), providing for the establishment of a striking committee to prepare, recommend, and report a list of members, chairs, and deputy chairs to comprise the Assembly's seven standing committees and one special standing committee.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request the Assembly's unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 38(1)(a) in order to move the motion appointing the chairs, deputy chairs, and members to comprise the Assembly's seven standing committees and one special standing committee.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's seven standing committees and one special standing committee:

- (1) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Mr. Hutton, chair; Mr. Magnus, deputy chair; Mr. Bonner; Ms. Carlson; Mr. Fischer; Mr. Knight; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. Marz; and Mr. VanderBurg.
- (2) Law and Regulations: Mr. Friedel, chair; Mr. Herard, deputy chair; Rev. Abbott; Mrs. Ady; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Cenaiko; Mr. Danyluk; Ms. DeLong; Mrs. Gordon; Mr. Horner; Mr. Klapstein; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Maskell; Mr. Mason; Mr. Masyk; Mr. Rathgeber; Mr. Renner; Mr. Snelgrove; Mr. Vandermeer; and Mr. Yankowsky.
- (3) Legislative Offices: Mrs. Tarchuk, chair; Mr. Ducharme, deputy chair; Ms. Blakeman; Mr. Friedel; Mrs. Fritz; Ms. Graham; Mr. Hlady; Mrs. O'Neill; and Mr. Tannas.
- (4) Private Bills: Ms. Graham, chair; Ms. Kryczka, deputy chair; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Goudreau; Mr. Graydon; Mr. Jacobs; Mr. Johnson; Mr. Lord; Mr. Magnus; Mr. Maskell; Dr. Massey; Mr. McClelland; Mr. McFarland; Mr. Ouellette; Dr. Pannu; Mr. Pham; Mr. Rathgeber; Mr. Snelgrove; Mr. VanderBurg; Mr. Vandermeer; and Mr. Yankowsky.
- (5) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Mr. Klapstein, chair; Mr. Johnson, deputy chair; Rev. Abbott; Mr. Amery; Mr. Cao; Ms. Carlson; Mr. Danyluk; Mr. Fischer; Mrs.

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- Fritz; Mr. Graydon; Mr. Hlady; Mr. Jacobs; Mr. Knight; Mr. Lord; Mr. Loughheed; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Masyk; Mr. McClelland; Dr. Pannu; and Mr. Zwozdesky.
- (6) Public Accounts: Mr. MacDonald, chair; Mr. Shariff, deputy chair; Mrs. Ady; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Broda; Mr. Cao; Mr. Cenaiko; Ms DeLong; Mr. Goudreau; Mr. Hutton; Mrs. Jablonski; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. Marz; Mr. Mason; Mr. Ouellette; Dr. Taft; and Mrs. Tarchuk.
- (7) Public Affairs: Mr. Strang, chair; Mr. Pham, deputy chair; and all members of the Assembly.
- (8) Members' Services: Mr. Kowalski, chair; Ms Haley, deputy chair; Mr. Bonner; Mr. Broda; Mr. Ducharme; Mr. Horner; Mrs. Jablonski; Mr. Mason; Dr. Massey; Mr. McFarland; and Mr. Woloshyn.
- [Motion carried]
- [At 3:48 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 11, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Please join me in the prayer.

Father, on this day of a new beginning we ask for Your guidance in the responsibility we have undertaken and Your help in fulfilling our duties. As Members of this Legislative Assembly may we faithfully serve all Albertans and, in serving them, serve You. Amen.

Would hon. members please remain standing. As is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to former members of this Assembly who have passed on since the House last met.

Mr. William Kenneth Ure December 22, 1913, to February 4, 2001

THE SPEAKER: On this day we remember William Kenneth Ure, who passed away on February 4, 2001. Mr. Ure was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of June 18, 1959, and served until August 30, 1971.

During his years of service he represented the constituency of Red Deer for the Social Credit governing party. During his years in the Legislature Mr. Ure served on the select standing committees on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration, and Education; Municipal Law; Municipal Law and Law Amendments; Private Bills; Public Accounts; Railways, Telephones, and Irrigation; and the special committees of Commercial Fisheries and Electoral Boundaries.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of his family who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Bill Ure as you have known him. Rest eternal grant unto him, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon him. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. McCLELLAND: As always, it gives me great pleasure to welcome and to introduce to you the Member of Parliament for Edmonton Southwest and my friend, James Rajotte.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the Speaker's gallery today is a visiting parliamentarian from the Yukon Legislative Assembly. Would you please welcome Mr. Scott Kent, MLA, who is the Member for Riverside in the Yukon.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition today requesting that the government put in a system of rent control. This is signed by 125 concerned citizens of Edmonton and Sherwood Park.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm presenting a

petition signed by 25 people from the Stettler and Lacombe areas who "support finding out whether taxpayers have to pay for Stockwell Day's legal bills and settlement."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition today signed by 36 Albertans from Edson, Red Deer, and Edmonton. They are urging the government "to determine legally whether taxpayers must pay for Stockwell Day's legal bills."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition today signed by 150 Albertans urging the government "to fully-fund women's shelters and transition houses."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 201 Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001.

This Bill 201 will facilitate the expeditious removal of illegal and nonconforming signs from the sides of Alberta's primary highways.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Bill 202 Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001.

The purpose of this bill is to create a genderless-based insurance system where both genders have the right to contract insurance services on equal terms without discrimination.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter from the mayor of the city of Edmonton, Mr. Bill Smith, to the Premier expressing serious concerns with respect to the recent actions of Alberta Infrastructure which to him appear to threaten the closure of schools in this city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of an article from the *Reader's Digest* about the world-famous Alex Taylor community school in my constituency, which is now threatened with closure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table five copies of a petition sent to the board of trustees of the Calgary board of education containing 295 signatures requesting that the Glenmeadows elementary school in Calgary be kept open.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an information brochure on PROP, Protection and Restraining Order Project.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table this afternoon for the benefit of all hon. members of the Assembly an Alberta government press release from December 15, 1992, announcing a new, smaller cabinet, 17 members, which reflects Alberta's views about the size of government.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from Mr. Keith Brown of High River, Mrs. Dorothy Corney of Red Deer, and Mr. Ron Tyler of Didsbury. These Albertans want the government to designate the Bighorn wildland park in David Thompson country and stop further industrial development in this area.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings. The first is copies of an e-mail from Therese Carignan from the constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. She is concerned about plans for a coal-powered generator in the Crowsnest Pass and would like to see the government develop wind energy in this area.

The second is copies of an e-mail from Dorothy Dickson of Innisfail. Ms Dickson is concerned about the proposed housing development by Waterton Lakes national park, and she would like the government to do whatever it can to stop this development.

The final tabling today is copies of letters from Mr. and Mrs. Chris and Betty Harvey of Bluffton and Mr. Kevin Lingrell of Fort Saskatchewan. They are requesting that the government designate the Bighorn wildland park a protected area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today four copies of a news release from TransCanada PipeLines Limited through TransCanada Power that announces its fifth Alberta power plant, actually not on the previous lists either, 80 megawatts, of which a certain portion will be used in Weyerhaeuser's Alberta operation with the balance going to a competitively priced, competitively structured Power Pool of Alberta.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table with the House five copies of the House leader agreement for the 25th Legislature signed by the House leader of the government of Alberta

and the House leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and the House leader of the third party New Democratic opposition.

As well, pursuant to the Legislative Assembly Act I table with the Assembly five copies of the following Members' Services orders: MSC 1/00 Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 6), MSC 2/00 Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 7), MSC 3/00 Administrative and Constituency Services Amendment Order (No. 1).

As well, hon. members, pursuant to section 61(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the financial statements as at March 31, 1999, of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Copies were distributed to members on November 29, 2000.

As well, pursuant to section 32 of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, *Revised Statutes of Alberta 1980*, chapter E-3, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 23rd annual report of the Chief Electoral Officer for the calendar year 1999, and copies were distributed to members on January 2, 2001.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Ms Xiao ni Liu. Kathleen comes from the beautiful coastal city of Qingdao in Shandong province in the eastern part of China, where, in completing three years of university, she achieved the highest mark in the education institution. Ms Liu has specifically chosen Alberta as the best place in the world in which to acquire the educational skills not available to her in China. Her objective is to take those skills back to China and impart them to her people. She is seated in the members' gallery. Kathleen, I would ask you to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two directors of Mirant Corporation. Mirant is about a \$17.7 billion U.S. company, and last year Mirant as a large energy marketing company sold over 186 million megawatt hours of electricity. It also moved 6.9 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day. In the members' gallery I'd ask Kim Randle, the director of external affairs, Mirant Corporation, and Suzanne Boucher-Chen, director of regulatory and external affairs, to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Assembly Business

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before the Clerk proceeds to calling Oral Question Period, there are a few matters that the chair would like to address before we do progress in the daily Routine to the first Oral Question Period for the 25th Legislature of the province of Alberta.

From the tablings today hon. members are aware that there was an agreement reached Tuesday, April 10, 2001, among House leaders concerning certain changes as to how the Assembly will conduct certain aspects of its business. In the chair's view it is a very, very positive step when members can agree on how they conduct the people's business. This is why the chair was pleased to acknowledge the agreement. However, hon. members, while the words are

important, this agreement like most things in this Assembly relies on the goodwill of members to succeed.

The scope of the agreement will necessitate some changes to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Some will be temporary. A motion to give effect to the changes agreed to by House leaders is required. The wording of the actual motion will be reviewed by the House leaders and the Speaker before it is introduced in the Assembly. Some changes concerning Recognitions, the number of members' statements, and the singing of *O Canada* may be the subject of a certain request today, so the changes will be in force for the brief period before the motion to amend the Standing Orders is before the Assembly.

There were a few issues that House leaders were unable to agree upon which must be addressed by the chair. One of these issues is the rotation of questions during question period. This aspect of our daily proceedings is fundamentally important to this Legislative Assembly. The book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 415 states:

The right to seek information from the Ministry of the day and the right to hold the Ministry accountable are recognized as two of the fundamental principles of parliamentary government. Members exercise these rights principally by asking questions in the House. The importance of questions within the parliamentary system cannot be overemphasized, and the search for or clarification of information through questioning is a vital aspect of the duties undertaken by individual Members.

Members will note that our Standing Orders are silent on the conduct of question period. They only say that it shall be in the daily Routine and be 50 minutes long. It is now established practice in this Assembly that each member asking a question is entitled to a main question, which may have a brief preamble, and two supplementary questions, which must not have a preamble. This practice will continue for the 25th Legislature.

The chair has reviewed the practices in every jurisdiction in Canada. Question periods vary in length from 15 minutes to one hour. There is no consistent practice or rotation across jurisdictions. Not all Assemblies allow members of the government caucus to ask many or in some cases any questions. In Alberta members of the government caucus are recognized out of respect for the contributions that can be made by individual members and, of course, their numbers.

In Alberta the Official Opposition has been entitled to ask the first three main questions since 1993. The chair sees no reason to depart from this practice. The third party, which is two seats short of having official party status under the Legislative Assembly Act, will continue to be entitled to the fourth question each day. A private member from the government caucus will be entitled to the fifth question. The Official Opposition will be recognized for the sixth, eighth, and 10th questions and government members for the seventh and ninth questions.

In recognition of the results of the last election the third party New Democrats will be entitled to the 11th question each day. A member from the government side will be entitled to the 12th. The Official Opposition will have the 13th. If time permits, the 14th and subsequent questions would go to government members.

The practice of caucuses submitting lists to the Speaker's office by 1 o'clock of those members wishing to ask questions that day will continue. In accordance with traditions of the Assembly, the Speaker will ultimately retain discretion when it comes to recognizing members during question period.

The chair wishes to remind all hon. members that brevity in questions and answers is of fundamental importance. Although there is no time limit in this Assembly for questions and answers, the chair notes that the House of Commons imposes a time limit of 35 seconds for each question and answer.

The chair will continue to apply the rules of decorum that are expected by the citizens of this province, who have honoured members by electing them to this Legislative Assembly.

On Members' Statements, the House leaders' agreement will increase the number from three to four when this item is called on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Three members from the government side will be entitled to make statements on Tuesdays and two on Thursdays. The combined opposition will be entitled to one member's statement on Tuesday and two on Thursday.

As the decision on the distribution of these members' statements between the opposition is undecided, the chair rules that they will be distributed in accordance with the respected sizes of the two opposition caucuses. For every seven statements by members of the Official Opposition, the third party will have two. In practice, after four members' statements by Official Opposition members the third party will be entitled to one statement, and after the next three statements by members of the Official Opposition the third party will be entitled to another one. Effective tomorrow, April 12, 2001, government members will have two members' statements, and the Official Opposition, two.

The same formula will apply to Recognitions. Members of the government caucus will be entitled to five recognitions on Mondays and Wednesdays, with the opposition being entitled to two recognitions. After Official Opposition members have had four recognitions, the third party will have one. Then after the next three by the Official Opposition the third party will have another one.

In the event these allocations are not being utilized, the chair will use its discretion to ensure that this important chance for members to address the Assembly is not foreclosed. As events unfold during the life of the 25th Legislature, the chair may have to revisit the arrangements that are the subject of this statement today.

I would now call upon the Government House Leader.

1:50

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to allow Recognitions to proceed Wednesday and the next sitting Monday; Members' Statements to increase to four; and the singing of our national anthem on the first sitting day of the week, as identified in the House leaders' agreement just tabled by yourself, until Standing Orders are formally moved for change.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, prior to recognizing the Leader of the Official Opposition for the first question of question period, I would now like to ask the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to rise for a brief statement.

head: **Congratulatory Statements by Leaders**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand on behalf of the members of the Official Opposition to extend congratulations to you, the Deputy Speaker, and the Deputy Chairman of Committees on your elections to the parliamentary posts in this Legislature.

I also take this opportunity to extend congratulations to the Premier on his election victory. We look forward to working with him and his ministers in creating a positive agenda for this province. We will act in the opposition's role to help them make the right decisions for Albertans.

Finally, to all members, congratulations and welcome to this Legislature.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, I am prepared to recognize you if you wish to make a statement.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to congratulate you on your election once again as Speaker of this Assembly. My colleague from Edmonton-Highlands and I look forward to working with you and all of our colleagues in this Assembly in a very positive and constructive manner. We'll be tough in the opposition, but we'll be constructive, as I said.

I also want to congratulate the Premier, members of the cabinet, and all members of this House on this first day of the business of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to add my congratulations to you as well as the acclamation of the Deputy Speaker and the Deputy Chairman of Committees. I would like to congratulate also the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East not only on his election but on his election as Leader of the Official Opposition and the Liberal Party of Alberta. I had the opportunity of meeting with the hon. member – I think it was yesterday or the day before – and I was very pleased to hear that the tone and the nature of the questioning will come down to issues of policy and to challenge government ministers to be on their toes and be prepared with answers. That's what the parliamentary process is all about.

I'm so happy to hear that there is a commitment from the Liberal opposition that decorum will be respected in this House. Mr. Speaker, I offer you the same commitment, that we will try to maintain decorum and maintain the dignity of this House.

I would like to also congratulate, of course, the leader of the third party on his election in Edmonton-Strathcona. I agree and I understand that the hon. member will be tough in his questioning, but I'm glad to hear also that the questions will be related to the issues. I look forward to this session, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Well, on this wonderful day of harmony I now call on the Leader of Her Majesty's Official and Loyal Opposition to embark upon the first of his questions in the question period in the 25th Legislature.

Electricity Pricing

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only a few weeks ago Optimum Energy Management Incorporated in Calgary released a study which concludes that electricity prices will remain high for the next few years. In fact, in their summary Optimum Energy states: "It is no longer clear that the prices consumers will pay are going to be lower as a result of deregulation." This comes on the heels of a number of other reports that draw the same conclusion, yet the Premier continues to contradict this industry's statement, saying that prices will soon be lower. My question is to the Premier. What numbers has the Premier seen that he can make his predictions for lower electricity prices?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, a number of reports have been published relative to the price of electricity today and into the future as it relates to a regulated environment or a deregulated environment.

The simple fact is that the price of electricity will never be what it was two or three years ago. That is a simple fact. When I say that the price of electricity will come down, I'm talking about coming down from where it was just at the end of the year 2000 and at the beginning of this particular year. Mr. Speaker, the figures cited are based on the Power Pool prices, which show that the prices being paid today are considerably lower than those prices being paid at the first of this year. If the trend continues, it stands to reason that the prices will be even lower in the year 2002 and the year 2003.

That would have occurred in a regulated environment or a deregulated environment. The simple fact is that the price of power throughout the continent is going up and has gone up considerably, but it will come down. It will never, I don't think – certainly in our term – be as low as it was three or four years ago, and I think people have to come to that realization.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Premier suggesting, then, that these analysts are wrong when their data show that electricity prices are not going to be lower under a deregulated system than what they would be under the previous regulated system? They're making the comparison between the two types of systems, Mr. Premier, not what it was last winter compared to what it is now.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is citing one report, the Optimum report. I've glanced over that report, and certainly I've read the newspaper accounts, television accounts, radio accounts, and so on of that particular report, but there are other reports that allude to the price of electricity coming down.

I will have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of issues that lead towards an energy discussion of downward pressure on prices throughout North America, and there are just as many reports on upward pressures. But what we do know is that because of a competitive market structure in Alberta we are able to bring forth increments of power without having to plan the entire marketplace; for example, the news release that was tabled just minutes ago announcing 80 megawatts more into the grid. There is also a list of well over 680 megawatts planned to come onstream. We do know that in a competitive market structure, the more supply there is, the more downward pressure it puts on prices on the demand side of the equation.

I'm sure there will be not only this report but much more discussion in many more reports. I would direct the hon. member to Senate testimony from the United States Senate and the appearance of Mr. Simmons at that Senate subcommittee.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier admit that a market-based pricing system, which uses the highest cost last unit input to price product, always gives a higher price than a blended or an average-cost system? We are moving to marginal cost pricing, away from average-cost pricing. That's always higher under a market structure. Is that not correct?

MR. KLEIN: What I will agree to, Mr. Speaker, is that a competitive market, a competitive scenario, brings down prices. Key to this and I think being lost in the messages is the fact that deregulation has provided the incentive and the impetus for new power to come

onstream. I think this is very, very important. This will contribute also to a lowering of the price, because there is a simple theory - well, it's not a theory anymore; it's a fact. That is the fact of supply and demand. The more supply you have, the less demand and the cheaper the price.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, since deregulation was announced, in excess of 1,200 megawatts are now under construction or coming onstream this year or early next year. In addition to that, another 4,000 megawatts have been announced, ostensibly coal-generated power now that the technology is there to achieve emission standards that should satisfy the environmental community. So there are two factors that are bringing the prices down. One is that overall there is a global lowering of prices because more electricity has now come onstream. In addition, there have been some other factors such as a slowdown in the economy, warm weather. A number of factors have come into play. But as the additional 4,000 megawatts of new power come onstream, we fully suspect, based on the fact and the law of supply and demand, that the prices will come down.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Natural Gas Pricing

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last summer the Energy and Utilities Board acted to approve the prices of gas to be charged to Alberta consumers for the October to April winter season. That was done without any additional steps being taken to safeguard or guarantee those prices for Albertans. In the end we saw fall and winter prices for consumers rise to unexpected levels as the North American market impacted upon Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the EUB not act to guarantee this price on behalf of Alberta consumers by requiring either a contract from the marketers or a hedge on the commodity futures market?

MR. KLEIN: Well, historically in this province, Mr. Speaker, and based on conventionally low prices for natural gas, customers in this province have preferred to buy based on the spot market. That has been traditional and historical in this province. We have experienced the anomaly, I guess, not only in Alberta but throughout North America of very sharp increases in the price of natural gas. I would say also that it's not the function nor do I think it's the responsibility of this government to direct the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, which is a quasi-judicial board, to take any particular kind of action other than make sure that the regulatory regimes relative to natural gas are adhered to.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, with the introduction of the Alliance pipeline last fall it was very obvious we were going to be in a North American market. Why did the EUB mandate not have it look at that and provide us with protection on our prices?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that the AEUB probably took that into consideration. Certainly there was consideration as to how much gas would be able to flow through that pipeline, the impact it would have on the Alberta economy generally, but to provide you with a more detailed answer, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, the concept of hedging,

or the concept of purchasing gas supplies for future usage, is one that is not in the purview of the EUB. Their job is to provide regulatory advice and direct on decisions that are set down by policy from the government. In a five-year analysis of hedging versus the spot price, the five years prior to this fall's run-up in natural gas prices, the difference was that the hedge purchase was at \$2.73 and the spot price purchase at about \$2.72, so really a 1-cent per gigajoule difference is quite marginal.

Just to comment, the other side is that it wasn't really the advent or the opening of the Alliance pipeline that created an absolutely abnormal spike in natural gas rates. It was a number of factors that contributed to this. The fact is that natural gas is deregulated in its purchase. I would think that we would like to see more competitive market forces in purchasing go on. Certainly low gas storage levels and an uptick in demand in the United States were all a number of factors besides just one single pipeline. In fact, Mr. Speaker, there's very little history that would have ever predicted a price going from \$3.35 per gigajoule in September to over \$10 a gigajoule in December.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, the minister has just said that it's not part of the EUB mandate to deal with protection of prices for consumers. If that's not part of their mandate right now, why isn't it, and are you prepared to make sure that they look at that in the future? After all, Albertans deserve some protection and some analysis.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board always serves the public interest. The function of the board is to make sure that those people exploring for and processing our energy and those people distributing that energy are fairly compensated at the same time that the customers, the people who consume those products, are reasonably protected. That is the function. I would remind the hon. member that this is a quasi-judicial board. We don't direct the board. We ask the board to do certain things for us. We've asked the board, for instance, to conduct a fairness hearing relative to rising electricity prices, but we have not directed the board to do anything. We expect the board to act properly and responsibly in the public interest.

THE SPEAKER: Third main question for the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Pricing (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's failed electricity deregulation scheme has already cost Albertans over \$2 billion in this year alone. However, contrary to government claims high costs will be with us far beyond this year or next year. Because of the government's decision to not allow utilities to recover any corporate shortfalls arising from high electricity costs, Albertans have been forced into a pay me now and pay me even more later situation. My first question is to the Premier. Given this government's decision to not allow utilities to recover their 2001 deferral costs this year, will the hon. Premier please tell us how much it will cost Albertans in the future to recoup those deferral costs?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have those figures at my fingertips, and I will defer to the hon. Minister of Energy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those deferral accounts will have a certain portion of interest attached to them. That will occur, as it does in any commercial transaction, and that will be the added cost.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the Premier confirm that the deferral account for the year 2001 could be as high as \$475 million?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier. Speculation here.

MR. KLEIN: I can't confirm that nor deny it, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, I do not have those figures or a projection of what that figure might be at my fingertips. I'll again defer to the hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I'd certainly follow the lead of the Premier, that I serve as well as all Albertans, and not speculate as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Given that the deferral account deficit for 2001 could be as high as \$475 million, can the Premier confirm that the deferral costs will add an extra \$22.75 a month to the average residential consumer's electricity bill next year?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to engage the hon. member in a debate over something that is purely speculative. I don't know if the figures he's citing are right or wrong. I don't have those figures with me today. I don't know if an analysis has been done with respect to deferral accounts. What we're dealing with here is nothing more or nothing less than a hypothetical situation.

2:10

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm compelled to rise and add to the information of those that would hold the deferral accounts and those that would be involved in financing these projects. For example, Scotia Capital mentioned on February 12, 2001, that the Alberta framework delivers a truly deregulated market with competitive price. CIBC World Markets in their equity research newsletter of January say: we believe that the approach to deregulation in both Ontario and Alberta will ultimately lead to the intended benefits of consumer choice as well as a more responsive and efficient electricity market.

Of course, I know you'd want me to go on, Mr. Speaker, but those are just a couple of comments that indicate that the banking communities, those who hold notes from the utility companies are looking with confidence at Alberta, its market, and its commercial transaction and market structure.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Cited Documents

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister should be aware that I'm withholding my enthusiasm for the full continued response, but I would like the hon. minister, as he has quoted from a document, to be prepared to table the document in the House.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Class Sizes

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 15 Alberta Learning received the final report on small class sizes, but this report was not released to the public until four and a half months later. A PC election document states that the reason that the report couldn't be made public was that the report had to go through the standard review process of standing policy committee, caucus, and cabinet. My questions are to the Premier. Why was there a four-month delay between the final report submission to Alberta Learning and the department receiving the final report if not to keep a lid on the study until after the election?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was no deliberate attempt to keep a lid on the report until after the election. As it turned out, the report was quite constructive and offered some good advice and some good recommendations. But in this government we do have a procedure that is followed very closely, and that procedure is to take an item through the standing policy committee process, back to cabinet, on to caucus, and this government and all members of the government caucus then decide what to do with the report, what recommendations will be accepted, which recommendations will be rejected, and how the report is to be released and responded to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again to the Premier. Did the government in fact meet the procedure he has just outlined, to send the report through either the standing policy committee, the government caucus, or the cabinet, before releasing the report publicly?

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry, and I do apologize, Mr. Speaker. I did not get the question, but if you would allow the hon. member to ask it over again, I'd be glad to try to answer it again.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I would repeat the question for the Premier and rather slowly. Did the government follow the procedure that the Premier said the government always follows when dealing with such reports; that is, to send the report through either the standing policy committee, the government caucus, or the cabinet before the report was in fact released?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Learning respond to the process that was followed relative to this report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What happened with that report was that a verbal commitment from the standing policy chair was made, was given. Cabinet was informed about it. This was a report that we wanted to get out to the public, that we wanted to get out as quickly as we could.

The other comment that I will make is that there were changes made to the document between the November 15 time line and the document roughly received about the middle of February, such changes as what was the class size. This was a document that studied class size, so we kind of felt that it was important that we knew what the actual class size was. Some of the objective findings were missing, such as how these students did on the objective tests that were given to these kids both before and after. These were very

important and critical parts of this study that were missing from the study. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I did answer the question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, I'm going to permit this briefly.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly, the answer to my question is no.

Then I ask the final question: was the government in fact telling the truth during the election when it said that the report couldn't be released until after it had gone through standing policy committee, caucus, or cabinet?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. As the hon. minister pointed out, the report wasn't finalized internally until somewhere midway through the election campaign. Needless to say, when you're in the midst of an election, a lot of things are not dealt with, but as soon as we were able to deal with the report, as the hon. minister pointed out, we did. I'll have the hon. minister explain slowly once again.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I already outlined, what happened was: I talked to the standing policy committee chair, gave a verbal report at cabinet, and we wanted this document out. There had been some controversy about this document during the election. We wanted it out with the basic information that was there, and I felt that it was extremely important to get this document out.

As the hon. member knows, the document did not hold any revelations about class size that realistically we didn't know already. There is a lot of good stuff in the document, and I wanted to get it out to the school board chairs. I wanted to get it out to the teachers. I wanted to get it out to the citizens of Alberta so they could in fact see what was being discussed in the election campaign. Mr. Speaker, there was no covert attempt to keep this under or anything like that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Education Property Taxes

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. At the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties convention municipalities raised concerns about the delay in receiving education property tax requisitions from the province. Municipalities cannot finalize their local property tax bylaws until they receive the provincial education property tax requisition, and they are becoming impatient. Can you tell me when the province will issue these requisitions?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Members of the Legislative Assembly attended the municipal districts and counties spring convention here in Edmonton. I also attended, and the Premier of course spoke at the convention.

In response to municipalities and the concerns they've raised, I'm pleased to announce that the education property tax requisitions are going to be sent out to all municipalities not within the next 24 days but within the next 24 hours.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Last year the town of Whitecourt set a higher

education property tax rate for separate school supporters through no fault of their own. Following the School Act, municipalities have no legal right to blend the tax. How can we be assured that this does not occur in the future?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question. In municipalities that have separate school boards that have opted out of the Alberta school foundation fund, different rates occur because of the changes from year to year in the proportion of assessment that is declared for the separate school boards. Now, Municipal Affairs has encouraged municipalities to blend the rates in the past so ratepayers within the municipality equally share the tax burden. This year Alberta Learning is proposing changes to the School Act to address this issue, but I am pleased to announce today that \$135 million of our government commitment to reduce educational property tax requisitions in fact are going to be benefiting all Alberta taxpayers, and that's taking place as we speak.

MR. VANDERBURG: My second supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Learning. Will changes to the School Act ensure that both the public and separate school board supporters pay education property taxes based on the same rates within the municipality, and when will those changes become effective?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can give the hon. member the assurance that that will indeed be the fact: public and separate school board supporters will be paying the same rate.

I will also tell him that that amendment will be brought in this session and will be retroactive to January 1 of this year. So we will look after the changes. I know it has been an extremely difficult issue in the town of Whitecourt, and we will bring the solution into legislation this session.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

2:20

School Closures

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton and Calgary schools located in the inner city are threatened with closure because of the government's utilization rate. These inner-city schools have existing buildings, utility servicing, and park/play areas long paid for. Moreover, these schools have proven experience and knowledge dealing with English as a Second Language programs and cultural understanding for children and their families. My first question is to the Premier. When cities are trying to rejuvenate inner-city neighbourhoods and encourage young families to live there, why is the province putting school boards in the position of closing schools like Queen Mary Park and John A. McDougall?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Learning supplement, but this government is doing no such thing. You know, the closure of schools is unfortunate and as controversial and as emotional as the issue can be – and certainly I went through it when I was the mayor of Calgary and had to deal on the local level with the aspect of school closures in certain areas. There is ample opportunity for school boards to deal with this issue and to find imaginative and innovative ways to put these buildings to use for educational purposes or community services or a combination of

both. We are not forcing the school boards to do anything other than come up with imaginative ways to deal with the situation.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to be with us forever. Cities are constantly changing creatures, and inner-city areas that accommodate an older population: eventually you will see a turnaround. The areas in exurbia, the new areas, eventually become older areas. The kids grow up, and there's no longer a need for the schools in those areas. This is a difficult issue that school boards will have to deal with in the future. They're dealing with that issue now, and they've had to deal with the issue in the past.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Learning. Given that the government sponsored a class-size project in which inner-city schools were chosen to take part, why is the government now putting school boards in the position of closing these schools because they have exactly those desirable small class sizes?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, what I will say is that the demographics of the inner city, the demographics of the second ring of inner city have certainly changed over the past 20 to 30 years, and what we are seeing is that the school-age children are now more in the suburbs than they are in the inner city. I don't think anyone in this Assembly agrees with the fact that we have schools that have 15, 20, 25, 30 percent utilization. We all can see that that utilization figure is an extremely important figure and that there's a lot of money being wasted.

MS BLAKEMAN: Aha.

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the aha over here, but that 70 percent of the school still has to be heated. It still has to be cleaned. There still has to be electricity put to it. These are all extra costs that could be put into the classroom to help with smaller class sizes.

MS BLAKEMAN: My second supplementary is also to the Minister of Learning. What does the government expect as an outcome when it promotes a school utilization rate that pits community against community, neighbour against neighbour? What is the outcome you expect from that?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will answer on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure, whose department it is to look after that. What we're looking at is learning opportunities for these kids. When you have 15 or 20 percent of a school actually being utilized, the learning opportunities for these kids are much less than if you combine two schools that are, say, 10 or 15 blocks apart or five or six blocks apart. We feel that we can get a larger economy of scale. We feel that we can get more learning opportunities for these kids, and we feel that they will get a better education when they have more of these learning opportunities. That's the reason this is occurring.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Postsecondary Student Loan Program

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are directed to the Minister of Learning. Students in my constituency have expressed concern about the high cost of postsecondary

education and the debt load they are facing upon graduation. Many are calling for a reduction in tuition fees. Government recently announced a new program of loan relief payments and additional scholarships for postsecondary students. Would the minister please explain how the new student loan relief program, set to begin this summer, differs from the existing remission program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very simply what is occurring is that after completion of the first year of studies, students will be eligible for the remission. So say, for example, their student loan is \$7,500 or \$8,000 in the first year, they will receive the \$2,500 or \$3,000 immediately after the first year. What will be occurring is there will be two times – at this moment two times – when the student will receive remission: after the first year and after their final year. As soon as our computer systems are able to handle it, our students will receive the remission after each and every year that they complete in university or postsecondary education.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister: does this loan relief program apply equally to eligible students attending private university colleges like Augustana University College in my constituency and those attending public university colleges?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this applies to each and every student who is taking postsecondary courses, postsecondary education in the province of Alberta, whether it be Augustana University College in Camrose or whether it be some other university or college in Alberta. This is specific to the student, not to the institution.

MR. JOHNSON: My final question is to the same minister. What is being planned in the way of additional postsecondary scholarships for the coming year?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, student financial assistance is something that this government takes very seriously. Over the past year, in the 2000-2001 budget we increased the actual amount of dollars for student assistance by 22 percent. Included in that and in the upcoming year we're seeing an expansion of the scholarships. We introduced the Jason Lang scholarship for second-year university students last year. We're expanding that to third- and fourth-year university students this year. We brought in a graduate student scholarship because the students asked us to do that, and I believe it's very important to do that. The Jimmie Condon athletic scholarship has increased from \$1,000 to \$1,800. So scholarships are a very important element of student finance, and it's something that we take very seriously as the government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Medically Required MRIs

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, for nearly eight months the minister of health and his department have been investigating some 30 cases in which Albertans may have been unjustly charged for physician-approved, medically necessary MRIs. The minister initially promised Albertans the investigation would be complete in November 2000. My first question to the minister of health: given the

enormous resources that the minister has at his fingertips, why, oh why is this investigation taking so long?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset that I recognize that this is both at once a very private and a very public issue. I say that it is very private in the sense of being a very personal issue and that I am not unmindful of the time that it has taken, and I regret the time that it has taken for these 32 individuals who brought their cases to the attention of Minister Rock.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, upon our inquiry into these cases and a number of other cases that have come forward to our attention, we realized that the situation involved much more than simply dealing with 32 cases. I've indicated by announcement earlier this week that we will have a panel that will be looking at not only these 32 cases but all of the other ones that have come forward. The 32 will be dealt with within the next four weeks. That panel will be made up of physicians who will determine on a medical basis whether these cases were in fact urgent and these people did not have an MRI given within an appropriate period of time.

2:30

Also, we have increased our capacity for MRIs. It will be a dramatic increase. Two years ago we did 20,000. Last year we did 30,000. This year we'll do over 40,000, and when we put in the seven new MRIs and make them operational later this year, we'll go to a scan rate of 24 per thousand, the highest scan rate in the country, recommended by radiologists that have worked with us, and we'll end up with a total of 73,000 per year, Mr. Speaker, a very good number indeed.

DR. TAFT: To the same minister. Are you willing to publish the criteria by which these decisions were made or will be made?

MR. MAR: It's my intention to have the panel of physicians deal with that, and it will be a very open and transparent process. So, yes, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAFT: Again to the minister of health, Mr. Speaker. Given the overly long delay in the release of this investigation and given that ordinary Albertans will have been out of pocket many hundreds of dollars each because of the government policy, will the government be paying interest to claimants on the amounts they have been charged for medically necessary MRIs?

MR. MAR: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Hoof-and-mouth Disease

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hoof-and-mouth disease epidemic in Europe has resulted in the slaughter of over a million animals to date and has meant economic ruin for those farmers in that area. If this disease is discovered in Canada, it will cause the same economic ruin here to an Alberta industry that's worth over \$9 billion a year and employs over 100,000 people. My first question today is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What steps has the minister taken to ensure that Alberta and Canada remain free of hoof-and-mouth disease?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member indicated, this is a very serious disease, and it is of great concern to the agricultural community in our province and, indeed, in Canada.

We've been working very closely with the federal minister of agriculture and with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure that we're informing our producers and the citizens of this province of steps that they can take to minimize the risk of this disease coming to the province.

I would say that my office and I personally have been in contact with Minister Vanciel's office as often as three times a week, and my department staff are discussing the issue with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency personnel that are stationed in this province to ensure that we're taking all of the safeguards we can. They have reviewed the procedures at airports. We've had very good discussions with the military bases, and we've done our best to co-operate in any way that we can to inform travelers of how they can minimize the risk of bringing the disease here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Learning. Given that many school classes are planning Easter holiday trips to Europe, where this disease is prevalent, what has the Minister of Learning done to date to inform the students and schools of the risks involved in taking these trips?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. Earlier this month I sent a letter to school superintendents and school board chairs and asked them to share it with the schools and school groups who are planning a trip overseas. In that letter it advised on the precautions that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development just talked about, and I asked them to share that with each and every school group that was contemplating a trip overseas. Some schools, such as the school in Black Diamond, did decide to cancel their trip as their itinerary took them directly through the heart of the issue, where there is a hoof-and-mouth disease outbreak. Mr. Speaker, we did provide them with as much information as possible.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Learning. I would certainly commend all those schools and school boards who did the responsible thing in adjusting their travel plans. However, constituents in rural Alberta are still very concerned about students taking these trips. Can the Minister of Learning assure Albertans that everything possible is being done to eliminate any risk at all of bringing this disease back to Alberta by students traveling to these areas? Constituents are simply asking: why not just cancel these trips?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, what I asked in the letter that I sent to the school board superintendents and the school board chairs is that they reassess their plans, reassess their itineraries, and look and see if indeed they are traveling through the area where hoof-and-mouth disease is endemic. I asked them to use their own judgment on that. I feel that it is not fair to have these students cancel their trips when the borders are still open, when we're having business traffic back and forth, when we're having tourist traffic back and forth. I feel that's an unfair penalty to these students who have worked so hard to travel over to Europe and various other destinations. I did ask them to reassess. I did ask them to look very closely at their itinerary. I can give the hon. member probably a 99.99 percent assurance that our school trips will be safe when it comes to hoof-and-mouth disease.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Logging in Kananaskis Country

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is about to sign an agreement allowing new logging on 4,200 square kilometres in Kananaskis Country. This is an area the size of a 14 kilometre-wide path from here to Red Deer. This agreement is being struck behind closed doors and without public consultation. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. How can the Minister of Environment, the minister seen as the steward of our wilderness and the minister responsible for policy on these issues, permit this logging to go ahead without assessing the environmental impact?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not an issue that requires an environmental impact study, and I would refer it to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As no doubt a number of you are aware, there are a great number of forest management agreements in Alberta that are utilized by various industries. There are also a number of industries that utilize the quota system. There are also other industries that utilize the commercial timber wood program.

There are different ways of harvesting resources in these areas, Mr. Speaker. One of the most stringent is the forest management agreement, and that is exactly what we are negotiating with the Spray Lakes saw mills. The negotiations are no different than what other negotiations have been in the past. There are lots of FMAs established. They're working very well. They're serving the industry very well.

In fact, the forest management agreement does not give the land rights to the FMA holder. Basically, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that actually the companies, once they are in the process of harvesting an area, have to file a plan with local public hearings in the community, and after that the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development still has to approve that plan. So when you're dealing with FMAs, they're not transferring land to the company. We as the government and the public have a greater say. The company has also more responsibilities in reforestation, more responsibilities in management of that particular area on a long-term basis, Mr. Speaker, and that's the only way that they are viable.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, is this minister saying, then, to us that he is quite happy in a situation like this to cut the deal behind closed doors without public consultation on 4,200 square kilometres of land in Kananaskis Country?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the company that we are talking about has been in there, I believe, over 50 years already as a family operation and plays a very, very important role in the economy of that particular region. In fact, the forestry sector itself plays a very, very important role in the overall economy of the province. There are over 50,000 individuals working directly or indirectly in the forest industry. It's the third largest industry as far as job creation in Alberta and income revenue for Albertans, so it is a very, very important industry.

Mr. Speaker, these negotiations have been ongoing for a long period of time because the company has requested more involvement

in how the reforestation takes place, more involvement in managing the resource on a long-term basis. As a government we are requesting stringent requirements in reforestation, for an example. These companies have to have a longer term security so they can plan their projects and their reforestation programs. Therefore, it is very necessary that negotiations continue in a positive way.

2:40

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the minister then commit to doing what the public is requesting, which is an open process, a public consultation process? Will he work with the Minister of Environment to initiate this full public consultation process, which would include surveys, public meetings, and a cumulative impact study and assessment done, before the decisions are made on this piece of land which is a vital part of our economy from a wilderness and recreation perspective?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, when you're negotiating a forest management agreement, all those other areas the hon. member mentioned are taken into consideration, and they are part of the plan.

In fact, the hon. member has asked in the last couple of days to have a meeting with my department to explain this whole process so she can understand it better. I have agreed to the meeting. Therefore, we are hoping in the next two or three days to sit down with whoever they want to bring from the opposite side and discuss the whole issue. Mr. Speaker, I didn't realize the question would be coming up the same day the meeting was asked for. [interjection] I have agreed. I have agreed to meet with the hon. member, and I'm willing to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

School Closures

(continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dozens of schools in Calgary, Edmonton, and other Alberta communities are being threatened with closure as a result of the government school utilization formula. Many of these schools are located in lower income neighbourhoods and are attended by already disadvantaged students. In my own constituency of Edmonton-Highlands decisions to close Alex Taylor school and Sacred Heart school could be made within weeks. My question is to the Minister of Learning. How can the minister justify forcing school boards to maintain a rigid utilization rate of 85 percent, including gymnasiums, libraries, and other nonclassroom space, before funds are released for new school construction?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would advise the member that a lot of those questions have been answered. Because this is under the purview of the Minister of Infrastructure, I will take it under advisement and make sure that the Minister of Infrastructure sees this question and responds to the hon. member with his answer.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that.

My first supplementary to the minister: why did the government undertake a pilot project on small classes, that gave hope to disadvantaged students through such innovations as eliminating split-

grade classes, only to force a utilization policy on the school boards that will force them to close some of the very same schools which took part in that pilot project?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the pilot project was on the class size; it was not on the physical structure of the buildings. In some of these buildings in question, as I commented earlier, we have a utilization rate of 25, 30, 35 percent. There are lots of classrooms available in those schools.

The study that I undertook was to look at the effects of smaller class size on achievement, look for the effects of smaller class size on teachers, look for the effects of smaller class size on the whole scholastic environment. As the hon. member knows – and I'm sure he's read the report – there were some very positive things that came out of it. I must remind the hon. member that this study was not to look at physical structure.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the minister: will the minister agree to review government policy on school utilization so that school boards will not be forced to close schools in established neighbourhoods, thereby hurting already vulnerable inner-city communities and families?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was a good question. The Minister of Infrastructure is doing that as we speak. He is doing that at this moment. I'm sure he hopes to have this utilization formula out very soon. Again, I will refer that question to the Minister of Infrastructure, whose mandate it is, and I'm sure he will get back to you on that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Social Assistance

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the past years I have visited many households in the constituency of Calgary-Fort. [interjections] Shall I continue, sir?

THE SPEAKER: Absolutely.

MR. CAO: Almost all are working very hard to make ends meet and proud of their productivity. However, there are a few who could not handle their personal situations because they were outside of their control. They need help. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given that the community service organization voiced to me about the social assistance rates, can the minister tell the Assembly about the current situation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have been getting phone calls and letters and e-mails about our current situation, and I just want to reiterate that this government is committed to help those people that are truly in need. We want the Alberta advantage to involve everyone. I would indicate that the throne speech did discuss and talk about how we will have a review of our support systems for people in need.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that Alberta has the largest percentage of people in the workforce, what is the government plan to ensure the equity of the working Albertan relative to the people who cannot work or cannot find work?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, certainly, Mr. Speaker, we do believe that low-income support programs should be a matter of temporary assistance, and they really should be a last resort. Not only this government but we believe that Albertans generally believe in a hand up and not a handout, and that, of course, is our philosophy. So we've focused our income support programs on education, employment, and opportunity, and we'll, of course, continue to use workforce attachment as one of our main objectives within our portfolio.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. What can the minister tell the Assembly about a government plan to address the assistance for the so-called working poor and the nonworking poor?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we're going to be working with the department to develop the scope and time frame for the process of a review. Once we begin that, of course, we commit to listening very, very closely to Albertans regarding this matter. We always want to, again, strike a balance between those that truly need our assistance, and of course I have to be a steward of taxpayer dollars and always will remain committed and dedicated to that principle.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six, I believe, members today who want to participate. If all hon. members would look at the Order Paper, it does not identify Recognitions on it, because pending the results of your approval given to the hon. Government House Leader's request for unanimous consent to arrive at it, it couldn't be printed till now. I will begin the process of introducing those people who will participate in recognitions today in 30 seconds from now.

Hon. members, perhaps we could revert briefly to Introductions of Guests. Is that okay?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mrs. Shelley Brown. Mrs. Brown is a recreation therapist, and she's in the public gallery with nine guests. With your permission I would ask Mrs. Brown and her guests to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

2:50

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the approval that you gave a little earlier today, there was provision for recognitions on the basis of five and two; that is, five government members and two Official Opposition members. As of this point in time four government members have advised me of their interest. If there's a fifth, please

send me a note. Otherwise we're going to proceed on this basis. First of all the hon. Member for St. Albert, then followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, then the hon. Member for Dunvegan, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Dr. John Paterson

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago in Toronto Dr. John Paterson was recognized by OISE, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, with a national honour for his lifelong commitment to the profession of teaching. Nominated by the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta and by the Alberta Teachers' Association, Dr. Paterson was awarded the distinguished educator award for his exemplary teaching skills and for taking a leadership role in his field throughout his career. I wish today to congratulate Dr. Paterson on behalf of all members here.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alice Tyler

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton artist Alice E. Tyler, probably best known for her creation of portraits of the Famous Five of the Persons Case, died on February 5, 2001. Inspired by the achievements of these outstanding women, Alice Tyler created portraits of the Famous Five of the Persons Case accompanying them with informative plaques drawn from her own extensive research. These works of art have been hung in the Alberta Legislature, the Edmonton Law Courts building, and the Edmonton City Public Library, as well as elsewhere in Canada and abroad.

In 1995 Alice Tyler was the recipient of the Governor General's award in commemoration of the Persons Case. We would like to recognize her contribution to our province and our history.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

Junior Curling Championships

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure and privilege for me to rise before this House today to recognize two junior curling teams from Grimshaw and Peace River. Both the junior boys' curling team and the junior girls' curling team won top honours during the provincial curling championships in Red Deer on March 9-11. After considerably more practice and hard work, they went on to represent Team Alberta at the western Canada junior championships in Calgary on March 29 to April 1.

These two teams in the age group of 13 to 18 years old were Alberta's junior curling ambassadors. Both teams represented our province and their communities very well. They curled against the most talented teams from across western Canada, and both teams came back with gold medals.

The junior girls' team is made up of Amanda Swicheniuk, skip, Erin Brennan, Kate Blakley, Charlene Swicheniuk. The junior boys' team is made up of Greg Webb, skip, Daniel Boorse, Rollie Robinson, and Kyle Spacil. They were coached by Al Riewe and Rod Webb. Their efforts and victory speaks well of what our young people can accomplish. The communities of Grimshaw and Peace River are very proud of their eight young adults.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Protection and Restraining Order Project

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to

recognize the first anniversary of the incorporation of PROP, the Protection and Restraining Order Project. Although it is one year as an incorporated society, in fact PROP was born from a committee established in 1995, and the project opened its doors in 1997.

In the mid-1990s it was both expensive and took a long time to get a restraining or a protection order. PROP was created to address the problem of women facing family violence or any kind of violence in which they needed to get an order, but they couldn't afford a lawyer or the court fees. With the leadership and vast amounts of volunteered time of committed women lawyers from Edmonton and the help of agencies which gave funds or support, the Protection and Restraining Order Project has, for a \$75 charge to people who qualify, made low-cost, more timely orders possible.

I know PROP would like me to acknowledge their supporters: Alberta Justice, victims of crime fund, the centre for wellness, Clifford E. Lee Foundation, the Edmonton Community Foundation, Edmonton Community Lottery Board, the Flora Trust, Muttart Foundation, Status of Women Canada, United Way, the YWCA, WIN House, and other dedicated agencies. And my thanks to Deb, Marie, Ellen, Marlene, Susan, and the other wonderful women.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Heebie-jeebies A Cappella Group

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and a pleasure to rise today for this very special recognition. The Contemporary A Cappella Society, CASA, has just announced its artist awards for 2001, and I want to offer my warmest congratulations to a local Calgary a cappella group known as the Heebie-jeebies – isn't that neat? – for winning the award for the best comedy album called *Heebie-jeebie TV* and also for winning the best comedy song called *Channel 12*.

I am very proud to know these four young men from Calgary, so to Jonathon Love, Ken Lima Kuello, Cederic Blary, and to my youngest son, Chris Herard: well done, guys.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Britannia Junior High School

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great thrill for me to stand to make this particular recognition this afternoon. The day after I was sworn in as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I had the privilege to officially open the new science lab at Britannia junior high school in the Edmonton-Glenora constituency. I would like to acknowledge the principal, Peter Jonkman, and his staff for the excellent work they are doing to enhance the education of the students. Also, I would like to commend Dr. Emery Dosdall, the superintendent of Edmonton public schools, and his team for approving and constructing the new lab.

Mr. Speaker, it was a special honour for me to be at the opening of the lab and make this acknowledgment today, as I am a graduate of Britannia junior high school.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Is there an additional government member who would like to participate?

head: Orders of the Day

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the items of business normally

conducted on Wednesday afternoon entitled Written Questions and Motions for Returns cannot be dealt with today as these items of business have not met the notice requirements of Standing Order 38.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to permit second reading of Bill 201 on the same day as its introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

**Bill 201
Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 201, the Public Highways Development Amendment Act.

This bill will do three things: lessen roadside distractions for drivers, reduce vision overload for drivers, and it will improve the aesthetics of our primary highways in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, along our highways advertising signs have become all too familiar a sight. These signs may be an important way for businesses to advertise their services to motorists, but at what price in safety and what price in aesthetics? Unfortunately, not all of the highway signs comply with existing legislation.

The Public Highways Development Amendment Act provides roadside advertisers with clear guidelines and regulations. Bill 201 would provide the Department of Transportation with the means to deal with signs that do not conform to law or regulation or the signs that have not been approved by the Department of Transportation authorities.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 is designed to have the following impact on illegal signs in the province. First, the offending sign owner will be sent a letter via registered mail or by hand delivery informing him that he has seven days to remove the offending sign.

3:00

Second, Mr. Speaker, when a violator fails to comply with the notice to remove the sign, then the minister shall cause any action to be undertaken that is required to comply with the notice and may direct any person to enter the land for that purpose. This will provide our Transportation officials with the mandate to take those illegal signs down and to store them in a secure yard, with the cost of both the storage and the taking down to be assessed to the owner of the sign.

Third, if a second violation occurs within 12 months of the initial occurrence, the minister can order the removal of the offending sign or object, notifying the owner in writing within 72 hours.

With this in place, department of highways officials will be empowered to officially deal with repeat offenders and the illegal and nonconforming signs that are becoming more and more plentiful.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 provides official agents of Alberta Transportation with protection from harassment. Anyone who obstructs an official who is lawfully acting to remove a sign is guilty of an offence and may be fined \$1,000. Enforcement officials from the Department of Transportation may now perform their tasks in an expeditious manner.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 will strengthen the ability of the department

to deal quickly with nonconforming advertising along our provincial highways, something it doesn't now have. Eye-catching advertising is distracting to drivers. It reduces their effectiveness, the effectiveness of directional and warning signs, and it reduces the aesthetic value of our Alberta countryside.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that Bill 201 will not restrict legal signage in any way. The bill does not address what is conforming or what is nonconforming signage, as its single purpose is to provide the Department of Transportation the means to expeditiously cause the removal of illegal or nonpermitted signage, whether by the owner or by department officials. There is existing legislation that determines legal and illegal signs. This bill will simply ensure that signs which violate existing law and regulations can be removed more efficiently by Alberta Transportation officials and their agents.

The current enforcement mechanisms have become ineffective in dealing with illegal signs. At present the process involves sending out a number of letters via registered mail to the owner of the offending sign, each with a 30-day compliance request. When that is not met and it is observed that the sign is still there, then a second letter, a third letter, and even a fourth letter, each with 30 or more days in between, will be sent, with the final letter being sent from the Minister of Transportation.

If the owner still does not remove the sign in the time specified by the minister, the minister has two options. He may direct an official agent to remove the sign from the property and charge the incurred expense and subsequent storage fee to the owner of the sign. This is not very often done. Or the minister may lay a complaint with the local RCMP detachment, and the Crown prosecutor will determine if the charges are warranted and proceed accordingly. However, if the owner removes the sign even a day before the court hearing, the case will be dropped because the owner has removed the sign. In the situation where the sign is not removed and the court case continues, if convicted the sign owner, in addition to being fined, is required to move the sign.

The present process has proven to be too slow. It may take up to a year or more, and it is so unwieldy that it doesn't have any real impact on the proliferation of illegal and nonconforming signs along our provincial highways.

Often the department representatives responsible for control of this problem just abandon enforcement action after they've made several unsuccessful attempts to have any sign removed. The department has little recourse should the owner of the offending sign not wish to comply. Often the offending sign is put back up a few months later. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the current system does not work.

There are reasons to bring this bill forward, and foremost is safety. We all know that driver inattention is one of the major causes of accidents, and an important element of that inattention is distraction. More and more signs along our highways translate to more and more distractions to the motorists who drive on them. It is important to note that many traffic and highway accidents are the result of driver inattention or error and that distraction can cause a driver to err.

Bill 201 is designed to help decrease the number of accidents along Alberta's roads. Mr. Speaker, reportable collisions per thousand drivers exceeded the Alberta Transportation rate by a factor of two and a half times, for a total of 44.7 collisions per thousand drivers in the year 1997 alone.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we have a duty as legislators to do what we can, what is possible to make our highways safer. Alberta boasts a spectacular array of sights, from the river valley in the Drumheller area or the Red Deer River to rolling hills, mountain views and the like, forests, and lakes. There is an undeniable beauty and an immeasurable scenic value to our countryside that can be spoiled

and obliterated by unlimited numbers of signs if it's to continue. This private member's bill will help to protect the aesthetic beauty and reinforce the province's commitment to maintaining the quality of our environment and ensuring that tourists visiting Alberta will get a chance to see what we truly have to offer. In the absence of this bill we will continue to have a growing visual pollution along Alberta's highways.

Beyond the issue of aesthetics, Mr. Speaker, there's a third reason to support Bill 201, and that's making Alberta's highways as safe as possible for motorists to use. The proliferation of illegal signs may have contributed to many traffic problems including visual overload, as too many signs compete for the attention of the driver so that the impact of the department's regulatory and cautionary and information signs are less effective. Over the last several decades there's been a steady increase in the amount of traffic on Alberta's highways. More and more signage increases the odds that a driver may not see a cautionary or regulatory sign because of the visual overload of this visual pollution of signs.

This bill strengthens a law that frankly, Mr. Speaker, has not been operating as it was intended. Because of the cumbersome and prolonged process of the current enforcement mechanisms, the law has consistently and in some cases rather flagrantly been ignored. This should be unacceptable to Albertans, and it should be unacceptable to members of this Assembly.

Simply put, Mr. Speaker, Bill 201 provides Alberta Transportation the means to fulfill their mandate in providing safe and efficient highways by giving them the effective regulatory means to remove the illegal signs as one small piece in their repertoire of keeping our highways safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and debate Bill 201, Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001. It would've been a little helpful for us if we would have gotten the information, the bill itself, sooner than we did. It's certainly tough to do any initial consultations when we don't get the information until just before we get into the House. I know it's the first day and organizationally it's not always that easy to get things rolling here, but it makes it tougher for us to get some feedback from the communities on issues like this which are, I think, important to people throughout the province.

In terms of the highlights of the bill, certainly we would support any bill coming forward that strengthens the ability of Alberta Infrastructure or any other department to deal with outstanding issues that we see in the province. Certainly nonconforming advertising along provincial highways is something that is becoming a more recurrent issue that needs to be dealt with, and certainly as the process has been described to us, it isn't very effective in terms of getting rid of these signs in a timely fashion.

As we see drivers busier within their vehicles as they're traveling on the roadways, we do need to seriously consider all the various options open to us to ensure that they are driving safely. All of us have seen and certainly some of us will have been guilty of not only reading the signs as we travel down the highways but talking on cell phones and drinking cups of coffee or eating lunch or talking to our neighbours in the car. All of those are major distractions, Mr. Speaker, and I think this brings up for me the notion that we should be taking a look as private members or perhaps on the government side at the kinds of issues and conflicts we have on the roadways now that need to be addressed through the legislative process, and this is certainly one of those.

So we're happy to see that this bill is coming forward in terms of being able to get these distracting signs off the roads in a time span that is much more effective than what we had before. It does raise a few questions for us though, Mr. Speaker, that we're hoping can be addressed, and some of them are questions that are of interest when we talk about roadway signs.

3:10

My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods and I were discussing what it looks like when you're driving down the highways here and in other provinces. Particularly, we noted in the province of B.C. that when you drive on reserve land, the signs there are far, far greater in number than what we see along other major roadways. So that raises the question here in this province: will this provincial law apply to reserves? If not, then is there any intent to address that and ensure that we have some conformity on our highways in terms of the kinds of distractions there are? You know, you get used to driving a roadway and seeing a certain number of signs, and when you suddenly hit a stretch that is completely cluttered up, it is distracting, as the sponsor of the bill talked about, and it certainly needs to, I think, have some consistency throughout the province.

We also had a question about the consultation process that Infrastructure does with municipalities on these issues. I personally don't know whether or not municipalities are in a position where they can derive revenue from the placement of signs along roadways. Who gets that money from those signs? Is it the private landowners? Is it in some cases the municipalities, or can it be the province? I think that would be of interest to people in this Assembly, and we would like to know if this change in the rules impacts any of that and who has a say, what is the appeal process, the standard kinds of questions that are asked in a case like this.

Also, I have a question around jointly funded roadways. For instance, here in Edmonton we have the Whitemud freeway, and roadway signs have recently been a hot topic in this city. There are a number of people who don't like the flower beds that are advertising along that freeway and have asked council to have them removed. My understanding is that they are in the process of being removed because people said that they were distractions, or they made an argument for them being distractions, while they were driving along the freeway. Because that was a jointly funded project with the province, I'm wondering who has the ultimate jurisdiction. Does the jurisdiction go back to the local municipality? It must; that's what council decided. But does the province have any say or impact on what happens there? I'm thinking again in terms of consistency of approach.

One thing I think we have to be careful of is that we never cross the line between what is a conforming sign, in terms of size and location to the roadway, and freedom of speech. I know that I see a lot of signs on the highway that have messages that I don't agree with. Some of them I find distasteful, at the very least, and some quite offensive, but there still is a fundamental right of freedom of speech in this country, and we must ensure that any new legislation we bring in does not bar people from participating in that process. Yes to fast removal of signs that are in the wrong locations or don't conform to whatever the standards are, but no to changes that might infringe on a person's freedom to speak.

We also had a concern about public mischief with the changes in this legislation. We've just gone through an election where all of us have experienced what can happen in sign wars. Your signs get moved sometimes by whomever and can go from a completely legal position to one that is illegal. My question is: who's responsible in that case, and what's the process for notifying the department that in fact your sign may have been moved illegally to a place where you

didn't want it to be? If you take a look at page 2, under section 32 it talks about how "any person who wilfully obstructs, interferes with or hinders a person acting under section 30(7) or (10) is guilty of an offence and liable to a fine of \$1000."

Well, it's nice to see that in there, Mr. Speaker, and it's wonderful if you can catch the person or find out who they are, but certainly my experience would be that finding people who play games with the signs is not an easy task. "Can you find them to have them charged?" is one question. In the absence of being able to find them and in the shortened time period there is for the sign to be changed or moved, what's the responsibility of the person who owns the sign to be able to, one, know that it's now illegally placed and, two, be notified in a timely enough fashion for them to address the situation? Who incurs the costs of changes that have to be made? I think those are questions that should be asked.

So my major concern with this bill is with changing the requirements here in terms of the notification. Is there going to be enough time for notification of people who have had their signs placed illegally, not by themselves but by others, and what onus of proof will there be on those people to in fact prove that they didn't place the sign in the wrong spot?

This is an interesting bill to come before us at this particular time. We were talking about how we would have thought that one dealing with cell phones would have been perhaps of equal importance, and perhaps that's something this Assembly can address through the various avenues open to us in this next session. Certainly we hear lots of talk in the communities about the kinds of problems that happen with cell phone use in cars in terms of distractions, as we see with these signs, and it's something that I think we need to start thinking about from a legislative perspective.

Insurance rates are very high for people. Many people are driving without collision on their vehicles these days for those reasons. We need to do whatever we can, I think, from a governing perspective to ensure that the risks on roadways are minimized. I think this is one step in the right direction. I think there are many steps that we need to take a look at and that need to be addressed in this Legislature. In fact, we see a number of issues coming forward this session that deal with matters associated with roadways, so what that tells me is that it's an increasing problem, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully the government will see the mood of the Legislature on these kinds of issues, and we can see some more legislation coming forward that will address them in a more comprehensive fashion.

So I think that in summary, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that hopefully those questions I have brought forward will be answered. In general certainly I support what has been brought forward in this bill. I'd like to add to the list of questions. What about mobile signs, the portable signs that we see on roadways though not stuck in the ground? I'm talking about those small ones on wheels but also those larger mobile ones that are semitrailers that are parked in farmers' fields. Do the same rules apply to those? Just a minor question but one that we would hope to be addressed.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments I will be supporting this particular bill. I think it addresses an issue that is interesting and important for us to be talking about. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to join the debate in support of Bill 201, the Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001, sponsored by my colleague the Member for Highwood. Effective infrastructure is something all Albertans support. When there are problems that impact the safety of our highways, the Department of Transportation needs the mandate to

act quickly to prevent any potential harm to Albertans. That is the intent of Bill 201. Its design will simplify the operation of the Department of Transportation so that they may act on behalf of Albertans to remove clutter and distraction from our roadways.

The act does not change the definition of prohibited signs but allows illegal signs to be removed quickly. Currently the long, complicated enforcement process does not provide an effective deterrent to offences. To the contrary, the bogged down enforcement process has tied the hands of enforcement officials to deal with offences to such an extent that the process is often an exercise in futility. The current process draws the Department of Transportation, law enforcement agencies, the courts, and the offender into a protracted situation that may more often than not lead to frustration and stalemate.

3:20

We are living in changing times. The population is booming in all Alberta communities. The opportunity to advertise to an enormous audience traveling the highways of Alberta every day is tempting. As the opportunity to advertise increases, so does the incentive to place illegal signs. The proliferation of signs in violation of the Public Highways Development Act has increased the strain on the resources of the Department of Transportation as well as our legal system and the RCMP. There needs to be a commonsense solution to protect the rights of motorists, and a new balance must be struck.

I would like to give a short analogy. If a boy were to stand accused of painting graffiti on a bridge and was caught in possession of the paint, would his rights be so protected to allow him to keep the spray paint until he was properly arraigned in a court of law? Of course not. The paint would be taken from him and would be returned upon proof of innocence.

Another analogy that comes to mind applies currently in Calgary with the bus strike. If I were driving on the streets and parked my car in an illegal spot, I'm sure the car would be towed. If they didn't tow it right away, I'd probably leave the car from 8 in the morning until 5 in the evening and pay a small fine rather than pay the hefty amounts collected by the parking lots. That's not right.

This is perfectly reasonable for most minor legal infractions but is currently not the accepted practice for the removal of illegal signs. This is an issue involving the property rights of the offender and the landowner, so regardless of the fact that these individuals are breaking the law, actions have been allowed to persist. The act's enforcement mechanism needs some teeth, and this is the intent of the bill sponsored by the Member for Highwood, which I support.

Some believe that those who own property adjacent to the highway have the right to place signs exhibiting whatever they choose. Our existing legislation doesn't give them that liberty. The allowable content and level of signage is currently regulated to prevent abuse. Currently we do have safeguards within our legislation to prevent the exploitation of our traffic corridors as a way to market countless products, services, or corporate logos to a captive audience. However, the mechanism to deal with noncompliance is very lax. The people of this province appreciate less clutter, less distraction, and an unobstructed view of the horizon as they drive on our highways, which, I might add, are the very best and the envy of a lot of provinces. The required changes to the legislation are adequately addressed in Bill 201, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I wish to discuss some of the implications that will result from passing this bill. To begin with, motorists and their passengers and loved ones will have a safer roadway. This I believe will be the single most important improvement resulting from passage of this bill. The quick removal of unreasonable signs will ease frustration

and distraction for countless motorists all across the province. A less distracted driver is a safe driver, and this will most definitely result in fewer motor vehicle collisions in the long run, particularly as our population increases and we have a higher volume of traffic on our highways.

The guidelines for signs under the Public Highways Development Act require signs to be simple, directional, and informative so as to not distract drivers. Anything flashing, floodlit, spinning, or resembling other traffic symbols is prohibited, as is any sign that is considered inappropriate or excessive. The process for the removal of a sign currently takes enormous legal wrangling and can extend over months, and after spending months to resolve the issue, should the sign be replaced, the entire process begins all over again. The people working in Transportation deserve a law that gives them the authority to act against illegal signs in a timely manner.

Bill 201 directs that illegal signs be removed seven days after a written notice of fault is given to the landowner. At this point the sign is picked up and stored pending resolution. In any case, the sign is removed quickly, which will significantly cut down the amount of time and effort in trying to enforce these incidences.

As most of you are aware, our court system is under increasing pressure to deal with an enormous backlog of minor offences and ticketed fines. The time and effort the court system expends in trying to enforce these laws needs review. In the case of an illegally placed or inappropriate sign the threat of a fine is sometimes not enough to force compliance to law. The offender more often than not has a substantial financial interest in the display of the offending sign and will fight a ticket to maintain his or her sign.

To give the Department of Transportation the authority to remove the sign after informing the offending party is a simple and meaningful solution. In this way, the punishment for noncompliance is immediate and just significant enough to substantially deter individuals from pursuing an often unreasoned legal defence and wasting the time of the courts.

The problem the current system is facing is that citing violations of the legal code does nothing to stop the offence. The method of ticketing violators is indirect and does not always provide incentive for the adjustment or removal of the sign. If an individual is in the process of a court battle over a ticket on a sign, he cannot be ticketed for the same offence again. This literally allows him to buy time for his sign in the form of a ticket that may be very small when brought before a judge. By way of this private member's bill any offender looking to abuse our legal process would receive no financial gain in doing so, and that, Mr. Speaker, creates a system that is sustainable, reasonable, and just.

For all the reasons I've discussed this afternoon, I urge my fellow colleagues as motorists to support Bill 201. It will make the Public Highways Development Act operate for Albertans as it was intended to do.

My friends, I also urge you to think about the beauty along our highways and how we should preserve it, and I hope that at the end of this second reading you will rethink your position and support this bill. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to engage in the debate on the Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001, as sponsored by the hon. Member for Highwood. I notice that the hon. member has been very active in pursuit of private members' bills. One act, I believe, that the hon. member is responsible for is the persons in care act. That was a step in the right direction. I initially had a look at this bill, Mr. Speaker,

after question period today, and I, too, would like to have a longer look at this before I commit my support to it.

3:30

When I think, Mr. Speaker, of the recent election, all hon. members of this Assembly, I think, would have eventually during the course of the campaign had a sign somewhere where it should not have been. I, for one, instructed our campaign to only put signs on private property, not on public thoroughfares, because I consider it a blot on the landscape. I consider it visual pollution. Not everyone else in the campaign in my constituency did that. It is an issue that has been brought to my attention at a public forum. Now, the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar of course is urban, and rural members of this Assembly may have a different view. But when you look at signage, I didn't realize it was such a problem from the point of view of safety. Certainly for visual pollution, as it has been described earlier, that is detrimental. How many of these signs and what size they are, I have no idea.

I think, for instance, in the oil industry we could see rig 36. Mr. Speaker, all signs point from Lethbridge west to rig 36, which is in the Chinchaga region of Alberta. We could have a little sign, I suppose, at each intersection along the way, kilometre after kilometre. Oilfield personnel routinely put these signs up, and sometimes they forget to take them down. Now that things are so busy in the oil patch, maybe they just don't bother. They move on to the next job. The implications of this in the short time that I've thought about it may not be necessarily as beneficial as first thought. There is certainly the issue of public safety. There is the issue of nuisance or visual nuisance, if I could call it that.

I understand there are four letters that have to be sent to the individual landowner. That landowner may not even know. In rural Alberta there's a law. Holdings are so vast. The owner may not be aware that someone placed a sign there. They may not want to phone someone on their cell phone whenever they're driving by to check this out because they may not feel comfortable ringing someone on their cell phone while they're driving.

But we need to look at this and consider all activities before we think of any more rules or any more laws. It's not a burning issue in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The election signs: I realize that's a municipal issue. It's not connected to a provincial highway, but people want a semblance of order during a campaign. They much prefer to see candidates with signs on individual private property, not cluttering roads one after another. Then there's also third-party advertising that pops up. They don't consider that appropriate in southeast Edmonton.

If this law is going to improve highway safety on the provincial highways and it is going to also reduce or limit the amount of visual pollution, then I suppose it would be a step in the right direction.

However, there are some other notes that I have made regarding this bill, Mr. Speaker. It also has to deal with farmers, the construction industry, the oil well, the gas well drilling industry. That would be section 30 and the amendments to it. Now, the amendments to section 30 may be a problem, for instance, in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury. At this time of the year there may be a rig move going on. The access to a controlled highway: there is a public safety hazard there because a lot of times the Hi-Boys have a lot of mud underneath them on their carriages. Then it can be cold at night and this freezes on the surface of the road and it can become a traffic hazard. Now, I don't know if the hon. member has considered this in the discussions of this bill, but it is certainly something that I think all members of the Assembly, particularly those from rural Alberta, should consider.

Now, there are also farmers. Farmers routinely – and I think they do this on controlled highways . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Also farmers. That's good to hear.

MR. MacDONALD: My goodness, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Environment has more to say now than he did during question period.

Mr. Speaker, the farmers routinely – and hon. members can correct me if I'm wrong – usually during harvesttime can sometimes have temporary access to controlled highways to remove their harvest from their fields. The implications of the amendments to section 30 – I'm curious how those amendments will affect farmers and rural landowners.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments at second reading, in the brief time that I've had to read this bill, those would be my concerns. With those concerns expressed, I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak in support of Bill 201, the Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001, sponsored by my colleague the Member for Highwood.

Bill 201 calls for effective enforcement of a law that has already been established in this province. The Public Highways Development Act and the highway development control regulations became law on July 11, 1966. The purpose of the act and its regulations was to govern the construction and maintenance of Alberta's highways, control access and adjacent developments of our roads, and to govern Crown liability for damages and the protection of highways. Specifically sections 25, 30, and 36 of the act contain regulations covering illegal signs, highway advertising, and entry onto private property.

Now, it's important to remember for the benefit of this debate, Mr. Speaker, that these restrictions came into force to prevent the unabashed construction of signs and notices along Alberta's highways. Such signs not only prove unsightly but, more importantly, also pose a potential safety risk to Alberta's motorists and wildlife. As the newly appointed chair of the council on workplace safety, I take a personal interest in this issue as well. The consequences that may result when motorists are not able to discern important information while driving because of distraction from signs that impede their line of sight and ability to focus could be deadly.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of signs along our highways fall under four different categories, as my colleague pointed out: to inform drivers of traffic regulations, (2) to warn motorists of changing road characteristics, (3) to provide information necessary for route selection, and (4) to raise motorists' awareness of temporary hazards such as construction or certain municipal or community events. Now, each of these signs must also meet regulation standards, as they are part of our law that makes driving easier and establishes greater road safety for everyone.

3:40

First, the regulatory sign indicates a traffic regulation that applies at a specific time or place on a road. These include stop signs, pedestrian crossings, or vehicle weight, for example. If these important signs are disregarded because of driver distraction or obstruction of view from unauthorized signs, then the driver would be fortunate to get only a traffic violation as his error could easily result in a fatal accident.

Secondly, a similar situation could also occur where a warning

sign could be missed as a result of driver distraction or obstruction of view. Warning signs are an essential and required component of highway driving as they inform the public of possible hazards like a slippery bridge or animal crossings.

Now, as most Albertans realize, there's an abundance of wildlife in our province. There's always the possibility of crossing paths with an animal while driving on one of our many highways. This brings up the point that not only could the animal warning sign beside the highway be missed, but the animal itself could also be missed or hidden by an unauthorized sign. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that we have all seen or at the very least heard of various degrees of accidents happening with large moose, deer, or elk because the animal had darted out onto the highway and into the path of oncoming traffic. It is essential that we act responsibly as a government and provide Albertans with a driving environment that is as safe as possible. This has become even more important over recent years as our urban centres have branched out due to population increases.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, there are more highway connections today between Alberta's urban cities and its rural towns than ever before in Alberta's history. As sign laws were developed to decrease the distraction of unnecessary or illegal signs along our highways, it only makes sense to make sure that those laws are easily and appropriately enforceable and to maintain our highways to make them as safe as possible.

The purpose of Bill 201 is to improve the ability of Alberta Transportation to deal effectively and efficiently with individuals who are currently violating the established law. There are no new regulations or restrictions being proposed here. What is being proposed, Mr. Speaker, is an effective means of enforcing the law as it currently exists.

My colleague the Member for Highwood is not proposing a ban on road signage. Currently privately owned signs are allowed with the provision that they are within the scope of existing guidelines. If in fact they are within the guidelines, Mr. Speaker, then the individual would simply require an approved development permit issued by the district transportation engineer.

However, illegal signs are abundant on Alberta's roadsides. The law enforcement officials are obviously having a difficult time regulating their locations and their numbers, or we would not be here speaking about the matter today. The problems that we are experiencing, Mr. Speaker, concern the fact that the time and the effort required to obtain a proper permit far exceeds the current cost of the violation. Prosecutions for illegal signage in this province are extremely rare, and the process is very lengthy. As a result, more and more illegal signs are erected with impunity every day.

The existing system requires that the Alberta Department of Transportation send four letters by registered mail to the signed landowner requesting that the sign be removed, with the final letter being sent by the minister. Now, if the sign is not removed within the time specified in the minister's letter, he may then direct any person to enter onto the violator's land and complete the directions of sign removal contained in the ministerial notice. He could also lay a complaint with the local RCMP detachment and have the Crown prosecutor determine whether charges are warranted.

Mr. Speaker, as I am sure everyone here can understand, this entire process is time consuming and strains an already overtaxed system. Bill 201 proposes that the owners of offending signs will be warned via written letter from the minister to remove the illegal sign within seven days, after which, if the offending party refused to comply with the request within the seven-day period, the material would be removed by Alberta Transportation themselves and placed in storage.

Now, while issuing fines has long been a preferred means of deterring motor vehicle and criminal offences, the option of legally removing the sign will be far more effective and expedient as a solution. This method will provide a meaningful deterrent to the violators.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Before I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I must concede that although I'm enthusiastic about the intent of this bill and the many positive effects that it could have on Alberta and its highway driving, I do have some reservations about certain details of the bill. Now, it's a small concern, but I worry about the ambiguity that exists with the current wording regarding the legal means that one must undertake in order to acquire a sign.

While I strongly believe that as government members it is our duty to do everything within our power to deal efficiently with citizens who are in violation of Alberta law, I also believe that this effort should not be taken to the point where it discourages legitimate and legal efforts of enterprising Albertans. We must not forget that the Alberta advantage resides in part on the lack of red tape that frustrates many small businesses, red tape that exists in many other Canadian provinces and jurisdictions. I am concerned that unless some clear direction is given in this bill as to how citizens may quickly obtain permission to place legitimate signs on Alberta highways, this bill may be incomplete.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill. Bill 201 will save a great deal of valuable time that our Infrastructure department, our courts, and our law enforcement officers could use to focus on other matters. Let us not forget the most important aspect of this bill; that is, the benefit and safety that our motorists will reap as a result of this legislation. I hope my colleagues will agree with me that the reservation I've just brought forth about this bill is minor with respect to its many advantages. Although there's a risk that this bill may be perceived by some to infringe on the fundamental right of freedom of speech, I believe that it will save lives, and that must take precedence. Again, I urge my colleagues to vote in support of Bill 201.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to have an opportunity to enter into the debate on Bill 201. Now, I've had an opportunity to read through this bill, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Member for Highwood. I think this is a well-intentioned bill. I think that the member has identified a legitimate concern.

However, in reading the bill, I'm not convinced that this is the correct process to come about with a resolution that is going to deal with what seems to be a fairly widespread problem throughout the province. When I look at the bill, essentially it can be watered down to two areas. First of all, in the existing statute there are requirements that illegal signs be removed after receiving notice from the minister, and the minister specifies the amount of time that is available for the offending sign to be removed. What we do under the amendment that's proposed by the member is insert in statute a provision that there be a seven-day limit before the sign is forcibly removed.

I'm not convinced and I'm not knowledgeable enough, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, to know whether or not this is a case where one size fits all. I think that there may be legitimate opportunities where the owner of a sign, the owner of the land may find that a

seven-day limit is inappropriate. I think that the amendments proposed in this bill make it too restrictive. There is no opportunity for any ministerial discretion. Under the existing statute if the minister wishes to put a seven-day limit for removal, that's within the discretion of the minister to do so. I don't know why it's necessary for us to change the legislation and by statute put a seven-day limit where the minister has that authority to do so under existing legislation.

3:50

The other part of the bill deals with an instance – and the member referred to it when he was making his opening remarks – where the process that's in place to remove a sign is successful, the sign is removed, and then shortly thereafter the same sign or a sign very similar reappears in the same location, and the whole process has to start all over again. Again, I don't know that it's necessary to have the heavy-handed approach that is suggested in this bill, whereby should this take place, the minister will forthwith order removal of the sign. I think that, again, we need to look at the existing legislation and determine what the problem is. If we're having a problem with signs being reinstalled after they have been ordered removed, perhaps the existing legislation is deficient in the penalties that are incurred.

I read in the bill, in the existing legislation on page 2 of the bill, there is a provision that it is

an offence if he again places or causes to be placed any property, equipment, material or other thing on the land within the distance from the controlled highway prescribed by the regulations.

Clearly it already is an offence under existing legislation to have that sign reinstalled. By adding a provision that says not only will it continue to be an offence, but the minister will automatically have the offending sign removed I think is addressing the problem from the wrong end. If we've got a problem with signs being reinstalled, obviously we don't have sufficient amount of penalty in place so that there is a deterrent to someone to reinstall the sign. I think that that is an area I would like to see addressed in any amendments that would be proposed to this bill.

The other thing I have concern with in this bill is that it seems to some extent to be putting the cart before the horse. Someone is essentially found guilty and then is forced to go to court to prove his innocence. It kind of goes against what principles I understand, where a party is innocent until proven guilty. Under the existing legislation before the amendment is proposed, if there is a disagreement – and presumably if a sign is not removed at the request of the minister, that would indicate to me that there is a disagreement – that disagreement eventually is resolved in a court, and a judge determines whether in fact a sign is offending or not according to statute. At that point there's an order made to remove the sign.

What the member is proposing is that someone – and it refers in the legislation, of course, to the minister, but we all know it's not the minister that is responsible for making the original determination. The minister is the one who eventually signs his pen to paper to initiate action, but someone – we know not whom – makes a decision, an assessment that a sign is offensive and is contrary to legislation and then has the authority to have that sign removed after seven days' notice, stored at the expense of the owner of the sign, the removal and the storage, and then has an opportunity to go to court and argue and resolve the dispute.

Well, that seems awfully backwards to me, Mr. Speaker, and frankly I think that's taking a very heavy-handed approach to enforcement. It reminds me of an opportunity or a similar kind of situation where here we're dealing with relatively inexpensive signs, in relative terms, where the removal costs may not be exorbitant and the storage costs may not be exorbitant. But let's for instance

imagine that instead of talking about signs, we're talking about setback provisions in land planning. Instead of having an offensive sign that is being automatically removed and then a court case held to determine whether or not it was proper for that removal, let's assume that someone builds a home on a lot and that home is built one foot beyond the mandated easement that's in place. I would suggest the owner of that home who wanted to dispute and had dispute with the official who determined that that home was one foot over the easement would have an opportunity to have his day in court before the wrecking ball comes along and moves his home.

I'm not suggesting that at the end of the day the wrecking ball still may not come along and remove that home. We all know why easements are put in place. We all know why laws are in place that restrict the signage on highways. We all know why they're there and I hope to a large extent agree with why they're there. But what we don't allow in this province are for decisions to be made by individuals that could potentially cause irreparable harm on the individual.

I recognize the example of removing a building is a bit of a stretch and a bit of an exaggeration over what the Member for Highwood is proposing here by removing the sign, but I bring that forward to make a case and to make the argument that it's a similar situation. We're going to come along, make a decision that the sign that's in place is illegal, is contrary to legislation. We will then remove that sign, store it, send you a bill for the removal and the storage, and then you have an opportunity to go to court and have a judge determine whether or not the original decision was correct and just. I suggest we're going backwards in this particular case, and I would suggest the existing legislation has ample opportunity for signs to be removed.

If signs are being reinstalled, as the member suggests, then we should have a look at the penalty provisions for reinstalling. They are provided for in existing legislation, and for that reason I would suggest to all members that this amendment is not required. There is existing legislation in place to allow for us to enforce our laws. We need to look at our existing legislation and the enforcement provisions of that before we start arbitrarily amending legislation in this House and causing damage that we really don't have an opportunity to envision at this point and place.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members to vote against this bill. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 201. Just in time. As a known advocate of traffic safety I believe that the government should play a role in regulating signs along our highways to ensure that they do not create any undo hazards or jeopardize the motoring public's safety. I applaud any reasonable initiatives to improving road safety and the initiative of my colleague the Member for Highwood for bringing forward such good ideas.

This afternoon several of my colleagues, Mr. Speaker, talked about how there is an increasing number of signs along our highways that may distract a driver's attention. I have to agree that some signs may distract a driver and get his or her attention at least momentarily. That is in fact what they are designed to do if they are working properly. Of course, if they distract attention at the wrong time or for an undue length of time at a critical moment, they may be contributing to creating a hazard. Both conforming and nonconforming signs may create this momentary distraction.

The issue of traffic safety is a legitimate and major concern of our society, so we should be aware of the nature of circumstances in which signs should be regulated to prevent accidents. As Alberta

grows in population, we must continue to review the laws that guide us to see if they continue to meet our needs. Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity that this bill provides us to engage in such debate.

4:00

However, Mr. Speaker – and I am sure you are far more aware of this than I am – rarely does a government have the luxury of debate on something that is obviously good versus something that is obviously bad. If only it were so easy. More often the nature of debates which enter into the political arena is debate between something which is bad in some people's minds against something else which is bad in other people's minds. The only choice before us, then, is: which choice is the least worst? Each choice leaves some people uneasy. That is the very nature of political decisions, and so it is with the decision before us here today.

The debate as to whether or not nonconforming signs are unsightly clutter and should be immediately removed or removed faster – well, that's an easy one to make if that is the only narrow perspective that we have on such issues. Of course they are sometimes unsightly, and of course they constitute clutter, at least to some people, and they may even decrease safety as well. But the debate as to whether or not such nonconforming signs should be immediately removed if they constitute very little additional safety hazard and make a very big difference between a poor family having some decent clothes on their backs or not because they had a sign out offering eggs for sale and managed to sell a few as a result and also had supper on the table for the little ones because of that unsightly sign which caught the attention of a passing motorist, well, suddenly, Mr. Speaker, we are not left with such an easy choice.

It is our responsibility as a government to find this right balance in these types of decisions. It is our responsibility as a government to strike the right balance on the fine line between concern for public safety and overregulation. We must find that balance between clutter and small businesses needing to find a low-cost way to promote a marginal economic opportunity, a balance between a concern for safety against people's need to earn a living and to be able to achieve the pride of self-reliance that comes with success in selling the result of their toil and labours.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, in the instance of Bill 201 we need to look very closely at this balance, and I believe that while the bill has good intent, its effect would ultimately harm a very important part of our society: small business and self-employed individuals struggling to eke out a living and finding themselves overregulated and underfinanced. Efficiency in removing clutter, yes, but not effectiveness in promoting improved quality of life for our microentrepreneurs. There's a price to be paid, Mr. Speaker, for the benefits that 201 promises, a price that is too high in my mind.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we must also be very wary of the unforeseen ramifications that upsetting the current balance might produce, and in this I refer to the difficulties that the city of Calgary experienced, which I am quite familiar with. Their attempts to improve the situation, as some saw it, resulted instead in inspiring legal challenges from newly frustrated individuals whose signs had been removed, challenges which were surprisingly successful for these individuals and resulted in exactly the opposite effect from what the city originally intended. They resulted for a time in no regulations at all as bylaw after bylaw was successfully challenged and struck down under Charter challenges involving freedom of expression and the right to free speech.

Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if Bill 201 might stir up a similar

hornets' nest that might be best left alone. I refer to such cases as *R v. 388923 Alberta Ltd.*, 1995 174AR292 Court of Appeal, and more recently *R v. 718916 Alberta Ltd.* as examples of the legal difficulties which may arise if we were to start changing the processes that we have in place now.

The Member for Highwood is proposing that the time limit for removing nonconforming signage from view of highway drivers be sped up to seven days only. I believe that the current procedure allows for an appropriate length of time before a nonconforming sign is removed. I do not see the need to move the time limit to a mere seven days, which barely gives a small business proprietor time to react at all, let alone to complete all the paper-intensive process of seeking regulatory approval for the now much more expensive conforming signage.

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined two main concerns with Bill 201. The first is how the quickened procedure will affect the economic development of small business owners and thus the prosperity of small rural communities. My other main concern is how it will infringe upon the rights of property owners and their rights to freedom of speech on their own property and the right to collect revenues from their own properties. And there are other concerns.

Mr. Speaker, we attract thousands of tourists to our province each year, and tourism is a viable and thriving industry in Alberta. Many business owners have gained financial stability by accessing this expanding market. In fact, many small businesses were set up expressly to cater to drive-by tourists. I believe it would greatly affect our smaller communities that currently enjoy economic benefits from tourists passing through, and both would suffer if the removal of signs on our highways was shortened to seven days. The tourists would not be made aware of unique, one-of-a-kind shopping experiences, and the entrepreneurs would be deprived of customers.

As a strong supporter of small business development for the economic viability of our province I am having difficulty reconciling the benefits of faster removal of all nonconforming signs with the damage this would do to these small businesses, who it must be remembered have very limited advertising dollars. As a government we must look at whether this is a fair trade-off.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to point out that our government has made great efforts to support and foster private enterprise. We have been a strong supporter of deregulation and less red tape and the belief that less government involvement allows greater room for small businesses to succeed. The effects of Bill 201 appear to be a reverse of this direction and a reverse of some of the deregulation benefits that we have achieved so far.

In the case of community businesses there is often a seasonal time frame for their product or services. As a province with a large agricultural sector I am sure we are all aware of the aspects of seasonal businesses. There are many small farmers who depend on the ability to advertise by the road for fresh corn or strawberry picking or eggs, as I mentioned earlier. It could be devastating for small farmers to have their signs removed in only seven days on account of their income being so seasonally dependent.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the seven-day time line for private owners to remove their nonconforming signs is just too short. I might find it easier to support Bill 201 if these concerns could be addressed, but I suspect that we are trying to make laws here which are based on a few exceptionally troublesome cases as opposed to the norm, and thus we would be punishing everyone for the transgressions of a very small few, a direction I find hard to support.

I agree that it is important to ensure that our highways are safe within appropriate boundaries, but the improvements being contemplated here are very marginal in my view. There are already

sufficient laws to regulate signage under the Public Highways Development Act, Mr. Speaker, and sufficient laws to regulate removal of nonconforming signs under this act.

May I also say, Mr. Speaker, that these regulations are very detailed. Nonconforming signs may be distracting to drivers, but frankly it was also driving me to distraction just reading about all the rules and regulations already required under the act which are necessary to obtain a conforming sign. I'm sure many others feel the same way, and perhaps that is why some people are avoiding trying to get one of these permits in the first place.

The government time line to assess all the details and then issue a permit can certainly be quite lengthy. There are many steps that must be followed to obtain the necessary permits to have a sign deemed to be conforming, and all of this takes time. Busy farmers and harried small business owners do not always have a lot of spare time.

There are alternatives to the course of action contemplated in Bill 201, such as promotion of the successful community business signs program and others. Interfering with the fundamental rights of our constituents and interfering with their initiatives to earn a living on their own does not strike me as the right way to turn on this issue. I do not believe that we need to regulate any further than we already have.

I certainly appreciate the time and effort that the Member for Highwood has put into this initiative and his good intentions in this matter. However, I think we would be going down the wrong road if we were to support Bill 201 at this time. With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood to close the debate.

4:10

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to first of all thank all hon. members who have participated in the debate, whether they were in support of the bill or opposed to the bill or maybe just had some comments that offered criticism. Those are all very welcome.

I'll try and answer some of the questions. First of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about reserve lands and signs there. No, this and the highways act with regard to signage do not affect them. Urban municipalities are similar. In their case, you're not allowed to use flashing lights and bright lights or lights that might be interpreted as signal lights or warning lights or whatever. I would presume that would also probably reach to reserve lands. However, the bill does not really address what is conforming and what's not conforming. That's elsewhere in the act. We're just talking about really speeding it up.

Freedom of speech and maybe this taking away freedom of speech. Well, I think we all know that freedom of speech is not absolute. For instance, we're all not allowed to speak in here at the same time. There's a time when you're allowed to speak and that kind of thing. It's sort of a little bit like graffiti. Graffiti is a form of expression. You might wish to say that that is the epitome of freedom of speech, yet we don't allow that in some places. You can go in the occasional washroom of certain bars, not that I've ever been there, and see graffiti, and it's welcomed there. The owners put up a great big blackboard to do that. Well, this really doesn't deal with that, but in some senses a proliferation of highway signs is a form of graffiti.

Too short a time, seven days. Well, there are a couple of provisions here. If you look at the bill on page 1, "Section 30 is amended," in (1)(a): ". . . within 7 days of receipt of the notice or any longer period allowed by the Minister." Then there's another exemption here that is put there under (b). There's always opportu-

nity, of course, in committee to expand this to 14 days or whatever.

Mobile signs. Yes, they can be removed in the countryside. That was again from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

There is an appeal. The appeal to the minister for more time is certainly there in Bill 201.

Edmonton-Gold Bar: rig 36 sign. The example: directional sign for vehicles to turn off the highway. That's certainly allowed, and that can be permitted. If it is strung out along the highway like Burma-Shave, then I suspect that maybe too many signs wouldn't be allowed. Certainly that's a very common kind of thing.

Let's see. There's another one here. Should this bill pass second reading, then amendments for some of the criticisms could easily be accommodated.

I would disagree with the Member for Medicine Hat's assertion that no opportunity for ministerial discretion appears to be there, but perhaps that was partly a function of my not being able to hear him well. I don't really think it's a heavy hand for a second-time offender, but that's a matter of debate.

The example given by Medicine Hat of the building that was one foot over – I happen to own a building where part of it's encroached on another's property and part of their building is encroached. That's more a function of surveyors, but the building has to have a permit to be there in the first place or it will be taken down very quickly. That's a little bit of what I'm trying to deal with here. Without permits some of these signs could be permitted, but they don't ask for permission.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Farm produce is allowed under the current act, not under Bill 201, and for the reasons that you so eloquently spoke about: the poor family that would lose its livelihood. This is not designed at all to interfere with them because the act already covers that, and there are all kinds of exemptions there. If it's a special event in a community, there are permits that you can get for rodeo for such and such a day or such and such a time, real estate signs, that kind of thing. A number of others are there.

Well, I've tried to answer some of the questions. Again, thank you for the support. I think Alberta should be committed to making its highways as safe a place for motorists as possible. This bill is committed to showcasing and allowing the showcasing of Alberta's boundless scenery and tourist attractions. This bill is committed to ensuring that the laws of the province are enforced fairly and justly in accordance with the wishes of the people of Alberta. I suggest Bill 201 will assist us in meeting these goals.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 201 as I believe it is in the best interests of the driving public and Albertans.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:17 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, okay. The Assembly has before it a division on Bill 201, the Public Highways Development Amendment Act, 2001. Now, whenever there's a voice call, a subjective decision has to be made with respect to what one hears. For those hon. members who said, "Yes, there very clearly were more people who were in the affirmative," and for those hon. members who said, "Oh no, there very clearly were more voice calls in the negative," please be advised that there is a speakerphone here attached to the desk of the Speaker which provides for very, very acute hearing throughout the whole Assembly. Some hon. members sitting in a

particular quadrant of the Assembly may feel that there are yeas or nays in their particular quadrant, but the Speaker is assisted by this amplifier which provides for a wide range.

For the motion:

Abbott	Coutts	Shariff
Bonner	MacDonald	Taft
Cao	Mason	Tannas
Carlson	Nicol	Woloshyn

Against the motion:

Ady	Hlady	McFarland
Broda	Horner	Melchin
Cenaiko	Hutton	Norris
Danyluk	Jablonski	O'Neill
DeLong	Jacobs	Ouellette
Doerksen	Jonson	Rathgeber
Ducharme	Knight	Renner
Dunford	Lord	Smith
Forsyth	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Friedel	Lukaszuk	Stevens
Goudreau	Marz	Strang
Graydon	Maskell	Tarchuk
Haley	Masyk	Taylor
Hancock	McClellan	VanderBurg
Herard	McClelland	Vandermeer

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 45
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[Motion lost]

4:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to permit second reading of Bill 202 on the same day as its introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill 202 **Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity)** **Amendment Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with exceptional honour and pride that I rise to first speak to Bill 202, the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001. I do not use the term "exceptional" lightly. I say it because this bill deals directly with a violation of one of the principles this province and this country have held as fundamental since the architects of this nation first established the values and laws of this country: the principle of equality.

The intent of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is very simple. It will end the practice of allowing insurance providers to charge young males significantly higher premiums for car insurance than they charge young females, a difference that can equal up to and exceeding \$1,000 a year. All this bill seeks to do is address one of the last vestiges of treating the two sexes as fundamentally unequal.

This afternoon I will explain to members of the Assembly who are curious just how a blatant act of gender discrimination managed to evolve over time into an institutionalized part of insurance provision in this province. I will demonstrate that gender bias was slipped in

under a clause that allows categorization in insurance provision but that this clause, as in all other laws, is no excuse for gender discrimination.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Next, I'll explain to members of this Assembly how this bill will affect Albertans on a personal level. It was because of several concerned constituents that I felt it necessary to act on this matter. Today I will present their stories to illustrate how seriously this issue is to the young men of this province.

Third, Mr. Speaker, I will point out that portraying all young males as a safety hazard on Alberta highways, as the current insurance structure does, is not only inequitable; it is erroneous. The greatest threat on Alberta roadways is inexperienced drivers of both sexes, and I am certainly in support of any measures that improve the driving performance of this group.

Finally, I will point out that the passage of this bill will not cause the unintended consequence of insurance providers refusing to provide coverage for young males. Such a result would defy the most elementary rule of economics: demand will be met by supply. If one insurance provider does not want to service a particular group under Alberta's competitive insurance industry, there is certain to be another company that sees this as an opportunity and will fill the niche gap.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin by explaining just how the inequitable auto insurance rates charged for young men came to be. In the 1930s, at the behest of insurance providers, legislation was passed in a number of jurisdictions across the country to allow insurance companies to develop a statistical plan. That is, the government allowed insurance companies to divide people into demographic groups such that different rates could be charged depending on the risk associated with each group, a risk determined by statistical analysis of that group's past. Initially, insurance companies chose to break down groups for customers only into business and pleasure drivers. By the 1950s these statistical groups had grown to include territory of the driver, previous accident claims, age, and marital status.

It was in 1957 that gender was introduced as a statistically significant criterion to break down insurance customers. Significantly, males under 25 were placed into a single statistical category, and any person who happened to be in this category was subject to the same hefty fees, whether they were the most irresponsible and reckless drivers on the road or the most courteous and careful people that ever sat behind a steering wheel.

So, Mr. Speaker, you can see that what has become an accepted abuse of gender equality started out as an addition to a law that had good intentions. The law does not demand that this categorization of males persist. It is merely something that seemed to fit the parameters of the law. It has crept in and stayed because no one has felt it a priority to remove it. Well, I'm making it a priority, and I hope you will agree that today is the day to fix this aberration that violates gender equality.

Some members of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, might question whether Albertans are truly moved by the abuse of their rights as individuals. As a member who takes pride in listening to her constituents' concerns, I can assure you that Albertans are upset, and increasingly so, at the way insurance provision works against them today.

I want to tell you the genesis of my introduction of this bill. When our son was graduating from high school, a friend of his was going into the trades to be a millworker. In order to do that, he had to buy his tools, which were expensive. He had to pay some tuition, some

costs for his instruction. He had to buy a car, a set of wheels to get him to the work site because public transportation didn't take him there. So he did all of those, paid all of that, and then he had to take out insurance on the old car that he paid \$500 for. What he was quoted for insurance was \$4,020, something that he couldn't afford to pay. Hence, the reason why I'm here today to speak to this gender inequity is because this young man's older sister was only paying \$900 at that time for the insurance on the car.

I have also brought with me, Mr. Speaker, a letter from a gentleman with the same root problem of abusive rates of insurance for young male drivers. With your permission – and I would provide copies to the House – I would like to read a paragraph from that letter. He says:

Although I realize that as a group, young men may have more accidents per driver than young women of the same age, the problem with the present system is that the determination of a driver's rating begins before he or she even gets behind the wheel, and is done so solely on the basis of gender. As you will no doubt agree, there are young men who are extremely safe drivers, and there are young women who are a road hazard. The injustice lies in prejudging a driver as safer or riskier based solely on what gender he or she was born. This must be stopped.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that members of the Legislature can see my point, that it is discrimination, plain and simple, to charge different rates for male and female drivers. Moreover, I hope they can see that this inequity is affecting Alberta's families. It is harming their mobility and in some cases limiting their ability to seek employment and to live a full and productive, honest and responsible life.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to make it clear that although I am very much in favour of removing inequities in insurance provision, I am also a very strong advocate of road safety. This is not at all a contradiction. I would be the first to say that offenders of our road laws should be punished fairly and expeditiously, but common sense alone tells us that not all male drivers are offenders and not all females are angels or vice versa or virtue versa.

If truth be told, Mr. Speaker, the greatest hazard on the road is young and inexperienced drivers. Driving is a skill that demands building a respect for the wheel, the vehicle, the road, and other drivers. Giving a driver time on the road is one of the most effective ways of building the maturity and confidence that will lead to reduced accidents. A report from the Coalition of Alberta Automobile Insurers, for instance, suggests that drivers with a licence for less than two years are twice as likely to be involved in a road accident.

I am, Mr. Speaker, fully in support of any policies that serve to reduce the hazard posed by inexperienced drivers. I am, for instance, a strong advocate of graduated licensing. For those members of the Assembly who may not be aware, I would like to explain the details of such graduated licensing. The essence of this policy is to turn the process of licence issuing from a sudden, complete process to an incremental process drawn out over time. Drivers are initially given a licence with certain restrictions placed on it that keep the driver away from driving hazard zones. It is a creative policy, nonjudgmental as to gender, and it works.

Ontario, for instance, instituted graduated licensing in 1994. In that time there has been a 31 percent drop in collisions, and the injury/fatality rate dropped by nearly 25 percent. Graduated licensing evaluations in Maryland, California, and Oregon have shown a 5 to 16 percent reduction in new driver crashes. So, Mr. Speaker, it is with great enthusiasm that I would herald Alberta's efforts to introduce a similar graduated licensing program. As it stands, Alberta will be joining almost every other province in Canada this year by enacting a graduated licensing program that will take effect shortly.

4:40

The last point I wish to make, Mr. Speaker, is that in legislating a law that prohibits insurance providers from charging higher rates for males, the result will not be insurance providers refusing to provide insurance for young males. Such a result defies the rules of elementary economics. In Alberta we have a competitive insurance industry regime. That is, any insurance company that meets certain standards is allowed to and encouraged to open for business in this province. This being the case, it makes little sense that all insurance providers would suddenly stop offering any insurance to males.

To support this point, I ask the members of this Assembly to turn their attention to the state of Montana. In 1985 legislation was passed in that jurisdiction which was very much in sync with the proposed legislation today. It unilaterally prohibited the use of gender in auto and all lines of insurance. It did not prohibit the factor of age nor modify its insurance regime in any way that would magnify the effect of simply removing gender as a rating variable. What was the result? Exactly as I have put forward to you today: no auto insurers stopped writing auto insurance for males for reasons other than noncompliance with state solvency laws. Mr. Speaker, this example serves to emphasize that the threat of an insurance provider exodus is merely a myth. It is an unsubstantiated fear that defies both logic and precedent.

I have presented this afternoon at length why Bill 202 is important to me personally and why it is important, I believe, to Albertans. In summary, I have shown, I hope, how provisions to allow for gender discrimination evolved over time, that gender was not always a criterion of insurance provision in Alberta, and that it need not continue to be an aspect of insurance provision.

Secondly, I brought forward the testimony of a number of Albertans to demonstrate that the issue is important to them. The passage of this bill and the efforts it will make in reducing gender discrimination will liberate young males and their families from an entirely unjust financial burden. It is a liberty that is owed to the young males of this province that are conscientious and responsible citizens. It is a liberty that is long overdue.

Third, Mr. Speaker, I emphasized that I am a strong advocate of road safety. My commitment to eliminating inequities in auto insurance premiums does not contradict my duty to this important cause. I believe Alberta's efforts to introduce graduated licensing are well placed, and I believe without a doubt that the new licensing system will markedly reduce traffic collisions on Alberta roads. Graduated licensing is a positive, nondiscriminatory way of reducing road hazards in this province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out again that it is nothing but erroneous to suggest that the introduction of legislation eliminating gender discrimination in auto insurance will cause young males to be denied access to insurance. Businesses will continue to be eager to meet the needs of the young male market. Evidence from other jurisdictions only confirms this point.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 is important for Alberta. It deals with a topic that has not received attention to any great extent in the past decade, not because it has not been important but because it has not had a voice. Some years ago my constituents raised their voice, and I'm here today to ensure that that voice is heard in this Legislative Assembly.

I ask for the support of all here to address this inequity as I have outlined in the auto insurance premium payments.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to address Bill 202, the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001. I always assumed that I would be the very last person in this Assembly who would speak against eliminating any kind of gender inequities in this province, but I find on this particular bill that I'm really torn in terms of the choices that we have before us. Eliminating gender inequities, whether they're male or female, is something that I have fought for over many years. But in all cases I think it's very important that we take a look at the issues before us and make decisions based on fact and background information rather than just assuming that if there is a bias, it needs to be eliminated.

I'm not convinced that this particular bill is the answer to this particular situation. I think, to me, at first glance it looks like tinkering around an issue that really calls for overall reform. Certainly there are lots of issues with car insurance that need to be addressed, and the gender bias may be one of them, Mr. Speaker, but I'm a little reluctant to take a look at it in isolation of the rest of the criteria that need to be talked about.

I say this, Mr. Speaker, having a 17-year-old son and a 15-year-old daughter, so both of them are at the stages where they're wanting to be driving, have licences. What do you do about the insurance situation? There's no doubt that it is exorbitant for young men. I'm a single parent, so if my son is insured with my car – he's insured as an independent driver, not as a second driver on one car. The quotes we've had range from \$2,700 a year to \$3,700 a year. For my daughter, who'll be 16 very shortly, the same quotes come in about \$750 to \$900, so I see that there are great inequities.

Why are they terrible? I think that's the question that we need to ask ourselves. What is it in the background of these young men driving that puts them in such a higher premium class? I don't think these decisions are just pulled out of thin air. I take a look at my two kids and I see that my son is a very dependable guy. He is an excellent driver, I think, a very reliable kind of kid, a very safe driver, but he's also a kid who can't find the milk in the fridge most days, Mr. Speaker. So what does that say to their perceptions when they're out there on the road? That is a question that I ask myself every time I see him getting into the car of one of his friends. How safe are they really out there? How well are they able to judge the different influences they have as they're driving and able to react to them in a timely fashion?

A couple of years ago I took a defensive driving course put on by one of the local companies where we had a really mixed group of ages and genders. By far the young men under 25 were the absolute worst drivers in terms of reaction time and being able to analyze what they would do in a potentially dangerous situation. There were young women there under 25 too. There were older people. [interjections] No, I don't think that the young women were the distraction in this particular case. Certainly we could see that these young men did not have the reaction time and were not able to assimilate all the information coming to them in any where close to the same kind of reaction time of the other groups. So it leads me to think that there is some justification for the kinds of classifications we have now.

4:50

When we take a look at this bill bringing into effect the reduction of a gender bias, the theory sounds really good, but how does it actually work in practical applications, Mr. Speaker? If we take a look at other provinces where this has been brought forward, what we find out is that the responses of the insurance companies are quite interesting. So far in Canada the provinces that have changed their criteria are British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. What happens is that the government insurers in these provinces

have chosen to charge less than the risk assumed for young drivers and male drivers and charge more for older drivers and female drivers, so you've got a cross-subsidization happening there. That is obviously going to be of consequence. If we subsidize one group of drivers, somebody else pays the price, so I think that's something that needs to be looked at.

In 1988 the Ontario Automobile Insurance Board proposed changes to their classifications that would have disallowed the use of age or gender or marital status as a ranking criteria, and what happened was that the proposed uniform classification plan was dropped by the government due largely to opposition from older drivers, who would have paid substantially higher premiums.

I don't think we can take a look at this particular bill in isolation of all the other factors that impact on it. I think definitely it's an issue that needs to be studied. I think we need to hear both sides of the story. We need to send this bill out to insurance companies and to other groups who are affected by it and get their feedback on it to find out what people think.

Certainly when we see court rulings about this issue, so far what's happened in the Canadian courts is that the rulings have come down in favour of current practices. They talk in the rulings about how the insurance industry must be allowed time to restructure the classification system in a manner that eliminates all kinds of discrimination in group characteristics and that so far there are no reasonable alternatives to setting these premiums. I agree with that.

I think we need an overhaul in the system. I think that we have a responsibility as legislators to put some pressure on the insurance industry to start to address that. I think there are many different ways that that can happen, but I don't think that we can just tinker with the system in this instance and think that that's going to come anywhere close to solving the outstanding issues.

I say that, being on both sides of the coin in terms of having to pay for insurance for these kids that are going out on the road, and I think we need more information. I think it's true that the greatest problems we have are inexperienced drivers, but also reaction times and ability to process multiple sources of information coming to people is an issue to be talked about. I think we're a long way from being able to bring in legislation that starts to address this issue.

I think that I would be fully supportive of any kind of a review that the government could bring forward on this or any initiatives brought forward by private members on this kind of an issue, but I just don't think that I am prepared at this particular time to support a bill that is tinkering.

So with those comments I'll take my seat and allow other members to participate in the debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 202, brought forward by the hon. Member for St. Albert. The bill proposes that under the insurance system both males and females should have the right to contract similar insurance services on equal terms without discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, as an advocate for equal rights for all I agree that we must try to achieve greater equality between men and women in our society. Allowing young men and women to pay vastly different auto insurance rates is discrimination, plain and simple. We cannot allow a practice that judges whether people are liable based on nothing more than just their gender. Several inquiries have concluded that the Alberta Insurance Act encourages and perpetrates the segregation of people by gender. This is a classification system that gives rise to discrimination of individuals, which violates their protected rights.

Different insurance companies within Alberta have developed several categories of insurance rates according to driver statistics. In order to keep the insurance level fair in each category, they have developed a system that differentiates between things like people who do not have driving experience, the amount the driver will be on the road, and where the driver lives. However, they have taken this categorization a huge step further; they have divided drivers under 25 into male and female categories. This becomes a problem when males under 25 are facing insurance bills \$1,000 higher than their female counterparts. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Insurance Act has allowed insurance companies to judge a person and their personal liabilities based on the fact that they are male or female, not personal experience or behaviour.

This bill would eliminate one of the last remaining acceptable practices of gender discrimination. All other classifications currently used for insurance purposes are classifications that the driver can choose to change his insurance rate. A person can decide what vehicle to drive, whether or not to take driver education, or what they use that vehicle for. Gender is something we have no choice over, and it is not fair to group people by it and impose vastly different rates based on this reason.

There are just as many good male drivers as female drivers. It is just that males on the average drive greater distances, which increases their chances for an accident and skews the statistics. This must be taken into consideration. We must judge people based on an individual's experience, not a generalization based on physical characteristics beyond their control, though it is a difficult decision to make in light of the poor statistics against male drivers under the age of 25. I don't believe we should ever discriminate against Albertans based on their gender.

This method of a gender-based system could be seen as over-charging some drivers by the risk they bring to the system. The present system takes a large amount from a small group and only slightly reduces the burden of the many, whereas developing genderless insurance would spread the burden of high cost by taking small increments from the many. When applying the multiple variables such as age and territory for the drivers who happen to fall in more than one high-risk category, it yields unsound premiums for such drivers. Rating with fewer categories merits a plan based more on individual experience. This would better justify the cost of premiums and build individual driver incentives.

The final benefit of Bill 202 is the social gain for individual rights that we will receive for eliminating another barrier. Discrimination based on gender is something that we do not and should not stand for in Alberta, especially as a member of this Assembly. Continued support of a rating system for stereotyping young, unmarried males as bad drivers can produce greater negative economic effects.

5:00

Those who are under the age of 25 in our society are usually unmarried and starting to build their earning potential. It does seem unfair to take the disproportionate share of costs from those who are economically incapable or deprived. Moreover, it is unfair to such high-risk drivers to allocate various administrative expenses in proportion to the premium charged. They have no choice under the present system of what category they are assigned to, yet they are also charged extra administrative expenses that match their premium.

By promoting a classification system, people must be judged by statistical risk from the beginning, not after losses are incurred. Thus, rates cannot be assessed on the individual experience, because forecasts of risk can be made only with reference to a group of statistics, and this is something we have to take into account.

To extend an individual rating system to its limits would eliminate

the concept of grouping, which is essential to insurance. In any case, the ability to predict the randomness of accidents is not a function of category-based insurance. It is reflected in the fact that some current social science theory demonstrates a preference for the use of statistical groupings over the individual cause in social science or studies.

Discrimination based on age or marital status does not imply socially offensive stereotypes in insurance. Discrimination based on sex taken together with other factors employed permits the separation of low-risk drivers from high-risk drivers. Also, the present system permits a reduction in rate wherever the improved performance of a particular category of drivers is detected, including performance of young male drivers.

Mr. Speaker and fellow members in the Assembly, I would like to say that the cause of rights, responsibilities, and equalities is important to uphold. Yet the whole principle behind categories of insurance premiums is the ability to charge the high-risk customer based on their ability, with or without individual experience. Though it is, again, a difficult decision to make in light of poor statistics against male drivers under the age of 25, I don't believe we should discriminate against Albertans on the basis of their gender. Creating a system based on individual experience would show that as a society we do not support judging people on the differences they cannot control but by their ability.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I rise this afternoon to speak to a private member's bill. It is with interest that I speak this afternoon. I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for St. Albert for reintroducing it, or, in these terms, if you at first are not successful, try and try again. The hon. member introduced this bill in 1999, and here we are this afternoon.

This bill, I believe, would restrict or limit the use of gender as an auto insurance rating criteria. Certainly this whole issue has been discussed in this province before. Of course, we go back – I think it's 11 years, Mr. Speaker, since this issue was dealt with at a human rights tribunal. By the time it moved through the process, the individual who initiated this hearing had gone into another age bracket and had insurance rates that were substantially reduced. But it did go to the Supreme Court of Canada at some point.

The only provinces that currently restrict the use of gender are the government insurers in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. I believe there's a verdict coming any day now, Mr. Speaker, on the government-run insurance program in British Columbia. I have read extensively about that, and I think the jury is going to release their verdict on that.

The Insurance Act is to be amended, of course, by this bill, and I understand this is to be added after section 294. Now, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed in the last session of the Legislative Assembly did a lot of work on overhauling the first part of the Insurance Act, which, as I understand it, had not had any extensive work since the First World War, and she worked very hard. She worked very hard with a group of people from the industry, and the bill was so large, they decided to do it in two sections. I'm curious, and hopefully later on in the debate in this Assembly the hon. Member for St. Albert can explain to the House why we need this stand-alone legislation and why we couldn't incorporate any of the further changes that are going to occur, hopefully in this term, with the Insurance Act.

Now, similar proposed changes were discussed in Ontario, I

understand, in 1998, but they were dropped by the government due largely to opposition from older and female drivers, who would have faced substantially higher premiums. There's a trade-off here, and contrary to what some government spokespersons may say, we do not have an aging crisis, an aging population in this province. We're one of the youngest provinces in Canada, but at some point in the future another generation, in the years 2016-2018, will have a substantially larger percentage of the population, 14 percent I believe, over the age of 65. If we were to reduce the premiums for one age group, will it unfairly increase them for another? If the hon. member could perhaps address these issues as the debate continues, Mr. Speaker, I would be very grateful.

I listened with interest to her remarks regarding graduated licensing, and I would be curious to know if there have been any studies conducted or perhaps even concluded in relation to graduated licensing and how that makes safety on our highways better and also if it reduces the number of accidents in those age groups.

Now, we're going to go through this legislative process, and we have to consider, when we discuss this bill, what has happened in the Supreme Court of Canada, and we have to look at and respect that the final rulings by the Canadian courts have been in favour of the current practices. We look at the 1992 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Bates versus Zurich Insurance* and the 1993 Alberta Court of Appeal decision in *Watters versus The Co-operators*. The Supreme Court in 1992 upheld the use of age, gender, and marital status as rating criteria, and it was a majority opinion, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

Now, I wonder what sort of consultations the hon. Member for St. Albert has had with the Insurance Bureau of Canada or perhaps with Mr. Wood here in Alberta. In response to this challenge, Mr. Speaker, the Insurance Bureau of Canada has examined auto insurance rating practices used in a number of countries and has conducted a detailed actuarial analysis for nine driver-related variables in data collected from all insurers through the current automobile statistics. The findings and recommendations from the survey and the actuarial analysis are concluded in two main points. A better measurement of risk is the best tool to ensure fairness in the pricing of automobile insurance for consumers, and age and gender are actuarially significant variables in the accurate determination of accident risk. Secondly, elimination of age or gender as auto insurance rating criteria would significantly disrupt current pricing as the cost of subsidizing young and male drivers is imposed on older and, again, on female drivers.

There is a relationship between driver age and accident frequency, and that has been well established. Now, young drivers are involved in a greater number of both fatal and injury-producing accidents than their older counterparts. The relative risk facing younger drivers can be as high as 2.5 to 3 times that of older drivers, and the evidence is also clear that female drivers typically demonstrate a lower accident risk than male drivers. The insurance industry recognizes that the higher accident frequency of younger drivers is due in part to their lack of driving experience. However, numerous studies have also demonstrated that because of their lifestyles and outlooks, young drivers still represent a greater risk than older drivers with the same amount of driving experience.

Now, to reduce premiums. If the hon. member's initiative here with Bill 202 is to do that for everyone, well, then I believe we're going to have to take a long look at considering supporting this bill. How the legislation will work in light of the insurance industry's visits previously to the courts not only here in Alberta but also in Ottawa should be considered by this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, we have to look again very closely at Manitoba and

Saskatchewan and British Columbia and the different systems that those provinces employ and, overall, at which better serves the consumers. It's fine to think that the insurance industry will appeal to the courts, but I would suggest to the hon. member – and perhaps the hon. member has already been in consultation with the insurance industry regarding this issue – that certainly it's an issue that we all will deal with eventually at our constituency offices. When we look at what the Alberta Human Rights Commission concluded in 1990, that yes, there was discrimination, and at what happened further along in the judicial system, then perhaps the best way of dealing with this is to consult, whenever there are further consultations with the insurance industry and consumer groups in regards to strengthening and modernizing the current Insurance Act.

Now, I don't know the business of the governing party, but certainly the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed did a very good job with the first initial modernization of the Insurance Act. Of course the jury will still be out on that because the consumers are just getting to understand, as is the industry, the implications of the first part of the modernization of the Insurance Act. Perhaps that is where this bill belongs, in the second part of the overhaul of the Insurance Act.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, with those remarks on Bill 202 I shall cede the floor to one of my hon. colleagues. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certainly pleased this afternoon to rise to speak in support of Bill 202, the insurance amendment act. I will present three reasons this afternoon for why this bill should be given just review and ultimately be passed by members of this Legislature.

First, the bill deals directly with a subject that is fundamental to the existence of this elected body, the principles of equity and justice. It does not take much common sense to realize the current practice of charging different prices merely based on gender is a violation of the most basic sense of equity. This is especially true in face of the fact that there are other accurate measures for determining risk that can be used.

Secondly, I would like to point out to the Legislature that Alberta is not the only jurisdiction that has considered legislation regarding automobile insurance. Several provinces in Canada and the U.S. have passed such legislation. In each of these cases the problems predicted by the opponents of this bill, such as insurance operators refusing to offer insurance to male drivers and massive increases in insurance premiums for female drivers, have failed to materialize.

Finally, I want to add that the idea for this bill was brought forward by a constituent, and passage of this bill will be a demonstration of the effectiveness of this legislative Chamber as being truly responsible to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, gender equity has been a much discussed topic in Alberta and around the world for several past decades. Most often the concern has been that women have been discriminated against in their workplaces, their homes, and their communities. Judicial bodies and legislatures have taken action to address these very legitimate and fundamental concerns motivated by the very basic premise that men and women must be treated as equals and individuals and that any set of rules that violates such a premise leads to an unjust society. Yet as these actions go on, we continue to allow for the existence of a regulation that violates the equity of men. Quite simply, allowing insurance providers to charge different fees for men and women, no matter how it is justified, is an act of sexual discrimination. Merely by being born as a male, a factor that clearly

no one can influence, people are subject to higher insurance premiums under current regulations.

According to statements from the Alberta Motor Association there could be up to \$1,000 yearly difference between the costs for males and females under 25, even with an identical driving record. If Alberta seeks to achieve the admirable goal of gender equity, it must not allow insurance providers to continue to charge these substantially higher premiums for males.

Opponents to this bill, Mr. Speaker, are sure to have suggested that equity can be justifiably violated in a situation where the group causing the highest loss costs pay the higher premiums. Indeed, the statistics do suggest that young males are more likely to get into an accident than females. The point of this bill, however, is to recognize that it is not all males that cause accidents; it is only a few. Those that do cause accidents should justifiably pay higher premiums. Those that do not are being outrightly discriminated against for their gender. Similarly, not all women avoid accidents. Some are free riding off the relatively reduced rates provided for their gender.

Rather than deciding on rates by dividing drivers into men and women, the equitable solution would be to look at drivers as individuals, to judge their performance as individuals and charge them a premium proportional to this individual performance. For instance, insurance providers could collect such statistics as miles driven per year, previous driving record, and convictions or the number of claims made by the driver. This information is easily obtainable and shows a direct link with the likely future driving record. Most importantly, it looks at drivers as individuals and does not judge them on the gender they are born. Gender equity will only become about in recognizing this very basic point and passing this bill.

5:20

The second point I seek to address, Mr. Speaker, is that the evidence from jurisdictions that have made changes similar to those proposed here is that they have not suffered from the negative consequences that opponents of this bill have suggested would occur. Insurance that does not discriminate based on gender exists, and it is working without problems. There are several such jurisdictions in Canada and in the United States.

I would like to refer to the case of the state of Montana. In 1985 Montana entirely eliminated the use of gender or marital status as a legitimate grounds in drawing up insurance rates. In no other way did they modify the insurance rate regime that amplified the effect of simply removing gender as a rating variable. And what were the results? No auto insurers refused to write insurance for young male drivers. There was no exodus of insurance providers fleeing from the state regulation. Indeed, it seems few providers, if any, have closed or moved since the introduction of the legislation in 1985. So despite what some opponents assure us would happen if this bill were to pass, insurance was still available. It is a myth that insurance providers will not continue to have an incentive to provide insurance for young male drivers if gender equity is made the law.

On this note of successful precedence, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to make it clear that evidence suggests not only that insurance would continue to be available for young male drivers but that under current legislation insurance agencies would most likely be required to provide some level of insurance. Under the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, it would likely be illegal for the Alberta Automobile Insurance Board not to provide adequate insurance to young male drivers. Of course, as mentioned, the necessity for such judicial intervention would be remote because insurance providers would be perfectly willing to cover young male drivers. I merely mention the point to address the inaccuracies put forth by opponents of the bill.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that passage of this

bill would serve to confirm that we in Alberta continue to be responsive to the people that elect us. This bill was brought to the attention of the Member for St. Albert by one of her constituents. She believes in it. She has been passionate about defending the voice of Albertans. It is time that this Assembly recognizes this determination, this effort to make the legislative process do the very duties it was created for. They must see that something which has been fought for this hard probably has some virtues that members may not have previously considered.

To summarize, Mr. Speaker, I have brought forth three important points about Bill 202. The first is that despite what excuses may be brought forth, charging a different insurance premium for someone merely because they are born male is simply inequitable. Allowing insurance companies to continue with this practice is condoning gender discrimination.

Secondly, I've brought forth the point that other measures of determining insurance rates in an equitable manner can exist and in fact are being practised. The Automobile Insurance Board in

Alberta has said that there exists no obvious surrogate for gender. Well, they are wrong. Other factors such as miles driven, driving record convictions, and number of claims accurately predict a driver's behaviour and can serve as perfectly suitable surrogates.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this bill has been brought forth in a manner that represents the best of the democratic process in Alberta. A violation of the equality of Albertans has occurred. A constituent brought an idea forward to their MLA to confront the inequity. The MLA has worked hard to get her colleagues to give consideration to the benefits of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, may I just say that because of the points made, I would urge the Assembly to support this bill and pass it. I now wish to move that we adjourn debate on the bill at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 11, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/04/11

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Government Motions**

Easter Recess

5. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns on Thursday, April 12, 2001, at the regular hour of 5:30 p.m., it shall stand adjourned for three sitting days, until Monday, April 23, 2001, at 1:30 p.m.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that a humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and privilege to rise this evening and reply to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of the constituents of Banff-Cochrane. I am also very proud to move acceptance of the throne speech presented by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor opening the First Session of the 25th Alberta Legislature on behalf of our hon. Premier, my caucus colleagues, and our government.

Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne is one of the more important documents that we as members of the Legislature address in this House. It highlights our government's plan for the coming year and reflects the hopes and dreams of Albertans. Our job is to turn these hopes and dreams into reality.

As mentioned in the speech, we are beginning a new session with a new group of legislators recently chosen by Albertans to represent them in this Chamber. We have been given a solemn responsibility and a duty to honour the trust that has been placed upon us by Albertans, and yesterday we were cautioned to respect that trust and to remember that first and foremost we are here in service to the people of this province. I believe we should seriously heed this advice, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate each and every member of the Legislature and sincerely wish them well in carrying out their duties. Regardless of party affiliation we all love this province and are committed to its success and its betterment. While our future is full of challenges, it is also full of opportunities, and working together we can find what we as a province are capable of.

Two months ago Albertans were presented a vision for our future which included low taxes, no debt, a strong economy, new jobs for our young people, sound infrastructure, good health and learning systems, stable and safe communities, and reliable social programs. This vision and our plan to implement it have been strongly endorsed by Albertans. They have told us to stay the course and to do so in a balanced manner that is both bold and thoughtful. Alberta

is in the rare and fortunate position of being able to respond to many of the public expectations that exist in the fiscal area, in the human services, and in the quality of life domain.

The Speech from the Throne lays a framework for moving forward with confidence as we attempt to successfully turn our potential into reality. After four years of working with the constituents of Banff-Cochrane and their issues, I can respond positively to the speech and the course it sets for the province as we aim to ensure that Albertans benefit from growth and prosperity and from quality, responsive, and affordable public services.

Mr. Speaker, geographically the constituency of Banff-Cochrane extends from the Calgary city limits to the Saskatchewan River Crossing. We incorporate parts of Bearspaw, much of Springbank, the hamlet of Bragg Creek and surrounding acreages, Cochrane, the Tsuu T'ina and Stoney reserves, the MD of Bighorn with Harvie Heights, Exshaw, Waiparous, and the Ghost River areas, Canmore, Banff, and Lake Louise. Without a doubt this constituency represents one of the most beautiful, vigorous, and vibrant parts of the province.

Our greatest assets are our natural surroundings and our people, and most of our challenges are related to growth. Within the constituency we have logging, oil and gas development, big and small industry, a growing number of small businesses, and some of the most spectacular ranching country in the world. We are one of this country's most popular tourist destinations and offer a wide variety of recreation in our many growing communities. All parts of the constituency are viewed as very desirable places to live and visit, and more people are wanting to call it home. Residents are there by choice. They love the mountains and the rolling hills and are passionate about their quality of life. They want to be there. They want to recreate there, raise families, do business and yet be close to the big city with its amenities. It's considered ideal 'rurbanville' with its proximity to Calgary and countrylike living.

But like many other parts of this province increasing demands for expansion do cause us to struggle with growth management, sustainable development, and controversy over land uses. Our growth puts pressures on schools, health care services, and infrastructure. It is precisely these challenges and others that the Speech from the Throne addresses.

Like this government plan Banff-Cochrane constituents recognize that a strong economy is not an end in itself, rather a means to achieve the things that matter most to Albertans. Constituents agree that a strong economy begins with a sound fiscal plan. We know it's our fiscal position that now offers flexibility to Albertans in terms of future choices. A deficit and debt-free Alberta is one of the greatest gifts that members of this Assembly can leave our children and their children. Government's commitment to keeping taxes the lowest in Canada and ensuring that spending is responsible and affordable will lead to a future with endless possibilities.

While the speech touches on a multitude of industries, I would like to comment on tourism. The tourism industry in Banff-Cochrane continues to be among the top economic engines that drive our economy. Locally it is responsible for many livelihoods while at the same time providing a solid base for other ventures. Therefore, I am pleased to see this area highlighted as a priority of the government. Tourism is this province's fourth largest industry and deserves our attention. Visitors to the province last year generated approximately \$4.2 billion for businesses and tourism operators, and concerted efforts are needed to retain our competitive advantage as an international travel destination.

Mr. Speaker, the speech speaks of the benefits of our participation in a free energy market and our need to ensure Albertans have access to a reliable, ample, and affordable energy supply within the

province. On behalf of the constituents I welcome both the proposed legislation to help protect consumers from high natural gas prices as well as the creation of the Government Advisory Council on Electricity to address electricity price concerns. Acknowledging the public interest in this area with strong action will help us maintain the Alberta advantage.

Agriculture holds a historic and important place in the province. The speech speaks to the viability of farms and rural communities as another priority of this government. With one in every three jobs depending on agriculture, we need to support Alberta farmers in times of need. Safe, affordable food production cannot be taken for granted, and long-term strategies based on the insights of Ag Summit 2000 are critical.

I've had the wonderful opportunity over the last few years to represent and get to know constituents who are involved in agriculture and have learned much about their many challenges. Organizations like Action for Agriculture, which consists of farmers, ranchers, and acreage owners, have kept me informed on issues like the inherent conflict between farming operations and residential development. The loss of agricultural land due to urban sprawl is only one issue, but it becomes larger, much broader, and more complex, particularly as Alberta's economy grows. I'm sure the initiatives set out in this speech to ensure the long-term sustainability of this diverse industry will be received well by these constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I can strongly support the significant part of the speech committing to government's desire to show their leadership in preserving and protecting Alberta's environment and with it Albertans' health and quality of life. A number of new initiatives will enhance environmental stewardship and ensure economic growth is responsible. The government will continue to strike a balance between preserving Alberta's natural heritage and sustaining its use as a contributor to outdoor recreation, nature appreciation and development.

Mr. Speaker, nowhere in this great province will you find residents that better understand the concept of striking the right balance than those of Banff-Cochrane. It is a reality of our daily lives. While we benefit from Canada's first national park, provincial parks, and Kananaskis Country in our backyards, we are also charged with their preservation and good management. We know that both the environment and the economy affect our quality of life. We must not sacrifice one for the other but rather must sustain both in a complementary way. Our success will always depend on how well we are doing that. We can with thoughtful planning and a balanced approach leave a legacy of our children.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, as well as a clean environment the speech speaks to government's strong commitment to a responsive and publicly funded health care system. Consistent with the recent expressed views of Albertans, priorities next year focus on health service access, illness prevention, and public accountability. While health care issues are shared across the country, I do believe we have the greatest ability of successfully meeting these challenges. A greater emphasis on home care, environmental health and prevention activities, while ensuring access to needed emergency and medical services, is evident among health regions. As well, we are working with health authorities on long-range plans for continuing care services that will help meet the future needs of aging Albertans in a co-ordinated and versatile fashion.

Like health care, education continues to be a top priority for this government. We all know the greatest returns are made from investments in learning. Albertans expect and deserve a system that will nurture the minds and skills of Albertans of all ages from every

part of the province. We have all recently had the opportunity to discuss education issues with many constituents, and I believe support is there for a government plan that involves lifelong learning that begins well before kindergarten and continues long after formal education. The speech lists initiatives ranging from increased funding to school boards for improved student learning to enhancements for a more accessible and affordable postsecondary system. There is no reason why we cannot and should not maintain Alberta's learning system as one of the best in the world.

Over the past two years I had the privilege of serving as chair of the standing policy committee on health and safe communities. I know firsthand the importance of focusing on many variables that support safe and strong communities. We must start with children, youth, and families that are at risk, but we must not stop there. Programs that will protect and enrich the lives of Albertans of all ages and all circumstances will help ensure a high quality of life tomorrow. As a society we are judged by how we take care of our less fortunate, and government must continue to do its part to support the truly needy and create a safety net with more self-reliance.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne speaks to Albertans' ability this fall to participate in charting a course for this province's debt-free future. The recently announced Future Summit will harness ideas and give us all a voice in crafting the vision that will carry us forward into the future. Unlike many jurisdictions we have real options. We have real choices. The opportunities created by freedom from debt go beyond simple economics. They are about choices for the kind of province that we all want to live in, a province where all citizens share in the prosperity and optimism and where opportunities become limitless.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share a quote from the speech.

The government's plan for Alberta's future reflects the values of Albertans themselves, values of community and family, hard work and caring for others, creativity, confidence and innovation, and excellence in all endeavours.

These values have guided us through history and, rightfully so, continue to guide this government. The government plan as presented in the Speech from the Throne bodes well for Albertans. It demonstrates our interest in improving an already strong province and sets the stage for raising our current levels of success. It considers both young and old and provides opportunities for Albertans to enjoy the many benefits of living and working in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to represent the constituents of Banff-Cochrane, I am proud to be an Albertan, and I am very pleased to move that this House accept the Speech from the Throne.

Thank you.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to second the motion for consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech. Yesterday's throne speech reaffirmed a strong, confident direction for Alberta, and I believe this government will continue protecting Albertans through energy rebates, environmental stewardship, a responsive health care system, and a strong education system.

I would like to begin by congratulating all the new and returning MLAs. We're here because the people of Alberta believe in us and have put faith in our abilities to keep this the best province in Canada. Needless to say, I'm honoured and very happy to be part of this government. It is exciting to be a member of this Legislature that will continue to build on the incredibly strong foundation laid down under three decades of Progressive Conservative governance.

I would like to take a minute and introduce you to my constituency, Edmonton-Meadowlark. It is diverse and special. In fact, I

think I'm representing the best constituency in the province. The constituency spans neighbourhoods in west Edmonton, from the older communities of Meadowlark and Elmwood in the east to the new, expanding community of Lewis Estates. It is home to one of the wonders of the shopping world and an attraction that draws tourists from around the world, West Edmonton Mall.

The old town of Jasper Place has been a part of Edmonton since the early '60s. It has a long, rich history, and in many ways the old town of JP still exists. The roots go deep. Part of the old town is in Edmonton-Meadowlark, and in many ways the old town has stayed intact, with three or four generations of families still living there. Many of the young people moved out after high school to attend a postsecondary institution, work elsewhere, or visit the world, but they came back and chose to live in the community alongside family and friends. I was reminded of this while campaigning. As I door-knocked my way through the communities, I recognized familiar faces and met again with old friends. I met with second and third generations. It was a great reunion. So many people remembered me as their teacher or their children's teacher. Frankly, it scared me spitless. Thankfully, they remembered me fondly. Do you think it's this ample figure perhaps?

Mr. Speaker, my single greatest passion has been education. I've been at two wonderful schools: Jasper Place and Vic. Many of today's Vic students are from Edmonton-Meadowlark. I've been principal of Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts for 16 years. It's my pride and joy. It has changed from a high school with a tough inner-city reputation that had been on the list of schools to be closed. Today it's a K to 12 school that includes IB and the arts at all grade levels. It is now considered a provincial centre for excellence, and we've been called the Julliard of Canada. Our students receive an education through the arts, but not many will be artists in their own right. They will be the future business and political leaders, et cetera, in this country.

A lot of time is spent on ensuring they understand this global village that has evolved. Just after the provincial election I led a group of 39 students, teachers, parents, and community members to China on an education mission. We traveled to eight cities and visited two schools, building relationships with Chinese students and teachers. China is a second home to me after more than 30 visits since 1984. Some of the people we met there will be visiting Edmonton for the same reason we went to China. At least 60 students will attend summer camps in July here in Edmonton as a result of this visit.

I cannot say enough about the importance of sharing educational experiences and skills with people from other countries. Forging partnerships with other nations can only help young people in Alberta. They learn tolerance and understand different cultures, but they also learn that the world is not as big as they think it is. This government through Minister Oberg's department has done a wonderful job of encouraging and promoting opportunities for students and teachers to participate in international exchanges by providing a large and strong languages program. I look forward to working to continue to further develop these opportunities.

While in China I was reminded of how strong we are at home. On the return trip, when I was preparing to leave from Hong Kong, I was pleasantly surprised to see an advertisement for West Edmonton Mall. Here I was halfway across the world and I was reading about my home constituency. So you see, Mr. Speaker, it's not just about reaching Albertans or Edmontonians anymore. No, I believe we're becoming the world's worst kept secret. The partnerships and programs this government has forged with other nations have made Alberta a force to be reckoned with around the globe.

I believe we must continue our hard work in making Alberta the

best place to live, especially in the field of education. Yesterday's throne speech reaffirmed this government's recognition and support for a strong lifelong learning system. Strong education for our young people increases our ability to compete globally in all areas.

8:20

As a rookie I'm going to share a little about myself. I'm proud to say that I'm a fourth-generation Albertan. Hard work and opportunity are why I'm here today. I had a mother that was abandoned when I was in grade 5. You know, in the 1950s a young woman from the Sangudo area with about a grade 8 education, raising a family on her own, was a rare thing indeed. I think my sister and I were the only students in our school that were part of a single-parent family.

I was also working before it was legal to do so. I worked at a bakery from grade 7 all the way through high school. When I graduated from Victoria high school, I remember the principal scolding my mother because I was not going on to university. It hurt my mother deeply, but at that time there was no financial support for postsecondary education other than that from the family. Attending university was not an option for me. Mr. Speaker, Premier Klein and this government have ensured that the support is there for all students who wish to pursue a postsecondary education.

After high school I went to work for the Northern Alberta Railways as an executive assistant. That was in the days when males were taking shorthand and typing for senior CEOs and so on. For 10 years I worked at the NAR in the daytime and worked full-time at the bakery in the evening six days a week. It seems like it's much like the life of an Alberta MLA, I'm beginning to think already.

I tell you all of this not as a poor-me story but because my dream to become a teacher had to wait until I was 29 years old. By the time I went back to school to get my education, I had a wife, a dependant, and a mortgage. I am thankful for my university degree as it has enriched my life beyond belief. I have loved every minute of my years at Jasper Place and Vic as a teacher, as a principal, and I've always thought about how proud my principal at Vic would have been seeing me sitting in his chair. I have forgiven his thoughtless comments to my mother.

I started teaching in 1969. You know, when you've heard already baker, railroader, teacher, principal and look at me, I know you are going to find it hard to believe that I've been teaching for 32 years. Through my 32 years of experience I have witnessed many changes to our education system. When I started teaching, it was usually six rows of six and maybe two or three sitting on the windowsill or on chairs in the aisles. I've shared many of the concerns of my colleagues in education, but yesterday's throne speech addressed these concerns with increased funding, including funding to ensure teachers are equitably compensated.

The road to success in Alberta is beating adversity through hard work and opportunity. Premier Klein through his visionary leadership has ensured that Alberta is Canada's strongest province. We have taken advantage of our resources, natural and human, and have made sure not to waste opportunities to build on our success. The Speech from the Throne outlined the Future Summit as a great example of this government's commitment to increase Alberta's potential. I think this is a great way to secure success for our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, I will bring my strong work ethic, my experience, and the support of my constituents to this Legislature. I would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Meadowlark for the privilege of representing them in this Legislature. I'm excited about the vision of this government and look forward to this first session.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the honour of speaking today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise tonight to speak for a few minutes in response to the Speech from the Throne. I promise not to use the full time allotted tonight because we've got a lot of people who would like to get a chance.

I guess the issue is that when we look at this, my first reaction to it was: well, this is kind of a short Speech from the Throne. But when you look at it on a per page basis, I think there were probably more initiatives in this Speech from the Throne than there have been in many of the previous ones. With a couple more pages and the appropriate number of initiatives, we probably would have had a good, rounded agenda for this session.

I guess the thing that we see that's really missing in here the most is the commitment to people in Alberta that are truly in need, that have no united voice that can speak for them. We've got all kinds of options in here to provide for additional remuneration, additional incomes for individuals who are organized in any kind of a number of ways. Yet when we look at individuals that don't have that kind of organization or a voice that can speak for them, we don't see any kind of support for them other than kind of a little comment that we're going to review the basic needs for individuals that are on support programs or fixed incomes.

So what we need to do is start looking at it, and I hope that this will show up by the time we get to the budget on the 24th, that we'll see some kind of a commitment to provide dollars for individuals that are on fixed incomes: AISH, SFI, social welfare. These individuals need to have some mechanism built in so that they can develop long-term plans for their livelihood and basically be in a position where the income that they receive from the public does have a degree of indexing or a degree of equity in terms of their ability to have a sustained living.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through the speech, what I want to do is kind of touch on some of the issues that were brought up in some of the areas. The strong economy section was quite well covered, and we talked about some of the infrastructure needs, but there was no reference in here to the kind of studies that will deal with the role that the public transportation or the potential rail links between cities might have. These are the kinds of things that we have to start looking at now if we're going to deal with long-term growth in our province so that we can have programs that will allow both efficient and cost-effective transportation of goods within our province. We've got a lot of development now that's going on, say, in the corridor between Calgary and Edmonton, and we need to look at ways to service that in a cost-effective and economic way.

I think this comes up, Mr. Speaker, quite regularly. I could tell you that a year or so ago, when I was coming up from Lethbridge, I could go to the airport and get a ticket for about \$480. A couple of weeks ago I went out to the airport to get a ticket to fly from Lethbridge up here, and they wanted round-trip \$890. Well, I don't see how they can double the price for an airline ticket in the matter of about a year. So we've got to start looking at options that will give good transportation within this province, and some of the high-speed links that are possibly out there need to be looked at as 10 or 15 years into the future.

MR. McFARLAND: Fly Integra.

DR. NICOL: The Member for Little Bow suggested: fly Integra. This is a great airline – two of the owners of it were former students of mine at the university – but they're so full in the morning that if you don't get out there at least three or four days in advance, there's no chance to get on them. When you have to deal with a short-term flight, you have to pay the price.

Mr. Speaker, we want to talk about these kinds of things, and we see that the reference here to the kind of infrastructure that's needed to give us a strong economy is outlined and talked about. The suggestion also at the bottom of the page talks about the commitment to sustainable, reliable, ample, and affordable energy. This basically makes reference to the natural gas program that's coming forward. No reference in here to what we're going to do with electricity. We've got to start looking at how that kind of utility fits in as well, not only the natural gas component. This basically looks at our situation from a really short-term perspective.

As we try and look at the concept that we have now in our electricity market, we're basically going to be subject to the price fluctuations and the stability of the entire western grid. As we export power from this province, anytime there's a shortage somewhere in the western grid, our generators will have the capacity to ship into that market, and we'll be subject to that price fluctuation and that price at our margin or at our spot price, just like we were with natural gas last year. What we've got to do is put in place processes that will allow for a lot of stability in terms of the pricing and the availability for our utilities.

8:30

These are the kinds of things that provide a real incentive for our small businesses to come, to establish, and to stay in this province. If we don't have that kind of stability, what we see is that a number of them look at options when it comes time for them to make a major investment. They look at other locations as the best site for them to expand, and if they can go somewhere else where stability of their input costs is predictable, they will look very seriously at doing that. We heard of a number of cases in the past winter where individuals have said they were contemplating this. You know, we have to make sure that kind of stability is here for us so we can actually have a sound basis for companies that want to come in here.

The interesting phrase here is that we talk about in terms of we want to commit to, I guess, the free market for energy instead of a free energy market, as it's written up in the Speech from the Throne, but what we also then have is in the next paragraph we're talking about providing government subsidies, which is an intervention in that free market energy system. We've got to look at how we can support the price or develop a price within Alberta that is competitive and doesn't have market intervention strategies attached to it. This is why we in the Official Opposition are trying to encourage the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to look at the possibilities of dealing with long-term contracts or hedges as part of their approval process when they accept the price regime from the marketers that are providing us with our natural gas. If we don't have that kind of stability, we end up with the kind of crisis that we had this last year.

So I guess the thing we'll have to watch for in the Government Advisory Council on Electricity is whether or not they actually come in with good suggestions and are able to bring us a really stable type of future. If they're going to leave us attached on a spot-market basis to the western grid, anybody new coming into this province will always be subject to negotiating new contracts for supplies that are contingent upon what the generators can get by selling into that western grid. Until we see stability in California – Texas is now talking about deregulation – we're going to see this kind of uncertainty prevail through our electricity sector for as long as it exists. We'll have to make sure also that as we do that – because of that uncertainty and that short-term market potential that exists in those export markets, the generators that do establish here will be calculating a very quick return on their capital investment, which in essence will make our prices here also more costly if that becomes part of the calculation system.

The next section of the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, turns to stable agriculture communities. I think it would be really appropriate if we started to look at the whole aspect of what constitutes a rural community. Agriculture plays a very important role in establishing the economic system for those rural communities, but it's no longer the sole component of those rural communities. We're seeing more and more small businesses being established in rural communities, and they're now wanting a voice, wanting part of that decision process that we see in that rural community as they decide the kind of community they want, when they decide what type of growth, what type of investment activities they're looking for in those communities.

I guess that's why it was really good to see the references in here to the new policy dealing with intensive livestock operations. Mr. Speaker, you know I've been a strong proponent of these provincial-level standards for intensive livestock operations for a couple or three years now. What we need to do is look at also providing the local governments with broader flexibility in their land-use planning and their zoning options so that they can, in essence, deal with some of the conditions they want to incorporate in terms of their siting requirements that are over and above the environmental and minimum distance requirements that are included in the draft proposal that we've seen for intensive livestock. We want to make sure those local communities do have some say and some final control over the kind and the location of the types of livestock enterprises.

We also have to look at how we deal with the issues that come up in terms of the support structures that are put in place for farmers. The agriculture community in the last three or four years has really been faced with a lot of issues between a lot more variability in the weather, kind of a depressed world price being caused by the subsidies in the U.S. and Europe bringing forward more production, which drops the price available to the Canadian farmers because of our basic reliance on a free market, a competitive market, in the delivery of our agricultural products.

So we've got to look at how we can basically restructure some of our programs that provide the assistance. It was good to hear the minister of agriculture on the radio this morning when she was talking about and recognizing that a lot of these programs that we do have in place now haven't probably turned out to be as good as they originally were thought to be in terms of the ability to support farmers when they have conditions that are ongoing. The FIDP program, the farm income disaster program, basically is an excellent program for a one-year downturn in farm income, but when we get these longer cyclical downturns, we're getting into a position where farmers are not being served appropriately by that kind of program, which was designed for one use, and we're trying to put it into application in a different way.

The crop insurance review process, that has been ongoing under the former federal minister of agriculture, Charlie Mayer, I think has brought forward some really good suggestions in terms of how that program can be improved. But what we've got to do is look at: can we bring the crop insurance, the farm income disaster program, and the net income stabilization program at the federal level together and combine them into a single program that will probably provide a service to the farmers in stabilizing their income that is better than each of the programs operated separately?

The next thing I want to do is basically put a little caution out when we talk about efforts to provide Alberta farmers with market-choice for their wheat and barley. The farmers in western Canada vote for a board for the Canadian Wheat Board, and we should be working through those members to bring change to the Wheat Board or to bring openness to the Wheat Board, rather than

us as a provincial government trying to create changes in that institution that are not consistent with the wishes of those elected representatives here in our province. If we believe in a democracy, we believe that the people who are elected to serve within an institution should have the ability to have input from their constituents, and we should be supportive of them rather than competitors with them in terms of setting the agenda for that kind of institution, especially an institution like the Wheat Board, that's not under our jurisdiction or our legislative development. So this is just kind of the approach we need to start looking at in that rural community area as we go through it.

The next section deals with a clean environment. What we see here is, I guess, a real lack of a long-term statement of vision for the environment in our province. We've seen some real initiatives that have come up in the past to deal with the economic growth and the stewardship issues, but when we look at how it comes together, I think we see this a little bit again in the agriculture community with the delay that went on with the intensive livestock. The questions we saw in question period today about the Spray Lakes, that there's no real public review of the process for that forest management agreement. These are the kinds of things that we have to start bringing into a more open public discussion. I think the end result will still allow us to have a good, sound tourism industry and also some economic activity that spins off through the industrial sector. But we've got to make sure it's consistent with the kind of programs that the community and Albertans as a whole support.

8:40

The next section on health care I think focuses on the right kind of issues: access to health care, illness prevention, and effective regional government. It was great to hear the commitment that two-thirds of the board members will be elected. Still, we need to have a rapid movement on this by the government to get the parameters out where we can see what kind of regulations will be in place, first of all, for developing the wards or the zones within the health regions, how we can get eligibility determined for the individuals that want to run, all these kinds of things, so the people can start planning. When you get ready for an election, especially a new election that doesn't have any kind of history to it, we've got to make sure that both the supervisory agencies and the individuals that want to participate as candidates have the time that's necessary to make sure they can get well versed and well prepared for these kinds of elections.

I guess the only thing that we need to look at in terms of the health care is what kind of targets or what kind of end expectations we have in the context of our health care system. I guess we would like to see some kind of initiative put in place that would give us some target measures that we could use for performance. Mr. Speaker, I'm not asking here that we say: okay, everybody gets, say, an MRI in 24 hours. I think the suggestions that came out with the announcement were quite appropriate in that area, but we've got a lot of other areas within the health care system where we've got to be able to provide a standard so that we can talk about the delivery, so we can measure the delivery, and then we can also get on to dealing with the cost-efficiency and the cost-effectiveness of our delivery. If we don't have any kind of perception of a target or level of performance that we want to achieve, then we don't have the means to deal with cost-effectiveness and to make comparisons, say, within our health regions or between our health regions and between our province and other provinces or other jurisdictions.

The issue comes up in terms of – well, we heard one of the chairmen of the health authorities talk about how much better the American system was. Well, I guess I question the wisdom of

having an individual that questions those kinds of alternative systems as being so much better than ours unless they're willing to make specific statements on what it is about them and how we could change our systems to make them better. Just to make blanket statements like that I think, Mr. Speaker, leaves some sense that we need to have a commitment to some kind of target.

I think the education part of the Speech from the Throne is one of the better. The only issue we see in there is that with the advanced education institutions there's no reference in here to the support that might be needed if we're going to deal with potential wage settlements. We make reference to the fact that there will possibly be wage settlement supports for teachers' salaries in the public system.

I guess in this area, Mr. Speaker, what I would do is encourage the Minister of Finance, when she prepares the budget, to make sure these are not put into the departmental budget at the start but are put into a contingency fund, because once you put it into the departmental budget in any of the areas when we don't yet have a wage settlement, what you end up doing is effectively biasing the negotiation process. We can't have that perception from our level. We've got to make sure that the dollars are there, and if we put them into a contingency fund, that doesn't create a commitment that a certain number will be available for any one group that starts a negotiation, but within our debate here and our discussions we will know we've got the money earmarked that we can use to meet those kinds of commitments as the negotiations proceed.

The safe, strong community area is quite good. The crime prevention area, the victims of crime support: these are good initiatives. I think they're really the kind of statement that we as legislators for this province need to make in terms of support for the communities.

I guess the kinds of questions that will come up are, as I've mentioned already once, the reference to the income support programs. These need to be dealt with quickly, need to be indexed so that people can plan their lives.

It's interesting. I know the Member for Edmonton-Centre made a comment on the last paragraph on that page when she said: well, you know, arts and culture is more than just film development. There's good support here for the film development industry, but there's not much of a statement about the rest of the parts of our arts and culture industry. So we need to see basically some kind of commitment to improve our relationship with the rest of the arts and culture community.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, that kind of gives a sense of where I see the Speech from the Throne going in terms of the agenda that's there. In the end I would say that what I want to do is encourage the government as we go through these kinds of programs to make sure that the accountability is there, that we can go out to our constituents and say clearly: this is what we wanted to put the money into, this is how we're going to measure the success of those dollars, and you can count on us to make sure we did it right and did it wisely on your behalf.

This accountability, you know, goes quite well into all the issues that we discuss in our debate on our legislation but most specifically when we start dealing with the budget allocations, because we've got to have measurements that are effective. We've noticed in some of the past years that we continually revise the performance indicators a little bit so that we in essence don't get much of a time series, data on them. I know this is part of refining the series, but we have to be able to make some comparisons on them.

I guess the other thing that's missing out of the Speech from the Throne is any kind of commitment to the conflict of interest issues that are being raised around the province. There were a number of people during the election who asked questions about the process the

government is using, who the beneficiaries are, how these people are involved, and I think what we need to do is make a commitment in this session to better outline and have better guidelines because perception is as much of a detriment as actual conflict in itself. We've got to make them strong statements so that we can improve and develop confidence with Albertans that the perception is not going to lead to reality in terms of conflict of interest.

I guess the last issue I want to address this evening is the fact that we have to be open with the discussions that we have. We have to talk about the issues so that they are understandable to Albertans, and we have to be in a position to make sure we relate to them some issues in a way that they can see what's happening.

I'd like to give an example on that, Mr. Speaker. We keep hearing and reading and even constituents out there talk about how they're getting support and subsidies and government input in terms of their energy rebates. But when you look at it, the \$40 they're getting on their electricity bill is not a subsidy. It's actually a return of the dollars they already put into their electric bill in past years. We recaptured that when we sold those contracts at auction, and we're returning that to them now. It's not a subsidy. It's their own money. It's not money that came out of our general revenue fund or out of our royalty funds. This is money that came out of selling something that they had already paid for. Yet most Albertans see that as a government subsidy, government support for them. So this is the kind of issue we have to start thinking about in the way we present our issues to the people of this province. We've got to present it so that we're telling them the fact as it is rather than as we want them to hear it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think I would just sit down. We're going to be hearing a lot of the debate as we get into the budget. Some of the legislation that's coming up we'll be addressing. We're going to have a lot of comments to make on the issues of Bill 1 as we get into it, talking about it. I noticed the news release that came out today. It's given me a whole other speaking period that I can talk on, so I'll wait till we deal with Bill 1 rather than make those comments at this point.

As we go on to look at this, I just want to, I guess, congratulate the government on the initiatives they're taking. I hope they listen to some of the suggestions we are making as opposition – some of the backbenchers have already made good comments tonight – and that we deal with some of those issues as we complete this session.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

8:50

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Visitors?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased tonight to introduce someone from Medicine Hat. We don't often get guests from Medicine Hat up here, especially one who sat in the Assembly for so many years. He sat in this Assembly from the early '70s till 1993, held a number of different ministries under both the Lougheed and Getty years. Some of you old-timers, not to insult the Speaker's age of course, will know Mr. Jim Horsman personally. He's a fine friend of mine and well respected in Medicine Hat. He's presently chancellor of the University of Lethbridge. He also sits on the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research and continues to make a very valuable contribution to Alberta. So,

Mr. Horsman, thank you for coming to observe us tonight. Please stand and accept the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: As it is most unc customary for an hon. member to refer to the Speaker in any way, shape, or form, let the Speaker just say to the hon. Minister of Environment that yesterday an overview was given of the average age of the citizens in this particular Assembly and the chair indicated that the average age was 51, and the chair also said that the range, then, from the most youthful member to the most seasoned member was 35 years. All hon. members should know that the one that was at the top of the 35-year list was the hon. Minister of Environment.

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**
(continued)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and make some observations on the Speech from the Throne delivered on Tuesday, April 10, at the opening of the First Session of the 25th Legislature of this province.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Speech from the Throne delivered yesterday is very much like the speech that was delivered in February. There is very little that is new in it. This speech and the one delivered in February both, of course, used very, very general and abstract language in defining what this government chose to call its vision for Alberta, the vision of the future of Alberta as the 21st century unfolds before us. The more vague and more general the goals a vision statement may include, the more difficult it becomes to disagree with that. It's a lot easier for everyone to say: yes, I agree. So given the very, very vague and general nature of this statement about this government's vision, it's difficult to agree with its broad thrust.

All of us clearly would like to pay taxes that are as low as possible so long as important social programs are not compromised. We certainly ran our campaign in the last election on orderly pay-down and elimination of debt and providing sound financial support for our social programs. But, like anybody, a government must be judged on its actions and not merely on its words, this being a truism with which all of us can agree, I guess.

Let's ask: what was the first major initiative of this government after the election was safely over? The first major initiative after the election was to significantly expand the size of the provincial cabinet. When the Premier took office eight years ago, he cut the size of the cabinet to 17. Now we have a bloated cabinet of 24. I don't recall the Tories running on a platform of increasing the size of the cabinet during the election. While the members opposite like to claim that the best government is the government that governs the least, this clearly doesn't apply when it comes to the trappings of power like fancy ministerial offices and fancy cars. [interjections] At the same time, Mr. Speaker . . .

**Speaker's Ruling
Decorum**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, the long tradition of the House is that only one member at a time is rising and speaking, and when the time comes for the Minister of Environment to speak, we'll all hopefully give him the courtesy that we expect him to give anyone else.

Hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your intervention.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: At the same time that the size of the cabinet has gone up by 40 percent, the number of frontline staff has gone down by 30 percent. This is something that we need to ponder over, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech continues to talk about prudence, the responsible management of our affairs, yet the actions of this government taken since the end of the election begin to speak I think a bit loudly about where this government might be headed. The throne speech tries to justify this bloated cabinet by talking about needing a new configuration of ministries to address priority areas. I wonder where this government has been over the last eight years when it felt and claimed that it could do everything that needs to be done, address its priorities and the priorities of Albertans, with a smaller cabinet.

Clearly, the claim that's being made in the throne speech about why the cabinet had to be expanded is just not persuasive, makes no sense. The expansion of cabinet has nothing to do, in my view, with good governance. In fact, it may impede good governance. Do we really need a Revenue minister separate from the Treasury Department? Do we really need a Solicitor General separate from the Justice ministry? At least make the Solicitor General responsible for gaming and liquor board policy rather than having a separate ministry of gambling.

Let's look at a few other elements and commitments in the throne speech. The speech says that the government is committed "to reduce and stabilize electricity prices by streamlining the approval process to bring new generation projects onstream." Well, first of all, let's be clear about what caused the prices to rise: this government's bungled deregulation policies. We have wasted billions of dollars of public funds over the last little while to deal with this crisis created thanks to the policies or lack thereof of this government. Now we are trying to find ways of reducing and stabilizing electricity prices.

Well, isn't this interesting? First we get skyrocketing prices with the government's deregulation scheme. Now we get environmental degradation through lowering environmental protection standards, as being promised in the sentence that I just quoted, Mr. Speaker.

9:00

So dividends of the deregulation of electricity are beginning to be paid out: high electricity prices and, most likely, rising air pollution. In other words, the environment and Alberta communities become the latest casualty of the electricity deregulation scheme. By any measure the government's deregulation scheme has been a disaster, Mr. Speaker.

First, Albertans were told that deregulation will result in lower prices. Prices skyrocketed instead, and now even the Premier admits that they are unlikely to drop as low as they were prior to deregulation. Deregulation was supposed to encourage green power, and now the government is prepared to sacrifice the environment in its desperation to lower power prices. But will they come down even if the environmental standards are lowered? Let's wait and see. I doubt it. If it's private companies' profit that drives them in terms of their investment, why would they generate so much electricity that that generation will cause a drop in their prices and therefore in their profits? This makes no sense.

So, Mr. Speaker, the government's bungled deregulation scheme is well summed up by the following quote from Dan Macnamara, executive director of the Industrial Power Consumers & Cogenerators Association of Alberta. Mr. Macnamara said: I could

have picked three monkeys from the Calgary zoo, and they could have done a better job of deregulation than this government. By quoting Mr. Macnamara, I by no means want to approve the deregulation scheme. All I'm saying is that even those who are allies of the government are now disenchanted with the manner in which this government has proceeded and risked their industries and their competitiveness as a result.

Another feature mentioned in this throne speech. Specific mention is made, Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech that a new policy dealing with the intensive livestock operations will be introduced. Such a policy – this is dealing with the rural communities and their agriculture – is clearly long overdue. Residents of rural communities directly affected by the intensive livestock operations' growth in the countryside have been speaking loudly and clearly, seeking ways to limit the risks that they see associated with this development. They're seeking assurances from this government that it will put in place regulations, arrangements that will ensure that their health and the quality of life will not be sacrificed in this blind pursuit of the growth of these industrial farms.

This growth of huge hog factories and megafeedlots is causing a growing backlash in rural communities. Concerns about these huge facilities have to do both with their environmental impacts and their social impacts. People are rightly concerned about the impact of these huge facilities on rural land and water quality. They are also concerned about the impact of these new industrial developments related to livestock, the impact of vertically integrated hog factories and megafeedlots on the future viability of family farms.

Mr. Speaker, in reading through the speech, I noted a certain absence there, not a single reference to the family farm and its future and how the government is committed to developing policies to make sure that the family farm, as an institution, as a hub of rural life, as an important feature of that life, remains sustainable in this province. Not a single word. The term "family farm" is entirely avoided. It is simply not used, and that to me is certainly worrisome.

Another matter related to the growth of these large factory-type operations is related to the agricultural industry in general. The words "agricultural industry" are used by this government in its speech, yet as these agricultural activities take the form of industry, increasingly becoming larger and larger operations employing large numbers of employees, there's no reference here that the time has come for this government to consider the application of employment standards to a certain size, that when agricultural operations move beyond a certain size, they will be subject to the requirements of employment standards. Not a mention of that.

Moving on to the area of health, Mr. Speaker, mention is made, of course, in the throne speech that RHA elections will be held, and two-thirds of the RHA boards will now be elected in the coming fall. This was followed up earlier today with an announcement of a few more details about the arrangements that will have to be in place before these elections can take place. However, many important details are still missing. For example, defining the total districts in which prospective RHA board members will be elected is still up in the air. It is indeed unfortunate that the government has failed to lay out the ground rules for elections that are scheduled to take place only six months from now. It's getting late.

RHA boards should, in our view – and we have always taken this position – not have members only two-thirds of which are elected, but these boards should be fully elected in order to be fully accountable to the residents they serve. By continuing the practice of directly appointing one-third of the boards, the government would appear to want to continue to control these boards and use them at its own will.

In terms of health care and education, I want to remind this

government that during the election the government talked about its reinvestment in public health care and public education. The government has no mandate to engage in further privatization, yet I fear that while Bill 11 now is law, this is exactly what Albertans will get: privatization. Just before the election was called, a few days before that, the government took another unprecedented action, and that was to approve a for-profit, postsecondary institution, the DeVry Institute in Calgary, and allow it to sell degrees for profit. This is another, in my view, extremely dangerous step this government has taken without consulting anyone, without any public debate, without allowing this House to have an opportunity to debate this extremely important and significant step. The New Democrats will oppose efforts to expand for-profit involvement in postsecondary education and in our hospital sector. Silence in this throne speech about the government's plans with respect to the future growth of private, for-profit postsecondary institutions should be a matter of worry to all of us.

Specific mention in the speech that the budget will contain more dollars for teachers' salaries: another interesting and, I guess, promising, in a sense, statement. Yet when you look at the statement in the context of nothing being said in terms of a commitment to reduce class sizes in elementary grades, particularly from kindergarten to grade 3, you wonder what the government is pointing to. Is it attempting to play the boards against teachers? You get either a better salary or you get smaller classes or what? I continue to worry about the real intentions of the government on this score, Mr. Speaker.

There's no firm commitment to reducing class size. The government has already spent \$500,000 on a study which tells it that it delivers the goods if you reduce class sizes, yet the government is not willing to make that commitment.

9:10

The throne speech contains a vague reference that the government will review income support programs to determine whether they continue to meet clients' needs. There's no recognition that there indeed is a problem of poverty in this province, that the policies of the government indeed create conditions where lots of Alberta children live in conditions of poverty. To acknowledge a problem is the first step to addressing a problem. Nothing is said on that. When it comes to reviewing these programs to determine whether they continue to meet clients' needs, Mr. Speaker, the time for review is over. The time is for action. There's no promise in this speech that action will be forthcoming. Existing programs are clearly not adequate. What's needed is action and action now.

Social assistance rates were cut by an average of 11 percent in 1993 and have barely increased since then. Since 1993 the number of child welfare cases has increased by more than 60 percent, Mr. Speaker. Children are poor because their parents are poor. We need to look at a number of measures to reduce poverty levels, not continue to review programs without taking action. Social assistance rates and shelter allowances need to go up. Thereafter we need to develop a formula to link future increases to increases in living costs, but this is not enough. We also need to increase income support for the disabled through the AISH program.

We need to increase the minimum wage to provide a better living for the working poor. Unfortunately, in this growing economy there are also growing numbers of people who are working and yet remain poor. We need to make further improvements to the family employment tax credit program to eliminate health care premiums and to improve health and dental benefits for lower income working families.

Another matter, Mr. Speaker, that I want to put on record, on

which I see absolutely no reference made in the throne speech, has to do with the freezing of tuition fees of postsecondary students and ultimately reducing those tuition fees. Silence on that one again.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to conclude, then, by saying that this throne speech is certainly a start. We'll have to judge the government as it takes actions and presents a budget in a couple of weeks.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your kind permission, before responding directly to the Speech from the Throne, I would like to spend a few moments on the recent election in my constituency. For the last four years it has been my honour to represent and my pleasure to serve the constituents of Calgary-Fort. I'm thankful to have received the continued support and solid trust of my constituents and to be back among my hon. colleagues in the Legislative Assembly. You can count on my continued serving of the Calgary-Fort constituents and all Albertans to the best of my ability.

To my new colleagues, my congratulations for your honour of representing and serving your constituents. To all my Legislature colleagues, I have a great confidence in each of you doing your best for Albertans, and may the coming term be the best part of your life.

To our Premier, my congratulations on your election leadership to a greater majority. May your outstanding leadership continue to make Alberta a shining star.

To you, Mr. Speaker, my congratulations and may your exemplary chairmanship continue to guide us in high-quality parliamentary work.

For sure I am here thanks to the valuable help from many others including my family members, friends, and their family members. Our democratic election has taught me to be humble, to be ever alert to who my bosses are. They are my constituents, the ones who sent me here to represent them.

Mr. Speaker, yes, we won a large majority, a landslide by the normal standard. In us Albertans entrust the leadership that works to improve their lives. Also, they entrust the implementation of their aspirations and choices. I never believe that they entrust in us to impose our own views on them.

In defending Calgary-Fort, our team fought off a seven-front attack. Just like in a track-and-field event, our athlete raced in our own lane along with seven others, the highest number in a single riding, and our athlete is by far the fastest. With my track record and our dedicated campaign team we won the hearts of around 70 percent of voters. We received three and a half times the number of votes of the second highest. We won at every poll. Mr. Speaker, do you know why we won the Calgary-Fort constituency? Definitely it is thanks to the solid support from the large majority of voters and dedicated PC teamwork during the campaign.

There is another secret. It is our name, PC, which also stands for pick CAO, and CAO stands for caring about others.

It was a big win, but it was not just my win. Each of our team did their part very well, from casting their votes to carrying out campaign tasks. There were people who participated directly and openly, but there were so many who provided assistance behind the scenes and indirectly, such as making contributions, lending their telephones, telling their friends and neighbours to go and vote. The amazing part is that we did all of this on a voluntary basis, and we had the participation of young children, seniors, and our friends from all walks of life, even the participation of many whole families.

Our Progressive Conservative programs and policies as mentioned in the Speech from the Throne are in good accord with the feelings

of a large majority of Albertans. The outstanding leadership and the collective wisdom of our government caucus will continue moving Alberta forward strongly into a brighter future. Yes, it is the truth of a proven leadership for a positive future.

During the years of my first term and over the recent election, I visited many homes and talked to many constituents. I met people from all walks of life in various professions, in different states of health, in various stages of life. Many can trace their roots here for generations, some just arrived from other provinces or other lands, but they all are very proud to be Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, they all need the assurance of the availability of our excellent health care system, learning system, and social assistance system whenever their personal needs arise. They want to live in a safe and healthy environment for themselves and their future generations. They want a continuation of Alberta economic development so they can make their living and show the pride of their productivity, abilities, and skills.

Mr. Speaker, besides the residential areas our Calgary-Fort constituency covers the largest industrial and business park in Calgary. There are a large number of manufacturing businesses, and they contribute to a high percentage of our Alberta economic growth and diversification. Their businesses compete in the global market, enriching Alberta's reputation for excellence and bringing back economic benefits to Albertans. As Albertans are dynamic and progressive, my resident and corporate constituents accept some short-term pains for long-term gains. They are always ready for continuous improvements, but they want the assurance of smooth transitions and assistance during the transition if needs arise, especially in the areas outside their control such as energy costs.

Mr. Speaker, during the recent election some of my constituents asked me: why did you decide to enter politics? To them my honest answer is that I decided to enter politics for a combination of reasons. First, I was brought up in a community-minded family, and I became a community-minded person myself, even during my professional career in my younger time. I'm always motivated and inspired by the ability to assist others. Certainly I have received great support and encouragement from my family and friends.

Thirdly, in my life I've reached a stage where I could do public service without worrying about personal gains or losses. Fourthly, our family had a past painful experience in the old country of standing by and letting others run the country, and they ruined it. My family members, friends, and many others suffered as a result. Lastly, I believe that I can take on any challenge to work giving back to the society that has helped me in the past.

9:20

More serious constituents asked me: what do you feel are the major issues and goals for the province? To that I answered that the real, major issue is how to maintain and enhance the Alberta advantage, which keeps Alberta on the leading edge and differentiates it from other jurisdictions. We need to develop conditions and programs that continue generating public wealth and balancing it with the needs and demands of Albertans. Just like in a family, Albertans pay close attention to their health care, education, rising costs of living, taxes, safe communities and so on, and how we can afford those.

A tougher question constituents asked me was: what is your stand on the issues that matter most to Albertans? To which I replied that I will continue to be accountable to Alberta taxpayers, with affordable spending based on Albertans' priorities and needs. I am committed to protect the much valued Alberta and Canadian system of health care, education, social programs, and a safe and healthy environment by encouraging innovative approaches and appropriate

and affordable funding. I'm committed to protect Alberta consumer businesses by enhancing the Alberta advantage. I'm committed to a debt-free Alberta with a low tax climate to enhance the Alberta economic advantage and enhance the quality of life for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, in almost all of the cases my constituents asked me point-blank questions such as: what will you do if you win? How will you best represent our riding? These are very meaningful questions. They helped me to envisage what work I plan on their behalf. My answers to that are that I will focus my work on people, prosperity, and preservation. I shall strive for programs that promote Alberta human resource development, early childhood development, early prevention of problems, and equity for hardworking Albertans. I shall continue to be an effective voice for all Albertans, especially seniors, children, people with special needs, injured workers, hardworking families, and businesses. I shall continue seeking out and bringing new ideas from constituents to the government. And I shall continue to promote the vision of Alberta as the best place to grow up, to work, to raise a family, and to retire.

Mr. Speaker, with that, with what I heard from my constituents and what I told them, I am very pleased with the government programs and policies expressed in the Speech from the Throne. They reflect the needs and the wishes of those who elected us. I recognize the priorities of Alberta now and in the future. They subscribe to the fairness of assistance based on priorities and levels of need.

However, I would like to emphasize the realities we must face. One reality is that our public purse is finite and limited to the revenue our citizenry agree, reluctantly if I may say so, for the government to collect. May I say that our public purse is just like a pizza. Pizzas come in different sizes. Regardless of the size of a pizza, a bigger slice for one means smaller slices for the others. If one contemplates or demands a bigger share, one must consider what's left for the others. That's the type of table manners I heard from Alberta constituents.

I wish for a scenario where all those special interest groups who demand a share can sit down among themselves and make their sharing decisions at the same time. Maybe the government should facilitate this scenario to take place.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw our attention to another important point: the notion of surplus in government finance. The so-called surplus amount, if there is one, is already earmarked to be spent 75 on debt payment and 25 on onetime programs, and it is in the law. To me there is no surplus amount to put aside, so to speak. This amount is tied to ever fluctuating prices and sale volumes of oil and gas. We cannot base our important ongoing operational programs on a fluctuating amount.

Mr. Speaker, seeing the growing public expenditure, my constituents worry. As personal and corporate taxpayers we worry about the sustainability and affordability of such growing expenditure. We see that our current majority mandate opens up a unique and necessary opportunity for implementing the vision I call triple E government: efficient, effective, and economical government. I believe it is time we should look further for least cost opportunities: removing duplication, sharing of common services, terminating less effective programs and replacing them with more effective ones. Our canoe would sink if we kept loading new cargo without off-loading some of the existing ones. We can keep the same rowing crew, the same equipment but unload less valuable cargo and replace them with more valuable ones. In order to arrive safely at our destination and with the most valuable cargo, we cannot just fill our limited cargo space with any and every cargo.

The triple E focus should be promoted not only within government services but in all other publicly funded organizations, and I'm

more than ready to help in promoting these triple E initiatives. I believe that this triple E implementation of efficient, effective, economical government is the key to maintain a self-built strength and leadership of Alberta internally and externally.

Before I conclude, I would like to extend an open invitation to my constituents, even of different political inclination, to address with me issues of importance to them. Through open dialogue and understanding the problems facing Albertans, we are better able to address the issues most important to all of us. So please feel free at any time to come and talk to me of your proposals and solutions to making Alberta even better.

To conclude, from the bottom of my heart I sincerely thank each of you, my colleagues here in the Chamber and my friends and constituents, for your valuable support in important democratic practices. Your voluntary participation, contribution, and valuable guidance always make a difference for Alberta. May God continue blessing Alberta and Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before taking the next speaker, I wonder if the Assembly would consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour and pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of our hardworking and dedicated Crown prosecutors in the city of Calgary, someone who has served the government and the people of Alberta well in that capacity. As people in this House will know, Crown prosecutors are at the front of the line when it comes to safe communities, protecting our communities, and making sure the justice system works well. I'd like Mr. Gary Belecki to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**
(continued)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and get a chance to say a few words about the throne speech that we heard the other day. But before I start with those remarks, I would like to formally congratulate all hon. members of this Assembly for their election victory, and I would also like to congratulate their family members as well, because I would feel that each and every member of this Assembly had a lot of help from their families in order to be successful. Over the next four years, particularly for those members who are coming to Edmonton from other areas of the province, I would encourage each and every one of you to patronize not only the fine business establishments in Edmonton-Gold Bar but some of the finest restaurants in the city. You're very welcome to just go five minutes east, and you will discover some of the most delightful dining in the entire city.

9:30

I would also like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar for placing their trust in me. It certainly is an honour and a privilege

to represent them in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I plan to continue to do the job that was given to me on election night by those constituents, and that's to hold the government accountable. It's very important in a democracy that we do not lose sight of the role of opposition in maintaining openness and accountability to a government.

Now, I've heard from media outlets, from hon. members of this Assembly about the extent of the win on election night, and it was a large victory. There's no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker. But I would caution everyone in this province about this victory, because it reminds me of the surface of a slough after the first hard frost, when the ice is everywhere but is very, very thin. That's what I think this large majority is. It's a large majority, but it's a thin majority, and I think we're soon going to see cracks in it. We're going to see cracks in that majority. Lots of them.

We heard from an hon. member across the way earlier about the three Es of this government. One of them was an economical government. I believe that is how it was described by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. But this is a government that has gone on a reckless spending spree. It has reinvented the special warrant, which led to this fiscal problem in the first place. Happy days are here again. The citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar asked me to describe at a recent meeting the new government, and I used two words to describe it: Cadillacs and champagne. Cadillacs and champagne, the best. But, Mr. Speaker, have they worked for it?

Now, I came to the Assembly, my first visit back. I went to my parking spot. I saw in the Annex parking lot in spot 639 a black Cadillac, a new one from Edmonton Motors: two-door, smoked, dark windows. [interjections] No, the expanded cabinet. It had no plates on it, Mr. Speaker, and it is symbolic of this government. It is dark and it is secretive. It is only going to be a matter of time before we discover which hon. member is touring the province in that car. Happy days are here again. We have this incredible sense with the current government that the province is theirs. Well, it is not. It belongs to the citizens. It belongs to the taxpayers.

An hon. colleague of this Assembly who left and went on to greater things in the nation's capital used to wear on his lapel that sweat-soaked loonie. Sometimes I think I would be doing the province a great benefit if I were to take maybe 70, maybe more loonies and give them to each of the Conservative members . . .

DR. TAYLOR: There are only seven loonies in this House.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You will get your turn, I'm sure, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, relevance. I'm planning on saving this government a lot of money, but the whole idea of this would be to remind each and every one of you of the sacrifices that were made so that this economy is as robust as it is.

You're all of course going to take credit for the robust economy, but market forces that are beyond the control of this province – and I'm grateful to live in this province; I'm grateful to have the opportunity to raise my family in this province – international market forces that have driven commodity prices high have had a lot to do with the prosperity. The concept that Progressive Conservatives are managers of public money is fiction, not fact. [interjection]

It has been proven, hon. member across the way, that the government is just trying to spend its way out of the problem.

The electricity crisis. To all new members of this Assembly, three years ago we had a debate. The electricity issue was first initiated in 1995, but we had to make amendments with Bill 27, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act. I heard during the campaign from so many sources that you had to elect government members because they would stand up for you. What did one of the most distinguished members on the government side from the city of Edmonton do in the middle of that debate? He stood up and moved closure. That's all this individual had to say on the entire bill. Another hon. member, a cabinet minister who has since retired, stated that we would only waste the Legislative Assembly's time if we were to continue debate on the electricity bill.

What has happened three years later? Three years later we are giving the citizens back their own money – their own money – because of our mismanagement. It's \$2 billion, and before five years are out, it will be billions and billions of dollars. I'm sorry, but the voters are going to notice next year when they have to pay a \$22.75 a month extra charge on their bill to make up for what they did not pay in election year.

Now, we look at this and the symbolism of the closure on Bill 27, and that was roughly three years ago. A year ago we used closure on Bill 11. Things are just fine in public health care now. Absolutely. But where will they be, Mr. Speaker, in three years' time? Just like our electrical deregulation scheme. It was flawless. In fact, the originator of the bill couldn't stand the heat, so he left the Legislative Assembly. He knew. That cabinet minister, that hon. member, knew the consequences. He did not want to stay here. However, Mr. Speaker, that is just one example of the chaos that has been created by a party and a government that thinks they know what is best always.

We need to look at this document, and it certainly is a light document. We look at the pledges. I don't see a pledge in here to stop reckless spending. I don't see a pledge in here against the special warrants. I don't see a pledge in here to somehow stabilize our natural gas supply. We are looking at a change, Mr. Speaker, in 10 years from a supply that was over a 19-year supply of current production rates in the ground. We've gone from there to an eight-year supply of natural gas. We have gone from industrial facilities in my neighbourhood, which had a reliable, cheap source of ethane as their main feedstock, to an enterprise that is now worried about the cost of that ethane. I ask all members of this Assembly, is that long-term planning? It certainly is not.

One of the greatest follies that any provincial government in the entire history of this country ever accomplished was not so much shipping natural gas to America via the Alliance line. I had no problem with that. But allowing the ethane, allowing the liquids to stay in that natural gas stream was a major policy shortcoming of the past Progressive Conservative government.

9:40

We all talk about the rise of political power in western Canada. I am convinced that political power will come as the population increases, and the population will increase as the economy develops and diversifies. But it's not going to develop and diversify if we sell ourselves short by shipping the ethane from the Peace River arch through to Chicago, and that, Mr. Speaker, is unfortunately what we have done. Are we going to see any more petrochemical developments in Ponoka? I don't think so. Are we going to see any more in Fort Saskatchewan? I don't think so, because the ethane is now going south of Chicago.

MR. LUND: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: A point of order has been called. The hon. minister.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, under *Beauchesne* 482, sixth edition, I wonder if the hon. member would entertain a question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure has asked whether you'd entertain a question. You don't have to give reasons. You just have to say yes or no. If it's yes, we get the question. If it's no, then you continue your speech.

MR. MacDONALD: No, Mr. Speaker, but I do admire the hon. member's persistence. He's been trying.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, we have to look also at medicare. Medicare is a wonderful way of delivering health care for all Albertans. I asked earlier where the medicare system will be in three years, and that is the question. That is why the ice on the slough after the hard frost is so thin. It's because the jury is out. The sky is not falling. The sky is not falling, but where will we be? We have lots of money going into the health care delivery system. Lots and lots of money. We have a shortage of staff. Those staff shortages were identified three years ago. What happened? We mismanaged the study. We squirreled it away in the Legislature Library during collective bargaining negotiations. If the government had acted on that publicly funded survey, perhaps we would not have to spend the money we do now to recruit staff.

The MRIs. The trumpet sounded. The money was delivered. We're going to have MRIs for the citizens, which is fine, but are we going to have the technicians to run the machines? This is another example of the mismanagement, Mr. Speaker.

Now, by the government's own statistics, the number of dollars going into health care is increasing. Monthly the Alberta Human Resources and Employment department releases statistics, and incredibly the number of health care professionals or workers is either decreasing or remaining stagnant. Now, you have to wonder where the money is going. Where will we be three years from now with this government? It certainly will be full of itself, and it will be at the point in its term where it will be looking certainly at getting re-elected. Their centennial year will be coming along, and there will be monuments, so to speak, to be built, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I would like to suggest that for centennial year, if we're going to do this, this city consider building a permanent home for the archives of this province. I think the capital city is a logical location for this. I'm willing to work with all members of this Assembly, and I understand the Progressive Conservative caucus in Edmonton has a caucus chair. I think this would be a worthwhile project. It's just one project. Even if it's just in the planning stages, it would be a worthwhile project for the citizens of this province. [interjection] All sorts of papers could be stored in there. You've got that right.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to have to also show more respect for Alberta's seniors. The cabinet certainly expanded. People asked me to describe it, and the only thing I could think of was that it was a make-work project. One of the things that I really liked, however, was the idea of having a stand-alone ministry for seniors. This is a very good idea, because if we plan now with this Seniors ministry – and long-term planning is not in the grasp of this government currently, but I'm going to encourage them – we can avoid a lot of the problems not only other provinces are having but other jurisdictions.

I would advise the hon. minister to take a close look at what is

currently occurring in the nation of Japan. They have a high percentage of seniors, and they are managing very well. It is a financial burden on the treasury because they're not doing that well economically, but they have had long-term planning in place and they're coping. I would encourage the new minister that's responsible for seniors to have a look at just exactly what the nation of Japan is doing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, education is also an issue that was foremost in the minds of the voters in Edmonton-Gold Bar. The idea that class sizes should be reduced was one that they endorsed. The size of a class and the ability of a student to learn, particularly in the lower grades, is increased. The more individual contact between the teacher and the student, the better the education is. In the lower grades, where we're looking at a sound foundation and getting off to a good start, I can't think of a better way to invest in the future of this province.

But, Mr. Speaker, was this accomplished? I don't know. We will have to wait and see. Hopefully the Minister of Learning in due time will take a close look at class sizes and, as the former Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Percy Wickman, would say, finally do the right thing. It is very important that we have a system of education that is for all Albertans.

I'm very disappointed that my time has run out, Mr. Speaker, but I'm looking forward to the remarks from the hon. Minister of Environment.

9:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and as they say, now for something completely different. First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and the other chair occupants for your elections to the responsible positions that you hold.

As I start this, through you to all of my colleagues here I would like to tell you how very pleased I am to be among you. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark was speaking, he was talking about the area of the city that I grew up in, Jasper Place. I can recall the first time ever that I was in this building. I looked up and thought, "My goodness, what a massive place this is." In my past life as a Member of Parliament, very often I would be driving past this parliament. As often as I went into the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa and as much as I respect and love that Parliament, this is home. This parliament, because I'm an Albertan, is my home. I share with you just how thrilled and happy I am to be here.

I didn't get here by accident. I got here because a lot of people worked very, very hard. The people in Edmonton-Rutherford in the campaign organization accepted me and supported me, and I wish now to publicly thank them, particularly Dick Flis and Cliff Downey, a name that many will remember here, who worked tirelessly in helping me win the election in Edmonton-Rutherford.

By extension, I know that politicians don't always have an easy ride in the media, and sometimes we don't always deserve an easy ride in the media, but behind those of us who are on the front lines, there are thousands of people who work without recognition, without any hope of reward but because they're citizens and because it's the right thing to do. They're the ones that are the reason we're here. I wish publicly to acknowledge that and to thank the people in the constituency association of Edmonton-Rutherford for giving me their support.

I'd also like to thank and recognize the past member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Percy Wickman. Percy and I have been

friends for many, many years. He's a friend to many of you in this Chamber. Although we may differ on how to achieve our goals, I think we probably share common values, and that can be said of many of us. So I as the member who will be filling his shoes will keep his legacy in mind respectfully.

The voters of Edmonton-Rutherford entrusted me with the responsibility to represent them in this Chamber, and I take that responsibility very, very seriously. Edmonton-Rutherford is much like many of the constituencies in Edmonton. It has a mix of seniors and of younger people. It has a mix of some people who would be considered to be very well off, and it has quite a number of people who are struggling to get by. I think I have to be particularly cognizant and aware of that.

I know that the people of Edmonton-Rutherford did not elect me to be one more voice. They expected me to represent them, and I will. Sometimes that may brush up against some conventions. I hope my colleagues will understand that anything I say or do is in the intent to represent the constituents who entrusted me with that great honour and in no way should be construed as in any way detrimental to the interests of this great party that I have been embraced by.

So, then, why did I choose to get involved in provincial politics? Why did I leave federal politics to get involved in provincial politics? Well, the answer is because in my experience – and it's been shown to be true thus far – provincial politics is where the rubber meets the road in governance. For instance, in the last two Parliaments in Ottawa when the reductions to transfer payments for health, education, and social services were being debated, it was an academic exercise. We were debating shifts in tax points. We were debating the amount of money that would be cut from provincial budgets, which would cause all provinces to have to live with a much reduced budget. But it was an academic exercise.

At the provincial level, where the services are delivered, it's real. Health, education, and social services, which encompass the most critical and the most important and the most immediate services to our citizens, are all provincial in application. So the new ideas that come in governance to our country are not going to come out of Ottawa. They are going to come from the government that is closest to the people, which may in fact be the municipal governments, but will be embodied here in the provincial governments who are responsible for the municipal governments.

So I think that the opportunity we as legislators have and I as one of this wonderful body have is to provide innovation and new ideas in governance. If these ideas start here in Alberta and find a voice here in our Legislature in Edmonton, it won't be very long until these ideas find themselves in the national consciousness. That's one of the reasons I hoped to get involved in provincial politics.

The debate, for instance, during the election on classroom size. I'm sure virtually everybody in Alberta for the price of a cup of coffee could have come up with a report on classroom size. It would have said that smaller classrooms are better. It's intuitively true. I mean, we all know that to be true. But that's not the answer. That's a gross oversimplification of the problem. The problem is not necessarily strictly classroom size, as the Minister of Children's Services knows so well.

If a certain percentage, let's say 15 percent, of the students in a classroom consume 80 percent of the teacher's energy, 80 percent of the teacher's efforts, and still aren't going to be able to get by because of socioeconomic conditions or fetal alcohol syndrome or any number of things which prevent them from learning, then maybe it would be a good idea for us to address some of these problems. If we were to make that investment in nurturing the next generation, the payoff down the road in one generation is 10 to 1. That's 10 to

1 proven, for instance, with Head Start programs. If we as a province were to decide that nurturing children would be our number one objective and made the investment in Head Start programs, for instance, so that Head Start programs . . . [interjections] Well, wait until I get to electricity. You won't be clapping then. If we were to make our investment in Head Start programs, we would see that investment repaid within one generation 10 times over.

So some of these ideas that would be important to our country nationally can happen here in Alberta. We can do it because we've got that cohesive nature. If we do that, we'll be doing something wonderful for our country. So I hope to be able to contribute along some of these lines.

Now, I just briefly mentioned electricity and natural gas. It's something that has come up quite a lot. Natural gas has pretty much looked after itself. Bill 1 is going to put a legal framework around it, and intuitively we know that as our resource revenue comes in, we have the luxury of being able to shield consumers from spikes in the price of natural gas. It's pretty straightforward, and I think most people understand it pretty easily.

10:00

Electricity is a far more complex and far more difficult consideration. When we're talking about electricity, it seems to me that we need to keep in mind three separate and three distinct considerations. They are these. Every decision we make needs to ensure that there will be more electrons in the system, because if there are more electrons in the system, we'll have more supply, and if we have more supply and a constant demand or more supply than demand, the price is going to go down.

The second thing that we need to do is ensure that every decision we make will promote conservation, because conservation, both with electricity and gas, is cheaper and better for the planet. We really have the opportunity here to do something really worth while for our province and for the planet as we're going through this electricity, to really think about the conservation that's inherent with paying a real price for the commodity that we're using.

As we will of necessity move to a realistic price for whatever commodity it might be, it's going to encourage conservation, just exactly the same as the spikes for gasoline caused us all to drive smaller and more fuel-efficient cars. I don't know about you, but you can sure see your breath when you get up in my house. I mean, that thermostat is turned down. If we do that everywhere and are more conscientious, we'll be doing something good for our pocket-books and for our planet.

The third is: will what we do result in the lowest possible price to the consumer? The answer is, in my opinion, yes, if we proceed with deregulation. The reason for that is this. If you give yourself an opportunity and just cast your mind and think about it for a minute, what entity, in anyone's imagination, that is owned by the government, financed by the government, and managed by the government has ever been a low-cost supplier of anything? It just doesn't happen. Energy is so critically important to the Alberta advantage, to our competitive advantage that we have to do what we have to do to get a market discipline into the manufacture of that essential commodity. So if we provide for a market discipline in the generation and the manufacture of electricity, we will end up with a better product at a lower price more consistently. You either believe in the market and have faith in it, or you don't. A market economy has served us extremely well in the west.

Now, if I may, I'd like to just touch on one other issue very briefly, and that is that it's likely in this Legislature that this parliament will be charged with some emotional issues surrounding human rights. I want to be on record right now as saying that human

rights accrue to us because we're human beings, for no other reason. They're inalienable, and they accrue to us because we're human beings. Tolerance is a two-edged sword; it works both ways. You can't have one group crying for tolerance and the other group not receiving it no matter which side of the fence you have to be on. So when we're charged with that debate, I'd ask members to remember that there are always two sides to every story and that tolerance is in fact a two-way street.

We are going to be charged soon with the Future Summit, the summit that is going to for at least our lifetimes chart the economic and perhaps the social path of our province into the near future. I'd encourage all Albertans, not just those of us in this room but all

Albertans, to participate in that, to have a voice, to be part of the governance of our great province.

I'd like, again, to finish as I started: to thank you and through you, Mr. Speaker, all members here for the great privilege that you have afforded me by bringing me into this marvelous Chamber to be able to participate and in some small way to contribute to the governance of this great and beloved province of Alberta. Thank you very much.

Since I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, may I move that the House do now adjourn.

[At 10:07 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 12, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, thank You for the life You have brought once again to the Earth. As Your light touches the world, nature blossoms forth. Let this vibrant energy renew our spirits and help us to use this strength for the good of all. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present on behalf of a number of constituents of Edmonton-Whitemud, Edmonton-Rutherford, Edmonton-Meadow-lark, Edmonton-Norwood, Edmonton-Castle Downs, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and Edmonton-Centre petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta "to put in a system of rent control."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have a petition by 24 Albertans to present to the Assembly. These individuals are urging the government

to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation [suit] and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly urging the government to determine "whether taxpayers must pay for Stockwell Day's legal bills." This petition was signed by 45 Albertans from Edmonton, Elk Point, and Fort Saskatchewan.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of 485 Albertans urging the government "to fully-fund women's shelters and transition houses."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to determine legally whether taxpayers must pay for Stockwell Day's legal bills.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Bill 2 Cooperatives Act

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 2, being the Cooperatives Act.

The purpose of this bill is to harmonize co-operative legislation across the country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act, be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Bill 3 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 3, being the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001.

The proposed act will amend the definitions, strengthen the manner in which we deal with individuals whose licences are suspended, adjust how fish in captivity are dealt with, and extend regulation-making authorities. The amendments contribute to the province's capability in protecting wild fish, thus sustaining the resource.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

Bill 4 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave again to introduce Bill 4, being the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed act will increase the compensation limit that can be claimed concerning damages from \$5,000 to \$25,000. This increase will reduce the time and money spent in court by an owner or occupant in recovering damages.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to table two reports and the appropriate number of copies of each. They are the Children's Advocate reports. On September 8, 2000, I released the first report, for '98-99. The second report, made

available to me just last week, is the report for '99-2000. It deals with children's rights interests, and the advocate acts on behalf of those children that are in the child welfare system.

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I have with me 24 tablings today. I'd like to table with the Assembly the requisite number of copies of the following documents: the 1999-2000 annual reports for all 17 regional health authorities as well as for the Alberta Cancer Board and the Alberta Mental Health Board; also the 1999-2000 annual report of the College of Physical Therapists, the 1999-2000 annual report of the Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists, the 1999-2000 annual report of the Alberta Registered Dietitians Association, the 1998-99 annual report of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses; and the 1999 annual report of the Alberta Dental Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission, I have three tablings. The first is a letter from Susan Horner of Manning concerned about the difficult time rural teachers in this province are having with class size.

The second is a letter from Kim Lambert of Manning to the Member for Peace River also concerned about class size and the effect on children.

My third tabling is some excerpts from the California statutes regarding class-size reductions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Music Alberta outlining the effect of cuts to Music Alberta by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

The second is five copies of a utility bill which is a typical bill for a condominium in Edmonton-Centre, showing a \$15,000 utility bill for December and a \$34,000 utility bill for January.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a memorandum from the separate school board of Edmonton to the parents of St. Michael and Sacred Heart schools indicating very clearly that the utilization formula is driving the closure or proposed closure of those schools.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly several guests who are with us. Harvey Aarbo and his wife, Elaine, and his children Aaron and Loree have traveled from the Elk Point region to join us this afternoon. An interesting note is that in 1905 Harvey's grandfather, Thor, built a raft here in Edmonton and sailed the North Saskatchewan River starting here. He was on the search for a new home and made it as far as Elk Point, where the river froze, and he had to stop. So that's where the Aarbo family set up their homestead, and that's where it remains to this day. The

Aarbo family will celebrate its centennial here in Alberta at the same time the province celebrates its centennial in the year 2005.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, with the Aarbo family today are their good friends John and Jean Stewart, who on this very day are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. I'm told that both John and Harvey go back a long way with the Alberta Cow Calf Association and that up until his retirement John ran one of the best cattle operations in Alberta.

I am pleased to have all six of these wonderful Albertans with us today. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a large group of grade 6 students, 91 in all, with their teachers Mrs. Debbie McFarlane, Mr. Ray Shapka, Mrs. Evelyn Nixey, student teacher Miss Shauna Gerike, and parent helpers Mrs. Janet Boomer, Mrs. Maryann Arndt, Mrs. Joan Soehner, Mrs. Kelly Wilson, Mrs. Wilson, Mrs. Walsh, Mr. Van Bostelen, Mrs. Morrison, and Mrs. Yopek. They are seated in both the members' gallery and the public gallery, and I would ask that they all please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West-Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly 10 young, upstanding citizens from Edson, from the Yellowhead regional division, with teachers Mrs. Kneteman and Mrs. Darlene Dixon. I'd ask that they please rise now and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly four members of the co-operative legislative working committee. This committee has been working since 1998 on developing replacement legislation for co-operatives. Today they were here to witness the introduction of Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act, 2001, just recently introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. Seated in the members' gallery – and I would ask them to rise as I repeat their names – are Ms Lynn Hannley, principal with Communitas Group; Mr. Rick Frederickson, supervisor for the feeder association with Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; Mr. Ray Zotzman, senior investigator with Alberta Government Services; and lastly, Mr. Mark Seville, legislative adviser with Alberta Government Services who actually chaired the working committee.

I would also at this time like to recognize the contributions of the three members who could not be with us today. They are Mr. Gerry Metz, corporate secretary of the United Farmers of Alberta co-operative; Ms Kay Robertson, legal affairs manager with Federated Co-ops; as well as Ken Ditzler, director of the Association of Seed Cleaning Plants.

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

MR. HORNER: Mr. Speaker, if you may forgive the inexperience of a rookie, I'd like to clarify my remarks by adding that my students and teachers are from the Brookwood elementary school in Spruce Grove.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly Jannie Edwards. Jannie is a poet, a member of the League of Canadian Poets, and an English instructor at Grant MacEwan College. She is here to promote April as National Poetry Month and to reaffirm the importance of the arts in our daily lives. She brings gifts of poetry postcards for all MLAs to celebrate poetry, National Poetry Month, and the arts. With Jannie are students from Holy Family school, where Jannie conducted workshops. Three of the poems from one of her sessions were chosen to be on the Edmonton Transit system's poetry in motion project last fall. Rhiannon Edwards is one of the student poets with Jannie. Also present from Holy Family school is Eliza Soco. Jannie is also accompanied by students from Grant MacEwan College, and they are Jason Doucette, Pam Sitko, Jordan Millard, and Amanda Carter. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

Holocaust Memorial Day

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 19, 2001, Alberta will mark the first official Holocaust Memorial Day following the proclamation of the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. This legislation honours the memory of the 6 million European Jewish people who were annihilated between 1933 and 1945 and millions of others who were victims of systemic violence, genocide, famine, persecution, racism, and hatred.

Last November I was honoured to sponsor this special legislation. It enshrines the spirit of Albertans as tolerant and compassionate citizens who stand against violence and discrimination. I'm proud to say that because Albertans hold such strong convictions on these matters, hon. members of this Assembly ensured that the act passed unanimously. Consequently, Alberta became the eighth province to officially recognize Holocaust Memorial Day, known in Hebrew as Yom ha-Shoah or day of the whirlwind.

I recognize, as does the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act, that many people in different parts of the world have perished as a result of some form of discriminatory violence. Today, however, I want to highlight the Holocaust on this special day of reflection. We all must do more than reflect, for Yom ha-Shoah is also a day for education about the horrors of the Holocaust and how the voices of history can teach our children the meaning of human suffering and how hatred and violence can scar the entire human race. Yom ha-Shoah brings people of the Jewish faith together around the world in remembrance of family members and friends who perished during the Holocaust. As Albertans we must all make an effort to take a moment today to pause and think about what this day means to each and every one of us.

My heartfelt compassion goes out to the Jewish community and indeed to all communities whose members have been victims of persecution and the tragedy of genocide. Victims whose voices fell silent still whisper to us the need to commit to a legacy of remembrance, education, and conscience. For Alberta to continue to be one

of the best provinces in which to raise our families, we must be diligent in protecting human rights and encouraging understanding. For the sake of our children we must be diligent in teaching them the cherished principles of respect, dignity, and equality for all. I urge all Alberta families of all races, religions, and political beliefs to make Holocaust Memorial Day an important day in their lives by sharing their thoughts and experiences with one another, particularly with their children.

Mr. Speaker and fellow members, as Albertans and as global citizens we have a responsibility to the past and future generations to maintain our vigil. We have an obligation to remember the unconscionable acts of violence and discrimination as the lowest points in human history and to prevent those horrific crimes from ever happening again. We must teach ourselves, teach one another, teach our children, for each generation must learn anew. We must look within ourselves. We're obliged as human beings to walk this path together. We can draw hope from one another.

We will remember, for we must never forget.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

1:50

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Official Opposition to the minister's statement marking Alberta's first official Holocaust Memorial Day. The lessons learned from the Holocaust are deeply etched on our souls and should forevermore guide our actions.

As the Official Opposition we were honoured to work with the government to support the Holocaust Memorial Day and Genocide Remembrance Act. It underlines for us that as legislators we set the tone. We propose, develop, and pass the legislation which becomes law and by which we all live.

I'm glad that the hon. minister committed to a legacy of remembrance, education, and conscience, and I would add vigilance. History does repeat itself, and we must keep hearing the lesson because we do not always seem to learn it; Rwanda and Bosnia, to name a few examples. In this House we cannot rest. We must be vigilant to ensure that hatred does not flourish, that the seeds of xenophobia do not find fertile soil, that the flames of violence are not fanned.

When I was first elected, I pasted a short poem to my desk to remind me why I was here in this Assembly, and I share it with you today.

First they arrested the communists, but I was not a communist, so I did nothing. Then they came for the social democrats, but I was not a social democrat, so I did nothing. Then they arrested the trade unionists, and I did nothing because I was not one. Then they came for the Jews and then the Catholics, but I was neither a Jew nor a Catholic, and I did nothing. At last they came and arrested me, and there was no one left to do anything about it. That's from Reverend Martin Niemöller, a survivor of the Nazi prison camps.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the enduring grief of Holocaust survivors and their families and extend our condolences and our commitment to stand on guard today and for the future.

Thank you for this opportunity.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is a very important day, and I would now ask that all of us and all of the visitors in the Assembly stand and join together in observing a moment of silence in recognition of this very important day.

Let us never forget.

Thank you. Please be seated.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Electricity Pricing

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier remarked that the increase in price for electricity is a continental phenomenon, but it isn't. A quick call and one will find that residential rates for electricity are much lower and stable in other jurisdictions except California, of course. In calls to B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec we find that only Saskatchewan has increased their price in the last year and a half and by a whole 1 percent. My questions are to the Premier. Why is Alberta alone in seeing such incredible increases in the price of electricity?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is the question that was asked during the election campaign, and obviously Albertans accepted the answer. There are a number of factors leading to the high cost of electricity in this province. One is the phenomenal economic growth that has taken place here, which creates a tremendous demand for electricity. Another factor is the whole issue of the Kyoto accord.

As you know, in this province the cheapest form of fuel to generate electricity is coal, and there was a tremendous reluctance on the part of power producers to use coal in light of Kyoto, that would have required emission standards to be reduced by 6 percent of 1990 standards by the year 2010. Electrical power generated by coal is now back on the table because the generators, the producers, are confident now that the environmental standards can be achieved relative to emissions.

Mr. Speaker, another factor that has led to the high price of electricity is that a number of generators were down – and some are indeed down today – at a most inopportune time. Another reason is the extraordinary high price not just in Alberta but North-America-wide of natural gas, and that accounts for, I believe, 30 to 35 percent of all power generation in this province.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's answer just kind of showed that if you're going to deal with marginal pricing, natural gas is our highest cost. Why do we not use an average pricing system to bring down the cost of that marginal price of natural gas by blending it with the coal and the hydro?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm certain that as the new power comes onstream, we'll see a stabilization in prices. When we're talking about average pricing, yes, we look at a high and a low. For instance, I'll give you an example of the latest, April 11, yesterday. The high was \$224.43 per megawatt-hour; the low was \$58.35. There's a tremendous difference. On Tuesday, April 10, the high was \$767.02; the low was \$84.35. The list goes on and on. When we talk about the average, the 30-day rolling average for power was \$95.07, or 9.5 cents per kilowatt-hour. So there is an average price, and we'll see that price come down as the weather gets warmer. As more power comes onstream, the price will go down even further.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: when you deal with average pricing in the context of a market system, is it not done at a spot time, not over a whole bunch of periods of time? It's done over the time period or the time frame of a contract; in other words, within our power pool on a one-hour basis, because that's what the bids go in with. If we were using average pricing for that,

we would look at the bids within that one hour, not over a number of days or a number of weeks.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, when you look at the bottom line, you look at what the consumer pays on the average. Our energy officials base that on a 30-day rolling average, and that 30-day rolling average is in the order of about 9.5 cents per kilowatt-hour, or \$95.07 per megawatt-hour.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Power Generation

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Using a competitive pricing system, our generators and the power purchase agreement marketers can sell to any buyer in the western grid. Is it not true that our current power price is determined by what generators get by selling into the western grid?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, this is regulated still to some degree by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Relative to the intricacies of how that power is sold into the grid, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would add that the western grid and the markets of the south will have some influence. In fact, as the debate now starts to grow in North America, the debate will centre around an aging infrastructure, fully depreciated assets, a power energy deficiency. The returns of the information technology industry and other industries in the past 10 years were so great that money was not reinvested into both these regulated and unregulated areas of the energy industry. That leaves, Mr. Speaker, an aging infrastructure that's fully depreciated, that now is starting to respond by having a shortage of supply, an increase in demand, and we're going to see higher prices. There's no question. We're going to see higher prices throughout North America. But what will be happening – and of course I know now that the leader of the opposition party will be preparing a brief for submission to the EUB as they do their market review of the electrical industry, commencing sometime in May.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is it not true that Alberta transmission companies have applied for an additional 1,000 megawatt export line to the south?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know if that statement is true or if it's not true. Perhaps the hon. minister can shed some light on it.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, that information would be in the hands of the transmission administrator. I do know and can inform the House that there is construction on a line that will bring in an additional 400 megawatts from Saskatchewan so that there is an increased capacity there. Of course, with the competitive market there's also an announcement such as yesterday's with the 80 megawatts from TransCanada as well as numerous other applications being put in place to bring on additional generation.

I think, Mr. Speaker, as we refer to this North American energy

grid, one of the things that will make Alberta one of the most prosperous provinces in the country will be its ability to provide low-cost, reliable sources of electrical energy that will come from coal-fired generation, that will come from cogen, that will come from a number of sources that will be stimulated by competitive practices.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the comments of the interim Leader of the Opposition, we can also note that the population of Saskatchewan today is the same as it was in 1935. The population of Alberta is substantially higher as demand grows here. In fact, I would say that Alberta, by taking this competitive market model, is moving ahead of the North American curve. In fact, we won't be exporting coal. We'll be importing jobs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Before we have any foreseeable reduction in our prices, we must have supply that will exceed demand by at least 1,800 megawatts, this 1,000-megawatt new export plus the 800 that's available now, or we'll have California and the western grid stabilize our prices. Is that true?

MR. KLEIN: Is that true? I don't know if that's true. All I can say is that there will be sufficient supply to meet the demand and also after all the strict requirements are met to allow some of the power producers to export some of the excess power. You know, Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, we have I think in excess of 1,200 megawatts of power in the hopper right now that is either under construction, about to come onstream, or has just recently come onstream, with another 4,000 megawatts announced. That is power sufficient, I believe, to light up another Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge.

MR. SMITH: All the Conservative areas of Alberta.

MR. KLEIN: Right. As the hon. minister said, all the Conservative areas of Alberta anyway.

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

Electricity Rebates

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, this government's assorted energy rebates have from the start been discriminatory by treating Albertans differently based on what type of home they rent or own. Now, the government has partially addressed this discrimination with regards to natural gas rebates but not at all for electricity. Albertans who live in apartments or who own condominiums with shared meters receive different electricity rates and rebates than those in single-family residences. My questions are to the Premier. What criteria did the government use to categorize shared-meter high-rise apartments and condominiums as commercial?

MR. KLEIN: Again, relative to the criteria that was used and the calculations that were put in place and all the intricacies involved in dealing with this very difficult issue, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister reply. Having said that, we appealed – we appealed – to the apartment owners and we appealed to those people who manage condominiums where individual condominium owners are not metered individually to pass on those savings to the customer. We would hope, for the most part, that they did precisely that.

Relative to the intricacies involved in arriving at the formula, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Basically the issue revolved around one meter and the consumption of over 250,000 kilowatt-hours per annum or less. I will, though, take the detailed question under advisement and see if I can table more information.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Given that this member, condominium boards, and individuals notified the government of differential treatment for residential energy prices and rebates, why did the government not correct this situation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we tried to deal with the situation as best we possibly could, understanding that there are different situations relative to various apartment scenarios, various condominium scenarios. I can relate to my own situation here in the city of Edmonton. I own a condominium, and I'm individually metered. Therefore, I received all the benefits of the electricity rebate program as a residential customer. Down the block from me there is another condominium where the condominium is not individually metered, and I would hope that the condominium association would have passed on the savings to the people who own the condominiums. [interjection]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you know the rule is that you ask the question. You don't answer the question.

Please proceed with your third question.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for the advice.

My third question is also to the Premier. Given that the government has insisted that municipalities pass on property tax reduction savings, why is the government not monitoring and enforcing that rebates given to landlords be passed on to renters? Why the double standard?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if there is and I don't think there is a double standard.

Relative to our ability to force landlords and/or condominium associations to pass on those savings, I just don't know what authority prevails, Mr. Speaker, if any authority whatsoever prevails. I'll have the hon. minister respond. Maybe he can shed some more light on it.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect – and I'm sure that maybe the Minister of Municipal Affairs will want to be a part of this answer as well – I think that tax money is collected from the citizens of the province by governments and flows in that nature. Rents are collected by individuals and are charged in normal commercial matters.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DeVry Institute of Technology

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On January 31, 2001, the provincial government gave the DeVry Institute of Technology, a for-profit, U.S. based corporation, the right to grant academic degrees under the Universities Act. This unprecedented decision, which allows the for-profit private sector now to enter the postsecondary education system, is opposed by, among others, the

University of Calgary Faculty Association, the Canadian Federation of Students, and the Canadian Association of University Teachers. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Conservative government getting back into the business of business by awarding academic degree granting status to the for-profit DeVry Institute?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, the one thing that this government is not afraid to do is to think outside the box. We have the deepest and greatest respect for our universities and for colleges that grant applied degrees, whether they are public or private colleges. We have the greatest respect as well for colleges like Augustana, for colleges like Concordia or like The King's college, that grant degrees. We are not afraid to think outside the box to allow an established academic institution like DeVry, that has demonstrated that it can teach students effectively, efficiently, and competently, to grant degrees in a very specialized area. There is nothing wrong with that. I would think that the academic community would welcome the opportunity for institutions other than universities to open their arms to provide people with education. That's what counts.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, so much for the Premier's and this government's commitment to stay out of the business of business. It says a lot.

My second question to the Premier. Will the Premier confirm that now that the for-profit DeVry Institute has been awarded academic degree granting status, it will be eligible for direct government funding on the same basis as private, nonprofit university colleges like Concordia and Augustana?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Learning respond to that particular question, but I do take exception to the fact that we are back in the business of being in business. We are in no way involved with DeVry other than setting standards to make sure that this institution complies with the highest academic standards that are relevant to its degree-granting status.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to make one point, and that first point is that the DeVry Institute receives absolutely no funding from us and will not receive any funding from us.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: How much?

DR. OBERG: Zero. Zero.

Mr. Speaker, the Private Colleges Accreditation Board sits and determines the standards for any degree-granting institution that is a private college, and it sat and decided that the classes, that the courses that DeVry was giving our students did meet the standards, did meet the qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, this line of questioning is going in a very interesting way. I would ask the hon. member across the way to think of one thing and one word, and that is the Internet. There are numerous colleges from the United States, from all over the world that are coming into Alberta, and we have to – we have to – be in a position to accredit them. We have to be in the position to put the standards there, because they are coming, and your people are doing it on the Internet right now.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll certainly track the

minister's statement on DeVry not receiving any dollars from the government.

My last question to the minister. Will the minister put on hold the thoughtless decision to give the for-profit DeVry Institute academic degree granting status until there has been a full public debate on the floor of this Assembly on whether or not the government should proceed along those lines? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Would the hon. minister please respond on behalf of the government. We'll ask some of your colleagues just to button it.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The answer to the member's question is no. We have an independent board called the Private Colleges Accreditation Board, that does a tremendous job in determining the standards, determining the quality of courses that are provided to each and every Albertan in this province. Mr. Speaker, they do a wonderful job. The colleges, the universities are in favour of this. So I would ask the hon. member that if he has a problem with the Private Colleges Accreditation Board, then he should take it to them, that he should take it to the university boards, and they will come back to me, because they have no problem with them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Electricity Rates

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past couple of months many of the constituents in Little Bow have contacted me with serious concerns over their power bills, particularly a variety of additional service charges. Although the Leader of the Official Opposition, who just happens to be one of my constituents, wasn't one of those who contacted me, I do believe that we've heard similar concerns from the people in the area. My questions are to the Minister of Energy, and they relate to electrical rates in the EUB. Number 1, minister: are the various electricity rate classifications that are used within the industry subject to the approval of the EUB, or are these rates provided by the wire service provider as a mandate to charge as they see fit?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the utilities that the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board regulates – and these would be the major ones such as ATCO, Utilicorp, and TransAlta – rate classifications are indeed subject to the Energy and Utilities Board's approval. Now, rate classifications for municipal wire service providers such as Enmax and EPCOR are not subject to the Energy and Utilities Board's approval.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the increases were approved for gas and power utilities in order that they might recover previous losses, is the EUB mandated to set current rates based on current costs that reflect the ability of customers to pay, or are they there primarily to guarantee predictable returns to the utility shareholders?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the mandate of the Energy and Utilities Board is to do both, not only indicate that those utility shareholders will have a reasonable rate of return but also that consumers are well-served, and the EUB is acting in the public interest and in the consumers' interests.

In fact, the mandate of the Energy and Utilities Board, Mr. Speaker, is twofold: one, to ensure that rates that consumers pay are fair and the service that is provided is safe and adequate; and secondly, to regulate gas and power utilities in ways that allow them to earn sufficient revenues to recover costs which include a fair return on investment. The energy supply side of this is the part that is determined by the marketplace. More and more as you see the models throughout North America start to move now, there is clear, clear evidence that the competitive marketplace is a far better judge of what a fair return is to shareholders, and in fact the competitive marketplace properly structured is also one that protects consumers in the most fair way possible.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. The last commonly asked question, Mr. Minister, is: given that in a free enterprise model of business people appear to have the right to go broke, why does the EUB appear to guarantee financial success for the utilities?

MR. SMITH: Well, I would think, Mr. Speaker, that now the interim Leader of the Official Opposition is probably wishing he had contacted his MLA to ask questions.

In fact, utilities do provide necessary services in areas that would not benefit from duplication of infrastructure, such as electrical transportation and wires. But we have to look at the size of the investment that is required and how one was regulated in the olden days, and now today wire services are regulated, as is transmission. Those in fact, Mr. Speaker, are also coming up for renewal and examination. I think that we have used those good facilities, and we've received good and fair regulation from the Energy and Utilities Board, but we are getting to the end of our rope with those facilities, or the end of our wire, if you will, and that is going to require further investments in the North American power infrastructure. But it is important that the Energy and Utilities Board ensure that these utilities are not allowed to use monopoly positions to charge distribution rates unfair to consumers. So that's why these hearings are taking place.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, that's why we're also seeing the Energy and Utilities Board, that has not in prior times examined gas supply pricing because it was against policy for them to receive a profit, is now examining those in new hearings set in April. So, in fact, the Energy and Utilities Board in an open and transparent process with written and full disclosure decisions continues to work in the best interests of Albertans.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Medically Required MRIs

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the Minister of Energy confirmed that interest probably amounting to millions or even tens of millions of dollars will be paid to electricity companies on deferred rates owed to them as a result of government policy on electricity deregulation. Yesterday also the minister of health flatly stated that no interest will be paid to ordinary Albertans who are owed money as a result of government

policy on MRI fees. My question to the Premier: will the Premier admit that this is a double standard that works against ordinary Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no. There is no double standard whatsoever. You know, the hon. member is comparing apples and oranges and grapes and pears. Other than MRIs are powered by electricity, how you could relate MRIs and the situation that now prevails relative to the review that is being undertaken by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to electrical rates is absolutely beyond me.

We have a situation here as it relates to MRIs where people, individuals, allegedly went to their doctor, they weren't satisfied with their doctor's diagnosis of the particular situation, and sought a private... [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I hear the yip-yapping over there about a year's wait. How long did they have to wait before there were MRIs? I mean, there was a time in this country and in this world when there was no such thing as an MRI. The best thing we had was a CAT scan and before that X-rays and before that nothing.

But these people on their own went to privately operated clinics and paid for an MRI to find out that they had something probably more serious, maybe more serious than the doctor originally diagnosed.

Mr. Speaker, we're going to review this. We have no obligation to review this. We have absolutely no obligation to pay those people at all. There are other jurisdictions in this country that are woefully behind Alberta in terms of the provision of MRI services. We are doing this because we feel it is the right thing to do. There is no obligation to do it, and I think that we are being more than generous and more than compassionate as a government in offering this adjudication of MRI services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier, a simple and straightforward question: how does his government justify paying interest on money owed to huge corporations making record profits but not paying interest on money owed to ordinary Albertans often in poor health?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, he obviously does not hear the answer or he won't listen or he's taken too many lessons from some of the veterans over there. Again, there is no obligation. There is no obligation on the part of the government to do this at all. We are doing this because we think it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, after the adjudication has taken place – and I don't know how many cases will be examined by the expert panel but probably in the hundreds now – many of those people probably will not get the answer that they wanted and some of them will.

Mr. Speaker, there is no interest paid to anyone who experiences a delay or experiences any other difficulty that might have costs relative to access to the publicly funded system. It has never been done before; it won't be done in the future. We are going to the length of compensating those patients that will undergo an investigation or an examination by an independent panel of physicians. We will compensate those patients, if we can find that there is evidence to prove that they should have had an MRI in the first place. We don't have to go that distance. We are going that distance because we're a government that wants to do the right thing and we have compassion.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier feel an obligation to

pay interest to major corporations and no obligation whatsoever to pay interest to ordinary Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I answered the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta advantage is the envy of every other province in Canada. Our deficit was eliminated years ago, and our province will be soon debt free. That's, of course, due to the good management of this government. However, I understand that an Albertan who is not able to work and does not have other income and needs the support of government can apply and receive support from AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped program, which has a maximum of \$855 a month. Constituents receiving AISH have told me that they are having a hard time living and making ends meet. Meanwhile, their rents and utilities are going up, the general cost of living increases, the bills keep coming. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: does the minister have any plans to increase the AISH benefits?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, currently we provide AISH payments – perhaps I should indicate that AISH stands for assured income for the severely handicapped – of \$855 a month, as the hon. member has suggested, to approximately 27,000 Albertans. So when we start to do the math, you can see then that it's a tremendous program.

I would want to indicate to the hon. member that there's more than just the income that is presented. If you are entitled to AISH, you're also entitled to medical benefits, and I'm told that an average client on AISH is receiving medical benefits of about \$240 a month. I need to remind all of the members and especially the hon. member who has raised the question that you can still qualify for an AISH payment provided you meet the medical criteria, but you could also have a hundred thousand in assets, you could have your own car, you could own your own home.

So I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, to all the members as a responsible MLA, a steward of taxpayers' money, that the AISH program that we have in this province, which is leading the nation, by the way, is a very credible and a very reliable and reasonable program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the \$855 a month that we're talking about. Does the minister really expect disabled Albertans to live on this amount?

MR. DUNFORD: There is no question, Mr. Speaker, that at \$855 a month it might be a difficulty. Let me again remind hon. members that the majority of AISH clients that we have on our rolls also have other income. We have been able, with the reform to the AISH program, to put a situation in place where, if they are able to find work, they're able to go out and work without deduction. If they're involved in a spousal relationship, then there is, I think, an exceedingly generous opportunity for the other partner, you know, to go out and earn money, something in the order, I think, of another \$775 month before there are any deductions made. So with the medical benefit and with the ability to turn other income, conceivably you could have a couple that could be earning over \$1,900 a month and

still gain a dollar of AISH but, more importantly, would still have access to that medical card.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the minister's comments, how can Albertans rest assured that our most fragile and vulnerable citizens are supported?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we're very proud of the AISH program, and I want to again acknowledge all of the members of this Legislature that contributed to the reform of the AISH program, started back in 1998 and brought into place in October of 1999. As a matter of fact, across this country now ministers of social services and including the federal minister responsible have just published a recent report; it's called In Unison.

Actually our AISH program has received national recognition in terms of an effective service to people with disabilities. Part of what was highlighted within that recognition, of course, was not only the medical benefits that I've been talking about but basically a hassle-free process if people have to return to the program.

So AISH is just one of many, many things that we provide for Albertans that truly need our assistance. And I say again not only to the hon. member but to all taxpaying Albertans that we will strike the right balance between the opportunity for Albertans to receive the assistance that they truly, truly need and our responsibilities to the taxpayers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Class Sizes

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Learning through the Alberta initiative for school improvement has approved more than 15 class size reduction projects across the province. The focus of the majority of these projects are on K to 3 students. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Given the results of the Edmonton study, why does the minister continue to selectively choose the students who will benefit from smaller classes through the sponsorship of these research projects?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta initiative for school improvement was something that I talked about extensively during the last session. Under the AISI project there are presently 760 different projects around the province. The way these projects came into being was that parents, teachers, school board officials, and administrators sat down and felt that they would do whatever was the most important to help their kids achieve within their own schools, and they addressed numerous issues.

Mr. Speaker, it's much too numerous to talk to, and the reason I'm saying this is because of those 760 projects, 15 of them dealt with class size. Fifteen of them felt that class size was the number one issue. In saying that, on the class size study that we did in Edmonton, it showed that, yes, some kids did benefit from smaller class size, some kids did about the same, and other kids perhaps even did a little bit worse.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point that I have said, and I have been very consistent in what I have said, is that the school boards need the flexibility to determine through their teachers, through their parents, through their administrators – they need that flexibility to be able to find out what is most important for school achievement in their particular area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the same minister. Why is the minister diverting money to research projects when the results are known and that money could better be contributed to a provincewide class size reduction program?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I will very simply quote what the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association said on CBC radio. He said that no one wants to legislate class size.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Why does the minister refuse to set and fund provincewide targets for K to 3 classes? Why?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again I will say the same answer. First of all, K to 3 is a very important age group. I don't think there's anyone in this Assembly that would argue with that. I don't think there's any research that shows that K to 3 is not a very important time. Where there is acrimony in the research is exactly what is the best way to effect change in the K to 3 age group. Is it our early literacy projects, where we saw a tremendous increase in results and achievement with these students? Is it by class size? Is it by one-on-one teaching? All of these are very successful alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, I believe in school boards. I believe that they have the best interests of their students at heart, and I believe that they will find the ways to do it. It is my job to give them the resources, and I believe in that as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Energy Rebates

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Calgary-Fort covers a large area in Calgary, including the residential communities and a very busy industrial park. Energy consumers, both residents and corporate constituents of mine, have a concern, and the concern is the energy rebate. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the current rebate of \$150 per month per residential gas bill will end by the end of this month, what is the government's plan beyond this time?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question is a good one. Of course, as we all know, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act was introduced by the Premier on Tuesday, so I won't go into specific detail as the bill is before the House, saying only that it will provide protection from spikes in gas prices in the future. So that is one arrow in the quiver.

Of course, a real opportunity here that we have is being fortunate Albertans and to be blessed by this resource to be able to use it for protecting Albertans. Any future rebates will go, as the bill will speak to, throughout the land. But right now I think that as well as Easter eggs that are on the horizon, so is another \$150 cheque being mailed out to Albertans, their second \$150 energy rebate cheque. Also, most Albertans receive a \$40 per month electricity rebate, that will continue until the end of calendar 2001.

For the important nonresidential or corporate constituents in Calgary-Fort, Mr. Speaker, there is the 3.6 cents a kilowatt-hour

rebate from auction proceeds that will proceed through to the end of calendar 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about the residential consumer, but commercial and industrial business is also important to the Alberta economy, and companies in my area also want to know what the government's plan is for these energy consumers in the industrial sector.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The 3.6 cents a kilowatt-hour that I did speak to in my first answer will continue, as of course the market transition credit will continue to the end of June. Program extensions could occur if needed. We are seeing a downward pressure on the Power Pool pricing from the initial spurt of a new competitive market model that came into being January 1. We are watching it. We're carefully monitoring the situation. Also, the Energy and Utilities Board has embarked upon a market performance review. We also look to advice from the Advisory Council on Electricity.

It's an important issue, Mr. Speaker. As I've said in earlier answers, we believe that we're ahead of a North American curve that's going to require absolutely phenomenal amounts of reinvestment in a whole energy infrastructure that will extend across North America, and Alberta again will be at the lead of this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. Could the minister update us on what is the total rebate up to now, and does the continuation of this violate the free trade agreement?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it cost \$1.1 billion, paid for out of increased natural gas royalties. There is no North American free trade contravention.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

2:40

Access to Information

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Payday has recently taken on a whole new meaning for Alberta taxpayers. Since Alberta taxpayers have taken over a three-quarters of a million dollars hit on Stockwell Day's defamation suit, it only seems fair that they have access to all relevant documents relating to Mr. Day's claim to the risk management fund. However, FOIP officials have demanded fees of at least \$60,000 to process our Official Opposition access to information request. My first question today is to the minister responsible for the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Minister of Government Services. Can the minister inform this House why FOIP officials have stonewalled our request by demanding fees of \$60,000?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current provisions in legislation under the freedom of information act are identified under the freedom of information regulations. There are a few in number and are very specific and narrow in their approach. We find the need for paramountcy in this issue arises primarily because information concerns require increasing confidentiality, and for that purpose the information that is put in place for access to freedom of information is done particularly for confidentiality as well as the proper information that should be put forward for people to enjoy.

MR. MacDONALD: Given that the information in this Alberta government news release dated January 16, 2001, states, "We are releasing this information in keeping with this government's policy of openness and accountability," can the public interests be served by the hon. minister urging FOIP officials to please waive this fee of \$60,000?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, there are many requests for information in this province through many departments, and each department is responsible for their own individuals and their own bureaucracy when looking after particular information that is being requested. It is important to remember that all of this bureaucracy being put in place to provide information costs a tremendous amount of money, and it's important also to make sure that frivolous requests for information be restricted because of all the demands for information. So with that, it's important that individuals come forward with proper information requests and make sure that those information requests are concise so that the costs can be kept down. If that would happen by members of the opposition, maybe those costs could be lowered.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given three-quarters of a million dollars in tax dollars, I do not consider it to be frivolous.

My next question is to the Minister of Justice. Will the hon. minister commit to tabling all the information in the Alberta Justice department on this issue? Will the minister table this in the Assembly?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't think I'd ever say this, but I long for the days when we had in the opposition benches people who respected privacy. In fact, one of the reasons why – because I don't know the details of this specific request or the cost estimates for it, I would assume that the reason why \$60,000 is required is because it takes an awful lot of work to go through records which involve a lot of private information of private individuals, both plaintiff and defendant in this case as well as others that might have been involved in the case, to determine what type of information is appropriate to be released and what type of information is not appropriate to be released and to respect the individual privacy of those individuals involved.

So the fees that are being charged are not being charged to reduce access to appropriate information that should be before the public but to protect the privacy and to allow the bureaucracy to do what is necessary to go through the documents to determine what is appropriate to be released under the act and at law and what is inappropriate to be released under the act and at law and to protect the privacy of individual Albertans, which is why we have a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling on the first of four members today to participate in Members' Statements, let me just apologize to the half a dozen members who advised me that they wanted to participate in question period today. We had only 10 sets of questions. Yesterday we had 12. May I ask all members just to review the rules because when we return on Monday next, you will see further interventions from the chair in terms of speeding up the process so that we can have additional members participate in question period.

In 30 seconds from now I will call upon the first of four hon. members to participate, but in the interim I want to have approval from the Assembly to revert to the introduction of visitors, if we could.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

MR. SNELGROVE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you and to the members of this Assembly a couple seated in the members' gallery that have worked tirelessly raising their family and running their business in the Vermilion area for nearly 50 years. Their contributions to the community and to the area are too numerous to mention. I have the tremendous honour of being their son. Bob and Margaret Snelgrove are accompanied today by my uncle Maurice Snelgrove, and I would ask them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon a number of individuals from NorQuest College joined us in the public gallery. They were led by teachers Mrs. Andrea Massing and Mr. Cap Tiege. We had in all a total of 17 very eager students who seemed to have enjoyed question period quite a bit, and I'm very glad they were able to join us. I'm not able to introduce them to you and through you to members of the Assembly, but I would ask the Assembly to please give them the traditional welcome in absentia, and I will send it on in *Hansard*.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an absolute delight for me to introduce some very special people today. There's an old saying: behind any successful man there's a very surprised woman. In this case, it's my entire family. I would like to introduce to you and through you my beautiful wife, Veronica, and my kids Claudia and Jack, who have come to join us here today at the House. Would you please welcome them.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Edmonton Regional Science Fair

MR. VANDERMEER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I rise today to speak about the Edmonton Regional Science Fair, which includes communities from Jasper to Lloydminster, Athabasca to north of Red Deer. This past weekend I had the privilege to attend the award ceremonies where students from grades 4 to 12 showcased their hard work. I was extremely impressed by the

quality of their science projects shown at the fair. I saw an interesting range of projects from power of wind and hydropower to laser driven fusion and behaviour based robotics.

2:50

I can see why Alberta students are high achievers on a national and international level, and activities such as this science fair enhance Alberta's excellent learning system by giving students an opportunity to explore topics in an in-depth way, further their knowledge, and follow their scientific interests. These students are a credit to their parents and teachers, whom I thank for encouraging their scientific efforts. I would also like to acknowledge the Edmonton Regional Science Fair council for their work in organizing last weekend's scientific fair. I really enjoyed the experience.

Congratulations to all the award winners, and good luck to the seven students who are representing the Edmonton region at the Canada-wide science fair. I am confident that these students and their projects will amaze the judges. I encourage students from all over Alberta to participate in science fairs and experience the excitement of scientific exploration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Class Size

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The release of the Edmonton class size study, confirming research elsewhere that smaller classes do make a difference, was accompanied by an unacceptable spin by the Minister of Learning. With this study was a covering press release that attempted to negate the findings and indicate that the same results could somehow or other be achieved through other means. In later comments the minister indicated class size would not become a matter of legislation.

Through private members' bills and motions in the Legislature the Official Opposition has asked the government to legislate class size in this province. Why? First and foremost, students will benefit, not just those students in school districts that can scrounge the needed resources but all students across the province. Second, such legislation would carry with it the obligation on the part of the province to provide resources so that those smaller classes could become a reality. Third, the province can't be trusted. This is the government that slashed kindergarten, claiming there is no research to support the benefits of such programs, and when parents objected, there was no protection for those five-year-olds to be found in the Alberta School Act. The objections that such legislation would be an unacceptable one-size-fits-all solution and too rigid to work seems not to be the case elsewhere.

The legislation I tabled earlier today is but a sample. Our calls for legislation differ from what has been done in the U.S. We will again ask for class size targets to be set. Our Bill 215 stated setting targets will allow lead time to ensure that there are adequate numbers of teachers in place and classroom spaces to accommodate additional classes. Targets would not be rigid. Classes of 28 students would not automatically be split into two classes of 10. Common sense would prevail. Class sizes will be reduced if not by this minister by his or her successor. Let's not delay one more generation. Let's not deny them the benefits of such class sizes. Let's do something about the situation now.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's seniors today are more than 300,000 and growing and are a very vital part of our

society. That is only one reason but a huge one why it is such good news that we now have an entire ministry dedicated to serving Alberta's seniors.

The steering committee for the aging population study, which I chaired, recommended that we have an associate minister of seniors within Community Development, and of course I was very thrilled, as most Alberta seniors must be, with the decision to create a separate Ministry of Seniors with the hon. Member for Stony Plain as its first minister.

As re-appointed chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, I am very pleased to acknowledge in this Assembly the valuable role the council fills as a link to Alberta's seniors and the government. The council is unique in that it consults on an ongoing basis with all seniors potentially, and frequently provides advice and recommendations to the government through the Minister of Seniors on areas of concern that are important to seniors.

The council also holds public consultation sessions around the province, and they're planning to hold their next one in Grande Prairie and area in June. The council participates as members on committees that work to improve the quality of life of seniors: the long-term care review, the impact of the aging population study, shelter cost study, and presently on a seniors' centre study. The council has very recently studied and made recommendations in areas of home care, mental health, and older drivers.

The 13 appointed and very capable citizens, I might add, who form the council with myself as chair look forward to an exciting and challenging time as we continue our work with Alberta seniors and the government, all within the new ministry, in the coming months. We will assist the government to address the needs of today's seniors while planning for the future and the impact of the aging population.

On behalf of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta I encourage all members of this Assembly to utilize this valuable . . . [Ms Kryczka's speaking time expired]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Environmental Policy

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the government talks about having a plan that will give Alberta's children a future with limitless possibilities, it is acknowledging that the questions we ask and the decisions we make in this Assembly have effects that reach far beyond this session, this year, and even the next 10 years. When we talk about Albertans benefiting from a decision or a project, we have to ask: which Albertans, and what is the real benefit? Will it be a short-term economic benefit for a particular company and a forest of stumps for the rest of the province? Maybe the benefit will go to larger companies and their shareholders while the local community gets a decimated landscape, falling water levels, and polluted air.

When we look back on the decisions that lay before us, decisions about energy and natural resources, will economists say that we got every dollar we could and therefore it was a complete success? Maybe we'll find ourselves sitting on piles of money and trying to figure out what to do with air we can't breathe and water no one wants to drink. I'm not against economic development or making money from our natural resources. What I am concerned about is that we are not asking the right questions at the right time. The government doesn't seem to really want to look at conservation and alternative energy sources. They pay lip service to these ideas, but their commitment is questionable. They just want to build another coal-fired plant as quickly as they can and keep costs down, but are they really considering all the numbers in their costs? Can we measure clean air and water in cents per kilowatt hour?

The Alberta government cannot continue to use dollars, debit, and

deficit as the bottom line. It just isn't sustainable, Mr. Speaker. As members of this Assembly we need the courage and the conviction to ask the right questions at the right time. A future with limitless possibilities means we have some tough decisions ahead of us.

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the government to share the projected government business with us for the week that we come back, starting April 23.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the 23rd under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, Bill 1, Natural Gas Price Protection Act; Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act; and address and reply to the Speech from the Throne.

On Monday evening at 8 under Government Bills and Orders, address and reply to the Speech from the Throne and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 24, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, as has been indicated, the Minister of Finance will provide a Budget Address to the House.

On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Motions if the opposition so chooses, that would be their first opportunity for a response to the budget. Under Government Bills and Orders second reading under Bill 3, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001; Bill 4, Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001; address and reply to the Speech from the Throne, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, April 25, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, under Government Motions: in the event that the opposition and the third party choose not to reply on Tuesday night, they would have the opportunity to reply on Wednesday evening. Thereafter Committee of Supply, day 1. We would ask for permission to revert to Introduction of Bills to introduce the supplementary supply bill and thereafter as per the Order Paper. Under Tabling Returns and Reports that day we would anticipate tabling the supply calendar of appearances as per agreement between the House leaders. For the information of the House we would anticipate introducing the interim supply bill that afternoon.

On Thursday, April 26, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for Second Reading, supplementary and interim supply, address and reply to the Speech from the Throne, and as per the Order Paper.

3:00

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 11: Mr. McClelland]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, I had concluded my comments. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to once again have this opportunity to reply to the Speech from the Throne. I, too, would like, as other members have, Mr. Speaker, to begin by congratulating yourself and the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees on filling the offices that you have been chosen to fulfill. It's not always easy. We aren't always the easiest group to lead and to stay in our places and do what's expected of us, but I appreciate the work you've done in the past and look forward to four more years of being treated similarly.

I, too, would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Mill Woods. This is the third time that they have been good enough to elect me, and their confidence is both gratifying and humbling, Mr. Speaker. Election campaigns are hard, and constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods ask good questions. They have high expectations of the people they put in public office, and I hope that I can fulfill those expectations.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I would also like to congratulate the new members that have been elected. The election campaign was hard fought, and it's a credit, I think, to your ability and to the hard work that all of you engaged in that you're here today.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I would, however, be remiss if I didn't mention a number of my colleagues who no longer share our work in the Assembly today. I'd like to mention if I could, Mr. Speaker, some of them by name.

I for one will miss the former Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. I'll remember her particularly for the very powerful speech – I think the most powerful speech I've heard in eight years in this House – that she gave when we were considering the Holocaust memorial bill. It was a speech that I think had members on both sides of this House deeply moved.

I'll miss very much the former Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. That member, Mr. Speaker, had a zest for life and a sense of good humour that made the tasks you worked on with her, in and outside of this House, very easy tasks, and I will miss her.

I'll miss the former Member for Edmonton-Manning. That member quietly traveled the province listening to Albertans and brought their voices back to this Assembly.

I'll miss the former Member for Edmonton-Calder. That member constantly reminded us that we had to write and we had to talk and we had to keep in the forefront of our consideration everyday Albertans. He often spoke of his barber, and his question was: would my barber understand that? Would my barber appreciate that? Lance's barber has a permanent place at our caucus table, Mr. Speaker.

I'll miss the former Member for Edmonton-Glenora as a bright and a versatile and an articulate young man whose sense of justice, I think, didn't leave anyone who met him untouched.

I'll miss especially, of course, Mr. Speaker, our former leader, the former Member for Edmonton-McClung. This was an individual who had the option of doing a lot of things. The fact that she chose to become leader of our party and to sit in this House and to serve Albertans I think is a measure of the woman. She brought with her a sense of style that will be very difficult to replace, and I will miss her.

Those are regrets, Mr. Speaker, and we can't dwell, I know, too far in the past, so it was interesting to listen to and to read the Speech from the Throne. I was especially interested, when I was thinking about my former colleagues, in the very last page, where the government takes a pledge. I couldn't help but think that maybe the former Member for Edmonton-Glenora would have something witty to say about the government finally taking the pledge.

But going to the Speech from the Throne, immediately after the election I was questioned by a reporter who said: "What are you going to do now? Your numbers are so much fewer. What are you going to do?" I guess my answer is the answer I gave today, Mr. Speaker, that we as a party are going to go back to our basic principles. We are going to oppose legislation that is brought forward that we think violates those principles and hurts Albertans. We will be offering our own versions of legislation that we think supports those basic principles and makes the lives of Albertans better, and we're going to support such legislation if it's brought forward by the government.

I wanted to talk just a few minutes if I might, Mr. Speaker, about some of those principles. Alberta Liberals believe in Alberta. We believe in only the amount of government that we need, but we insist that we get all the government that we need. We believe in a government that's strong enough to use words like "love" and "compassion," and I was pleased to see the section in the Speech from the Throne that talked about the values that Albertans hold, the concern for community, the concern for family. I was also pleased to see the promise in the speech that those values will be a continuing guide to the government.

We Liberals have an abiding faith, Mr. Speaker, in education to lift the human condition. One thing you'll find that all Liberals, I think, agree on is the value of and the need for the very best education we can afford. We believe that the talented have to be encouraged. We should do everything to make sure that they develop the kinds of skills and interests and abilities that they have to the fullest.

But while survival of the fittest may aptly describe evolution, it should not be the philosophy of a government. Government should fill the gaps that have been left there by chance or by a wisdom that we don't understand. So government has a role, a strong role, in helping the vulnerable and in making sure that the talented and those blessed with talents do make the very best of their abilities.

Alberta Liberals believe that a province that's as blessed as ours, a province that can spend billions of dollars on private-enterprise schemes, ought to be able to help by lowering class sizes, by maintaining women's shelters, by providing homes for the homeless. Surely with all the resources that we have and that we can draw upon in this province, the vulnerable should be looked after.

There was a question earlier today in question period about the AISH payments. Most of us in the Assembly and the new ones will soon be visited, I'm sure, by those recipients of the AISH program. It's painful to find the kinds of life situations they find themselves in, the kinds of limited options that they have in terms of looking after themselves, and for them to feel somehow or other that their fellow citizens are attacking them or at least not stepping up to the plate and providing them with the kind of help that they need. The AISH program is a wonderful program, and it has great potential, but I believe, Mr. Speaker, that there has to be a systematic way built into the system that reflects increasing costs for that group of Albertans, that allows them to live with some dignity so that they don't have to take the very few precious assets that some of them have and dispose of them so that they are eligible for further increases.

3:10

The system has to be changed. I think the numbers that were

given earlier in the day are disgraceful. When you contrast the way those increases come about periodically with the way we have looked after our own affairs as MLAs, where we have attached increases to our own salary to an index, I think there's something wrong, Mr. Speaker. There's a basic fairness that's missing there in terms of treating the vulnerable.

The throne speech, Mr. Speaker, speaks of values that Albertans hold. As I said before, there are other values, and there are values that the opposition has to be particularly aware of and make sure aren't violated. Those values include loyalty, justice, and freedom. It's our charge as the opposition to make sure that government actions do not in any way lessen or make less relevant those values in the lives of Albertans.

I think, Mr. Speaker, with those comments I'd like to conclude. I look forward to seeing the kinds of legislation that will follow from the Speech from the Throne. I'm left, I guess, with a question, and it is just that I'm not quite sure. The opening pages of the speech speak about: "It was only two months ago that I laid out the government's vision for Alberta's future." It goes on to talk about what that vision for Alberta was: "It was a vision of a strong economy, new jobs." So the vision for Alberta is laid out on the first page, yet on the last page we're told that there is going to be another summit to find out what the future is going to be. It seems to me that there's a basic inconsistency there. Either you have the vision, on the first page, or you're looking for it, on the last page.

With those comments, I'd conclude. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and congratulations on the election of Mr. Speaker and the Deputy Speaker.

It's an absolute delight and a great pleasure for me to have the privilege of responding to the Speech from the Throne, and I thank you for this opportunity today. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, this is an especially moving occasion for me, given that it is not only my maiden speech as an MLA but as Minister of Economic Development with responsibilities for tourism in Alberta. A month ago I was standing on a freeway freezing in the dark and waving at people. Now I walk through the building and people call me honourable. Go figure. This is a very strange business.

I need to take a very special moment to offer my wife, Veronica, and my two children, Claudia and Jack, all the love and support and thanks that I can give them. It's been a very long year, as everybody knows who has done this process, and I would not have made it without them. I thank you sincerely for being with me. I also want to thank my wife for kicking me out of bed every morning. It really helped. It worked.

I need to thank more than 75 volunteers, Mr. Speaker, who believed in me and worked tirelessly day and night on my campaign. There are times when all of us know how it is to continue on with the process in the face of all the challenges we're met with on the campaign trail, and without those volunteers I would not be standing here today. I need to say to them: thank you. They are the very best.

I would also like to thank the voters of Edmonton-McClung. Those people have put their trust in me to be their MLA, and they have voted for me to help them represent their views inside this government as we work toward creating a positive and exciting future for all Alberta. I am very excited and humbled by their trust, and I am delighted to be here to work for them and the people of Alberta. As I said in my campaign, there is nothing more important than having somebody say, "You have my support," and I will always work very hard to continue earning that trust.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our Premier, who led this campaign with class and dignity. We never got mired down in any kind of name-calling. We discussed issues. We told Albertans what we believed and where we were going. They believed in that vision, and they voted overwhelmingly for this government to return to this House to lead them for the 25th Legislature. It's been an outstanding campaign, and I am grateful to be part of this Progressive Conservative team.

Our purpose here this afternoon is to address the eloquent throne speech given by the Lieutenant Governor on Tuesday, April 10. Much of what Her Honour spoke of was the same vision I share, a vision of no debt, low taxes, reliable social programs, jobs for our young people, and a strong economy. All of these noble endeavours are why I became involved in politics. I hope it is my belief and commitment toward keeping Alberta the best place to live, work, and do business in Canada that the people of Edmonton-McClung recognized and entrusted me to bring to this government.

The Lieutenant Governor mentioned that this work we are doing toward achieving the vision begins with strong economic and fiscal planning. Nowhere is that more evident and more prevalent than in this province of Alberta. We are one of the strongest economies in Canada, if not the strongest. We continue to grow and prosper despite economic slowdowns faced by other jurisdictions, and we will continue to be the strongest growing economy in all of North America.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, my hometown, the great city of Edmonton, is poised for some of the strongest growth of any city in Canada. We anticipate growth in the neighbourhood of 5 percent, and I look forward to working toward that very, very enviable goal. As development in the north continues, everything from oil sands, gas, and tourism continues to boom, and Edmonton is poised to assist in that growth. It is our responsibility to serve as the gateway to the north and be an invaluable source of business resources and information to those communities. I will endeavour as the Minister of Economic Development to ensure that I do everything within my power to continue that growth pattern.

MR. SMITH: Hear, hear.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Murray. [interjection] What a Chamber.

Across the province we are planning for growth in tourism, and I know that if my colleague from Banff-Cochrane were here, we'd be hearing the same thing. We are planning for growth in tourism, large growth in tourism. Alberta's fourth largest industry is tourism. Our goal, with the help of the very wonderful resources that have been given to us by God, is to take this 4 and a half billion dollar industry to \$6 billion by the year 2005.

Aggressive marketing and strong partnerships with the tourism industry and Ivan Strang will help us toward that goal.

Speaker's Ruling **Referring to the Absence of Members** **Referring to Members by Name**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'd just like to take the opportunity to say a number of things to new members. One is that we do not refer to the presence or absence, particularly the absence, of hon. members. You can refer to them but not to the fact that they may or may not be here. They may be in their office or whatever.

We do refer to one another by our constituency names, not our given names.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you for that input, Mr. Speaker. If you've followed my career to date, I've made a habit of putting my foot in my mouth, and today is no different. I will attempt to move on.

3:20

Debate Continued

MR. NORRIS: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's success rate is a result of the hard work of Albertans, many of whom work in small businesses throughout the province, and the great leadership of this government. It is also a result of their trust in government to create an environment that fosters prosperity and investment. As someone who only a few short weeks ago was reliant on a small business to support my family, I can assure you that I have the intimate appreciation of the needs of small businesspeople throughout this province, and I will continue to work to meet their needs.

There is no doubt that growth causes its own pressures, and in Alberta we are faced with some of those pressures due to outstanding and phenomenal growth. I was pleased to see in the throne speech that some of these pressures, such as roads and infrastructure, were going to be addressed and noted that the government will continue to respond with programs such as twinning of the north/south corridor and the \$1 billion three-year commitment to build or modernize schools.

Clearly our focus is addressed where it should be, and I am proud to be part of this team. Addressing these types of pressures is important, not only in meeting the immediate needs of Albertans but in continuing to improve our quality of life. We also make the province a more attractive place for things such as trade, investment, and tourism, and that helps ensure our long-term prosperity and continues to make Alberta the very best place in the world to live, work, and do business.

It is that future as a result of our prosperity that Her Honour referred to in her reference to the Future Summit. The Future Summit will give Albertans a voice in charting a course for a future as a debt-free province. I am very pleased to have been asked to be part of the organizing committee for the Future Summit. I look forward to working with the other ministries – Revenue, Finance, and Community Development – and the Alberta Economic Development Authority to make this summit one of growth and vision for all Albertans. [some applause] Thank you, hon. member.

The general theme of the summit is to develop a plan for what a debt-free Alberta will look like. The summit starts from that fiscal perspective, but as noted in the throne speech, a good fiscal plan and solid economy allow the province to address quality of life issues. Therefore, economic development issues will be a vital component of the summit discussions. That will be my primary focus as Economic Development minister. The Future Summit will give our government and all Albertans a chance to hear what people's priorities are for the future direction of this province and its wonderful growth.

Mr. Speaker, those who know me know that I am a family man. Family is no doubt the most important thing in my life, as I'm sure it is in all members' lives. I believe its one's love of family that fosters the love of our communities, and that in turn makes our communities a better place to live and grow. I think this philosophy is something that was taught to me very directly by my father, who also served the residents of Edmonton through public service as an alderman from 1977 to 1986. I believe the citizens of Edmonton were better served for that service. I would also like to acknowledge him and thank him for giving me the gift of public service.

Being an Edmontonian, I can't help but recall the sentiments of Grant MacEwan, who always espoused the very, very simple philosophy that you should try to leave the world a better place than when you got here. Those very simple words I believe, Mr. Speaker, are why we are all here. It is something that guides my actions and activities every day.

As I begin my public service, I want to assure you that I will work

to serve all members of this Assembly, the constituents of Edmonton-McClung, and the people throughout the province of Alberta to the best of my abilities. It has been an outstanding month since the general election, and I must tell the members of this House that if you asked me to write a job description for how I'd like to spend the next 10 years of my life, I could not write a better job description. The people I work with are outstanding. The goals and admiration that I have for people in this House are second to none, and I believe sincerely that this 25th Legislative Assembly will accomplish great, great things for the province of Alberta.

I wish to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this privilege of speaking today, and God bless all Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would like to apologize to the hon. member for interrupting him in his maiden speech. I hope you will forgive me for that.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to start my response to the throne speech by congratulating those who were elected. It's not easy to run for public office. It's very hard work. It's a great commitment from families. I appreciate and I honour all of those who were successful. I also grieve for those who were not successful. We've lost some good people in this House. I miss them dearly, and I would like to thank them for the service they gave while they were in this House. They weren't re-elected, but that doesn't diminish the service they provided while they were here with us.

I join others in congratulating the Speaker on his election and the other officers that we've elected to guide this Assembly. I would also like to make mention of the table officers who join us and who are of such assistance to us at all times: unfailingly gentle, although at times we probably deserve a firmer hand.

Now, here we are at the beginning of the 25th Legislature, and it's interesting listening to the debate that has gone on here over the past couple of days. Certainly I acknowledge that the Progressive Conservative Party has formed the government with 74 seats. That's overwhelming. But I caution my hon. colleagues on the other side that that is not all of Alberta that was speaking there. I think it comes out to about 30 percent of all Albertans, and that needs to be kept in mind. As legislators we have not captured all of those who were eligible to vote, and that's something we all need to work on. What is it that we're not doing that we have such low voter turnout? If only 50 percent of the people that are eligible to vote are voting, we're not doing something right, and we need to look to that.

So we do have a significant portion of eligible voting Albertans who did not support the current government. It's my job as a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to hold this government accountable, to raise the issues that the government may not want raised or perhaps doesn't think important, but some Albertans do, and I will raise those issues for them.

I'm not sure what the mandate this government was running on was about because I really didn't hear any policy articulated during the election. I heard a lot of announcements of money, and that's fine. If that's the indicator of what their policy is, fine. I didn't hear that policy articulated specifically, but I did see billions and billions of dollars that were allocated that had not been scrutinized by this Legislative Assembly. I think that is something we need to look to: not approving money much after the fact but approving it before it's spent and scrutinizing it on behalf of all Albertans.

I did hear the platform being put forward about "proven," but I think there are a couple of different takes on that record. Certainly when I talk to the people in my constituency, they talked about it

being proof of being back in the business of being in business when they looked at various loans and losses in business support that this government had provided to large corporations here in Alberta like Al-Pac or the Prince Rupert grain terminal, West Edmonton Mall, Bovar, Millar Western. People still remember that, and I think it's a caution that we all need to keep in mind.

A number of people were very, very distressed that they had spoken clearly and loudly to the government with their concerns over the Health Care Protection Act, which at the time was known as Bill 11, and were deeply offended when the government not only insulted them by calling them left-wing nuts but didn't listen and didn't react to what was being said. We need to keep in mind that those people were coming forward with deeply held beliefs. Certainly in Alberta to have people motivated to come out to the Assembly and hold a demonstration speaks very loudly indeed.

3:30

I think "proven" also has meant in many cases that it's government behind closed doors, and I've often spoken in this Assembly about that. We have more legislation being passed that has huge referrals back to the regulations, and regulations, as we know, are not passed through the Law and Regulations Committee in this Assembly. I don't think the Law and Regulations Committee has been called probably in my lifetime, which I think is a real drawback. There's a lot to be said for all-party committees working in the Legislative Assembly. It would probably get rid of some of the confusion and high temper that we see in the Assembly at times if that was able to be discussed more openly.

"Proven" has also meant to me less time in this Legislative Assembly. I'm sure almost everyone in here has heard remarks about: "Well, you know, you get holidays for eight months of the year. You're only in this Assembly for barely four months." Again, I question that. I think there's more that needs to be discussed and debated here. This is the citizens' avenue to having their points of view heard and their issues raised. We should be spending more time in this House, not less.

"Proven" also meant more user fees and licences and tariffs, and I've spoken about that in this House previously as well. Yes, taxes have been reduced, but if you had your taxes at a thousand dollars and they've been reduced to \$800 out of one pocket but you have 900 bucks worth of user fees, tariffs, and licences that are coming out of your other pocket, you know, you're not really further ahead here, folks. I think we have to be honest. When we look at taxes, we also have to look at all of those other fees that people are now paying that have been put into play by this government.

So I read the throne speech with great interest: what was now being put forward as a policy or as a program to be followed. Certainly the economy takes up the largest single section in the throne speech, and that may well be appropriate. It's certainly a very high priority for this government, as demonstrated in the past. I think the discussion about a diversified economy is excellent. We've been trying to achieve that for some time, I think through the last three different Premiers, and it's been some struggle to achieve it. Obviously, in Alberta, with such a strong resource base in the oil sector, we need to continue to work on that.

It also talks about jobs, and I think we have to be careful here. Government doesn't create jobs. The only jobs that government creates are those in their own bureaucracy. Beyond that, I'm assuming you're trying to give an economic platform that attracts small business to grow and thrive. Certainly we know that small business is the biggest generator of new jobs in the sector, but I think the government has to be very careful about not promising that they

are creating jobs. They're not. We have to rely on the economy for that.

I read about fiscal plans. Excellent. I would like to see much more planning on behalf of this government and certainly much more of putting that plan out well in advance so it can be seen by Albertans and debated by Albertans. Certainly we could use an improvement on the past record of those increasing costs with user fees and licences, et cetera.

I would ask the government to please work harder on strong, solid performance measurements, particularly ones that stay in place from year to year. As Albertans and as members of the opposition look at that budget and scrutinize it – and we've all moved to a system where we are looking at performance measurements – there's not much to measure when you're changing your performance measurements every year. You can't go back and compare on how you did the year before. I think we're all missing out on a very good and productive tool here.

Better management overall. I've heard now that we've put more money back into health care than where the system was in 1995, but the waiting lists are still longer than they were before. So there's a disconnect here and still a serious problem. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods would also argue that there's lots of money going back into the school system, but we're still having trouble with results, with literacy, with numeracy, and with the ability for children to move ahead and have a full and productive life. Certainly it's been a concern of mine, and I've already raised questions in the Assembly about the use of the utilization rate in school closures. I really don't think that it moves us further forward to be closing schools in the inner city or putting the school boards in the position of having to do that in order to justify expenditures of new schools in other parts of the city. It shouldn't be playing one off against another.

Also, in the throne speech I see modern transportation, safety of roads and highways. Definitely. I think anyone could support that, and we all know that even the Auditor General was on the government's case for deferring maintenance on highways. Maintenance has to be a regularly scheduled expense. We can't not do it for five years and think you can put the same amount in and end up with the same quality and safety of your roads and highways.

I continue to have a concern about the north/south trade corridor in that it does seem to be set up in a way that it bypasses Edmonton. As Edmonton is still the gateway to the north, I do express concerns on that, and I would be happy to have any member from the other side prove me wrong on that one, but so far that has not happened.

I notice that the government is putting a lot of weight on the 2001 World Championships in Athletics. Actually, they seem to be expecting everything from it. The actual section reads:

The government will continue to provide business and investment programs, especially in conjunction with the 2001 World Championships in Athletics. These programs will focus on the strategic benefits of investing in Alberta and demonstrate the province's diverse and world-class energy, petrochemical, forest and building products, agriculture and food, tourism, and information and communications technology sectors.

Yowza. All of that in 10 days. Wow. They're expecting an awful lot to come from that 10 days.

I think it's a great opportunity for Edmonton. My ongoing concern about that – and I've raised it a number of times with the previous Minister of Community Development – is an expectation that the local professional arts community will be promoted through this. Certainly we would like to see community arts groups involved, but we have an astounding professional arts community here in Edmonton and throughout Alberta, and that should be showcased as well. I note that no money that came from the

province was tied specifically to the funding of that, which I think was a serious mistake, but they may well have risen above that, and I look forward to the games this summer.

The energy market and the energy free market. Well, I think the two sides are just going to agree to disagree on this one, although I will point out that even the Premier has now admitted that we're not going to see prices go back to where they were before, so I still question why we got into electrical deregulation. That was supposed to be the point, but I guess we're not going back there.

I have a concern around the promotion of new generation and, particularly, streamlining the approval process, in that in my riding we have right now an application before the Energy and Utilities Board on the Rosedale power plant and potentially having three turbines added to that plant, which was to be decommissioned in the year 2000. Certainly it was not anticipated in any city planning or in the area redevelopment plan that we would now have a new and three times as large power plant in the centre of our city. My concern around this streamlining of the approval process is that there be no interference with the application and the intervenors who have raised points to the EUB around the Rosedale plant. Essentially, how does the EUB, which is a regulatory body, operate in a deregulated marketplace? I think that's something that needs to be clearly outlined. Also, how does the EUB operate with the Government Advisory Council on Electricity? Will the EUB be able to make unimpeded decisions on the Rosedale plant and others?

There have been a number of issues that have arisen around electricity deregulation in Edmonton-Centre. I've already raised the issue of discrimination against those living in single-metered high-rise apartments and condominiums. This has been significant for those people. They both had a much higher rate to pay under a regulated rate option and received lower rebates. They also received lower rebates for the gas rebates. That has been adjusted at this point, and time will tell whether it's been successful.

3:40

The second thing that happened around that was there was no competition. These buildings were each told: "Well, that's okay. There are 18 different suppliers out there. You can go and get a competitive bid from all of that, and you'll end up with a lower price to pay for your electricity." Wrong. They were too small a user to be able to attract bids from those 18 different power plants. In fact, they were down to just the two, Enmax and EPCOR, and in Edmonton that meant EPCOR, so now we had a monopoly happening. There was no competition involved in that.

The government has also talked about stable agricultural communities. I'm certainly pleased to see some movement on the intensive livestock proposals. I think that's really important not only for the rural areas but for all of Alberta. I am concerned about a long-term strategy for the agricultural sector, and I look forward to more debate and ideas being shared. If there's anywhere that needs to be thinking outside of the box, I think that would be it.

A clean environment is obviously of great importance to many Albertans. It consistently comes up fourth in a priority for constituents that live in Edmonton-Centre.

Responsive health care. Obviously, I'm glad to see the government keeping to its promise, finally, to elect board members for regional health authorities, and it appears that we are indeed keeping 17 regional health authorities, but I am still concerned about how we address diagnostic queue-jumping other than saying don't do it. We need other things in place. I'm looking for more by way of prevention and more to address the waiting lists, and that doesn't mean more money. That means smarter. That means better management.

That means better planning. Health care is consistently the second key issue for constituents of Edmonton-Centre.

The third key issue is education and lifelong learning. In particular, I'm going to single out postsecondary education. There are a lot of students who live in Edmonton-Centre. They go to NAIT, they go to Grant MacEwan Community College, they go to Alberta College, NorQuest, the university, and these people are really struggling. While I appreciate that there are additional scholarship programs being put in place, those scholarships really only apply to a very small number of people. We are not addressing the overall problem of that intergenerational transfer of debt that has happened onto students' shoulders in this province, and that indeed is what happened. Supposedly we were getting rid of our debt here so that we didn't transfer that debt, but we did it instantly. When we've got students coming out of university programs with a \$50,000 debt, that is instant intergenerational debt transference.

As well, I think there needs to be a look at student finance. Certainly the way it's set up now, there's an expectation in the budgeting for student finance that a student would only pay \$359 for rent and utilities. I challenge you to find some place that you can stay in any centre in Alberta that has a postsecondary educational institution for \$359 including utilities. A lot of students don't qualify for student finance. They have to get it through a regular bank loan, which is, again, the same problem. They end up with a huge debt load.

Under Safe, Strong Communities there's talk about a Future Summit. You know, I really see this as another move to separate people's representation from people. It is separating the Legislature from policymaking, the spending of tax dollars. That disconnect that I talked about when I began this, between people and politicians, widens with this sort of endeavour. We all noticed in the campaign, I think, the number of single-issue campaigns that were running as a corollary to us, and there's a reason for that. It's because people are beginning to question whether they're getting their voices heard in here, and I think that with the reduced hours, with more decision-making behind closed doors, it's increasing that disconnect between people and their representatives. When they have budgeting and financial planning that's done by a sort of mail-in multiple choice and they don't see what they've said represented in that, we are contributing to that feeling that they're not being represented by people.

I'd like to talk now about what's not in this Speech from the Throne. I don't see anything in there about employment standards and labour relations, which are sadly lacking in this province. We need a lot of work on that, including a look at the WCB.

Again, I talk about real support for the arts, not just sort of as a nice thing for the tourists to see when they come to the world games or photo opportunities for tourism brochures but real support for it. That sector is still operating on 1988 dollars and has not even had a cost of living increase. In particular, what I'm hearing now is that the PASOs, the provincial art service organizations, are in trouble. Those are the organizations that took over many of the programs the government used to offer.

So I'm looking forward to an opportunity to bring up the rest of the issues I have.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Next is the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to be able to participate in this discussion today with regards to the Speech from the Throne, and I rise in this esteemed Chamber with pride and,

I must admit, a little trepidation since this is my maiden speech.

I would like to start by first and foremost taking this singular opportunity as a new member of the 25th Legislature, the first Legislature after the first election of the new millennium, to thank the people of Calgary-Currie for their vote of confidence in our party and in me and, further, to thank my wife, Patty, my family, and my invaluable campaign volunteers, who did so much to help me gain that vote, without whom I certainly would not have this position today. It is an important position, that of MLA, and is a privilege and honour and a heavy responsibility indeed all rolled up into one but certainly a privilege and an honour and a responsibility that I intend to take very, very seriously and hope to prove worthy of.

Secondly, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that I would like to add my voice to those of so many others in congratulating you on your recent re-elections: first, in your re-election to this Chamber and now, once again, on your re-election to the prestigious office of, in your case, Deputy Speaker. As well, through you, let me extend my congratulations to all of my colleagues here today and to all the hon. members of this Legislature on their recent election success as well. I look forward to working with you and each and every other member of this Legislature. As well, I would like to say that I look forward to working with all the very helpful, exceptionally friendly, and very important support staff of this Legislature: the people who toil so hard in the background on our behalf with so little recognition.

Let me just say that I'm looking forward to working with all of you in the months and years ahead in the service of the people of Alberta, as we look to continuing on behalf of the citizens of Alberta our own local brand of triple E government here in Alberta. I use a slightly different definition than the one that was presented yesterday by my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fort, so I guess I am now presenting the third definition of triple E – the triple triple E definition – effective, efficient, and ethical government, government that currently is and will be even more so setting the gold standard benchmark for so many others and governance that is making us all so very proud to be living here in this great province of Alberta.

I like what I have heard in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker. I like the vision, the aspirations, and the ideals that have been so eloquently expressed therein. I like the challenges that such a grand statement places before us all, commitments that are very worth while indeed, and for those I thank Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for her directions and thoughts so eloquently expressed.

I also thank especially our hon. Premier for his guidance and leadership in helping us to develop these aspirations and more importantly for his able direction in putting these thoughts into action as he steers and stays the course towards continuing success and an even more positive future than Albertans have already been able to enjoy to this point.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that the messages contained in the Speech from the Throne will be well received in Calgary-Currie, because Calgary-Currie is a riding whose people are familiar with change, since they have seen so much of it, and who understand and appreciate innovation, leadership, straight talk, and more importantly action on the issues. I can say this because I have been working in the riding now for 18 years and can even say that I was actually born in the riding. So I certainly have had the opportunity to get to know and to appreciate and to call my friends a great number of the people living in the area over the years. They are without doubt some of the finest people that you would ever meet anywhere.

3:50

I'd like to tell you and all our hon. colleagues a little more about

Calgary-Currie, Mr. Speaker, if I could ask for your indulgence to allow me to brag a little bit. In terms of population Calgary-Currie today is a riding that has one of the highest percentages of young adults living in rented premises in the city of Calgary, young people who are filled with the energy, aspirations, ideals, and high-tech knowledge of so many of our young people today but who also tend to have very little money and are very concerned about things like rent prices.

Calgary-Currie today also has a much larger than average percentage of more senior individuals with their irreplaceable wisdom and the experience and the patience that can only come with the seasoning of many years. But a lot of them, sad to say, Mr. Speaker, also have very little money and are vulnerable in many other ways as well.

We also have just about everything in between, Mr. Speaker, with young and old living side by side, with rich and poor, lots of solid family people and lots of singles, young children and empty nesters, professionals, and salt-of-the-earth folk, all working with each other to build a safer, stronger, and more caring community. It is clear that Calgary-Currie today is an area that is succeeding in the face of all this contrast, succeeding in not just meeting change but capitalizing on it as we move ahead.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Speaking of change and of building, it is truly amazing how fast new building is taking place in Calgary-Currie, Mr. Speaker, particularly on the lands which used to belong to the Canadian forces base, the lands surrounding Currie barracks, from which Calgary-Currie got its name. This area in Calgary-Currie is home to what I understand is the largest urban renewal development project of its type in North America, as these former CFB lands are starting to fill up with all these new families in new houses. It makes for a curious and eclectic blend in the district. As these new constituents look out from their luxurious new homes, some of the most expensive new homes in Calgary, across the streets and across the district are some of the oldest, most famous, and most significant heritage homes in all of Calgary, because Calgary-Currie is also one of the most significant historic districts in all of Calgary, with about 2,700 of our buildings having been built before 1946 and 6,735 of them having been built before 1960.

Now that we are in the new century, Mr. Speaker, looking back at our past heritage and forward to a positive future, it seems that Calgary-Currie has all the necessary ingredients and essentials to fit in perfectly with this theme of old meeting new as a model community in Alberta, a melting pot of bubbling vibrancy and diversity and energy, which it certainly is, filled with thinking people who are passionate about the issues and who come from all walks of life, people such as Paul Jefferies, two-time world champion tattoo artist, Austin Hook, owner of the oldest retail computer store in the world, Peter Papisideris, certainly one of the world's greatest living marksmen, and many, many other interesting, successful, and eclectic people as well. This is Calgary-Currie today.

Now, besides interesting people, we also have some very important institutions in Calgary-Currie. Calgary-Currie is proud to be the location for Mount Royal College, already one of the most important postsecondary educational institutions in our province and certainly an ambitious institution focused on lifelong learning concepts with major expansion plans assuring them of an even more positive future as well and an even better reputation than they already have.

We also have an exciting, fairly new addition to Calgary-Currie with the headquarters of the film industry in Alberta located in the riding, an industry that I have a solid background in myself person-

ally and thus will be taking a great interest in as well. We have a thriving arts and culture environment, a thriving small business backbone in areas such as the Marda Loop, which boasts an attendance upwards of 30,000 people at their increasingly popular Mardi Gras/Summerfest each year, as well as many other attractions throughout the district. In all, we have a lot to build and a lot to build on in Calgary-Currie.

But it isn't all positive news in Calgary-Currie, Mr. Speaker. Crime is a very big concern, as it is a big concern to all Albertans, so I am glad to hear the initiatives mentioned in the Speech from the Throne on this subject. Aging infrastructure, social issues, affordable housing: these are all particularly acute concerns in Calgary-Currie. The greatest recent concern is the announcement in the media that five of the seven elementary schools in the district may be closed this year, including King Edward school, where William Aberhart was the first principal. It is an announcement that has stunned and shocked many people in the riding, myself included, and it is an announcement that has many people wondering what possible reasoning could be behind such a decision, again, myself included.

In the face of all this major revitalization, in the face of this urban renewal, in the face of an estimated 10,000 people moving into the area in the next few years, people are wondering why they're suddenly having to see their schools considered for closure. This is coming on the heels of a lot of other bad news in the riding – it's not bad news, but it is for Calgary-Currie – over the past few years, most recently the relocation of the Children's hospital, currently located in Calgary-Currie, which has been such a pride and badge of honour to the community for the past many years.

I would not want, Mr. Speaker, to give the impression that Calgary-Currie doesn't have a few issues to which my constituents are demanding answers. I know from experience that my constituents can be very loud in their demands, having represented many of them for the past two terms on Calgary city council as their alderman. I am well aware of their expectations of me in this regard, and as their representative I am certainly going to be fighting hard on their behalf to address these concerns. I'm also very mindful of the strong leadership and representation that these communities have had over almost the past century and of the sort of expectations that Calgary-Currie constituents will therefore have for me and for their future as a result.

Mr. Speaker, when I talk about the proud history of this riding, may I just say that Calgary-Currie has had in the past and still has to this day some of the most important political names in Alberta history counted among the citizens who have lived or are still living within the districts bounded by the borders of Calgary-Currie, including many names that are well known in this Chamber to all of you. Beyond politics in Calgary-Currie we're also very proud to have some of Alberta's most important and well-known citizens from virtually every walk of life calling our district home.

I have very big shoes to fill, Mr. Speaker, and a high road to follow, which, I must say, makes the challenge before me all the more exciting and daunting all at the same time, one in which I truly hope and trust that I can rely a great deal on everyone here for advice, for consideration, and for your experienced guidance in helping me to address these and many other issues as well on behalf of my constituents.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this is an opportune moment to speak a little about what I have worked on in the past and what issues I hope to focus on for my constituents now that I have been given this opportunity to serve at this level of government. During my tenure on city council I worked very hard on a great number of issues, and I like to think that I enjoyed some success at it, as perhaps evidenced by my presence here today. These issues remain of concern and of

interest to my constituents and therefore are especially of concern and interest to me. Since there are so many of them, I won't list them all here, but let me just talk a moment about some of them.

Having been a small business entrepreneur my entire working life, signing the front of a paycheck since I was 18, I was often referred to as the voice of small business on Calgary city council, and small business, believe me, needs all the voices it can get. I emphasize the words "small business" too, although since approximately 75 percent of all businesses have five employees or less and in fact 95 percent have 50 employees or less, the reality is that numerically almost all business is small business. The quality of the environment that we create for microbusiness entrepreneurs in this province to start up new companies, to translate their dreams into reality, and to succeed against the daunting odds any new business faces is of paramount consideration in my mind and vital to continually review, if we are to create a better quality of life for all Albertans. There is a lot of work that needs to be done in this area at every level of government.

I also had opportunity, while on council, to work on a lot of high-technology and environmental issues, particularly in introducing high-technology solutions and creative approaches to problem solving, and problem solving is what I like to do most in life. I hope that this government, as excellent as it is, has still left me one or two problems that I can get involved with so that I won't be disappointed there.

4:00

Speaking of problem solving, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to let all of you know that I'm also very pleased to be part of a new team here of exceptionally capable, brand-new MLAs. I'm speaking in particular about exceptionally capable six brand-new MLAs who are located on the third floor of the Annex Building. I am very confident that we are soon going to be dazzling all of you with our brilliance and innovative new ideas. You might say a new Department of Solutions, so to speak. We haven't quite decided on the name yet. I am calling us the bright lights on 3, but I am sure that all of you will very soon be impressed; no doubt about it.

And speaking of a better idea from the bright lights on 3, let me just start with one little one here, Mr. Speaker. When I first came into this esteemed Chamber on orientation day, the first thing I noticed, believe it or not, was the 600 light bulbs on the ceiling here, and I remember discussing how difficult it was to change them: clearing the Chamber, putting up scaffolding, and so on. I also noticed that they are incandescent bulbs, not the compact fluorescent bulbs, which look almost the same, give off the same light, but use 70 percent less electricity and last 10 times longer. So I wondered: why aren't they? Better yet, if we were to use the latest light-emitting diode technology, which uses almost no electricity at all in comparison to incandescents and which is expected to last for decades without replacement, it seems to me we could save the taxpayers a lot of money and have the opportunity to show leadership in energy conservation concepts right here in this Chamber.

Now, I may not be the first to suggest this idea, but maybe I could further suggest another idea. We could calculate the savings we could get, including the scaffolding avoidance savings, and leverage these funds even further by awarding the savings in an annual bursary or prize to the student or other individual in Alberta who comes up with the best energy conservation project each year.

So there is an opportunity or an idea for consideration, Mr. Speaker, in an important area for Albertans and this government, energy conservation. In fact, the whole area of energy conservation, ideas, expertise, and technology strikes me as one of the areas that Alberta is perfectly positioned in to develop as a major export. Instead of the past, olden-day ways of just being hewers of wood and

drawers of water and drillers of oil and gas, why not really get behind fostering an even bigger transformation from what we are already seeing in this province, a transformation from energy production to full energy management across the spectrum, becoming a hub of the world's leading energy conservationist experts, products, technologies, and ideas?

We already have some outstanding examples here in Alberta; for example, the Alberta sustainable home in Calgary built by Jorg Ostrowski, a home so energy efficient it is almost off the municipal grid, virtually no external energy requirements at all. So we already have a few Albertans setting the pace worldwide. Let's promote this.

I find it an exciting industry to contemplate, Mr. Speaker. I'm one of those who has always looked for the silver lining in the dark cloud, which is why I have always looked at the Kyoto agreement as probably one of the world's biggest business opportunities, if we can just figure out how, and I think I have a few of those ideas. Energy conservation principles are an area in which I was pleased to have played a leading role in introducing to the city of Calgary during my tenure there. The initiatives under way there now are resulting in projects that are going to save an estimated \$100 million for city of Calgary taxpayers over the next 10 years and are also expected to allow the city of Calgary to meet almost 50 percent of its entire Kyoto commitments on greenhouse gas reduction, and this is just within city buildings.

When I say that \$100 million is a drop in the bucket of what I believe could be done right across the province, I think I can now say that with some credibility, Mr. Speaker. This is why I'm very pleased to have been appointed to serve on the energy and sustainable development committee, where I hope to make a good contribution.

In conclusion, let me just say that I am very proud to be here today. I am very proud of the constituency that has given me this opportunity. I look forward to representing Calgary-Currie and achieving the goals in the Speech from the Throne in a manner which befits the very nature and substance of the great people in my community, a blend of the conservative wisdom of a district with an exceptionally proud historic past balanced against a new, enthusiastic energy that pervades the community as it looks forward to a very positive and progressive future. In short, Mr. Speaker, a Progressive Conservative constituency.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak, and God bless Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope you will forgive my nervousness today, for I should not be. I have been made to feel truly welcome in this Assembly, and it is with tremendous pride I stand before you today representing my constituency and the people of Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the encouragement and support from my family: my wife, Bev, and all my children. Particularly I would like to mention some of my key campaign organizers. Mrs. Brenda Lee, Mrs. Silvia Solay, Mrs. Sherry Stalwick, along with over 240 other volunteers and 170 different financial contributors made our campaign fun and very successful.

I, too, Mr. Speaker, would like to offer my congratulations to you on your re-election as Speaker of the House. The pride and tradition you bring is evident by your actions as you work so hard to try and integrate us new members into this wonderfully complex Assembly. I know I speak for all the new members when I ask you to convey to your staff, and indeed all the staff of the Legislative Assembly

including our assistants, our thanks for all they have done to prepare us for today and the future.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate all my fellow members, including the opposition, for we are all Albertans. Although our philosophies may differ, I know their concern for the people they serve in this great province is genuine. I look forward to working with them over the next four years.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow for the tremendous vote of confidence Albertans bestowed upon him.

The speech offered by our Lieutenant Governor has provided a clear path for the government of Alberta to take. Maintaining and building our strong economic base, coupled with providing responsive, effective, affordable health care and education systems, relevant economic, environmental, and social programs, all combined within a framework of fiscal responsibility: this combination, Mr. Speaker, will make Alberta truly the best place to live.

Mr. Speaker, I have four children, from kindergarten to grade 11. My parents are seniors, and my mother-in-law lives in a senior's manor in Vermilion. I guess you could say that I have more than a passing interest in our province's education and social programs.

Mr. Speaker, I've spent the last 25 years working with my family in several different businesses including farming, the construction industry, and a tourism and hospitality business. I know these sectors are all very important to the Alberta economy. I hope to bring to government my business philosophy. Simply stated: we must be adaptable and efficient, we must be able to foresee change, and we must be able to build strength from diversity. I share the vision this government has put forward in its throne speech, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to attain it.

Mr. Speaker, nowhere is the Alberta advantage more obvious than in Lloydminster, where the incredible oil and gas prices and a booming retail market have the city bursting at its seams. This tremendous growth has the existing infrastructure, in both human services and utilities, stretched to the limit. It is a problem that many cities and towns would love to have, but it still comes with a tremendous cost.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, less than a half hour from the city, many small communities scratch and claw to try and preserve their way of life. The loss of many of our country elevators, the consolidation of our service centres and our machinery dealers, and a grain industry devastated by years of rising input costs and low commodity prices have left many of these communities with no longer the financial capability or the population growth to support even the most basic services many of us take for granted. As stated in the throne speech, economic prosperity depends on a solid foundation. I believe that these rural communities and the populations that surround them are the bedrock of our prosperity. As a province and as a country we do a tremendous disservice to future generations if we let this way of life disappear.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, the government recognizes the value of agriculture and of the related value-added industries. However, the ongoing debate surrounding intensive livestock operations must be addressed. There are huge differences in philosophical arguments, emotional reactions, and scientific fact. I look forward to working with the government to develop a set of sound, comprehensive regulations putting both the producer and his neighbours at ease. Also, I believe the Premier showed foresight and understanding when he realigned his cabinet to better reflect the needs of this diverse province.

The Speech from the Throne spoke of the government's commitment to make strategic investments to improve the safety and

efficiency of our highways and roads. This is great news for the farmers who must haul their grain many miles now to market or to the people of Lloydminster and area who have truly found that any time and every time is train time in downtown Lloydminster.

The Speech from the Throne also made notice of the forthcoming addition to the north/south trade corridor. We must be careful to remember the importance of the east/west trade corridor that runs from Lloydminster through Edmonton and beyond to Jasper. This corridor provides more efficient access to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia not only for the people who live in my constituency but for all the people who live along the Yellowhead highway.

I would like to commend this government's commitment to maintaining and furthering the excellence of our education system. This government has provided our learning institutions with the education delivery methods and systems to prepare Alberta's youth for the world of tomorrow. This government's commitment to increase funding to school boards to allow them to address specific issues in their jurisdictions will enhance student learning in all our schools. Mr. Speaker, success in education should not be measured by how much money we spend but by the results we get from carefully targeted spending.

The administrative offices of Lakeland College are located in Vermilion, and at this time I would like to congratulate the chairman of the board, Mr. Bill Kondro, and its president, Dr. Mark Lee, for they have been instrumental in guiding Lakeland College to its current place as a leader in the fields of agriculture and environmental sciences, business and computer studies, the trades and technologies, and many others.

Located near Lakeland College in Vermilion is the Alberta Fire Training School. Under the management of Mr. Don Gnatiuk this renowned institution has earned the reputation of being a world-class facility and has been responsible for the graduation of many well-educated and well-trained firefighters and EMTs. As well, the Alberta Fire Training School has been designated network manager for the delivery of municipal, industrial, and disaster services training for the province of Alberta.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Community Development is currently working with a group in Vermilion to develop an Alberta fire museum and interpretive centre, which will complement both the school and the community. By the year 2005 Vermilion will be able to boast not only one of the world's most advanced and successful firefighting schools but a state-of-the-art, interactive educational fire museum and interpretive centre.

Mr. Speaker, this government's support for agricultural societies and other programs has facilitated the building and operation of many community halls and seniors' and recreation centres, and they are truly the glue that holds these small communities together. Islay and Clandonald are both small communities in my constituency that have recently revamped or rebuilt their community halls, and they are a great example of the partnership that is important in these communities. Last Friday we turned the sod for the new Vic Juba community theatre in the city of Lloydminster.

Mr. Speaker, as the new Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster I have heard many times that I'll be working in the shadow of my honourable predecessor, Dr. Steve West. On the contrary, I feel we are working under the brightest shining lights of the most prosperous province of Canada. Thanks to all the members of the 24th Legislative Assembly and Dr. West. During his long and successful term Dr. West played a key role in making Alberta a stronger province. His term as Provincial Treasurer saw the government of Alberta become more efficient and prepared to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Never retract, never explain, never apologize, get things done, and let them howl: the battle cry of the incomparable Dr. West? No. Nellie McClung. I trust that future generations of Albertans will honour the legacy and cherish these accomplishments of a truly decent man, the Hon. Dr. Steven West.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the throne speech has given all Albertans a clear idea of what this government envisions for the future in attempts to provide Albertans with a strong economic base that can provide stable, effective, and affordable government in the future. I for one can hardly wait to be a part of it.

Thank you.

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, it is with the greatest of respect and awe that I rise to address this 25th Legislative Assembly, and I begin with my heartfelt congratulations to the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, and the Deputy Chairman of Committees on your elections as Speakers. Already, in the few short weeks I've had to get to know you three gentlemen, I can honestly say that the members have chosen wisely. I was glad to see that Mr. Speaker did not put up too much resistance when the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition walked him up to that big chair.

Now, I'd also like to thank Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Lois Hole for the excellent presentation of the Speech from the Throne on February 12 and again on April 10, 2001. My mother attended the swearing-in ceremony held on April 3, and she commented on Her Honour's kind mannerism and the genuine sincerity that she felt from our Lieutenant Governor at that great occasion as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's true.

REV. ABBOTT: Yes, it is.

Now, as I stand before this House on behalf of the almost 30,000 residents of the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency, I know that they would want me to invite all Albertans to come and visit our beautiful riding. Within our approximately 200 kilometres by 80 kilometres borders you will find a flurry of activity, including agriculture, oil and gas, mining and forestry, retail trade, professional and other services, and golf courses.

We are like a small Alberta within Alberta. We boast a diversified economy that is currently booming beyond our wildest expectations. In fact, the average family income back at the 1995 census was just over \$50,000 per year, and it has grown steadily since then under this current government's programs and principles.

Now, because our diverse constituency is so reflective of our entire province, every initiative that this government undertakes will be of great interest and of great importance to us. We are used to enjoying a high standard of living in a province that is determined and built by its citizens, not by its government. We believe in more personal freedoms, in individual initiative, and in financial responsibility.

[The Speaker in the chair]

As was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, we too envision a province with low taxes and no debt, a province that lives within its means and that presents balanced budgets with affordable spending on priority programs and services.

Now, in Drayton Valley-Calmar we, like the rest of Alberta, have a very good population balance of young and elderly, so a good education system and a good health care system will be high priorities for us in this mandate. Like our neighbouring constituencies around us we want to ensure a positive future for our children in a modern and safe school building that is well staffed. We want

state-of-the-art technology in our hospitals and long-term care facilities to help our seniors. We want good roads to move our oil and gas and forestry products. We want commonsense government with no waste and no frills.

Now, the farmers of Drayton Valley-Calmar want to be valued and respected for the important work they do. It seems sometimes that farmers in other countries are appreciated more than farmers in our country. We must never forget that farmers are the lifeline to everything else we do as a province, for without food hospitals and schools and even roads are not much good. High input costs and low commodity prices are currently squeezing the farmers of Drayton Valley-Calmar, and we need this government to not only lobby the federal government but also to share the Alberta advantage with those who created it in the first place. Now, I'm pleased to see that the throne speech has addressed this issue by pledging to implement insights from Ag Summit 2000.

4:20

Another real issue that we face in Drayton Valley-Calmar along with the rest of the province, I believe, is that of single-parent or no-parent families. We are so blessed to have a good Children's Services ministry and many excellent professionals and employees that serve therein, but now it seems that the rest of the professional sectors are running ahead of any wage or staffing increases to this important government department. During this mandate we envision the government increasing Children's Services' funding as well as continuing to promote and support pro-family and pro-life issues.

As a former minister of a rural church I have seen firsthand the great needs that are facing Alberta families. Some of these needs cannot be fixed by money at all. Some require Albertans and this Legislative Assembly to reaffirm and strengthen our commitment to the family. Like the new Minister of Economic Development, I too am a strong family man. Good families produce good citizens. We need to protect the family and to tenaciously defend Alberta's legal definition of marriage as that of being the union between a man and a woman. We need to value and encourage two-parent families, such as we have recently done with Alberta's new personal income tax exemptions that recognize the true value of having one stay-at-home parent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I recently read – you guys will be interested in this – that Edelman Financial Services of Fairfax, Virginia, completed a national study on the worth of the stay-at-home mother, based on the average North American salary. They compiled a list of the typical functions of a mother, such as financial manager, cook, psychologist, bus driver – 17 different occupations that a mother has. Now, the study reports that since mothers wear many hats and since a mother is on duty 24 hours a day, the typical mother deserves a full-time salary for 17 key occupational positions. Now, based on this conclusion and on the average national salaries for the 17 respective jobs, mothers should be paid just over \$508,000 per year. Actually, the editor of *Working Mother* magazine called the half million figure a little low, saying that many mothers often take on far more jobs than were covered in the Edelman study.

We need to promote strong families in Alberta, but I am not suggesting that it is only stay-at-home moms; in some cases stay-at-home dads are what is best for kids and for families. You see, it is the women of Alberta that have been starting up new small businesses as of late. It is the women who have been creating new jobs for Albertans, and we don't want to stop that. We simply want kids to be valued and cared for by a loving parent so that our province has the positive future that we have been promising.

New jobs, health, education, farms, and families – oh, yes, there are many needs, Mr. Speaker, but since 1971 the residents of my

constituency or its predecessors have repeatedly voted Progressive Conservative in election after election because they believe and have been shown that this is a good government that cares and that listens and that exercises a healthy balance between tax reduction and reinvestment into worthwhile programs and services. They have seen this current government keep their promises to Albertans, so we support these new initiatives outlined in Her Honour's Speech from the Throne. As a new MLA I relish the opportunity to help this government continue to build on the best province in Canada, and I will be doing so as I work hard for the best constituency in Alberta.

On March 12 I was both honoured and humbled that the constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar chose me, an Evangelical Covenant Church pastor, to represent them for this current mandate. I believe they chose me, though, not just because I have lived in the riding for almost 20 years, not just because I have a background in small business and farming as well as in oil and gas and in the professional field. Rather, I believe they chose me because of my love for and understanding of ordinary people and because of my strong stands on pro-life and pro-family issues. I believe they chose me because of my promise to uphold high morals and values and because I am a fiscal conservative with a social heart.

It is difficult, Mr. Speaker, to be all things to all people, but I have promised to be visible, accountable, and accessible to the people of Drayton Valley-Calmar. I have promised to work hard to bring forward every idea and concern of our constituents. I believe that this is the time to be bold and, as our Premier said today, to think outside the box so that we can continue to make the best province in Canada even better. This is the time to embrace modern technology without forsaking proven practices in principles of the past.

In my 12 years as pastor I learned that success requires two things: a clear vision and a willingness to change anything but that vision. Our hon. Premier has a clear vision, a grand vision, and he now has 73 other team members to help shape and carry out that vision. We also have nine hon. members in total on the other side of the house to help keep us on our toes and to offer healthy debate and constructive criticism to government initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, let me say in closing that I am not so naive to think that I was chosen to represent the fine people of Drayton Valley-Calmar merely on my own merits. I believe they chose me because of the great work of my predecessor, MLA Tom Thurber, and my wonderful campaign team, my wonderful family, and because I am part of a larger team of PC MLAs with proven leadership.

Ralph Klein is truly a great leader with proven leadership, and the Tory caucus is truly a great family. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the six of us on the third floor of the Annex are fast becoming a family within a family. The bright lights on the third floor: I like it. I look forward to building many more relationships and families throughout this mandate. Alberta is a province that believes in family. Without family none of us would be here. We know that strong families give us a strong province.

Let me close with a quote from our former Alberta Treasurer and the current Leader of the Official Opposition in Ottawa, Mr. Stockwell Day. In his maiden speech to this House back on June 24, 1986, Mr. Day stated:

I am firmly committed to three essentials for a truly great society. These are faith, family, and freedom. I will support and promote all ideas and initiatives from either side of this House which embody any or all of those principles. It is my prayer that the members of this Legislature would be gripped with a desire to do what is right, not necessarily what is expedient; that we would show ourselves to be not civil masters but truly civil servants, for only out of a genuine willingness to serve do we earn the right to govern.

Now I echo those words today, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Mr. Day ended his speech as I will also end mine. He

said, "May it be said of us in this House, 'They came here to serve.'" God bless Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to rise as the newly elected Member for Edmonton-Calder, and I regard it as a privilege to speak to the Speech from the Throne. Before I comment on the speech, I'd like to join with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and pay homage to the former Member for Edmonton-Calder, a member who served in this Assembly for eight years. Prior to that he served the city of Edmonton for nine years. That is 17 years of public service. I got to know Mr. White throughout the campaign. I regard him as a gentleman, and I'd like this House to acknowledge the 17 years of public service that he committed to this city and to this province.

4:30

I'm pleased to succeed Mr. White as the Member for Edmonton-Calder. For those of you who are not familiar with my constituency, it is in the city of Edmonton. It extends from 111th Avenue on the south border to 137th Avenue on the north border, from 109 Street on the east border all the way to the western city limits. Geographically it is a large urban area by size. It is the home of 31,290 constituents and a large industrial base. It is comprised largely of working-class families but has a large percentage of senior citizens.

The history of Calder goes back to the turn of the century. Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, Calder was once a rural community and was called the village of West Edmonton. It was not until 1917 that the village of West Edmonton officially joined the city of Edmonton and became known as the Calder community.

Transportation is the history of the Calder constituency with the evolution of the CN rail yards, and transportation remains a viable part of the Calder constituency. The CN rail yards are in the very geographic centre of the Calder constituency. Moreover, Calder is home to the Via Rail terminal, the Edmonton municipal airport, and highway 2 and the Yellowhead Trail both transgress and transcend the boundaries of the Calder constituency.

I have lived and practised law in the Calder constituency since 1994.

The constituency is proud to host many active community leagues and neighbourhood associations. I'm pleased and proud to be a member of the Inglewood Community League. I must admit, Mr. Speaker, that I was not entirely familiar with all of the community neighbourhoods within the geographic boundaries of Calder until the recent electoral campaign, during which I had the privilege of visiting all of the constituents and learning more about the residents of the constituency that I now represent.

I must acknowledge that a majority of the constituents seem to be particularly happy with the way the current government has been performing. Employment opportunities remain very high within this portion of Edmonton. Taxes are comparatively low. Many of the constituents that I met knocking on the doors throughout the 28-day campaign had recently immigrated to Alberta from other parts of Canada, and they seemed to be particularly happy to find the employment opportunities that exist within our province and were especially pleased to find out that this is the only province that has no provincial sales tax. The residents of the neighbourhoods within the Calder constituency are generally satisfied with the record of this government, as is evidenced by their endorsement of my candidacy.

The Speech from the Throne delivered by the Lieutenant Governor a couple of days ago is a statement of the government's commitment to carry on with good government. It is a record of continuing

to build on the Alberta advantage. It is a vision of low taxes, no provincial debt, a strong economy, new jobs for our young people, sound infrastructure, a good and sustainable health care system, a viable education system, stable agricultural programs, safe streets and communities, and reliable social programs.

Having grown up in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, I can say that Alberta is genuinely the envy of all of Canada. Our majestic scenery, our fertile farmland, our educated and skilled labour force, our forest reserves, and of course our generous abundance of oil and gas reserves give Albertans advantages that are the envy of all Canadians. Thankfully, managing all of this, we have a government with solid fiscal goals which allow all Albertans to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams and enjoy the economic prosperity that living in this province allows.

But there are challenges, Mr. Speaker. Albertans want protection from rising energy prices. I'm pleased that both the throne speech and Bill 1, introduced by the hon. Premier, indicate the government's commitment to provide such protection. This bill will ensure that all Alberta consumers have competitive natural gas prices so that they can continue to enjoy the Alberta advantage.

There are also local issues within the Calder constituency that will need to be addressed by this Legislature. The Calder constituency is home to the now vacant Camsell hospital site. The Calder constituency, as I indicated, has a high percentage of senior citizens. Thankfully, I hope to continue to work with the Ministry of Infrastructure to develop a plan that the private sector is developing to convert the vacant site into affordable housing for senior citizens.

The Edmonton-Calder constituency is also the home of the Inland Cement factory, and the Inland Cement factory, as some hon. members, including the hon. Member for St. Albert, are aware, has recently applied to convert from natural gas to coal in its foundry operation. This, of course, causes some concern for the residents in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

I came to this position with a very simple message to the constituents who entrusted me with their support: put Edmonton-Calder back in government. I'm beginning to form good and solid relationships with the various ministries, the ministers, and their staff, and I'm confident that through hard work, co-operation, consultation all of these issues will be resolved to the satisfaction of both the government and the constituents and most importantly to the neighbourhoods which are so viable within the Calder constituency.

I'm confident and optimistic that as a government member I will be able to bring the concerns of my constituents directly to the government and that the government will be sensitive and responsive. That is the pledge that I made to the residents of Edmonton-Calder, those who entrusted me with their support on March 12. I am proud to be their representative in this House, and I'm proud to occupy this seat in this hallowed Chamber.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't my intention to speak this afternoon in reply to the Speech from the Throne, but having been afforded the opportunity, I couldn't pass it up.

First of all, let me add my congratulations and best wishes to you on your acclamation as Speaker. It's well-deserved recognition of the work that you've put in over the past four years in the previous session of this Legislature and the reputation that you have achieved for fairness and for dealing with all members of this House with equity and equanimity and the enthusiasm you bring to the whole concept of the parliamentary tradition and parliamentary structure. I for one appreciate the reputation that you're building among

parliamentarians across this country for the Alberta Legislature and for the work that you do. So I just wanted to add my congratulations and my appreciation for your election as Speaker and for your agreeing to carry on that tradition for the next four years.

I, too, am very pleased to return to this House after the election of March 12. Having experienced my first term after the 1997 election, I can say that there has been no experience in my life which brings greater satisfaction, which brings greater challenges, which I can say is such an honour and a privilege than to serve the residents of Edmonton-Whitemud and the citizens of Alberta in this Chamber and to be considered a parliamentarian, to be considered a member of the Legislature and particularly to be a member of this government under the leadership of Ralph Klein, the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

I believe that it is appropriate to address the two speeches from the throne that we've had this year as Her Honour included a reference to the earlier Speech from the Throne in the speech which she delivered on Tuesday. They addressed many of the issues that are very, very important to Edmonton-Whitemud and to all of Edmonton. This session of the Legislature, I think, is going to be a particularly important one when we address the issues of importance of Edmonton.

I am very, very pleased as well to welcome and congratulate my 10 colleagues from Edmonton who have joined us on the government side of the House for this session and who I know will not only represent their constituencies well but will represent Edmonton well in both government caucus, in cabinet, at the very many policy discussion tables and standing policy committee tables, and the very many places at which we have to bring the personality, the issues, and the perspective of Edmonton to the table as we discuss the future directions of this province. It's particularly a pleasure to have so many additional members from Edmonton on the government side of the House so that we can be so much more effective at representing Edmonton in the context of Alberta's future, not, of course, to pay any disrespect to the concept of the capital region.

4:40

The capital region has been a very important part of this process, and the Member for St. Albert, as the chairman of the capital region caucus, has served ably in bringing together the MLAs in the past session from Edmonton and from the capital region to be a cohesive group of individual legislators, bringing forward that whole combination from the capital region, and bringing the enthusiasm and the personality of the capital region to caucus and government.

I particularly wanted to mention that because the capital region of this province has been a dynamic and growing force over the last four years. One of the reasons I believe we were so successful in electing members in Edmonton and the capital region and particularly in Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and other constituencies in the area was because of that dynamic force, because of the optimism that we have in this region, because of the growth that's happening in this region, because of the economic activity that's happening in this region, and because of the quality of life that's happening in this region. Much of that is due to the policies of this government putting in place an infrastructure and a tax regime and a business concept which allow business to grow and prosper, provide jobs to the people of the region, provide economic opportunity to people of the region, and allow us to operate within this district to provide a very, very positive future for our children.

It is sometimes ironic, I think, that much of our time as MLAs is spent dealing with constituent concerns, which are very, very important, providing access for our constituents to government, trying to solve individual problems, and dealing with the issues of

the day. That is a very, very important part of our role as members of the Legislature. But the irony is that I think most people really want us to be elected to think about the big picture and the long term, provide a sense of vision and direction to the province. So as we spend a lot of our time dealing with day-to-day issues which are exceedingly important, we must always struggle to make sure that we have the time to stop and think, the time to look at the big picture, the time to think about visionary ideas. As I look at the Speech from the Throne, I'm really pleased that we have in that speech a framework which outlines exactly those concepts.

A clean environment, Mr. Speaker, is very, very important to the people of Edmonton and to the people of this province. As we look at this province, one of the things we are probably the most proud of is our geographics – our mountains, our clean air, our clean water, our national parks and provincial parks – and our ability to enjoy our province and enjoy that clean air and clean water in a climate of sustainable, long-term development, the ability to enjoy the resources that this province provides without polluting, without destroying the province, in fact, as one of my colleagues said earlier today, with the goal of leaving this province a better place than we found it. I think that means from an environmental perspective as well as all other perspectives. So I'm pleased that in the Speech from the Throne Her Honour addressed the issue of a clean environment, made it a priority for this government in terms of where we're going in the future.

But as we talk about the future, as we talk about where we want to go in the future of this province, there can be nothing more important, Mr. Speaker, in my humble opinion than education, than talking about how we educate our children and ourselves so that we can embrace the opportunities that have been provided in a global context and we can have the ability to go out and compete in the world. We often hear that in the modern context we will have four or five different jobs during our lifetime. My dad in particular, for example, worked for 45 years for one company. He was the last fur trader to retire with the Hudson's Bay Company, 45 years with one company. That won't happen much anymore.

So when we're talking about education, we have to, I think, make sure that we talk about education in the big context, not as job training but as teaching our children or teaching ourselves how to find information, how to access information – we're in an era where there's more information available to each of us than ever before – how to discern what information is important, what information is reliable, how to analyze it. In short, education really is about teaching ourselves how to think and how to communicate, and that has to be a basis of everything we do in the education system. I think we must be very careful to separate that concept of education from job training. We often think about needing to put more money into specific programs so that we can have more technologists for information technology, or more radiology technicians to run MRIs. Those are important, but we have to think of those two in separate contexts: education and job training.

I think if we want to have the type of province where our children can grow up to have the best opportunities they can have and to go out and compete in the world, we have to value education as a concept. We have to fund education appropriately. We have to provide the resources. I'm not talking about throwing more money at it. I'm talking about looking at what the cost, the actual cost, is of providing an appropriate education, knowing what we mean by providing appropriate education, targeting those resources, and making sure that all of our children have the opportunity to get a good liberal arts education, to learn to think and distill information and communicate so that they can go on to train themselves for whatever jobs they might want to undertake.

That's extremely important, Mr. Speaker, because innovation and technology are going to be the future in this province. We've been hewers of wood and drawers of water, as we've heard earlier this afternoon. We have agriculture as a base industry, and it will be a base industry in this province for a long time. Tourism is a good industry for this province. Forestry is a good industry for this province. Our natural resources have provided a very strong base for this province, but as we move forward, we're going to have to gravitate to an information and technology-based economy. World commodity prices have shown that they're not going to hold up over the long term, and we're faced with the reality that unless we go into value added, unless we can upgrade our resources here, unless we can bring in the industry and the technology which will allow us to employ people here, we will not be able to compete in the long-term economy. So education is the basis to allow our children to be innovative, to be thinkers, and to engage in research and technology and innovation and science.

Biosciences and life sciences I think are going to be for the next 20 years what IT was for the last 10 years. It's a wonderful opportunity for our province and for our people. We have a young, well-educated population now. We can compete with any area in the world in that area. We have to continue to build on that base and provide the education so that we can build on that base.

As we're looking to the future – and that's what we campaigned on, proven leadership for a positive future – we have that positive future. That positive future is going to be there for our children if we invest in education, if we invest in technology and the sciences and provide those opportunities for our children to take advantage of.

While we're doing that, of course, we also have to ensure that the gap between those that have and those that don't have doesn't get any wider. There's a real danger, Mr. Speaker, in our society today, where education and technology are going to be where the jobs are and where the opportunities are, that those who don't have access or can't make it in that kind of an economy will get left behind. As a society and as a government I know we have the values which lead us to make sure that we are always there to protect and to support those who are most vulnerable in our society and who cannot provide for themselves, not in a manner which takes away their ability to have faith in themselves or their ability to strive to be the best that they can be, whatever that might be, but in a manner which ensures that they can live in dignity and that they can participate to the best of their ability and have a decent life in a province where everyone should be able to have a decent life and a decent opportunity.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the main issues that I wanted to speak to today, issues that are important, I think, to citizens of Edmonton-Whitemud, issues that I heard about on the doorsteps. It does come back to basic issues when people talk to you: issues of how many children are in their classes, what type of computer technology is available in the classroom, how many resources we have. I think those are important issues to be addressed, but, as I say, we need to also think in the bigger picture and the longer term so that we're not narrowed down into those day-to-day issues to the extent where we lose the concept of the bigger picture.

4:50

I would be remiss, Mr. Speaker, if I didn't in my capacity as Minister of Justice and Attorney General talk about safe communities. We talk about the Alberta advantage and we talk about it normally in economic terms, and I don't apologize for that. I think having a strong fiscal agenda, being fiscally conservative, keeping within our means, and making sure that we have a strong economy is the basis for everything else that we do. If we don't have a strong

economy and we don't have jobs, then we won't be able to afford the other issues that we want to have.

One of the keys to a strong economy, one of the things that I learned through the course of the last four years in great detail when I had the opportunity to go to an IRDC conference in San Antonio – IRDC being an organization of professionals with corporations whose job it is to look for the next place for their corporation to locate – is that they're looking for a well-educated population. They're looking for a safe place for their people to live. They're looking, in essence, for quality-of-life opportunities, because if families, if spouses don't want to live in a place, then their chief executives aren't going to want to move there, and so it's necessary that we have safe communities, that we have quality of life.

I've spoken about the education side, the safe community side. The family value side is also very important. Safe communities aren't something that we get by hiring more police and putting them on every corner. Safe communities are something that we get when we all take an interest in our community. To use the title of a book that was written on the subject and that has been followed with great interest by the city of New York and other jurisdictions, *Fixing Broken Windows*, we have to fix our broken windows. We have to look at our community and say that this is the type of community we want to live in, and as citizens we have to take responsibility for the type of community that we want to have and ensure that we fix our broken windows, that we clean the place up, and that we take responsibility for it.

I'm not suggesting, Mr. Speaker, that people should go up and tap the local drug dealer on the shoulder and tell him that he shouldn't be doing that, but I am saying that if we know there's something going on in our schools or in our communities or in our shopping malls that is not helping us to have safe communities, then it's our responsibility to let the authorities know.

I am a very strong proponent, Mr. Speaker, of the concept of having school resource officers in the schools. These are police officers who are part of the school team, not to catch criminals but to build that relationship with students so they can work together to take ownership of their community, and I think that's a very important concept. We need to do that ourselves in our communities. So safe communities are a very important concept for us.

Mr. Speaker, I'll close on that note. There are lots of individual issues in particular constituencies, and Edmonton-Whitemud has its own individual issues, even though people think of Edmonton-Whitemud as being a relatively affluent constituency, and it is, a well-educated constituency, and it is.

MR. DUNFORD: Do you have pine shakes there?

MR. HANCOCK: We have pine shakes. Thank you for that.

So there are issues in every constituency of this province that we need to address, and I certainly have assured my constituents that I will be bringing their local concerns to our table for discussion, that I will be pushing for effective resolution of those concerns, that the

pine shake issue, which is still so prevalent in Edmonton-Whitemud, will be on my agenda for topics of discussion, and that we will try and find appropriate resolutions to that problem and to those types of problems.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go into all the details with respect to all the issues that are prevalent in Edmonton-Whitemud, because I want to stop where I started, by talking about the need for us to focus on the big picture and the long term, to provide a vision for this province as to where we're going.

One of the members across the way indicated earlier that they thought there was a contradiction in the throne speech where we talked at the beginning about setting out a vision for our province and at the end about having a Future Summit to talk about the future of the province. Well, there's absolutely no contradiction in that. Our job is to set out a vision and a direction, but it's not our job to ignore what the people of Alberta want. It's our job to constantly – constantly – be asking the people of Alberta what direction they want this province to go, what they want this province to look like, to bring that feedback in, to involve them in the discussion.

One of the most important jobs, in my view, that we can have as members of this Legislature is to go out and foment discussion, to get people in this province talking about the important issues and bring that discussion back in here to provide an update to our vision, an ongoing revision of that vision so that we can go in the direction that Albertans want to go, provide that direction for this province, provide that wonderful future for our children, which our children deserve. As my colleague from Edmonton-McClung said earlier, to leave this province a better place than we found it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think we've had a very productive and a very interesting first week, and I think all members should be congratulated for their participation and a special congratulations to the new members on all sides of the House who have participated in the response to the Speech from the Throne. I think we've all been greatly enlightened.

But, Mr. Speaker, we are coming to a very important weekend. There will be a lot of people, our members, traveling. We want to wish them a safe journey, and I would respectfully move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the House until Monday, April 23 at 1:30 p.m.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I call the question for the motion, best wishes to all hon. members for a safe journey home and a very happy weekend. Due to the thoughtfulness of the Government House Leader and the unanimous consent of all members, we can now deal with the question of the motion to adjourn the House until Monday, April 23 at 1:30 p.m.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 5 the Assembly adjourned at 4:57 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 23, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Welcome back. Please remain standing after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

I now call on Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and would all members and guests please join in in the language of their choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several members of the Air Cadet League of Canada, Alberta chapter, who are here today to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the air cadet movement. I'll ask each of them to stand as I introduce them, and then we can receive them jointly with a collective applause at the end: R. Bob Bondarevich, chairman, Air Cadet League of Canada, Alberta Provincial Committee; Warrant Officer Second Class Carolyn Halladay from the 395th Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron; Warrant Officer First Class Cole Rosentreter, representing the 504th Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron; and Warrant Officer First Class John Veale from the 810th Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron.

Mr. Speaker, they have also graciously provided each member of this Assembly with this very beautiful commemorative pin to mark the significance of this very important occasion. I'm confident that everyone here will wear this pin proudly, as will I momentarily. Our guests have all risen. I would ask that everybody in the Assembly please greet them with the traditional warm welcome that this House is so accustomed to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also wish to introduce to you and through you Mr. Krishan Joshee and Ms Noni Heine. Mr. Joshee is well known to members of the Assembly as chairman of the Wild Rose Foundation, and Ms Heine is the newly appointed executive director over the last couple of years with the Wild Rose Foundation. They are joining us today to commemorate also a very special year, that being the International Year of Volunteers. As well, they are here as special guests to celebrate the beginning of national Volunteer Week, which commenced officially yesterday and will run through to April 28.

Mr. Speaker, the Wild Rose Foundation is our focal point for ensuring the strong and lasting legacy of volunteerism of which this province is so duly proud. They work very hard on our behalf, and particularly in this year we're looking forward to even greater things. They have risen, and I would ask the House to warmly welcome our special guests from the Wild Rose Foundation. Thank you.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as I was rushing in, they were so excited, they handed me one of these special commemorative chocolates, so I'm going to ask the pages to distribute those, with your permission, to each member of the Assembly as well as one of these special commemorative pins, which are on their way.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer Alberta will be hosting two world-class events, and at one of these, on July 21 and 22 of this year, Edmonton will host the world at the ITU triathlon world championships to take place at Hawrelak park. Approximately 2,000 athletes, 3,000 family members, friends, and officials from 60 nations will be converging on our city. Economic Development Edmonton has estimated the economic impact to be more than \$17 million. These games are going to be here in large part due to the hard work and energy of two individuals sitting in your gallery this afternoon. Sheila O'Kelly, the executive director of this year's world championships, and Brian Hetherington, chair of public relations, are standing in your gallery. Sheila has been a force nationally as a director of Triathlon Canada, and Alberta is fortunate to have these two individuals volunteering and working in our great province. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. HORNER: Mr. Speaker, on your behalf I am pleased to introduce to the Members of the Legislative Assembly four members of the Evergreen Catholic separate regional division who are seated in your gallery this afternoon. They are superintendent Mr. Mel Malowany, deputy superintendent Mr. Larry Hlushak, chairman Mr. Gerald Bernakevitch, and trustee Mr. Alvin Yager. Again, on your behalf I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present to the Assembly today a petition from the Society of Bowness Residents signed yes by 5,459 Calgarians from all the communities throughout Calgary and also signed no by 31 and no opinion by one. The petition calls for the government of the province of Alberta "to preserve the Paskapoo Slopes from housing development."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition that states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

This petition is signed by over 20 Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition signed by residents of Edmonton, St. Albert, and Jasper asking that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for funds to settle his defamation suit.

Thank you very much.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would ask that the petition I presented signed by 45 Albertans regarding the payment of Stockwell Day's legal costs by the government now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to determine legally whether taxpayers must pay for Stockwell Day's legal bill.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the successful conclusion of House leaders' negotiations and the subsequent kind assistance of your office, I'd like to give oral notice of the following motion, but before I do, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands for their co-operation in dealing with issues relating to the procedures of the House prior to this spring sitting and to advise the House that we have as House leaders agreed to revisit questions of parliamentary reform and legislative reform with respect to the rules following this spring session.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give oral notice, then, of a motion to be dealt with later today.

Be it resolved that to give effect to the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement, the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly be amended as follows:

- 1(1) Standing Order 7 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1)
 - (i) by adding *O Canada* (first sitting day of each week) on the line preceding "Introduction of Visitors",
 - (ii) by adding "Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)" on the line following "Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes";
 - (b) in suborder (4) by striking out "three" and substituting "four";
 - (c) by adding the following after suborder (5):
 - (6) When Recognitions are called on Mondays and Wednesdays, up to seven members other than members of Executive Council may make a one-minute statement of congratulations or recognition, which is not debatable.
- (2) Standing Order 49(2)(g) is amended by striking out "nine" and substituting "eleven".
- (3) Standing Order 80 is amended by adding "directly" before "prays".
- (4) Standing Order 83.1(2) is amended by adding "in order

to be" before "read and received".

- (5) Standing Order 114(2) is amended by striking out "February 14, 1995" and substituting "April 23, 2001".

And in accordance with the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments to the Standing Orders not be effective past the dissolution of the 25th Legislature:

- 2(1) Standing Order 56(2) through (8) shall be of no force or effect.
- (2) Standing Order 57(1) through (6) shall be of no force or effect.
- (3) Standing Order 58(4) shall be of no force or effect, and the following is substituted:
 - (4) The Official Opposition House Leader may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to 4:30 p.m. on the day following the Budget Address, designate five departments' estimates to be considered by the committee.
 - (4) Standing Order 58(7) shall be of no force or effect.
- 3 The amendments to the Standing Orders in sections 1 and 2 shall take effect on Monday, April 23, 2001.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Legislative Assembly today two reports. The first one is the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report for 1999-2000, and secondly, the report on university animal facilities for the year 2000 under section 52(5) of the Universities Act. Additional copies of these reports are available through my office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to file four copies of the annual statistics of the Surface Rights Board and Land Compensation Board for the calendar year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table with the House five copies of a letter that I've written to the chairman of our Wild Rose Foundation, Mr. Joshee, whom I introduced to you earlier. This letter is being sent to acknowledge the foundation board and their staff for their enormous effort and their hard work in relation to the commitment they share for Alberta's volunteer sector. They are a government foundation – we're very proud of that – and we thank them for their work in this regard, particularly in this special year, the International Year of Volunteers.

Thank you.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly this afternoon five copies of the annual report of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission for the year ended March 31, 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first are letters from Carrie Trueman of Drayton Valley and Heather Tarkowski of Edmonton. Both are concerned about development in the Bighorn wildland area and would like the government to designate this area as a protected park.

The second tabling is a letter from Linda Lachance of Condor, Alberta. Ms Lachance would like the government to protect the Bighorn wildland area, and in her letter she included another letter

signed by Courtney Clay, Ty Clay, Brooklynn Bystrom, Brennen Bystrom, and Braden Bystrom of Condor. These children are Ms Lachance's grandchildren, and they would like the government to protect the Bighorn wilderness area and "Just keep it for play - don't let 'our land' get wrecked."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from the Integra Co-op in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre in support of keeping John A. McDougall school open.

The second is a letter addressed to the Minister of Community Development from the Elder Advocates of Alberta with a series of suggestions on how to improve the Protection for Persons in Care Act, particularly standards of care.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. My first tabling is a news story from the *Edmonton Journal* dated March 31, 2001, in which the Minister of Environment is quoted as promising public hearings on the issue of coal burning at Inland Cement.

My second tabling includes letters from five principals with the Calgary board of education critical of larger class sizes.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Through you and to you it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce one of my constituents, Ms Heather Miller. She's in the gallery today. Would you please join me in giving her the warm legislative welcome she so rightly deserves.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 34 students from Archbishop Jordan high school who are here to observe the proceedings in the House. They are accompanied by Yolande Joly and Lucille Belzil. I would like to ask that they please rise so that we could applaud.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 27 grade 6 students and their teacher Mrs. Susan Adam from the Westbrook elementary school in the learned and vibrant constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. They're here today to observe and learn about our government and to attend the School at the Legislature. That program has welcomed a number of classes from Westbrook school, and this class has had the good fortune - I hope it's good fortune - to be here while the House is in session and actually see parliament at work while they're studying about it.

They're seated in the members' gallery, I believe, and I'd ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 56 members of Albert Lacombe school in St. Albert. They are here today to spend the entire day at the Legislature and to learn about the functioning of the government and the Legislative Assembly. They are seated in the members' gallery, and they are accompanied by their two teachers, Mrs. Tracey Bowes and Mr. Binette, and by six volunteers, whom I'd like especially for us to acknowledge since it is the International Year of Volunteers as well as this specific week is honouring our volunteers. They are Mrs. Edie Pitchko, Mrs. Kathy St. Arnaud, Mrs. Michelle Palmer, Mrs. Susan Bennett, Mrs. Russell, and Mr. Latawiec. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly 12 students who are visiting today. These students are from Japan, and they are part of a reciprocal two-week exchange. There are 170 Japanese students visiting area high schools, and in July 140 Alberta students will visit Yokohama. These students are in the gallery. They are from the Yamate high school in Yokohama, and they are accompanied by a teacher from Austin O'Brien school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Colleen Stepney. I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce today to you and through you to members of the Assembly Ms Pam Young, who has successfully and very efficiently and very effectively and, I must say, very graciously served the constituents of Livingstone-Macleod since 1993 in our constituency office in Fort Macleod. She is joined today by her husband, Bruce Young, and I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm congratulations of the Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a young woman presently completing her first year of social work at Grant MacEwan College. She's been completing the practicum portion of her program in my Edmonton-Highlands constituency office and has been doing a superb job of helping out those constituents who call or come to my office for assistance. I would like to thank her for the work she has done and wish her the very best in the second year of her program. Her name is Mary MacKinnon, and I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Government Revenue Projections

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Premier. The problem with the short-term approach that the government uses in their budget planning process is that they have no idea if the projections are sustainable and are thus stable. What has the Premier done to determine if the past surpluses are sustainable rather than temporary and just resource based?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance will deliver her Budget Address tomorrow, and I hope the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition will be reasonably pleased to know that the items that will be outlined in the budget speech tomorrow are indeed expenditures on items that we deem to be sustainable.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the question was basically formed around the revenue side. Would he tell us how he's dealing with sustainability on the revenue side, stability on the revenue side?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are built-in cushions. Secondly, we have a good handle. There are still thousands of people who work in both Revenue and Finance who are charged with the responsibility of forecasting as accurately as possible and providing the Legislature and the people of this province with quarterly updates relative to our budget progress. So all of these things are brought into play. None of us are absolutely, for sure, one hundred percent accurate crystal ball gazers, but we do the best we can. Fortunately, our projections have been conservatively estimated, and as a result of that conservative – and I say it with a small “c” and a large “C” – because of that conservative budgeting practice we've been able to generate very significant surpluses as opposed to deficits.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To facilitate long-term planning, will the Premier adopt the Alberta Liberal recommendation of preparing 10-year projections for fiscal and economic trends so that we can see a degree of stability that's coming in our revenues?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know of any business, any government in the world that uses 10-year projections. Certainly we have a vision as to what this province wants to look like after the debt is gone. We have a vision, of course, of having the ability to invest in priority areas like health and education and solid infrastructure. It has been the policy of this government to embark on three-year business plans, to stick to those plans, and to provide Albertans with a reasonable degree of certainty relative to fiscal planning in this province.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Continuing on that question, Mr. Speaker, when the debt is gone, will the Premier invest the surpluses in the Alberta heritage fund to increase this endowment and give us an income stream that will stabilize the mercurial nature of resource revenues?

MR. KLEIN: I appreciate the question, Mr. Speaker, but I can't even begin to anticipate what we will do and what we will not do relative to the investment of dollars that would otherwise be paid to the banks and where those dollars might go. That will be the subject and the sole subject of the Future Summit to be held in September, later this year, when we will involve all Albertans, including members of the opposition, to work with us to determine where this province should go, where we should invest, where we should not invest in a debt-free province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of the performance indicators are not currently true measures of the outcome of public expenditure, what is the government doing to correct this?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that statement to be true, and since the Minister of Finance is more intricately involved with these matters, I'll have her respond.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Performance measures that are in our business planning process are reviewed every year by our standing policy committees. We try to make sure that we have realistic performance measures on all of the goals that are laid out in those business plans. They're debated here in the House as part of the budget debate, and at that time I'm sure that if hon. members opposite have particular performance measures they don't think are true indicators of success in various departments, they should raise that through the budget debate. We certainly review it on a quarterly basis. We look at a variance analysis, and we publish a quarterly report, that goes out to all Albertans so that they can see how we're measuring up to the performance measures in the business plans.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. We do on a regular basis.

My final question: what analysis does the government do when they put additional dollars in the budget and the performance indicators do not change? For example, more money has been put in health care ostensibly to reduce waiting lists, and in the end the waiting lists do not shorten significantly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't believe that statement to be true. I think the allocation of more resources – as a matter of fact, I don't think; I know. The allocation of more resources to priority areas in health care, particularly to reduce waiting lists, to increase diagnostic capacity, and to create centres of excellence, these dollars have been properly identified and well used for the intended purpose.

Relative to the specific question, I would like an answer to this because I think the answer is going to be contradictory to the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's assertions. That is the question as it relates to waiting lists, and I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've made some significant investments in the area of infrastructure to deal with the issue of waiting lists. Some tens of millions of dollars have been put in MRIs. As an example, in the city of Calgary the waiting list for MRIs has gone from an average of 200 days down to 80. The number of heart surgeries that we've done has gone up dramatically and has increased at a greater rate than the growth of the number of people requiring that type of surgery. We've been very, very careful in targeting our dollars for both infrastructure and for investment in people and equipment as well as those areas that are pressure points, and we have responded appropriately.

THE SPEAKER: The third main question. For the Official Opposition the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Pricing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 11 in this Assembly the Premier was asked about the anticipated cost of \$475 million for electricity deferral accounts. What he said was that it was speculative to talk about deferral accounts. It would be better called planning or foresight, because EPCOR has recently released

an interim analysis with first-quarter financial statements for the year 2001, of course, which shows that it already has over a \$95 million deferral deficit. That is only one quarter for one company. My questions this afternoon are to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us why he would say that deficit deferral accounts are a hypothetical situation?

Thank you.

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that still holds true today. I don't know if \$475 million is an accurate figure. This is predicated on what the price of electricity is going to be in the year 2002 and beyond. All we know is that all of our projections show that the price of electricity is starting to come down and to come down quite significantly.

Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal opposition who predicted that the price of electricity at the beginning of the year 2001 would be something in the neighbourhood of I think it was 20 or 23 cents a kilowatt-hour. Well, the rolling monthly average has been more in the 9 cents range. So, you know, they may be projecting and predicting a worst case scenario. I don't believe that to be true, but perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy has a better handle on things, and I'll have him supplement.

THE SPEAKER: I appreciate all that, but we're not going to speculate too much today.

Please go on with your next question.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. When the Premier said, "I don't know if an analysis has been done with respect to deferral accounts" while EPCOR refers to a regulatory review that will determine the final amounts collectable, is the Premier suggesting that EPCOR is wrong when it includes \$95 million in its deferral accounts in its financial statements, that just have been released?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they also announced a huge profit. Again, I would suggest that like any other company they have to do budgeting on a reasonable estimate of what their analysis is going to show for the years coming. Perhaps our analysts have some different ideas. I don't know. But I will have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of deferral accounts, that has been referenced in the financial statement, is one that's based on a change in business from EPCOR. They have, in fact, purchased more customers through the competitive process. They're a bigger company. They're a different company. Seventy percent of their revenues come from outside of Edmonton now. So one could fully expect that they would do what is in the charter of acceptable practices and state what they have as an outstanding either liability or asset, depending on how you view a deferral account, and would state it accordingly. I'd suggest that the probity of their financial statements is accurate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the hon. Premier tell this House how much the final deferral amounts are expected to be which Albertans will have to pay on top of their already existing bills after the regulatory review is completed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I cannot provide a figure, and that is consistent with the last answer I gave on this particular matter a

couple of weeks ago. If the hon. Minister of Energy has any further information on this particular issue, I'll have him respond.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, deferral accounts will change by company, by customer load. What we're seeing is the competitive market process in action, where companies buy other companies, where companies buy customers on the retail side, where they exit from other sides of the business. We're seeing a competitive market unfold.

Just as one of the hon. members from the opposition predicted that prices would increase and advised that EPCOR should in fact remain in city council hands, now they're concerned about the price increase that has occurred creating a difference in revenues. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker. I mean, you predict something. Something does occur. In fact, one of the outcomes of January's move was to put deferral accounts into place. They're there. They vary by the amount of customers that you have as a company and they vary by the amount of customers that you serve across Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Inland Cement Limited

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the government decided to fast-track environmental approval of Inland Cement's application to burn coal rather than natural gas in its cement kilns in northwest Edmonton. Last month the Minister of Environment promised public hearings on the Inland Cement proposal. It now seems that even these hearings will not take place. To the Premier: why has the government broken the promise made just last month by the Minister of Environment to hold public hearings on the Inland Cement coal conversion project?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, well, first of all, the hon. Minister of Environment has not reneged on a promise. The question here is a question of public hearings versus a formal hearing before or a joint hearing between the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, perhaps even the involvement of the federal government through the EARP process, the environmental review process of the federal government.

The extent of the hearings. The hon. minister has committed that there will be public consultations, there will be town hall meetings, and there will be a more informal process to assess and evaluate the environmental merits of this particular project. I'll have the hon. minister respond if he wishes.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we're going to try and move forward.

The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: how can the government justify not holding a full environmental assessment including public hearings on Inland Cement's proposal when converting to coal means that 403 tonnes per day of additional greenhouse gases will go up the stack and daily emissions of such toxic heavy metals as arsenic, chromium, and mercury will go up anywhere between 30 and 80 percent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I have the hon. Minister of Environment comment, I will say this. I will make a comment in response to the comment made by the hon. member, and that is that he does a tremendous disservice to the coal industry in this province and to a highly valuable natural resource that has the reputation certainly throughout North America and worldwide of being some

of the cleanest burning coal if not the cleanest burning coal around. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to assure the hon. member that this is a fully public process. Before a company can have its environmental approval changed, it must go through an environmental review process, and this environmental review process is fully public. There are public meetings held. They've already had open houses that my staff was at as well as staff from Inland. There's a meeting this Thursday in Edmonton, I understand, and we will be organizing a meeting on behalf of my office in the affected community sometime in the third week in May – that's the time frame we're looking at – which I will personally attend as well as officials from the Department of Environment.

If anybody is unhappy with the ultimate decision that is made, then of course they have the process of the Environmental Appeal Board. They can appeal to and make their case in front of the Environmental Appeal Board, and that is another fully and totally public process.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, to the minister this time: why does the government believe that company-sponsored open houses are an acceptable substitute for full environmental hearings, especially in light of increased air pollution that will result from burning coal rather than natural gas at Inland Cement? What's next? A wine and cheese for a strip mine?

2:10

DR. TAYLOR: Well, quite frankly, we're hearing lots of whining from the other side, so it's not necessary.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have not substituted company open houses. I quite clearly stated in my last response, that the member apparently didn't listen to, that that is only one aspect of the public process. There are public meetings. As I said and if he would listen, I will point out that in May we will be having a public meeting, that I personally will attend as well as members of my staff. As well, at the open houses we did have members of the staff of the Environment department there to answer questions. They were very successfully received and answered a lot of questions from the people that were there. As well, the public has a chance to input through letters and statements of concern. If they're still unhappy with the decision, as I pointed out, there is another completely public process, which is the Environmental Appeal Board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Today the U.S. Department of Commerce decided to investigate unfair allegations made against the Canadian softwood lumber industry. There have been suggestions that the Alberta government hasn't done enough to protect the Alberta industry from these allegations by the U.S. softwood lumber industry. What is the government doing to protect this industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We do expect that the U.S. Commerce department will formally announce that they will be

proceeding with antidumping or countervailing investigations. I'd like to assure the questioner and members of the Assembly that the Alberta government believes that what is required here is a very thorough examination of our forestry practices, because we feel that these allegations and this decision by the United States are really founded upon information that is misunderstood and that they do not fully appreciate the way that our forestry system operates.

We will certainly respond to any allegations that are made. We will be responding to the overall American position. We'll be working with the federal government and the other provinces in making our case to protect the forestry industry in Alberta and all across Canada because this is a national effort. We want, of course, to continue with constructive relations and trade in this particular commodity, but we are certainly going to defend very vigorously our position in this matter. We have been doing so for the last five years, Mr. Speaker, on this particular topic. It is not something that has just been recently brought to our concern, and to this point in time our representations have been effective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the minister of sustainable resources. Can the minister tell the House what impact the United States' trade action will have on our Alberta softwood lumber industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to stress to the Assembly the importance of the forest industry to the province and the overall economic diversification plan of our province. It does create thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in revenue, so it is a very, very important industry. Therefore, the province is fighting the U.S. industry's allegations because we strongly believe that the Alberta government does not subsidize our lumber producers.

The U.S. industry's actions against us are primarily targeting our province's forest management practices. In Alberta we believe that our timber harvesting is definitely sustainable and involves environmentally sound practices. Mr. Speaker, our practice gives consideration to wildlife corridors, watersheds, and fire management practices. The timber dues and other fees we collect together with the significant responsibility we impose on industry ensures a fair return to the province and a healthy, sustainable forest for Alberta's future.

The U.S. actions make a concern for the many small independent operators that are out there providing a strong tax base, jobs for many communities across Alberta. Therefore, we will do anything to defend that industry. It is very important.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. There has been some suggestion that Canada should use the ample energy resource as a bargaining chip in resolving the softwood lumber dispute. Is the Alberta government considering this tactic?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, but of course one should elaborate. The North American free trade agreement has been a very productive agreement for Alberta and for all of Canada. Overall exports from this province to the United States have

quadrupled over its life, and to use one part of the agreement which is working well to try and deal with a problem where there is a mechanism to resolve difficulties, which I've outlined as far as softwood lumber is concerned, would I think be counterproductive and totally beyond the intention of the agreement that we have.

We have a good overall trade agreement, Mr. Speaker, an excellent one, which is now being looked at on a continental basis and also with South America. We want to go through the procedures, the steps that are available to us, and to fight this battle with all the information and expertise at our fingertips to make sure that we have a positive result with respect to the overall dispute.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Education Policy

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We must preserve our schools for the sake of our children and our communities. It all goes hand in hand. This is a quote from a parent whose words are being echoed by parents in communities served by small schools across this province. To the Premier: when will policies that attack and harm small school communities be changed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that there are policies that attack and harm small schools. We have as much respect for small schools as we do for large schools. The question comes down to that of quality of learning and the ability of children to get a proper education. The hon. Minister of Learning can certainly allude to the many wonderful policies that are in place to achieve precisely that.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I will say that the small schools are very critical to the scholastic environment in Alberta. As a matter of fact, in direct response to the hon. member's question, I am in the process of setting up a curriculum advisory committee for small schools because it became very apparent in talking and visiting the small schools that there were issues there that were not being addressed on the whole. So there will be a curriculum advisory committee for small schools, which will help us address issues such as distance learning, such as areas where there is not an economy of scale. When you have four or five students taking math 30 or math 31, this is a considerably different issue than when you have 25 or 30 students. So, Mr. Speaker, I will be setting up that committee to look specifically at issues around small school curriculum.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure: when will the minister stop hiding behind the utilization formula and change a community-destroying policy?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been no hiding going on, as the member indicates.

I think there are some important things to look at, as well, when you start talking about the utilization of schools. For example, with the cost of keeping the lights on, the heat, and all of those other things, if you have two schools and you can amalgamate them and have them in one, there is the opportunity then to transfer money from those operations into the actual class and use it for learning. Certainly working with the Minister of Learning, this is exactly what we are trying to do to make sure that the most money is going into the classroom, therefore giving a better opportunity for the students to learn, and that's our objective.

2:20

MR. BONNER: To the Premier: with at least two ministers present at the sod turning for a new school in Edmonton, will government ministers make themselves available at school closure meetings to explain these destructive policies?

MR. KLEIN: Was it to me? Mr. Speaker, I'll defer to the hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Anytime a school is closed, it's a very traumatic situation for the community, and we will be looking at each specific issue when it comes to a school closure. As I've risen in this Assembly before and talked about, there are some schools that are very logical to close. I had, for example, a school in my constituency that had 10 students, and five of them were from Saskatchewan. So schools like that, it made ultimate sense to close them. But we do look at every school closure. We look at it very closely, and we attempt to make the best decision for all the students, based on learning opportunities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Meningitis

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A father and son from Grande Prairie were both hospitalized with meningococcal disease. These new cases have raised concerns among parents and grandparents in my constituency about the spread of this very serious disease. Could the Minister of Health and Wellness tell us what the province is doing to contain the spread of meningitis in our province?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to indicate and emphasize that we do not have an emergency situation in this case, but as a preventative and proactive approach we announced last week that we are moving ahead with a spring vaccination campaign targeted to Albertans between the ages of 20 and 24 who have not already been vaccinated, and that campaign will commence beginning in May. I want to assure the hon. member that we are continuing to monitor the situation closely. I should note that these are the first cases in the Mistahia region in 2001. In previous years there have been generally two or three cases of meningitis in that area.

With respect to the specific individuals, Mr. Speaker, I am advised that both father and son have returned to their homes from hospital and are recovering well. To help contain the spread locally, the regional health authority of Mistahia has provided medication to family members and to friends who had close contact with this pair. This is the most appropriate medical intervention in this situation as a vaccination does not become effective immediately.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again for the minister: why has it taken so long to initiate the provincial vaccination program?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did announce the program in February and have since that time taken systematic steps to ensure that we vaccinate young Albertans. We have had to order half a million doses of vaccine. Canadian licensing requires that the manufacturer go through a very defined quality control procedure, and that quality assurance program requires time. I'm advised that the half million doses of vaccine which have been ordered will be arriving later this week.

Mr. Speaker, public health staff from each of the regional health authorities are scheduling staff and times and places for this vaccination to take place so that residents can be immunized. Taking the time to prepare a systematic approach will ensure that we are best able to co-ordinate delivery of this important program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how will Albertans in other regions find out when and where they can be vaccinated?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, regional health authorities are working with department officials from the Department of Health and Wellness, and they are putting in comprehensive plans to let local residents know about the schedules for vaccination and the places. There will be used advertisements, posters, school information, media, and also MLA constituency offices, and I would certainly encourage Albertans to watch those places for information about times and places for vaccination.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Children's Advocate Report

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The most recent report of the Children's Advocate is a frightening document pointing out the government's negligence with respect to children in care. We're talking about a government that is the legal and, we learn, often irresponsible parent of approximately 13,000 vulnerable children. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why are children still being inappropriately placed in homes and institutions?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge children are not being inappropriately placed in homes and institutions. Every effort is made when intake occurs to provide the most appropriate placement. We look at the child and its needs, and the best interest of the child is always the watchword.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at the Children's Advocate report, it addresses that period up to and before many of the children's services authorities had received their full delegation from our government. They have through 18 authorities worked diligently to provide the priorities and address the needs within their communities, and for the first time, where they are not able to provide those services, those homes, that type of environment for the child, there are ways through their interauthority protocols for addressing other placements for children, which have netted very many successes.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to go further and suggest that the 13,000 children who are under the services of Children's Services through community agencies are not all an increase because of inadequacy by this government. In many circumstances children with handicapped children's services are only newly receiving information because they are learning more about what services are available, and in many of the First Nations communities they are becoming even more aware of the services that they can receive.

So, Mr. Speaker, that number that is cited by the hon. member, while we always look for reductions of the numbers of children that need government care, illustrates the very good and due diligent job in many circumstances in our communities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To this same minister: why are youth obviously still in trouble being dumped from the system at 18 years of age?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are not dumping children. Please believe that the amount of money that we have committed this year, last fall, \$1.2 million for children in transition – we are looking at 15 to 21 year olds – on their advice, in part, to find that best way to mentor them, to provide some bridging and funding so that they can establish themselves in the proper circumstance, to assist them as they find career development and career training that will help them to establish themselves, to look at other adults in the community who may wish to take on a mentoring role or to assist them as they move forward.

Mr. Speaker, many foster parents, because of extensions we do provide, provide additional support to those youths as they are maturing and finding their way around the world.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister undertake to report to this Assembly the government actions taken on the advocate's recommendations before the end of this session?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we have, as you know, been reviewing the office of the Children's Advocate to determine whether or not we are serving Albertans in the very best way through this advocacy provision, and I would be very pleased to provide a response to this House about the recommendations that are already under way, that we have taken as a result of that review. I will also be very pleased to provide a response on a number of the issues that we're working on to improve that advocacy role in our society in Alberta for all children. One of the chief criticisms of this office has been that it addresses predominantly the child in child welfare, and many other children do not require intake into child welfare in order to need an advocate from time to time.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues that we're reviewing. I believe that there are a number of initiatives that the hon. member would be pleased to know are in place, and I will be pleased to provide that report subsequently.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Adoption Records

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is also for the Minister of Children's Services. There is a large and growing number of Albertans who would like to see adoption records opened in Alberta. Adoption records are open in Ontario, B.C., and recently in the state of Oregon. One adoptee, now 55 years old, told me that the only wish she had was to find her mother before she died. Will the government of Alberta consider opening adoption records with a veto clause for those who do not want their personal records opened?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1985 the post adoption registry agency was opened in Alberta, and at that time registry with that agency was purely voluntary. On a voluntary basis both the child and the parent could register. Amendments in '94 and '95

opened it up to a registered search agency that could assist in a find for the child or for the parent so that they could locate one another, provided that both parties agreed.

In 1999 our most recent amendments gave an opportunity for a veto to be in place, but in fact if that veto was not in place on January 1, 2000, and for all adoptions heretofore, the child's record will be available for those who wish to seek it. One of the reasons that the veto was in place was to ensure that no child, maybe a nine or 10 or 11 or 12 year old, receives the record and goes forward to meet a parent unexpectedly or in a situation where the parent is not prepared. This is to honour current contractual agreements that were in place at the time of the adoptions, and for that reason, we still hold the veto policy, although I acknowledge that there are other ways that we could look at it, as they do in other places. My colleagues tell me that what did happen previously in those other jurisdictions was often a circumstance that was unhappy for both child and parent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also for the Minister of Children's Services. I understand that at this time you can release adoption information in special circumstances. To what situations does this policy apply?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Predominantly in circumstances where medical examination has identified what may be a genetic disorder. Then with very careful screening processes the minister under special authority may sign and release certain documents, but it does not always release the identity of the person who was a parent. That, again, is subject to the parent's right for veto. So it's usually when there is a health issue and where extenuating circumstances apply.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the Minister of Children's Services again. How can Albertans at this time access their adoption information?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps one of the things that I should identify is that today very few people take advantage of the fact that the post adoption registry agency is free. It exists for Albertans to go forward and register that they would like to have an opportunity to talk to their parent, or in this case to their child, that there may have been a change of heart. If people, the child or the parent, wish to contact the registry for their free service to see if in fact there is an opportunity to access that name – it may already be registered – the registry can be contacted at 427-6387, and information will be provided.

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

Social Assistance Rates

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta College of Social Workers recently called on members of this Legislature to debate in this session the issue of welfare allowances. Families on

welfare, mostly women and children, are faced with escalating utility rates, increasing rents, and reduced vacancy rates. Further, although the pay for the members of this Legislature increased April 1 to reflect the 3.3 percent increase in the weekly earnings for Alberta, the Minister of Human Resources and Development has put off a review of welfare rates until later this year. My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister assure this House that his department's policy, reflected in Order in Council 5/2001, of assisting welfare recipients with energy costs will continue after April 30?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, thank you very much. First, just to make a comment on the preamble part of the question, if I can. Certainly one of the responsibilities of this government is to provide assistance to those Albertans who truly need the assistance, and we do it on the basis of a philosophy of a hand up and not a handout. So any discussion that would relate around assistance to low-income Albertans will always be within the context, then, the philosophy, that you are better off in the workplace or at school than you are just solely on assistance. So we'll provide whatever programs we have to put in place so that Albertans who truly need our help of course will get it.

On the specific question, of course, we are aligning ourselves with the rebates that other Albertans are entitled to, and certainly it'll be my job as minister to see that that happens.

MS BLAKEMAN: Will the Minister of Human Resources and Employment allow a public review of welfare rates now and not wait until the session is over?

MR. DUNFORD: As a matter of fact, I think the answer to that likely would be yes, although I'm not inside her head to fully the understand her agenda. As we speak, we are putting together a review of low-income programs and services to Albertans, and certainly we want to be prepared to deal with that before the next go-round on business plans.

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Human Resources and Employment give serious consideration to the Alberta Liberal proposal to establish an independent committee, which would include welfare recipients, to automatically review welfare rates on an annual basis?

MR. DUNFORD: I think the responsibility that we have as a ministry is to look on an ongoing basis at the types of programs that we offer to Albertans. Certainly we would accept input from any Albertan. This would include not only the member individually, but also, if the Alberta Liberal Party itself wants to provide input, we'll accept that. I think, more importantly, Mr. Speaker, that we have to have someone responsible, and in this particular case the buck stops here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Inner-city School Closures

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This was to be to the Premier, but I'll direct it to the Minister of Learning. During the recent election campaign the Premier talked about the need for more support for inner-city children from disadvantaged back-

grounds. He talked about the fact that smaller class sizes might benefit these children, yet the government's utilization formula is threatening to hurt these very same children by closing the schools they attend. To the minister: what steps is the government prepared to take to ensure that the world-famous Alex Taylor school in the Edmonton-Highlands riding is not closed until all avenues have been explored to keep it open, including smaller class sizes and more special-needs and community programs for its students?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The time has come to stop thinking about schools purely on a bricks-and-mortar basis. What we have to think about is learning opportunities for our children.

The Edmonton public school board has gone through a very extensive process on combining schools to increase learning opportunities for these kids. This is very important. Alex Taylor school is one of the schools that the Edmonton public school board is looking at. A decision has not been made at the moment, but I have full and utmost confidence that the Edmonton public school board will be making the decisions based on learning opportunities for their students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Minister of Learning in response to a question I put to him two weeks ago indicated that the utilization formula will be reviewed, will he now indicate to the Assembly whether or not the review will be completed in time to save Alex Taylor and Sacred Heart schools from closure?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I'll pass that question to the Minister of Infrastructure as that is presently under his mandate.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, once again, this is a very hypothetical question, and I think he'll just have to stay tuned.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, it was a very specific and concrete question.

Will the Minister of Learning undertake to work with parents, communities, school boards, and municipalities to ensure the vitality of inner-city communities and their schools?

2:40

DR. OBERG: Obviously, this is a very important concern to government. It is my job as Minister of Learning to work with the school boards. It's the school boards' job to work with their communities on that. I feel that the Edmonton public school board will come up with a very viable alternative to these school closures, and I look forward to working with them in the future. Mr. Speaker, as you know, they will be looking at this issue apparently tomorrow night, and hopefully we will know more after that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Library Funding

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. Libraries are an integral part of all of our communities, and this weekend libraries, librarians, trustees, and staff will be meeting in Jasper, Alberta, to deliberate and discuss libraries and their future. Many that have

talked to me are discouraged and concerned. Before I begin, I would like to say personally that I believe reading is to the brain what walking is to the body. I support, endorse, and use regularly our libraries. Mr. Minister, when will libraries see a much-needed increase to their per capita funding, funding that was cut in 1994 from \$4.29 to \$4.03 and has not been reinstated nor increased since that time?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, that is a very good question and a very fair question. That's why I began to address it about three weeks ago when I first met with the library representatives, and I will pursue it further again when I meet with them this weekend in Jasper.

I share the member's feelings about libraries. I think they contribute enormously to our overall quality of life, and that's one reason why I've already asked that the issues surrounding public libraries be on the Future Summit agenda for this fall when we talk about specifically the balance between economic and fiscal issues, on the one hand, and issues to do with quality of life, on the other.

I think the more specific answer to the exact question, Mr. Speaker, is that I will look at this issue now, and I hope we can address it in the next round of funding deliberations.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, why are we utilizing obsolete population figures, three-year-old figures from 1997, when determining our provincial per capita grant?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, it's true that the past couple of years of funding have been based on population stats that go back to 1997. I would tell the hon. member that we now have updated population statistics and that we will be looking at employing those. In fact, the Minister of Finance will be releasing her budget on behalf of the province tomorrow, and one would hope that it will contain some good news for many different sectors of the economy.

MRS. GORDON: Again to the same minister. As all other provincial jurisdictions in Canada except Alberta and Quebec have initiated legislative policies that disallow their libraries to charge borrower fees or membership fees, will the hon. minister consider taking the necessary steps to do likewise here in Alberta?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: It's another issue, Mr. Speaker, that I've discussed with some of the library representatives from across the province and another issue that I'll be addressing again more fully with them when we meet on Friday and Saturday in Jasper for a major meeting of public library representatives.

I would say that the current act that governs this issue goes back to about 1930, if memory serves. Yes, it is time to review that issue, and I will address it, but I do want to say that the act also disallows any public library from charging an entry fee. So people shouldn't go away thinking that just because there are some jurisdictions in Canada that charge for borrower fees or library card fees or membership fees, that fee in itself precludes anyone from entering a library or using the services on-site.

There are specific things that we have worked out with our partnerships at the local level to address this issue, and I will be pursuing this much more aggressively in the next few months, because I, too, am a very large supporter of our public library system, as I know all members in this House are.

Thank you.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of six hon. members. The government can actually

have five recognitions today. I'm advised there are only four, so there's opportunity for one additional one.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Dr. Joseph Shoctor

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week we lost a great Edmontonian, a great Albertan, and a great Canadian. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Joseph Shoctor, Order of Canada, Queen's Counsel, who passed away last Thursday. I believe the Premier said it best when he said:

Joe's contributions to the public and cultural life of Edmonton have left a permanent mark on the city. Edmonton's incredible theatre community owes a great deal to him, as do sports fans and others who work to make Edmonton a better place to live. Great cities are built by people . . . like Joe Shoctor – people with vision, with humour, and with remarkable abilities. He will be missed, and he will be remembered.

I would also like to personally pass along my condolences to his wife, Kayla, and his children, Ian, Marshall, and Naomi.

The world is a better place because Joe was in it.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Volunteerism

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize that this is national Volunteer Week and also the United Nations year of the volunteer and to celebrate the Alberta volunteers who make so many things possible. Just think of all the things that would not exist or would be greatly diminished without volunteers: community leagues offering amateur sports and other programs and always there to watch over and ensure the safety and integrity of the area; recreational and cultural groups developing programs for people's leisure time, offering instruction and enlightenment, and many times putting in the sweat equity to build or expand facilities; youth groups like cadets or Baseball Alberta or the Youth Emergency Shelter or block parents. Social service or helping agencies could not operate without the assistance of volunteers. Think of Meals on Wheels or the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers or the Sexual Assault Centre.

Volunteers give us the Alberta in which we want to live. They make things run, they make things fun, and for many, many agencies they make it possible. Thank you very much to all the volunteers in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week takes place April 22 to 29, 2001. Organ and tissue donation saves lives, restores health, and gives hope for new beginnings.

Unfortunately, the need for organs and tissues for transplantation is far greater than the available supply. Last year in Alberta 32 people died waiting for donations. Everyone should consider themselves a potential organ and tissue donor regardless of their age. It is the health of the individual and not their age which is the deciding factor.

One critical reason why waiting lists are so long is that families do not know the wishes of potential organ donors. It is crucial to become an organ donor and that the family makes the final decision regarding donations. Less than 50 percent of Canadians are not

aware of their family members' wishes regarding donations.

The green ribbons we were all given today symbolize the promise of lives that may be saved and improved through organ and tissue donation. The Canadian Association of Transplantation, the Kidney Foundation of Canada, the HOPE program, and the Comprehensive Tissue Centre have been promoting public awareness of donations through the distribution of green ribbons across Canada since 1997. We hope all Albertans wear them proudly, especially during donor awareness week, April 22 to 29, and talk to their families to show their support of the greatest gift of all, the gift of life. Remember, transplants work. Between 80 and 95 percent of recipients are doing great one year after surgery. Please make a life-giving decision for nearly 3,500 Canadians waiting for transplants.

Speaker's Ruling Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as the subject being responded to by the hon. Member for Redwater was of such importance and significance, the chair chose not to intervene. The hon. member went way beyond the one minute allocated for this particular part of the Routine. One minute. As there are only four government members today who've indicated – and the government actually can have five – the fifth one will now not be recognized.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:50

Clear Answers

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. April 23 is Canada Book Day, a day when we pause to celebrate the writing of Canadian authors, so it seems an appropriate day to recognize the writings of a recently elected member of this Assembly, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine* is the best-selling book the member co-authored with Gillian Steward, published by Duval House, University Press, and the Parkland Institute. The book has been shortlisted by the Alberta publishers association for their Alberta book of the year award, having been selected from an initial list of about 40 nominees.

Given that the emphasis of Canada Book Day is on giving books as gifts, members of this Assembly may want to keep *Clear Answers* in mind as they purchase books for presentation to individuals and groups in their constituencies.

I am sure all members of the Assembly will want to join me in recognizing the writing talent of an Albertan, a Canadian, and one of our own, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Thank you.

Volunteerism

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, I, too, am pleased to recognize volunteers in Alberta communities during national Volunteer Week. In collaboration with Volunteer Alberta the Wild Rose Foundation encourages organizations to host volunteer appreciation activities or promotions that focus on our volunteers.

Each year the number of communities participating in national Volunteer Week increases. This year 123 Alberta communities representing more than 2 million Albertans are participating. In fact, Mr. Speaker, for the International Year of Volunteers the number of participating communities has reached an all-time high.

While Volunteer Week beckons us to honour local volunteers today, we have a responsibility to do this year-round. An estimated 74 percent of adult Albertans have volunteered within the past year, so I urge all members of this Assembly to proudly applaud them for their important role in building strong communities, for delivering

programs and services that make the Alberta way of life the highest quality of life anywhere and for helping to ensure a strong and lasting legacy of volunteerism.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Air Cadet Program

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to salute Canada's air cadet movement as it celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Canada's air cadet movement was started to train young men to fly in defence of freedom and to prepare them to become air crew members in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Approximately 1 million young Canadians have participated in air cadets, a program that maintains its military structure, although the youth remain civilians, under no obligation to serve in Canada's military. Today's movement focuses on citizenship and leadership with an orientation towards aviation, where young people between the ages of 12 and 19 learn initiative, self-reliance, discipline, teamwork, and leadership.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta boasts 42 air cadet squadrons, and approximately 2,917 young men and women proudly wear the air cadet uniform. In partnership with the Canadian Forces and local citizens air cadets provides wonderful opportunities for Alberta youth. Last summer six provincial cadets served as goodwill ambassadors in Europe, Asia, and the U.S.A.

I extend congratulations to all air cadets, past and present, and commend and thank the Canadian Forces, the Air Cadet League of Canada and officers and instructors, parents, and sponsors for helping these young Canadians.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to move the Notice of Motion for which I gave oral notice earlier.

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. Government House Leader. The process would be that first of all you're going to have to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 38(1)(a) in order to move the motion. After receiving unanimous consent, then we can go to the motion.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent of the House to deal with the notice of motion for which I gave oral notice earlier.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Changes to Standing Orders

14. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that to give effect to the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement, the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly be amended as follows:

1(1) Standing Order 7 is amended

(a) in suborder (1)

(i) by adding *O Canada* (first sitting day of each week)" on the line preceding "Introduction of

Visitors",

(ii) by adding "Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)" on the line following "Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes";

(b) in suborder (4) by striking out "three" and substituting "four";

(c) by adding the following after suborder (5):

(6) When Recognitions are called on Mondays and Wednesdays, up to seven members other than members of Executive Council may make a one-minute statement of congratulations or recognition, which is not debatable.

(2) Standing Order 49(2)(g) is amended by striking out "nine" and substituting "eleven".

(3) Standing Order 80 is amended by adding "directly" before "prays".

(4) Standing Order 83.1(2) is amended by adding "in order to be" before "read and received".

(5) Standing Order 114(2) is amended by striking out "February 14, 1995" and substituting "April 23, 2001".

And in accordance with the April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement be it further resolved that the following temporary amendments to the Standing Orders not be effective past the dissolution of the 25th Legislature:

2(1) Standing Order 56(2) through (8) shall be of no force or effect.

(2) Standing Order 57(1) through (6) shall be of no force or effect.

(3) Standing Order 58(4) shall be of no force or effect, and the following is substituted:

(4) The Official Opposition House Leader may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to 4:30 p.m. on the day following the Budget Address, designate five departments' estimates to be considered by the committee.

(4) Standing Order 58(7) shall be of no force or effect.

3 The amendments to the Standing Orders in sections 1 and 2 shall take effect on Monday, April 23, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: It's my understanding, hon. Government House Leader – and please just nod if it's so – that all hon. members have been provided with the motion as well, so they should have it in front of them.

Now, this is a debatable motion.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak on Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act.

It's an enabling piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, that does allow Albertans the ability to benefit from the ownership of their resource, and that resource in this particular case is that of natural gas. Natural gas is a commodity that has been developed in Alberta over the last 50 years. It comes in a variety of states. Of course, it has had the benefit of a very sophisticated infrastructure that has created a great deal of jobs for Albertans and a great amount of benefit for Albertans.

One of the benefits that does accrue to Albertans, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that this commodity is traded on a continental basis. It is traded throughout Canada, east and west, and also traded north and south, and it is the benefit of the free trade agreement, of the NAFTA agreement, that has allowed Albertans to prosper from this commodity, from this heating source.

Mr. Speaker, it is in the last two or three years with the advent of additional pipeline capacity, the ability to take away gas from Alberta, that has created a tremendous surge in continental markets. In fact, if we go back to pre-election days, pre-March 12, 2001, there was a time when natural gas would continue along at an acceptable rate of around, oh gosh, \$2 to \$2.70 a cubic foot or a gigajoule, the difference being a gigajoule is the metric system of heating and the mcf being the imperial measure. But there was a constant price, a price that in Alberta was in many cases lower than what it was throughout the balance of Canada and the United States.

Then basically with the Clinton administration in the United States we saw that natural gas became the fuel of choice for the United States, for markets in air-conditioning, for markets in heating, and created an increase in demand for natural gas. This increase in demand started to put upward pressure on the prices. The producers, by initially sponsoring a pipeline called the Alliance pipeline and by the good works of TransCanada PipeLines and Foothills pipeline, being able to meet demands and take away gas, started to export more and more gas to the United States. Then of course the price of natural gas has been deregulated in Alberta since 1985, and we started to see upward pressure on gas prices.

3:00

Last September, Mr. Speaker, natural gas was about \$3.35 an mcf, and it was creeping up through the year. But then as an effect of cold weather and an effect of low storage levels in great caverns around Alberta and in some parts of the United States also at low levels, from the period of September to just past Christmas of the year 2000 gas prices went from approximately \$3.35 an mcf, or \$3.35 a gigajoule, to a high of \$12.60 a gigajoule at Christmastime. That particular spike, which was something of an anomaly or something of a phenomenon – and we don't know if it will be a continuing anomaly in future prices – created a real price spike to Albertans, who live, as we all know, in a relatively harsh climate during the winter months. That created what we call a double impact of, one, the price escalating due to increased demand and a shortage of supply and low inventories coupled with the second impact of severe winter heating conditions. So not only did Albertans' bills go up as a consequence of the cold on heating systems, but Albertans' bills also went up because of the almost quadrupling of natural gas prices.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, there was a good program put in place by the Alberta government that delivered a number of energy rebates reflecting the ownership of the resource. Of course, everybody here would be the recipient of the \$150 cheque that was issued last November, plus another \$150 cheque that should be coming the members' way as well as all Albertans' way in April of this year, this month. That was also coupled with a price per household rebate of approximately \$150. Depending on how the gas distributor billed the rebate is how it showed up on the bill. That covered the price increase for most Albertans for that period. There was also a commercial aspect to the cost protection side in that the costs were shielded from the consumption rate to the tune of 5,000 gigajoules as a maximum, and there was a rebate of \$6 per gigajoule.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, and continued strong prices in natural gas pricing, it was deemed to be prudent that the government of Alberta would put in place a program that I'll call shelf ready, a

program that would allow the government of the day to be able to react to violent price swings, also noticing a potential increase in volatility of natural gas prices, at the same time being mindful of a program that should be cognizant of market forces, a program that should not tamper with the normal market process of buying and selling natural gas, and one also that reflects the fact that natural gas belongs to all Albertans.

So Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, is one that will focus on enabling the provincial government to be able to react to spikes in prices, to be able to react to giving Albertans a period of certainty and price protection during times of high consumption, which is primarily of course, as we all are familiar with in this House, the winter months, when we all want to put our feet close to the fire and keep our doors shut and practise good conservation practices and use the least amount of gas possible to extract the maximum amount of heat.

As with any other bill, Mr. Speaker, the regulations will reflect the type of program that we will be embarking upon for the benefit of Albertans. I look forward to debate from all members on this bill as to how that program should be appropriately constructed. It is one that we want to ensure shields Albertans from violent price spikes, ensures that there is a payability, if you will, by citizens of Alberta and some certainty as to what they can expect to pay for natural gas in months where heating costs are higher than what they are in normal summer usages and summer volumes.

The legislation is primarily enabling. It does not interfere with market signals. It allows the producers to continue with the free-market buying and selling of gas. It's one that also recognizes, Mr. Speaker, that in Alberta today there exists a great deal of credits, a carryover from the program past, from January to the end of April. So it's one that we would envisage as certainly not being beyond the capability of the government of Alberta to pay, one that does not become an embedded subsidy if gas prices in fact do go down to traditional rates, and it gives us, again, the affordability of reasonable gas prices in the heating of our homes.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a bill that will allow us to develop regulations that put in place certainty, some protection, and recognizes that the resource properly belongs to Alberta, which is the result of a hard-fought battle, an eight-year battle by former Premier Brownlee, who worked very hard in this Assembly and in Ottawa to ensure that Albertans would be able to benefit from this rich resource that lies beneath their feet, that resource being, of course, natural gas and all its constituent parts as well as crude oil and other resources.

As a matter of fact, if I can just move for a second into that, Mr. Speaker, that resource ownership puts us in an absolutely unique position to reflect upon this new continental energy plan that President Bush and Vice-President Cheney are working hard on. It's a program that we would be more than pleased to share with other provinces who are starting to develop their gas reserves now, such as Nova Scotia and Sable Island, Newfoundland and the Terra Nova field, and other areas like that, as well as being able to work with important partners in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

So it's a bill that has simplicity as its guideline, has enabling as its principle, and is one that will have regulations developed in accordance with the general procedure of bill passage and bill discussion in this House. We look forward to debate on this bill, and it's a real privilege for me to be able to move this motion – or this bill. You can tell I'm just back, Mr. Speaker, after being gone for a while, but it is a delight to be back. It's a delight to be able to move this Bill 1 in this Assembly today.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

3:10

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to what the Minister of Energy had to say this afternoon initially regarding Bill 1. My first response is that this government has come dangerously close to the gas fireplace. They've gotten quite comfortable, and I believe they have fallen soundly asleep.

I see this bill and I think that we must start at the very back, Mr. Speaker, with the Natural Gas Rebates Act, which is to be repealed on proclamation of this bill. This certainly is an indication that this bill is all about public relations and has nothing to do with consumer relations or consumer protection, particularly for consumers, whether they are commercial, residential, or industrial, of natural gas or its derivatives in this province. This bill, from my view, is unnecessary legislation. I have reviewed thoroughly this past weekend the Natural Gas Rebates Act, and I cannot understand why there is a need for this piece of legislation.

Initially when I entered the Assembly four years ago, I used to hear many hon. members talk about how there was no need for the Assembly to meet because if it did meet, it would pass laws, and the laws would be accompanied, of course, by regulations, and this was not in the best interests of Albertans. Albertans wanted to be free, free from all legislation, and here we are with a piece of legislation that was initially introduced in 1974, Mr. Speaker.

I believe we have to understand our history before we continue into the future, and in this case I don't see that this government has reviewed the recent history. This is only 26 years ago, and there may even be an hon. gentleman up in the gallery this afternoon that was part of that government. My history may be a little bit lax, but there's a gentleman that I see up there who – I'm not sure – may have been part of this discussion going back to 1974, when the whole issue of natural gas and provincial rebates was discussed and, I must say, discussed very thoroughly in this Assembly.

Now, we look at the title of this bill, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. Well, to further explain how a government can become comfortable and fall asleep, I was amazed to find in my research that this bill as described, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, first came to the attention of the public in this province in a *Calgary Herald* May 4, 1974, editorial. Now, this editorial talks, Mr. Speaker, about Alberta's gas plan in 1974. This is the gas plan that was put forward – of course, it's the Natural Gas Rebates Act – by the then minister of utilities and telephones. This is just one quote:

It probably should be called the "gas price protection plan" instead of "rebate plan," but whatever the semantics Albertans received the details of a good deal yesterday.

Now, this is from an editorial many years ago in the *Calgary Herald*.

Am I to assume, after a promise by the Premier during the height of the election that there had to be gas protection for consumers, that a diligent researcher on the government side looked this editorial clipping up and thought to himself, "This is going to save a bit of work," and away they went, and here is the result of that, this bill? So I say that this bill is a reflection of a government that has certainly lost its way and is trying to get the consumers of the province to look in another direction. When you look at this Natural Gas Rebates Act, you can see that there was legislation already in place.

Now, when you look at this enabling legislation, as it's been described, it already exists. Perhaps hon. members from across the way can during the course of the debate explain to the House and explain to Albertans why this bill is not good enough. What's in this little document that's not in the current legislation? With all the rebates that have been given out, millions and millions of dollars that now total over billions of dollars in rebates, there was no mention of

this existing act. I can only assume – I believe it's interim supplementary supply No. 2 that's going to come forward – that this is where the dollars and cents will be accounted for for our massive gas price shielding or subsidies.

There's so much in this bill. When you compare it to the Natural Gas Rebates Act, I just cannot understand why it is necessary to have this. I think the existing legislation is far stronger. It is far stronger unless there's something in here now. We're certainly going to have regulations. There are lots of regulations in this new bill. The minister in his remarks talked about an embedded subsidy and the fact that this bill is not going to interfere with market signals and price protection. We have to look, Mr. Speaker, at section 2 on price protection and what exactly the minister can do, and it is quite clear that there can be market intervention.

We look at other issues, and we look at the fact that history tells us that in 1973 the Energy Resources Conservation Board was to conduct a field price hearing on the price of natural gas. This was a new move. It was a change in direction from all previous administrations. Prior to that time the Energy Resources Conservation Board had not been involved in the question of price. Now, this is interesting. We are certainly going to continue this direction with section 2 of this bill.

The government in 1974 I believe had the interests of all Albertans in mind. They were focused on diversifying the economy, but they seemed to feel that Albertans' fuel costs would be the lowest in Canada. They also thought that Albertans through their government would start to receive a fair value for natural gas taken out of this province, which is fair enough, and I'm very grateful for the fact that this was accomplished.

They also seemed to think that Alberta's economy would become more competitive with the rest of North America and that it should improve job opportunities for our citizens if the natural resources of this province were prudently managed, not only for gas producers, who were keen to ship out of this province and in most cases out of this country, but also for Albertans and Canadians. The government seemed also concerned at the time that Albertans would and should have improved prospects of finding the yet undiscovered new gas reserves in this province, and they felt that it was an asset for all people.

3:20

Now, with the development of natural resources and the policy surrounding it, the government of the time had this in mind: that sufficient resources are conserved for the future requirements of Albertans and their children. Earlier today during question period, Mr. Speaker, we were talking about a 10-year plan, and it was a novel concept to some of the hon. members across the way. Yet this government was talking in 30-year time frames and from one generation to the next generation. Long-term planning: that's what that's called, long-term planning, not getting by lurching from one election to the next, not lurching from one energy crisis to the next. We're fortunate that we have billions of dollars in royalties so that we can buy our way, but we must start by going back and looking at past governments and some of their sound, long-term policies and some of the strategies they developed.

The government also said that the resources should only be disposed of at a fair commodity value and with adequate return to the owners of the resources: the people of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, over this term of the Legislative Assembly hopefully we're going to have an opportunity to have a discussion on what that fair rate of return is to all Albertans, particularly with the raw natural gas streams that are being exported from this province. The Alliance pipeline is one project that comes to mind rather quickly.

Also, the past government was very keen to see the development of resources and keen to see that it was directed towards processing in Alberta to the extent practical to expand job opportunities for our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, what is Bill 1 going to accomplish here? We look at the rates of rebates. We have no idea what's going to happen. This is all going to happen behind closed doors. Citizens will have no input. It is, in my view, unacceptable.

Now, we also have to look at what occurs when a government seems to feel that you can naturally have market intervention when you want. You can call it anything but price protection. You can call it rebates; you can call it shielding. But what you need, Mr. Speaker, is to have a good, close look at exactly what could happen with a rebate program that may go wild. I look at this Bill 1. This could wind up costing us billions of dollars. What criteria will determine who gets a rebate? Who is going to decide if gas used for industrial purposes, including the petrochemical industry, is to be included in Bill 1? Gas used for power generation: are the rebate payments going to be for generators of electricity? How are the coal-fired power plants going to feel about this if there's a massive subsidy to the gas-fired generators?

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that equitable?

MR. MacDONALD: I don't know. The hon. member is questioning whether that's equitable. Hopefully my concerns regarding this will be discussed during the debate on this bill.

Now, we look at natural gas used as a fuel or for hydrogen generation and other purposes in connection with the upgrading of crude bitumen, and we know with the Athabasca tar sands there's further development there. How much money could be used by those enterprises out of Bill 1? These are very critical questions, Mr. Speaker. I think they certainly deserve an answer.

Is the so-called Natural Gas Price Protection Act going to subsidize compressor fuel for gas pipelines. I would view that as a subsidy to a compressor station. Gas also used as a plant fuel and to compensate for plant shrinkage: is that going to be included in Bill 1? These are all industrial gases, and the volumes of these would be really high. Also gas used for miscible floods in oil fields: there are large volumes of gas used to sweep through formations. Is that going to be part of Bill 1? Albertans are going to pay for this. It's already cost in excess of a billion dollars, rebates that Albertans received. We have to be very, very careful here.

Now, consumers deserve shielding, and they can be adequately looked after with the existing legislation. We don't need this legislation. It's simply not needed. There is an existing statute there. I would encourage the government to come to their senses, realize that this bill is not necessary. My research indicates that the regulations in the existing Natural Gas Rebates Act lapse in March of 2000. I can only assume, as I said earlier, that interim supply is going to take care of our natural gas rebates.

You could strengthen existing legislation. Perhaps there's something in this Bill 1 that has been overlooked. Perhaps an amendment could be put forward.

Now, when we look at the objectives, we have to look at what's not in Bill 1. Is there a mechanism in there to do audits of those companies who are handing out the rebates? Is it the vendor? There's not even, I believe, a definition of a vendor in this bill. There's certainly one in the Natural Gas Rebates Act, but there's not one in the new Bill 1.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, when a government, when a tired government has to go and fish through 27-year-old newspaper clippings to come up with a new name for what is essentially

watered-down existing legislation, I have to become very, very cautious about supporting this bill. I do not think it is necessary. I think of what people told me when I entered this Assembly and how it shouldn't meet because every time it meets, there's legislation created that stops business and puts unnecessary regulations on all Albertans. When I see this bill, I just have to quietly laugh to myself because there's already consumer protection for Albertans under existing legislation. This is just a bill to promote a gas rebate process that probably is not necessary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, might I ask the privilege of the Assembly for an introduction?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: When World War II ended, millions of Europeans were on the move, and in the rubble that occurred, millions left Europe and moved to various parts of the world. One of those individuals who left Europe in 1945 as a refugee made his way to the Northwest Territories in Canada and worked in the mines and ultimately made his way to Alberta and ultimately became a Member of this Legislative Assembly. He was the first immigrant to have been appointed to a cabinet in Canada in post World War II times, and he's here with us today. In the public gallery is the hon. Dr. Horst Schmid, who probably is the best-known representative of this Assembly throughout the world other than one or two individuals in our history. Dr. Schmid, please rise.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

(continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had hoped to be pleased to speak in second reading on Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. I really was looking forward to what the government's plans were going to be, as revealed in this legislation, and I think I was expecting to see some policy put forward. I was expecting to see some process put forward, and I am sorely disappointed. I was looking in this bill for a plan, and I don't see a plan. What I see in fact is a blank cheque, something along the lines of: trust us and we'll do something, maybe, but we're not going to tell you what it is we're going to do.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think the idea of this bill is of great interest to Albertans. Certainly I'm sure that many of us heard this issue raised many times when we were at the doors during the election, so I anticipate a fairly keen interest in this bill. I'm sure that many Albertans would like to be involved in the discussion through their representative in this Assembly. Unfortunately, it's going to be darn hard for Albertans to figure out exactly what it is they're discussing because there is very little specific in the bill. It's essentially not legislation but a plan for legislation. I'm a very keen promoter of plans, and I would keenly urge the government to actually come up with

legislation that tells us something about under what circumstances and against whom we are in fact going to protect individuals or companies with natural gas prices.

I think that one of my major concerns when I look at this bill is the list of circumstances that cabinet may make regulations for, two-thirds of this bill. So it's all about: we'll make regulations on things. We may make regulations on things, but nothing is actually put out as to what is going to happen, even whether or not there is going to be any rebate at all. In one section it says: well, in the opinion of the minister; and, yes, we might do it; and maybe cabinet will authorize it through regulations. So we don't even know if in fact anything is going to happen. Later, sometime, maybe cabinet might do something, but we don't know what, we don't know how much, and we don't know under what criteria. Nothing is laid out in this bill. I mean, how are Albertans to give feedback? Or has this already all been decided by cabinet, and they're eventually going to let Albertans know?

When I examine a bill, I'm looking to see whether I think this is going to be for the benefit of all Albertans, and I'm looking for several things. I'm looking as to whether the proposal creates stability. Is it sustainable? Does it promote growth? Is it good management, or is it encouraging good management practices and processes? Of course I'm always going to be asking: who benefits? Is this an equitable arrangement that's being proposed? I'm struggling to find answers to any of those questions in this bill.

The crux of what we have before us is the distribution of rebates, stabilization of natural gas prices for Albertans. As I said, I certainly had a lot of constituents expressing concern, because even then there was a lot of concern expressed around the imperfect process that the government had put in place with natural gas rebates from January to April.

Interestingly, I had a number of constituents who really were suffering because the rebates were not enough. With many of the older houses and the two-by-four construction you can only get so much insulation into the walls of those houses. Even if they had the money to put forward, to put new windows in, to do the caulking, to upgrade the furnace, to have the energy efficiencies that one can put into a dwelling now, there was only so much they can do with some of those old, sort of square box stucco houses. So for them the natural gas rebates were not enough. They were looking at increases from around a hundred dollars into the \$500 range. That's a significant hit: \$400 for one household to take. So the \$150 rebate, while appreciated, wasn't helping people. They still had a lot of money to take out of their own pockets and out of other parts of their lives and other areas where they would spend money.

Interestingly, I also had constituents who were laughing because in fact they could afford an R-2000 house. That's where they were living, and they were basically putting that \$150 rebate straight into the bank because their utility bills didn't amount to very much to begin with. So they were making money on this scheme. So my question about who benefits is a very real one.

What is the underlying philosophy behind this bill? If we're starting with the assumption that all Albertans own the natural gas resources under our feet, and I believe I heard the minister say that – I'll have to check the Blues later, but I was sitting here and I'm pretty sure I heard him say it – then the revenue, the benefit from it should accrue to all Albertans, not specifically to a corporation or through usage, but all Albertans get some sort of benefit from this.

Okay, that's fine. That's one way of doing it. It's possible in fact to go through and classify it by age. Certainly the \$150 cheques that were mailed out as a program called the energy rebate program, I think – one was mailed in November, and the second one is due later this month – was based on over 16 years of age and having filed a

1999 tax return. So there were limits placed on it, but essentially it accrued to all Albertans, just not those under 16, but we presume that they're being looked after by parents or guardians.

The other way to do it is to classify by family or by household, because I had a number of people contact me and go: "Why on earth is the government giving my next door neighbour's 16 year old 150 bucks for the utility bills when I as a single person living in my home don't get that kind of assistance? It's just me and my \$150 to try and hold down these gas prices, whereas my neighbour, you know, gets a cheque and she gets a cheque and the 16 year old gets a cheque. So how is this fair?" So already there was a perception of inequality happening there, but that program was supposedly based on the fact that everybody got this. I think that was supposed to be the gasoline refund. Everybody got it, but then somewhere along the line the government changed the way they were talking about that program, and it turned into this energy rebate thing. I think that's where people started to wonder about the equality of it.

If we are going to say that these rebates are given based on usage, then we're into a different system, but this bill doesn't indicate any of that. It doesn't say every Albertan is going to benefit from this because it's under our feet and we all own it, so everybody is going to get a piece of it. Nor does it say we're going to do it based on the fact that it's for consumption, so anybody that consumes more than X amount gets such and such a rebate. People in Alberta, individuals though they are, are very perceptive about perceived inequalities and discrimination.

3:40

On a number of times, both inside and outside of the House, I've raised the discrimination that's happening with high-rise buildings and energy prices. Specific to natural gas energy, I think any MLA in here who's got a high-rise apartment building or condominium must be aware by now that those people are being discriminated against in the way these rebates are given out, because the rebates of \$150 per household off your utility bill from January to April that was happening for single-family dwellings: that's not the way it worked in these high-rise apartments and condominiums. They were classified as industrial or commercial, and they were subject to the industrial rate of \$6 a gigajoule. Well, some of the condominiums that I had got their pencils out and their calculators and figured out pretty quickly that this was a significant difference. If they had been receiving a \$150 per unit in the apartment building versus how much they were going to get on the \$6 per gigajoule rebate, for one apartment in particular it was \$14,000 difference a month. This really starts to add up. It also makes people mad when they think that they should be receiving a benefit and they're not receiving the benefit.

I was looking forward to the debate on this bill so that I can send the *Hansard* out to all of those people that have been communicating with me and say: well, here's what the government is proposing. Do you think this is a good idea? Would you like to see it? Does it work for you? Do you see it as being equitable? I can send this out to people, but none of that is nailed down in this bill; none of it. I mean, it doesn't even indicate whether or not there is going to be a rebate. Well, we can decide maybe in cabinet, behind closed doors, and then a page and a half of what might be decided by regulations.

I think the third method here is by looking at how the rebate is given out. If these payments are given based on a utility bill payment, then in essence they become a subsidy for the natural gas users. I think that should give us cause for concern. If the program was to allocate payments to gas consumers, whether they're residential or business, the program cannot be an equal payment to everyone, because it is essentially based on usage. When it's

coming directly onto the utility bill, it doesn't even pass through their hands. You get a utility bill; it's already been deducted off.

So I think what I'm going to have to look to do is to bring forward the Dickson memorial amendment, requesting that any regulations . . . [interjections]. I am serious; I stand in this House in all seriousness and in recognition of the enormous amount of work done by the previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo in attempting to bring this Assembly to account, in that regulations that are formulated or put forward or proposed by cabinet should indeed be referred to the legislative Committee on Law and Regulations, where there's an opportunity for all members of the House to discuss the regulations, where it's in *Hansard* so our good citizens in Alberta can check the web site at www.assembly.ab.ca, follow along with the discussion, and give us all input on what they would like to see us doing.

I think that's critical, given what we've seen in this bill. I mean, four pages long and no specifics in it at all. We don't know whether the plan is to give a rebate to every Albertan. We don't know whether the plan is to give it based on usage, per household, per family, per usage of a certain amount of gas. Nothing. Nothing is spelled out in here.

One of the other issues that came up around rebates and discrimination for my constituents during the election was the concern about rebates that were received by a landlord being passed on to the constituents. I notice that in fact there is a clause that relates to that here that does state quite clearly that if a rebate is made to a vendor for the benefit of the consumer, "the benefit of the rebate must be passed on to the eligible consumers." That's wonderful. That's exactly what I've been asking for in other areas, but it doesn't say how that's going to be monitored, and it doesn't say how it's going to be enforced, which was the failing in the electrical rebate program and the failing in the existing natural gas rebate program.

There's no monitoring in effect and there's no enforcement in effect and there's nothing in here that says how it's going to be monitored or how in fact it would be enforced. It's actually in the legislation but with no process with which to make it happen. Therefore, I wonder how great the intent is that in fact it should happen. I don't see how it can here.

There are a lot of people that live in apartments. I think every single member in this Assembly must have an apartment building or two in their riding now. So to dismiss this as a concern of the downtown areas or the centre of the metropolitan areas that we have in Alberta doesn't fly anymore. I'm sure members have constituents that are indeed watching them to see how they're going to deal with rebates for them and the discrimination that this government has put in place as far as people living in high-rise apartments and condominiums.

I keep seeing references in here to "as the Minister considers appropriate"; the Lieutenant Governor in Council may decide to do things. Nothing is clear from what we've got in front of us. I listened carefully to what the minister's opening remarks on the bill were – it all sounded really nice – about why they wanted to do this but nothing specific that I could glean from his comments either. So I do invite him and encourage him to continue to respond to the concerns that are being raised and to outline with specifics what the government's intending. If we have constituents that do want to go on-line and read *Hansard* or perhaps go to the library and get the *Hansard* out to understand what's being discussed here – we have in the past been able to rely on comments and remarks made by ministers as they bring forward and propose bills so that after a time you can go back and say: "Yes, but you said in your remarks here that it was intended to do thus and so, and it's not doing that. So what are you going to do to make that better?" We have nothing to run on here.

Let me take a step back. This government with some innovation did put in place key performance indicators in their budgeting process. Now, for all the concerns I have about what the key performance measurements are – and I think many of them are inappropriate – nonetheless they were there. So how do we measure this bill? What are the performance indicators for this bill? How do we look back a year?

Let's go a year into the future and look back and say, "How do we judge whether this was successful?" We can't, because there are no standards in here. There are no benchmarks in here. There's nothing that says something will happen. It says: might happen, maybe happen, if we get around to it, possibly, perhaps. But even then it doesn't specify exactly what it's supposed to be. So there's no way to determine, and I'm wondering if this is just an interesting process of the government, that in fact they can never be judged on what they're putting forward and what they're proposing on behalf of all Albertans. I don't think that's a sign of good management; I don't think it's a sign of good planning.

3:50

Let me go back to the criteria that I talked about at the very beginning. Does this bill create stability? Well, hard to tell. I don't think it does. Is it sustainable? Well, again there are no specifics in the bill to indicate what it's doing to create sustainability. Can these rebates go on ad infinitum? Do they go on forever? Do they only go on if we have a surplus? Do they only go on if we have resource revenues above X dollar amount? Nothing is in there. So it doesn't look like it's sustainable either.

Well, then is it promoting growth? I don't know how it could be promoting growth. It's not outlining any way that companies or Albertans can be moving forward based on sure knowledge of what is going to be available to them in the rebates. How about good management then? Could we find good management? If I use a criteria of good management, can I find it in this bill? No. There's no information in the bill. There are no key performance indicators in the bill. There are no measurements of any kind in the bill. It doesn't say at all what it's going to do.

I'm looking forward with great zeal to continuing my debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

Bill 2 Cooperatives Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act.

In general the Cooperatives Act 2001 replaces the current Cooperative Associations Act, which has not been reviewed since 1946. The Cooperatives Act 2001 is part of a movement to harmonize cooperative legislation right across this country. Generally, this bill provides co-operatives with better access to capital financing and meets the needs of new-generation co-operatives and other types of co-operatives. It also provides flexibility while not imposing complex rules on small co-operatives. In essence this bill will allow co-operatives to compete and grow efficiently in the new millennium.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to say a few words about the Cooperatives Act. As has already been explained by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill, this is modernization, and it certainly replaces co-operative legislation that was initiated here in this province in 1946, as I understand.

Now, the government in this draft - it's so different from the previous bill, Bill 1. This bill certainly, I think, is useful. The groups, the affected stakeholders that are referred to, are pleased. They're not only pleased with the diligent work of the hon. member but also the consultation process that existed that led to the drafting of this legislation.

It's quite a comprehensive bill, and I'm cautious about dismissing it casually in second reading, but we have to look at how this will affect new-generation co-operatives, Mr. Speaker. New-generation co-operatives are value-added processing, closed-membership co-operatives. Now, this particular group, members of the Official Opposition, have had no direct consultation with them that I'm aware of, nor have our research staff. They first emerged in North Dakota and Minnesota and during the last decade in neighbouring states and provinces. They were formed by producers involved in niche markets such as bison or beans or dairy, corn or soybeans, just to name a few.

They differ from other co-operatives in several ways, Mr. Speaker. There is a restriction of membership. There is a higher level of initial equity investment, transferability and opportunity for appreciation or depreciation of delivery rights, and delivery rights are tied to the level of equity invested.

Now, the shares have three distinct features. First, shares usually represent a high level of initial equity investment to which delivery rights are tied. Secondly, shares embody those delivery rights within contracts which define both rights and obligations of the producer and the co-operative. Shares are transferable or tradable and can appreciate or depreciate in value.

From a rural development perspective the new-generation co-operatives are not a silver-bullet answer to increasing rural development and to decreasing the decline of prairie communities. I think school closures, regardless of how many children are in the schools, have more of an effect on the decline of prairie communities than anything else. This is certainly an issue that's not recognized by this current government.

These new-generation co-operatives are another tool that can stimulate value-added ventures in Alberta. Investment in a new-generation co-operative is much greater than a traditional co-operative. We'll just have to see how this works, but many, many different individuals have been consulted, Mr. Speaker, as I understand.

In closing I would like to congratulate the government in this case for a legislative review that certainly is endorsed by many, many different people who are associated with co-operatives. Co-operatives have been a fundamental basis for operating businesses in Alberta for decades and as such are part of the economic and social fabric of our province. We in the Official Opposition support the efforts that will improve the operation of the co-operatives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

head: **Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 11: Mr. Hancock]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have lived most of my life in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora. I went to school there, to Youngstown elementary and Britannia junior high school, and my children go to school in the community as well. My roots run deep in Glenora.

When I was elected on March 12, I was deeply honoured. It was because of the hard work of 126 volunteers. I would like to name a few of those today. They are Sasha Angus, Judi Kendall, Heather Klimchuk, and Cliff Tetzlaff. They were with me every step of the way over the period leading up to March 12.

4:00

I was not born in Canada; I was born in Scotland. My parents chose this country, and they chose this province. They came to a place called Violet Grove - and I believe it's in the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne's riding - and ultimately moved to the town of Jasper Place, which now is in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, once it amalgamated with Edmonton.

I am enormously proud to be here as the representative for Edmonton-Glenora. I have always loved my province and my community. I've considered it to be a very positive and influential part of Edmonton, full of new growth and vibrancy with roots that extend back in time to when it was the old town of Jasper Place. The west end is diverse and prosperous. It has a diverse and prosperous business community as well as a vibrant social network of people who feel strongly about their community, as I do.

While building strong ties to the great metropolitan area of Edmonton, my constituents have kept the small-town feeling of community. The community leagues throughout the area are vital links between these diverse and dynamic people. The local business associations of Edmonton-Glenora represent and promote their local members vigorously and draw in new residents as well as new customers and clients.

To name a few of these outstanding organizations. The West Edmonton Business Association has grown to be one of the largest organizations of its kind. Likewise, the 124th Street Business Association has spearheaded new growth and attracted new development to the area. In the heart of Stony Plain Road the Jasper Place Gateway Foundation incorporates community leagues, businesses, and individuals to make positive strides in the development of west Edmonton community experience.

As set out in the Speech from the Throne, safe and reliant communities are an area of great importance. Through community organizations individuals can work together for a positive change, and with some assistance from the Alberta government our community leagues are providing a place for people to come together in sport and leisure and at the same time build ties in their communities.

Speaking of sport, I'd like to take this opportunity to mention a sporting event that will take place across the river from Edmonton-Glenora in Hawrelak park. On July 21 and 22 of this year thousands of world-class athletes will be coming to take part in a sport widely recognized as one of the most difficult sports ever, the triathlon. I was fortunate enough to be a member of the world triathlon bid committee and worked as the tourism volunteer for the first couple

of years leading up to the 2001 ITU world triathlon championships. It is one of the most prestigious sporting events that this city can host. I am certain that Edmonton is prepared to offer its best and, as is usually the case, set a new standard of excellence. The event may not be as big as the 2001 world track and field championship, but it is nevertheless a great honour to be chosen as a host. It is also an opportunity once again to raise the profile of Edmonton and Alberta on the world stage, and I am enthusiastic about witnessing Edmonton once again outdoing itself.

I'd be remiss to not mention some of my new colleagues. As a recently elected member I have the pleasure of joining five other rookies on the third floor of the Annex. I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, and the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

I would also like to take this time to respond to the Speech from the Throne by saying that I look forward to respecting the charge placed upon me and conducting myself in a manner that reflects the importance of our undertaking. We have a great deal of business to take care of over the next four years, and I am prepared to take that task with devotion and propriety.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, it is with honour and respect that I rise this afternoon among seasoned legislators and newly elected colleagues to follow a great tradition and deliver my maiden speech in this Assembly.

I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker, on your reinstatement. Your capabilities are well known and are considered to be ones of a true parliamentarian. We in the province of Alberta are indeed fortunate in that this government has always carried out the affairs of the province with the dignity befitting a people of proud heritage. You, sir, have been and, fortunately for us, will continue to be a mainstay in that process. It is for this reason that your guidance has earned respect and loyalty from every member of this House.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize my predecessor for the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency, the hon. Walter Paszkowski. All of you who sat in this House in the 12 years of his service would know that Walter was a man of great honour, an excellent representative of our constituency, and a very capable minister. I'm sure his presence will be missed, but his legacy will stand in all the work he accomplished in his presiding years.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, our constituency changed during Mr. Paszkowski's tenure. His term began in 1989, serving the constituency of Smoky River. The representation divisions changed during his service in '93. It is, therefore, my honour to stand before you all today to deliver not only my maiden speech but the maiden speech on behalf of the constituency now known as Grande Prairie-Smoky. It is with pleasure that I take this opportunity to formally introduce to this House the constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky.

The fact that there has been a change in the electoral divisions attest to the change in growth that our region has seen over the past decade. The Grande Prairie-Smoky region is exceptionally active. More jobs are being generated, and the growth rate is accelerated but manageable. Our population has increased by close to 10,000 in 10 years, and our economy has more than quadrupled the capital investment being placed in development in the same 10 years. I urge you all to come and visit. The area is dynamic both in terms of people and economics. Though we still maintain the same rural values and charm, we have a lot more to offer people.

The Speech from the Throne delivered by Her Honour the

Lieutenant Governor on April 10 dealt with many wide-ranging issues dear to the hearts of all Albertans. There was also in my view a real commitment to uphold the vision that was directed from the preceding speech in February. This government has maintained its commitment to providing its people with a high standard of living through some difficult times and is able to celebrate its productivity in prosperous times. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent on each and every one of us to practise and promote responsible fiscal management.

The growth we have experienced in the past decade has been due to the diversity in our region. Our location gives us the unique ability to access all the major commodities which Alberta has to offer for export and national consumption. We have oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, and tourism. It is an exciting time for Grande Prairie-Smoky, one that will produce even greater benefits for Albertans if we take hold of our potential.

It is from this note that I would like to comment on the commitments of this government to Alberta and how Grande Prairie-Smoky would contribute to the growth of this province in the coming years. It is a concern of my constituents that their voice continues to be heard by the government on issues that are important to them. It pleases me and my constituents that there has been a commitment to the vision of greater economic growth for everyone. The continuation of a sound fiscal plan will maintain the economic benefits that this government has achieved in the past few years. A deficit- and debt-free Alberta is an important factor enabling Albertans to gain maximum benefit through a flexible fiscal plan. We are pleased to live in a province where a commitment to keeping taxes the lowest in Canada is a priority.

4:10

The throne speech outlines some important visions for our province to base our priorities on for the coming year. The visions include many key areas that are important to achieving development goals in Grande Prairie-Smoky, important visions for health, agriculture, energy, and education. Along with defining what is necessary to obtain greater achievement in these areas, Grande Prairie-Smoky would like to point out that the forest industry is an important and viable economic resource in our province. The people in my constituency would like to remind the government that it is imperative that we direct a vision for forestry as well and urge our government to continue to pursue a vision for renewable resources.

Albertans would benefit a great deal by aggressively supporting our forest producers in their endeavour to maintain market share. It is important to pursue this market in such a manner that unfair and unfounded economic damage is not incurred.

Grande Prairie-Smoky produces a major amount of wood fibre for domestic use and export. In the Grande Prairie region alone the forest industry generates in excess of \$400 million annually, and there are approximately 3,000 jobs provided in direct and indirect support to this industry. This does not include the thousands of students who have funded their postsecondary education through seasonal work. It is a viable industry and one that has been part of Alberta's heritage from the beginning and continues to make a big impact on a good number of our communities.

The annual forestry show held to gather all those involved in the forest industry and those who would enjoy learning more about it is coming up on May 11 in Grande Prairie. The show demonstrates the importance of the industry to our economic viability and, as well, allows those involved to share ideas, products, new information, and gives recognition to those companies who have given back to the community in many different ways, companies like Ainsworth, Canfor, and Weyerhaeuser, who have supported the community and

its young people by sponsoring the development of a new residence for Grande Prairie Regional College. They support the communities they are involved in, and often you see them giving back to the people by funding things like community recreation centres and libraries.

Alberta has an extremely high environmental regenerative standard to protect the future viability of our forests. These standards are readily enforced and expected to be upheld within the entire industry.

Fire suppression has been extremely successful in Alberta since the 1950s, and it's an important concern for the residents of Grande Prairie-Smoky that the government utilizes all new information being generated about fire suppression. With the amount of energy stored above ground in the form of mature timber, government and industry must look for ways to prevent huge fires like the disastrous one in Virginia Hills. This is a great concern to the people of my constituency especially because of the current situation where there has been very little precipitation so far this year.

Using the methods of sustainable development and responsible harvesting to ensure our future is also important to our agricultural industry, which is echoed in the words of our Lieutenant Governor. The agriculture and food sector is a critical part of Alberta's economy, and it pleases my constituents that we have promised to continue to value its importance by making agriculture a priority. A significant portion of Alberta's land base is used for agricultural purposes. This means that the agricultural industry also has an impact on a majority of Alberta's communities. It is a highly developed economic sector in our province providing a large amount of revenue. In order to maintain agriculture as a viable business in many of these communities, we must continue to focus on the small farm, especially when trade barriers are being dismantled on a global scale.

Mr. Speaker, we have said repeatedly to Albertans that we will not fail our rural communities. Grande Prairie-Smoky is committed to making a positive contribution to maintaining effective and efficient agriculture alongside our government. It pleases the people of Grande Prairie-Smoky that the government has chosen to actively pursue these goals by using recommendations from last year's Ag Summit 2000 where our farm communities would benefit through investment in value-added production. With continued support of proposed value-added investment and continued assistance in times of unforeseeable disaster, Alberta's farmers are sure to benefit from greater economic stability in the coming decade.

With some of our traditional agricultural pursuits under increasing pressure, our innovative agriculture entrepreneurs have turned to alternatives such as bison, elk, deer, boar, and game bird ranching. I would be pleased to see this government address regulatory concerns to assist these farmers in their efforts to be a viable sector of Alberta's rural community.

Water management. A comprehensive water management strategy would be another very positive step and another benefit to future Albertans. Our water is becoming increasingly important in North America, and an in-depth study leading to a strategy is not only desirable but necessary.

Energy concerns are not on the forefront these days. The energy business appears to be quite healthy. They have healthy profits, but I must say, Mr. Speaker, that these profits are being reinvested to replace reserves that are being produced. The energy sector is not a hot item on international markets. There is still a perception of instability and rapidly fluctuating prices. Recent comments with regard to North American security of energy supply should help to refocus investment and support in this extremely important sector of our economy.

Infrastructure is also an important factor in the development of our communities. Better highways and roads enable the trade process to be efficient and bring greater safety to drivers and the general motoring public who are accessing communities along these highways. A project which has received tremendous support and will bring greater efficiency and safety to the Grande Prairie-Smoky region is the twinning of highway 43, the north/south trade corridor, which is to be completed by 2007.

As the Grande Prairie region grows, each year the concern for keeping the fabric of our community strong becomes more challenging. The people of my constituency are proud of their ability to maintain the importance of community throughout our past decade of rapid growth. The outcome is quite apparent. We are committed to helping our children with the most beneficial tools we are capable of providing them. This is why Grande Prairie-Smoky highly supports the scheduled plans for the Alberta Supernet. We believe that this cutting-edge project is an excellent tool to link all of Alberta to limitless opportunities and give even the most outlying regions of the province the ability to access the world.

Further in education in the Grande Prairie-Smoky region, from Grande Prairie Regional College comes a new housing initiative, a program enhancement, and they are in the process now of looking at the funding formulas that have been laid out for secondary education. They have a concern that there are shortfalls in qualified instructors, and the availability of alternatives provided by this government such as the high-speed Internet will certainly help in this area. Northern Gateway school division also must be commended for their effort in pursuing quality education linked with responsible infrastructure utilization. The Valleyview K to 12 campus initiative linked with community-shared facilities is just such an effort.

Alberta's tourism is a large economic generator. Many smaller communities in our province have benefited from the rise in ecotourism in the past decade. Smaller businesses have realized their earning potential by accessing this market. We have been fortunate to grab the attention of visitors and tourists who wish to access the wonderful recreation prospects we are surrounded by. Grande Prairie-Smoky has a lot to offer visitors, and all the information is available to our guests in a friendly and beautiful multi-use facility, Centre 2000, built to mark the new millennium. We will also be proudly celebrating Alberta's centennial in 2005 with an incorporated museum, which is already 90 percent completed. It is an exciting time for Alberta, one which we are happy to contribute to and to share with pride in the celebration.

4:20

Overall, Mr. Speaker, I see a bright future for this province. We are fortunate to have a wealth of resources available to us for our use. We have a unique position in Alberta, where every community is different from one another. Grande Prairie-Smoky believes that this province will continue to flourish, and we will work together to ensure that the concerns of our province are continually met with a fair address and responsibility. Our strength as a province depends upon our ability to work together and to have our voice heard. Our concerns as an entire province should be met within our country.

The Alberta advantage is not just about money. It's not just about our people or just our resources. It's about this land itself. Grande Prairie-Smoky, like all of Alberta, is a place that binds its people to the land, and a deep, positive commitment ensures our future and that of other generations. Whether you are a native Albertan or come to participate from other parts of Canada or the world, Alberta pride soon envelops you, and that is our greatest advantage. The combination is the key, a key we have custody and responsibility for, a key we must hand over untarnished to the next generation.

On a lighter note, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to work with the Super Six, although I prefer to refer to the third floor of the Annex as the Three for All.

Mr. Speaker, I have a volunteer story that goes along with volunteering and goes along with the business of becoming an elected member. We had a great commitment from a large, large number of people, of course like all folks that have been through this have had. One particular story I'd like to repeat to the members here. We had a gentleman taking care of signs for us. He had a little difficulty sleeping because we didn't have signs where other folks had signs. At 4 o'clock in the morning he wakes up thinking: what's he going to do about this? Can't sleep. He gets up, goes out in his pickup truck. Driving down highway 43, not the twinned part but highway 43, he stops and discovers he's got a really good place to set up a sign. So he gets out and he's driving metal stakes in the frozen ground. Another pickup truck pulls up behind him. Two gentlemen are in the truck. They roll down the passenger-side window. A fella says, "Have you got trouble?" "No," he said. "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm just putting up some signs, election signs for my candidate." "Well, can we give you any help?" His reply was, "Is either one of you guys a psychiatrist?"

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my pride to this House in being chosen as the representative for Grande Prairie-Smoky. It is my honour to serve as the voice of such a hardworking and community-driven people. I see a bright future for my region based on the visions and the commitment of those who live there. We have a lot to offer the province of Alberta, and we are proud to be part of the whole community and look forward to giving our best to achieve the visions and goals of this province.

Thank you.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, first allow me to extend my congratulations to all the recently elected members of the 25th Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta. We've all worked very hard to become Members of this Legislative Assembly, and now is our opportunity to demonstrate to Albertans that we can and will provide the leadership necessary for a positive future.

Myself, I'm following in the footsteps of a man who has a track record of approximately 30 years in serving his constituency, namely Peter Trynchy, the former MLA for Whitecourt-St. Anne. He has left some large shoes to fill, and I feel honoured to have the chance to accept this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, it's with the utmost pride that I stand today on behalf of my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne. This constituency represents a large geographic area of west-central Alberta and at its widest point is approximately 80 kilometres wide by 180 kilometres long. Within the boundaries of this constituency there are some 30,000 citizens who on March 12 declared their confidence in both myself and the PC government by electing me to represent them as their Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. This, of course, was the result of the tireless efforts of my campaign team. We all worked very hard, first for the nomination selection and then for the provincial election. Teamwork has put all of us into these seats, and it is at this time that this same type of teamwork will carry this government well into the 21st century.

Personally, my election as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta is a pinnacle of something learned at my father's knee. My parents are both from Holland, and after surviving the horrors of World War II, they emigrated to Canada and settled in Whitecourt, Alberta, in the late '50s. They knew firsthand about having their freedoms and privileges taken away from them and so raised their three children not only to respect freedom but to cherish it.

My father became known as Mr. Red Cross for his devotion and

endless work as a volunteer with the Red Cross, whether it was coordinating blood donor clinics, providing disaster assistance, providing health aids, or fund-raising. This was his way of demonstrating his tribute to an organization that provided many forms of relief to the citizens of Holland during the Second World War. His example is undoubtedly what influenced me to become an active community volunteer, and I have done so my whole adult life. I have served as a coach of minor sports, president of the Whitecourt Chamber of Commerce, town councillor, regional board member for the Stony Plain-Lac Ste. Anne health unit, and until this election served as mayor of the town of Whitecourt for the past nine years.

Now is my opportunity to acquaint you with my constituency. Whitecourt-St. Anne is fortunate enough to have two major highways running basically east and west through the length of it: highway 16 towards Jasper national park and highway 43 to the north. Over the years these two highways have been extremely important in the development of agriculture, forestry, and the petrochemical industries. These industries and the resulting spin-off services required by them have created some communities that are totally dependent on a single industry to drive their economies. Meanwhile, these same two highways have also generated great tourism opportunities in this constituency.

Besides living in the best part of Alberta, residents of this area have long enjoyed outdoor recreation, whether one likes to fish, hunt, camp, bird-watch, snowmobile, riverboat, cross-country ski, golf, trail ride, or attend rodeos, and I can go on and on and on. In recent years Whitecourt-St. Anne has been well known for its outdoor opportunities and now is host to visitors from all around the world seeking some of our sports and challenges.

In my constituency and throughout the province each industry has its own unique challenges that continually require this government to provide leadership and assistance. Investigating and adjusting our own rules and regulations to fit not only the problems of the day but also with an eye to the future could hopefully deal with many of these challenges. For example, the softwood lumber agreement affects our forest industry, large operation or small. Our agriculture sector is faced with low commodity prices and consistently increasing input costs. The resource industry, expanding at record rates, has to deal with environmental pressures, lack of a skilled workforce, and short time lines. Tourism and industry in my constituency will both reap the benefits of highway 43 being twinned.

4:30

For many years highway 43 has been known as the busiest highway in Canada for tonnage, second only to the 401 in Ontario. Currently it's known to be the busiest two-lane highway in Alberta, carrying the largest truck traffic volumes ever experienced. At the same time, many sections of this highway are famous for high accident and death rates due to the fact that it is only two lanes and that much of this highway has little or no shoulders.

Meanwhile, the twinning is well started, but completion needs to be accomplished as soon as possible. Land acquisitions along the route have definitely slowed this process down. It's my hope to work with the Minister of Transportation to try to achieve a more streamlined but still cost-effective method to advance this process. A shorter completion date would also help to accomplish the north/south trade corridor from Alaska to Mexico. A lot of people in my constituency call this the Canamex highway.

My constituency is composed of a sprinkling of many small villages and towns, generally situated on, near, or in between highways 16 and 43. Some of the more familiar names are Evansburg, Wildwood, Niton, Peers, Whitecourt, Blue Ridge, Green Court, Mayerthorpe, Rochfort Bridge, Sangudo, Cherhill, Glenevis,

Darwell, Rich Valley, Alberta Beach, Gunn, and Onoway. Many of these communities and some that have fallen by the wayside were settled near the turn of the 20th century. At that time this area was all part of the North-West Territories and land was very cheap. This was part of a great scheme to populate and civilize the wild west. The sweat and toil of these pioneers resulted in Alberta becoming a province in 1905. Their descendants also worked diligently, and all this effort has resulted in Alberta becoming the innovative, vibrant, and prosperous province that we all enjoy today.

This constituency also enjoys a rich cultural and ethnic diversity along with unique languages and traditions. Perhaps best known is the annual Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage that sees aboriginal and Metis people come from mainly western and northern Canada every summer to participate in religious ceremonies. Lac Ste. Anne is a rather special area. During the summer months the local population spirals as many summer villages are filled with people who prefer to leave the city and live near the lake. This results in a flurry of summer activities for all to enjoy.

Whitecourt-St. Anne has a very high senior population, so proper accommodation and health care are important to all of us. Good geriatric care becomes very important, but at the same time, seniors prefer to remain in or near their hometowns. I'm very proud that our government has recognized the need for new, innovative health facilities in a town like Evansburg and appreciate the importance of the new facility that is scheduled to be built there very soon.

Mayerthorpe is home to an alfalfa plant that is one of the major employers in the community. Like many other alfalfa plants in this province, they are struggling to keep open in spite of the fact that utility costs and other input costs are outstripping revenues. The former Whitecourt-St. Anne MLA and the former agriculture minister worked together to help this industry survive. It is my hope that I can carry on this cause through the standing policy committee on agriculture, to which I have been appointed.

Onoway citizens have related to me the fact that they wish to preserve their school building, which has stood since the early 1900s. Hopefully I can achieve this with some assistance from the province.

I have municipalities in my constituency that are concerned about inadequate supplies of safe drinking water. Others are faced with aged infrastructure that needs new capital. All this puts an ever increasing pressure on the municipal tax roll. I do have to commend our government for reducing the education tax burden on the municipal tax roll by 10 percent this year. It is my hope to convince all of you that we must continue to reduce this education tax burden on local property tax rolls.

I do have concerns about inequities in the property tax roll. Under the present regulations in the School Act municipalities that wish to blend their school taxes are in contravention of the act. Mr. Speaker, I'll use the example of the town of Whitecourt, where two identical homes, side by side, one owned by a Catholic ratepayer and one owned by a public-school supporter, would pay a difference of \$200 in their school requisition. I'm pleased to hear from the Minister of Learning that he is well aware of this situation and in many municipalities across our province. It is my hope that through the Department of Learning, with the support from all of you, we can resolve this inequity soon.

More generally speaking, I am very aware that many of my constituents are very concerned about the cost of gasoline, natural gas, and electricity, and there are ongoing concerns about the costs and directions of both health care and education.

Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned just a few of the many challenges that I know our government will help to resolve to make a positive future for the constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne as well as for

the province of Alberta. I'm excited about working closely with all of you over the next few years. I'm also looking forward to working alongside my colleagues on the third floor of the Annex. We Super Six rookies are all energetic and dedicated and will do our very best not only to maintain but also to enhance the performance and direction of this government.

I will end by again thanking my campaign team as well as the 7,579 voters of Whitecourt-St. Anne who all worked together to put me in this seat. I also want to thank my wife, Liz, and our two sons. They were my champion supporters. To all the constituents of Whitecourt-St. Anne and to all of you in this Assembly, I promise to work honestly, with integrity, and to the best of my abilities.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASZYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly honoured to be able to speak to this House today responding to the Speech from the Throne. It is especially an honour this afternoon because this is my maiden speech. It is the first opportunity to voice concerns on behalf of the people of my constituency, Edmonton-Norwood. On behalf of all Albertans let me say right now that I hold this elected position to be a very special privilege, and in all my actions in the upcoming months and years I will do my very best to listen, to learn, to develop, and to implement ideas that enhance the quality of life in this province.

Let me begin by congratulating all my fellow MLAs on their successful election and re-election. I have not had the chance to meet everyone yet, but from those I have met, I have come to see that we have a strong team that has been sent to Edmonton for this 25th Legislature. I look forward to working with all of you in achieving effective results over the next few years.

I'd also like to make some very important thank-you's. First, I'd like to thank all the people of Edmonton-Norwood for putting their faith in me. I'm especially grateful because I know that Edmonton-Norwood faces many unique challenges and needs a particularly strong voice in the Legislature to bring those concerns forward. I want it to be known that I regard your vote of confidence very seriously and will not fail you. I want all residents of Edmonton-Norwood, including those who may not have supported me during the election, to know that I am approachable and open to ideas. As well, I would like to thank the hon. Lieutenant Governor for her clear and eloquent presentation nearly two weeks ago and the hon. Premier for setting Alberta forth on such a positive agenda and for steering Alberta towards an agenda with tremendous vision and ability over the next few years and in years to come.

Before I address some points from the throne speech directly, I feel it is important to bring some attention to the unique aspects of Edmonton-Norwood. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of my constituency is a visible history. Edmonton-Norwood is not a new area. It's been home to some of Edmonton's most vibrant businesses, cultural centres, and schools almost as long as Edmonton has been a city. A tour of the district would enthrall all visitors with the elaborate architecture of such buildings as Edmonton-Norwood's elementary school, Spruce Avenue school. Just over 25 percent of the buildings in my district predate World War II. It's truly a beautiful district to tour both because of these man-made structures and also because of the many parks that have been put in by city planners over the decades.

A second noticeable characteristic of Edmonton-Norwood is the particular ethnic diversity. Edmonton-Norwood is home to many of Alberta's earlier immigrant populations and their descendants. By

this I refer to the significant populations of people of Ukrainian, German, and British origin that reside in the constituency, but Edmonton-Norwood is also home to a newer wave of immigrants that have arrived in past decades, including many people of Chinese and Asian descent. In addition, Edmonton-Norwood has a sizable aboriginal population. All of these diversified backgrounds make it one of Alberta's most culturally active constituencies.

4:40

A final feature of Edmonton-Norwood that members of the Legislature might find especially interesting is that Edmonton-Norwood is close by. The boundaries of this constituency being not more than 12 city blocks from this Chamber means at least two important things. First, it means that it would be rude of me not to extend an invitation to all my fellow members to join me one day and tour the district, perhaps over lunch or during a break. Second, though it stresses how much Edmonton-Norwood is at the heart of Alberta, the geographic proximity of my constituency serves as a demographic barometer. If Edmonton-Norwood, not a hop, skip, and jump from the Legislature, is facing a problem, then surely the problem is widespread throughout the province. My constituency, then, is worth keeping a close eye on.

What I have said so far, Mr. Speaker, does paint a picture of much of everyday life in my district, a district made up of hardworking people who care about one another. Yet daily life in Edmonton-Norwood is not without significant challenges as well. I'd like to address some of these challenges as they relate to the vision expressed by the throne speech.

In the speech, Mr. Speaker, much attention is given to building safe, strong communities. One of the unfortunate aspects of Edmonton-Norwood is that in many ways it is not safe. This is particularly clear in the prevalence of prostitution that continues in my district. Prostitution brings problems with not just one criminal element. It results in condoms and needles and related drug abuse being left in school grounds. This is disgusting and dangerous and is not an environment in which we should be letting any children in such a prosperous province as Alberta grow up. Prostitution and its associated crime are complex issues that demand innovative solutions.

Certainly the fact that Edmonton-Norwood has such profound difficulties with these issues is related to one superlative ranking that, quite frankly, Edmonton-Norwood would rather not have. Edmonton-Norwood has the lowest average household income in the entire province, standing at just \$31,900 per year. This is a challenge, then, that demands innovative and dramatic solutions, at least one of which I would like to mention here.

The Alberta Avenue Business Association is striving hard to revitalize 118th Avenue with support from the city of Edmonton government, small local businesses, and other stakeholders. The idea is that improving the esthetic looks of that area will attract a line of consumers with different width and depth than current clientele. By changing the demographics of the average consumer, the idea is that the entire atmosphere will change, that a cleaner look will arrive with more reputable businesses, causing amongst other things those who perpetrate the prostitute trade to move on. This is not to say, Mr. Speaker, that this will resolve the issue of prostitution. Prostitution is the world's oldest profession. Its root causes are complex, as are its solutions. Support needs to exist to offer people alternatives to getting into prostitution, and support needs to exist for those who have gotten into it.

Yet the effort on 118th is one step towards improving the community. It is clear, though, that much more is needed to be done to improve the safety of Edmonton-Norwood. Provincial funding for

crime prevention initiatives and mobile community teams responding to crisis situations, as suggested in the throne speech, needs to be given to local police services to target these areas. This must be a priority followed through on.

Another principle stated in the Speech from the Throne was education, that it continues to be a top priority for the government, and that the government will increase funding to school boards to help improve student learning, particularly at the early grade levels. Edmonton-Norwood is one constituency that could benefit enormously. By following through on this commitment, one place that funding could go would be to reinforce and expand the hot lunch programs at schools. Common sense tells us that a child who is hungry simply will not be able to concentrate, and other efforts are wasted on them if food is not provided. Unfortunately, there continues to be many students in my district whose families simply cannot afford to feed them properly. This is an ideal opportunity for the government to step in and make an effective difference.

Another place funding could go would be to reinforce or expand funding for the DARE program. This drug abuse resistance program provides children with the information and skills that they need to live drug free and violence free. It's been proven it makes a difference, but as I've been told many times by my constituents, with a little more funding it could do so much more.

The third point addressed in the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, was to continue to help protect Albertans from high natural gas prices. Well, there is one group in particular in my riding that needs that support, the support to cover energy price increases in general. That group is seniors. Many are living on a fixed income that they earned by being hard working and contributing to Alberta all their lives. Now they are faced with energy bills that have the potential to inflate substantially while their incomes remain fixed. To say the least, we owe our seniors something for what they have given to this province. In the name of equality I suggest that special action be taken for the most vulnerable group.

So crime prevention programs; improve education at schools; protection, especially for seniors, from energy price spikes: these constituent priorities articulated in the throne speech need to be followed through in my constituency.

I would like to add, Mr. Speaker, a little information about myself. Perhaps my outlook on life and my vision of how Alberta might better itself in the coming years is best expressed in a little information from when I was young. I grew up on a small farm outside High Prairie. We farmed little by little. We picked roots and drove tractors and did the whole thing. The machinery we used was older stuff, and eventually we upgraded. When I was 18, I kind of had enough of that and went to work for a fella. I worked for him all summer long. I didn't take any wage. I was driving a Kenworth truck. We kind of had a plan that I was going to own this truck eventually, so slowly I started putting new tires on it, as I was driving for him, and getting this fixed and that fixed.

Fall came along, and he wanted \$25,000 for the truck. I had saved \$10,000 of my own throughout the years, and I already had \$10,000 in equity built into this truck from not drawing wages all summer. So I came home one day with this truck, and I'm peeling off the other guy's name from the door and putting mine on. My dad comes to me and says, "What are you doing?" I said "Well, I'm changing the name on this truck to mine." He said, "Well, you can't do that." I said: "Why not? I own it." "Geez," he said, "you can't just drive for a couple of months and go into business on your own like that." I was 18 years old at the time. I said, "Well, why not?" He said, "You should have come home so we could discuss these things." I said: "Dad, I don't have time. I've got to work in the morning in Red Earth. We have a lease job to pack." He said, "Well, man,

what if this? What if that?" I said: "Well, you know, I don't have a choice. I'm definitely not going to farm any longer. I like this trucking thing."

So that's how I started in it, slowly of course. You know, sometimes you can't buy a job, so I wanted to see what everybody else was doing. This guy had a hoe. Well, okay, how do you get a hoe? Of course, you get into debt and so on and so forth.

Anyway it's a lot about risk, it's a lot about management, it's a lot about planning ahead, and that's what attracted me to the government, how they plan ahead. Different hon. members have told me that the government's vision is 25 to 30 years of planning. That is so important. I mean, that's how you build a province, and you can see the fruits of it. We're coming in halfway through the profits of hardworking Albertans, the hardworking Alberta government, and it's good to see. It's a little bit easier. The momentum is there. You know, that's how we carry on as a government and as a province.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest a new area that this government has not yet touched on so far as I know but is a particular interest of mine and the direction I would like to see the government go in. I'm not trying to bring legislation in, but it's my belief the government should be assisting young people with home ownership. There are many, many hardworking young families that are responsible for paying rent on time. They find it very, very difficult to own a house. It seems like when they save a few dollars, either the insurance is due or it's Christmastime. There's always something chewing away at their little \$2,000 or \$3,000 nest egg. I think we could somehow see a way in the kindness of our hearts and our purse strings to assist these young people with home ownership.

4:50

One initiative: if the payments are made on time over a period of 10 years, forgive 5 percent. It's only \$5,000 on a modest home. Forgive it, and the children can go to and from school saying: yeah, this is our house. The parents can go to and from work saying: this is our house. The benefits would be so enormous that you really couldn't put a dollar figure on it, because social life and social aspects – you really can't put money on those things. It just carries on forever and forever.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, I would just like to thank everybody. I hope that God will be with us all. We continue to seek His guidance and His direction, and with the Almighty looking upon us, we cannot make a mistake.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a new member of the 25th Legislature I'd also like to rise on the floor and give my maiden speech, or my maiden address, as a response to the throne speech. I was very impressed when the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor gave the throne speech, because I also felt her sincerity, which has been remarked upon many times in here. I think the part that touched me the most was as she headed towards the end of her speech, when she said, "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and God bless you all," and then she said, "God bless Alberta." For a moment she was choked up, and that really struck a chord in me, because I thought: she loves this province. And you know what? I love this province. It touched me because I realized that the vision was built upon loving a province, and I thought: what an important thing to have in a Lieutenant Governor. How proud I was at that moment to be in this Legislature.

I'd also like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and your colleagues for the wonderful job that you do. As I was considering who we should

pick for Speaker, I was reminded of the thousands of basketball games that I've attended as a mother of four teenage boys and the many times I've tried to, you know, act with decorum and not get out of control at those games. Then we had an interesting thing happen in our family. My children decided that in order to earn extra income, they would become referees themselves. So they went to referee school, and they learned to be referees. I learned what a different experience it was to sit in a gymnasium as the mother of the referee rather than as the mother of a player and how much I resented those parents who couldn't seem to control themselves at that time. I appreciate the decorum that you guys exhibit in this House and how you help and aid us in trying to get the work done in this House, so thank you very much for that.

You also mentioned in your response to the throne speech that there were two members of this House that were not the first generation to enter this House, and I'm really proud to be one of those. I am the daughter-in-law of the former hon. Member for Cardston, Jack Ady, who was in this House for 12 years. [applause] Thank you.

As you can imagine, on our family vacations the conversation was perhaps a bit different than other people's family vacations and Christmas holidays. As Jack served in this Legislature, many times he would talk about the vision of this Legislature, particularly after the first four years, and how concerned he was with the debt and the deficit that were growing in the province and how he was worried for his children and his grandchildren, whether there would be a future in this province for them and whether they would be able to turn over, you know, the kind of future for them that he was hoping for.

After four years in the Legislature he and his colleagues with vision and, I think, courage advanced an idea and a plan where this Legislature would become fiscally responsible. I think that took courage. A lot of people say today that Alberta is in the position that it's in because they've had high oil and natural gas prices, but I'm here to say that when they began that plan, it was not that way. It was during tougher times. We were just coming out of an energy recession in this province, and I remember it very distinctly, because we were just coming out of university ourselves. I was impressed that they had the courage to stand tough and to do the hard things that needed to be done in this Legislature in order to create the kind of future that Alberta has today. Jack would often say that he was worried and wanted to be able to pass on things to his children and his grandchildren. I particularly was thankful for that since he was talking about my children. I think they've done a fabulous job of that, and I commend the past Legislatures for the position that this province is in today.

Part of the Alberta advantage I think is synonymous with the Calgary-Shaw constituency, and the reason that I think it's synonymous – and I know many of you have stood and talked about how you've come from the best constituency, but I know it's because you've never visited Calgary-Shaw, so I go ahead and let you be a little ignorant in that area.

I'd like to describe to you the Calgary-Shaw constituency. I was reading the maiden speech of Jim Dinning, who was the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw back in 1986. At that time he described the Calgary-Shaw constituency as three subdivisions and a cow pasture. Well, I'm here to tell you that we've come a long way, baby. At this time the Calgary-Shaw constituency is the largest in the province.

Now, I know I have rural colleagues in here, particularly from Whitecourt-St. Anne, that will tell you that they're large. Well, physically they are large. I always say that it only takes me 15 minutes to drive across my constituency from one end to the other, but if you were to drive across that constituency, you would go past

80,000 constituents. When you think that the average size of a constituency is 30,000 people, we're pretty large down south of Fish Creek these days, and we have come a long way, baby.

There are now 15 subdivisions south of Fish Creek park, and if you looked at the city of Calgary and imagined a large provincial park that stretched from the east to the west, we're everything that is south of that park until you hit the city limits, 15 subdivisions with two new subdivisions just being brought on line at this time.

At this point in time, because of the Alberta advantage, this particular constituency has grown by 40 percent since the last election, 40 percent in four years. That's a lot of growth quite quickly. As I was going to the doors of those some 80,000 people, it was amazing to me how supportive they were of this government. In fact, in this last past election – and some say it's because I have the most people that we were the highest in the province, but we also had the highest percentage of voters that supported this government. As I went door to door, they expressed the same concerns as I've heard in this House before. They wanted there to be strong health care. They wanted a good education system. They wanted there to be a future for their children. But the main concern of the Calgary-Shaw constituency – well, there were three. They were infrastructure, infrastructure, infrastructure, all three.

If you were to come to the Calgary-Shaw constituency, you would see wonderful subdivisions and strong families in those subdivisions. You would see very productive people, but they lack just a few things. They lack roads. If you were to come to the Calgary-Shaw constituency, we have basically two major feeders in. One is the Deerfoot and one is, of course, highway 2, or we call it in the city of Calgary the Macleod Trail.

Now, the Deerfoot is on the east side of my constituency, but if you were to come to the west side and see what Macleod Trail can become in the morning, you would understand what gridlock looks like. Basically, we have the problem that we're trying to transport all our kids to school across that park and all the workers across the park with only one major feeder across at this point in time. It's of deep concern to us because – and I always say this – if you were to start to have your chest tighten and your arm go numb at the wrong time of day in the Calgary-Shaw constituency, you would have difficulty trying to access help.

One of the things that's happening to us at this point in time is that they're extending the Deerfoot Trail, which we thank government for, and they're also extending the LRT, which is also very helpful. But at the time they decided to extend the Deerfoot Trail, they thought, well, it would take all the trucks off highway 2 as it headed through the city. By the time that Deerfoot Trail expansion is complete, the same number of cars will now be traveling up Macleod Trail because of the growth. In those subdivisions that I'm a part of, we now have four building caps in place because there is not the infrastructure in place in order to build the homes. So while a lot of people are moving to access the Alberta advantage and the homes are there, we don't have the infrastructure, and it's a deep concern for the residents of Calgary-Shaw.

Another concern, of course, is schooling. If you were to come to Calgary-Shaw – and let's compare it to something like a city the size of Red Deer. We're about 20, 25 percent larger than the city of Red Deer. We're like a city unto ourselves south of Fish Creek park. We have basically seven public schools in that area. If you were to go to Red Deer, I think they have 18 public schools with 20 percent less people in them. So you can begin to see the problem that we're experiencing. We can't all move to Red Deer, so we have to deal with the situation down in Calgary-Shaw.

5:00

Basically, at this point in time we have almost 2,000 high school students that are now trying to get to high school. Now, some would

say that a lot of kids ride the bus to high school, and that's true. It is true, but the reality for our kids is that some of them are on those buses – actually, they take a bus, a train, and a bus to get to their high schools now – for almost an hour and a half. [interjections] It does, and some would say that, well, in rural Alberta people travel far. It is not the distance that we're traveling in miles or kilometres. It's the amount of time it takes to get through traffic that you have to consider when you look at south of Fish Creek, and it is taking these kids a long time. In fact, that's on the good days. On the days when we have a snowfall or we have, God forbid, an accident on Macleod Trail, we're finding that most kids cannot get to school in the morning. They're basically having to turn around and go home and wait till afternoon, as well as those people trying to access employment. We go to immediate gridlock in south of Fish Creek, so again infrastructure problems.

Now, I do have some good news. I do have some good news: they are about to announce an emergency ward down in south Calgary and also, hopefully within the next two months, a site for a new hospital in south Calgary. I'm reminded of a firefighter that I spoke to in Calgary-Shaw who talked about a child who was choking on a hot dog – it plugged the throat – and trying to get up to the Rockyview hospital during heavy traffic times. The child would gasp and gasp and froth at the mouth until he'd pass out, and basically then it would clear the airways enough that he could come to, to choke again as he went on trying to get to the Rockyview hospital. The firefighter said that they were driving the wrong way up 14th Street, anything and everything to try and access help.

The difficulty is not distance. It's the idea that we now are a large city, and there are a lot of people living south of Fish Creek. I again remind you: 80,000 people.

The people that live in Calgary-Shaw constituency are also marvelous people, and I just want to give you three really quick examples. I think of Wilf Mack, not the most patient man – he's 74 years old, and he's often been known to write letters to this Legislature, sometimes not even very complimentary letters – but a man that deeply cares about this province and about government. I think of him because I spent almost eight weeks door-knocking, and he would at 74 years of age door-knock with me up to seven hours a day. It didn't matter if it was 30 below. It didn't matter if there was ice on the roads. Even on those days when I'd say, "I don't know if we can do this," he'd say, "You can do it; we can do it," and he'd pull me along. I'm hoping that at 74 I can walk an hour, let alone seven hours. So Wilf Mack is a great example of the kind of people that live in Calgary-Shaw.

Next I think of the children of Janet Johnstone school, which I visited last week. Seventy-five grade 6ers. They grilled me. They had 22 questions, and if I dared step out of line on those questions, they let me know right away. As I was reading the letters that they sent me afterwards, I thought: you know what? The future of this province is in good hands. These were bright, capable children, very interested in what we're doing in here and wanting to know what lobbying looks like and those types of questions. As one boy wrote and told me: thanks for teaching me about lobbying; now I'll be lobbying my mother for more allowance. So they're very bright, quick children.

The final example of the Calgary-Shaw constituency that I'd like to point out today is the South Calgary High School Committee. It's a committee that's been working for two years trying to bring a high school to south Calgary. They've spent countless hours. I remember some 1,200 letters coming into Infrastructure last year from people in the Calgary-Shaw constituency. In particular, this high school committee has put in countless hours, many of whose children will never see the high school, but that's not why they do it.

They do it because they think it's important, and they value their community and want to see the Calgary-Shaw community thrive.

I would be remiss if I also did not mention my colleagues on the third floor of the Annex. Now, some likened us to bright lights on the third floor. I don't want to say that I'm the 100-watt lightbulb on the third floor and they're 60s or that as the only female amongst five male colleagues I am the thorn amongst the roses, but I do want to say that it is with deep pride and, I have to say, it has been a lot of fun to be able to work with them as we try to figure out our way around here. We've been able to be very supportive of each other. I call them colleagues, and I am proud to be a member of the third floor of the Annex. Thank you.

Last, I'd like to just return to something that my father-in-law said to me about two weeks ago. We were returning home from the swearing in, and I said, "You know, Jack, I've been up there for about three weeks now, and as I've been wandering the halls, I have been just so surprised at how many of my colleagues and the staff of the Legislature truly admired you." I said, "You know, you really

left a good name behind when you left the Legislature." I thought he would, you know, joke, as Jack is often wont to do, but he looked me in the eye and he said: "That's right. I left a good name. See that you do the same." I must say that at that moment I felt the mantle come down on my shoulders.

It is my hope that I will be able to leave a good name in this Legislature, and I look forward to working with you as my colleagues in trying to advance this Alberta vision. I am thankful for the opportunity to stand on this floor today, and I'd just like to echo the Lieutenant Governor when I say: "God bless you all. God bless Alberta. God bless Canada."

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:08 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 23, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/04/23

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

head: **Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that a humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 23: Mr. Stevens]

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise for the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne and give my maiden speech in the Alberta Legislature on behalf of my constituents of Calgary-Bow. Now, many other members have risen in this Assembly to state that their riding is the most beautiful in Alberta, and Calgary-Bow is certainly a place of great beauty, but I'll come back to that later.

Right now through you I wish to inform the hon. members that Calgary-Bow has the most warmhearted, hospitable people in Alberta. During this last election I knocked on about 10,000 doors, and that's nearly every home in the constituency. From Valley Ridge on the outskirts of Calgary, through Greenwood meadows, through Parkdale, through Briar Hill, through St. Andrews Heights, through West Hillhurst, through Hounsfield Heights I found hospitality. I found people that sometimes did not agree with me, but they unerringly were polite and hospitable and kindhearted. So many times I went away just feeling incredibly warmed by these people.

In the centre of Calgary-Bow is the old town of Bowness. Though it was swallowed up by Calgary many years ago, it has retained its small town identity. Mr. Speaker, Bowness is still a town where even the rural members of this Legislature would feel at home. Like with many rural communities the young people sometimes move away to the big city of Calgary, but they find their way back to Bowness to raise their own children. Third and even fourth generation Bownessians are very common.

Bowness is bounded on one side by the beautiful Bow River and on the other side by Paskapoo Slopes. Paskapoo Slopes is a name you will be hearing again in the next while and, I hope, far into the future. Paskapoo Slopes is an expanse of wilderness that we can raise our eyes to from our kitchen windows, from our backyards, from our front yards, while we're walking down the street. That strip of nature enriches our everyday life with its clean snow of winter, its first gentle blush of green in the spring, its lush green followed by its breathtaking, flamboyant display of yellows, reds, oranges, and greens in the fall.

Mr. Speaker, those hon. members who represent rural constituencies and thus have the advantage of being surrounded by nature as a common occurrence may find our passion for our few remaining wild places near our homes difficult to relate to. Those hon. members from Edmonton, who have wisely protected most of their river escarpment, may look down upon Calgary, raise their eyebrows and say: well, duh. For the daily quality-of-life issues alone these slopes would warrant protection. Paskapoo Slopes are best appreci-

ated from Montgomery, Bowness, Greenwood village, and Valley Ridge, but they're also viewed from Scenic Acres, Tuscany, Arbour Lake, Ranchlands, Silver Springs, Hawkwood, Varsity, Country Hills, Patterson Heights, Strathcona, and Artists View, and by all travelers entering or leaving Calgary by the main western access on the Trans-Canada highway.

For all these tens of thousands of people Paskapoo Slopes is like a park in the sky enriching their everyday life, but Paskapoo Slopes is also an accessible wilderness park right within the city. It's a natural area that includes ravines, gullies, streams, springs, glades of aspen, balsam poplar, dogwood, and riverine tall shrub. The slopes are also home to deer, small mammals, coyotes, and a large variety of migratory and breeding birds. Not only is it a home for the animals, but it's also a key wildlife corridor within the city.

Mr. Speaker, most of us members here are familiar with Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, which is UNESCO's world heritage site. At last count there have been found more than a hundred archeological sites similar to Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump on the Paskapoo Slopes, right within the city of Calgary. These archeological finds date back as far as 8,000 years ago. I just checked the historical time line and found that the first habitation at Stonehenge was only 5,000 years ago. The 8,000-year-old relics at Paskapoo Slopes are quite literally older than the pyramids. What an incredible treasure.

Now, imagine a series of nature trails winding through the trees, bush, ravine, and grasslands of Paskapoo Slopes. Intersperse these trails with discreet interpretive centres that take the visitor back thousands upon thousands of years into Alberta's past: days of the mighty buffalo and of whom and what? We don't know all the stories that these archeological sites will tell. These interpretative centres could display archeological evidence from the very spot that a person was standing upon.

Mr. Speaker, our esteemed Premier Ralph Klein is an honorary chief of both the Siksika and Tsuu T'ina Indian nations on the edges of Calgary. For these peoples the Paskapoo Slopes are more than just a heritage to be proud of. They are much more personal. These slopes can provide the clues to tell the long-lost stories of their ancestors. To ravage these sites would be a personal affront to their very identities.

Time is of the essence. On December 5 Calgary city hall approved residential development on 164 acres of Paskapoo Slopes. Development has not yet proceeded. Can we afford to provide the day-to-day quality of life that Paskapoo Slopes gives to tens of thousands of surrounding residents? Can we afford to provide the wilderness experience to people right within Calgary? Can we afford to continue to provide a wildlife corridor within the city? Can we afford to respect the history of our native peoples? Will the additional tourist dollars coming into Alberta from all over the world balance the equation? These are some of the questions that we will be asked to address over the next few months, and I believe that the members of the Alberta Legislature will say yes. The Paskapoo Slopes is Alberta's heritage, a pride to us all.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour to deliver my maiden speech to this Assembly, and I look forward to further opportunities to bring forward to this body the issues of my constituents and the concerns of all Albertans.

Thank you, all hon. colleagues and Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks for this opportunity to respond to the throne speech and to address the Legislature for the first time outside of question period.

I'm delighted to serve as MLA for Edmonton-Riverview. There are many people to thank for my election. I'll begin in an unlikely way by thanking the Premier for taking a keen interest in my political views and personally encouraging me to run as an MLA. In 1997, in response to the success of my first book, *Shredding the Public Interest*, the Premier announced to the media that if Kevin Taft thinks anyone supports his views, he should try and run for office. Well, it turns out that many people do support my views, and as a result I stand here today.

My election success owes a great deal to an amazing band of campaign supporters who worked on my behalf in Edmonton-Riverview. Close to 500 people actively supported my campaign with time and money. People from every corner of the constituency came forward, many of them working every day of the campaign, some of them taking time off work, many of them complete strangers coming together to work in the common cause of democracy, forming friendships and establishing commitments that will last for years. I owe them more than I can say. They placed a trust and confidence in me that is humbling, and I will not betray that trust. I also want to thank Linda Sloan, the Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Riverview these past four years, for representing the constituency so well and making my election easier.

8:10

I can think of no greater privilege than representing Edmonton-Riverview in the Legislature. It has been my home for 40 years, since before there was a Whitemud freeway or a Fox Drive, since the time when the University of Alberta farm was truly out in the countryside. I know parts of this constituency with the intimacy that comes from childhood back-alley games of hide-and-seek and family picnics in the river valley.

Edmonton-Riverview is truly a remarkable constituency. At its heart is the valley of the North Saskatchewan River, which flows through the centre of the constituency. On the banks of the river are some of the loveliest urban parks anywhere and, of course, the University of Alberta. The U of A is one of Canada's elite universities, and I can say from direct experience, as someone who has studied both there and at one of Britain's top universities, that the University of Alberta holds its own on the international stage. On my street alone there are three U of A faculty members who are national winners of the 3M teaching excellence award, Canada's most prestigious award for university teaching. The University of Alberta is a great resource to this province, and I will be working hard to strengthen it further and ensure that it's accessible to all deserving Albertans, regardless of income.

Not to be overlooked is Grant MacEwan College, which has a campus in Edmonton-Riverview and makes a great contribution to the lives of Albertans.

Edmonton-Riverview is also home to some of Canada's pre-eminent hospitals, including the University of Alberta hospital, the Cross Cancer Institute, and the Stollery children's centre. These facilities and their terrific staff serve all of northern Alberta and often far beyond and are frequently in the news for their groundbreaking research.

The voters of Edmonton-Riverview live mostly in neighbourhoods that define the notion of healthy urban communities. Peppered with schools and community halls, parks and shops, Edmonton-Riverview is a place where people care deeply about each other, their community, their city, their province, and their country. These voters supported me for a reason. They want a strong voice of opposition in the Legislature, opposition with a capital "O," strong, tough, and pointed. They want good questions asked, questions that reflect their concerns and values.

For the past several months I've been listening carefully to what people in Edmonton-Riverview and people across Alberta have been saying about politics. Here are some of the things I have heard, messages which will underline my approach to serving as an MLA. For example, the sum of Alberta is greater than the 3 million people who live here. Alberta is more than an economy; it's a society. There can be too much government, and there can be too little government. The marketplace can be endlessly productive, but a market economy cannot look after everything, as we are learning so clearly with electricity deregulation. Albertans believe in free enterprise with heart. Good government is well within the realm of human capability; it is not a contradiction in terms. It's better to outthink than to outspend, as my colleague Dr. Massey has said.

Alberta's democracy is not a gated community. The processes of the Legislature are here for reasons and should be respected. For all its shortcomings the Legislature is a better place to conduct public business than backrooms or boardrooms or barrooms. Blowing up hospitals after one election and building new ones just before the next is stupid. Starve-and-binge funding is a perfect way to keep public services in constant crisis and a guaranteed way to waste resources. If some people choose to spend a hundred dollars for one loaf of bread, as you can in Edmonton-Riverview, it's their privilege, but if children are going to elementary school hungry, it is our problem, and it must be corrected not because it's a good investment in human resources but because it's the right thing to do.

Women and men are equally valuable. Health care workers are as important as investment bankers. School teachers can change the world, and they often do. By helping each other, we can all be better off. Alberta's not a food chain. It's not a real-life version of *Survivor*. At the end of the day we want every Albertan to be here to survive and to flourish. These statements signify some of the most important values that I believe the voters of Edmonton-Riverview want me to bring to the Legislature.

In an Assembly where the government members hold such a large majority, well earned, the opposition members have a special responsibility. It's a great responsibility and it is also, I think, a noble one, the essential responsibility of parliamentary democracy, the responsibility to hold the government accountable, to speak for the large number of Albertans who did not vote for this government, to make the Premier and his cabinet ministers uncomfortable by asking the genuinely difficult questions, and ultimately to put our shoulders to the wheel of change to bring a fresh start and even a new government to Alberta. As the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview I am proud to stand with my colleagues and embrace these responsibilities. We will make a difference. Just watch us.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to address this Assembly for the first time. I congratulate you on being re-elected as Speaker of the House. I commend your initiative in taking steps to inform new members of the proceedings of this Assembly. It has been extremely helpful. It is with admiration that I observe the manner in which you conduct the challenging role of being Speaker. Your office's contribution to the enlightenment of students through Youth Parliament and the manner that you raise pertinent issues has great impact on the citizens of Alberta. I appreciate your valuable input.

Mr. Speaker, it's always a pleasure to be in the presence of a wonderful lady, Her Honour Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor of this province. The eloquence and the sincerity with which the Speech

from the Throne was delivered was inspiring. The throne speech reflects issues that Albertans expressed during the recent campaign and gives confidence that this government intends to address their concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to praise our Premier for his commitment to the people of Alberta. His ability to stay on task despite formidable pressure is a sign of a strong leader. Our Premier understands the direction that Albertans have given and will guide us towards a positive future for Alberta.

Congratulations to the new and returning MLAs who sit before me. We come from different backgrounds, different places, and have differing views, but we're all driven by a common mandate of making Alberta a better place for all. I am excited to be part of this process and honoured to have the opportunity to work alongside each and every member.

Mr. Speaker, it is important for me to also recognize and thank those government members who represented the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency before me, the most recently retired, Mr. Paul Langevin, and the late Mr. John Drobot, who was also my neighbour, both good men who gave many years of excellent service to their community and this great province.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, by way of introduction I would like to give some personal background. I am a third-generation Albertan of Ukrainian and Romanian descent. I farm the land that my grandparents relocated to in the 1940s, east of Stony Lake, situated between Elk Point and St. Paul, bordering the North Saskatchewan River. My first language was Ukrainian. Together with my wife and three children I operate a cow/calf, grain, and forage farm. With two children presently in university and one who lives away from the farm to play hockey, our family life is in transition, and the future of our generational farm is ever present on our minds.

My children are appreciative of the opportunity they had growing up on the farm. To witness the rebirth of life every spring is a heartwarming experience that brings us in touch with nature. The responsibilities and the hardships that are incurred with this lifestyle are excellent training and character builders. Our ties to the land are very strong. The legacy of stewardship of the land was instilled in me through my grandfather. Treat the land with care, nurture it, and it will take care of you. Respect the land; it cannot be fooled.

Living in a rural community has offered us unique opportunities. Our family benefited through involvement in 4-H and minor sports. I enjoyed coaching junior and high school basketball and minor hockey. My interest in youth was expanded during my tenure as a school trustee. My commitment to the rural community increased during my years as county councillor. My focus is now expanding beyond the borders of that county.

I would like to highlight my constituency, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Mr. Speaker. I believe I am not alone in stating that I represent the best and most unique constituency in our province. It takes three and a half hours to drive from Frog Lake First Nation on the southeast, close to the Saskatchewan border, to the community of Owl River, north of Lac La Biche on the northwest boundary.

The constituents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul are a diverse group of people, rich in culture and broad in occupational scope. Fostering and preserving cultural heritage is very much alive through the region, as exemplified by various cultural celebrations and museums. Although the region is diverse, the ability to work together has proven successful to the benefit of the communities that take the initiative. Many recreational and cultural facilities have been built with community co-operation and volunteer labour. Ambulance service is maintained through municipal co-operation and support.

Volunteers staff the fire departments that serve our towns and rural areas. Communities work together to enhance the quality of life within the region.

Mr. Speaker, health care and medical services are essential to the residents of rural communities. Opportunity for quality health care should be accessible to rural people, as it is to urban people. The burden of transportation and accommodation for patients who need to travel great distance needs consideration. Keeping our senior citizens in their home community is a priority. The waiting list at Sunnyside Manor seniors' lodge in St. Paul is currently 68, even though additions were made only two years ago. The residents can move elsewhere in the province, but this means that they will be isolated from their families. Distance is a detrimental factor.

Education is very important to the constituents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul. In 1994, when the Minister of Education announced that the structure of school boards had to be changed, St. Paul region led the way. Protestant, Catholic, and county school boards united to form a unique governing board in Alberta, St. Paul education regional division No. 1. Cultural and religious identities are determined at the individual community school. Sparsity and distance funding are major concerns in our rural schools. There is also a continuing demand for modernization and upgrading.

Blue Quills First Nations College and Portage College provide upgrading and postsecondary education in our area. Recent initiatives involving collaborating programs with other postsecondary institutions are taking positive strides in accommodating student needs.

There is a demand for skilled labour in this constituency. The gas and heavy oil industry continues to expand. The largest salt plant in western Canada is located at Lindbergh. The logging and forestry industry is strong in the northern part of the constituency. Alberta-Pacific is a major industry that employs and subcontracts a significant labour force. They are leading the industry in techniques in extraction and reforestation.

Agriculture continues to be the prime industry in the region. Livestock generates the largest revenue of various farm enterprises. There are over 1 million cattle in northeastern Alberta. Resourceful alternative livestock farmers are visible in the area, with bison and elk being prevalent. The challenge to us as politicians is to support the development of value-added products. The agriculture centre of excellence in St. Paul conducts research on grains, pulse crops, and herb and spice varieties.

Historically the area has been a significant grain producer. The first wheat grown in western Canada in commercial quantities was at the Lac La Biche mission. Foreign subsidies, rising transportation and input costs threaten grain production in the area today. The abandonment of rail lines, the closure of prairie elevators, and the prolonged drought have put tremendous pressure on the grain farmers and farm communities. The landscape is changing. Stewardship of the land must be managed to control the infestation of noxious weeds and rodents. As my grandfather said, "Take care of the land."

With the trend towards factory farms, environmental stress will increase. The recent closures of railways has increased pressure on the highways. Industrial activity needs to be supported by strong infrastructure. Transportation routes continually need upgrading due to increased traffic transporting heavy oil, logs, and agricultural products. Road safety continues to be an issue to our residents.

Although the loss of the railway causes considerable grief, something quite positive has arisen in the tracks from Heinsburg to Elk Point. A 34-kilometre Iron Horse trail was started with a delegation of snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, walkers, horse-back riders, wagon trailers, ATVs, and adjacent landowners. In

conjunction with the municipality an association was formed to manage and maintain the trail for recreational use. Other groups are working with the municipalities and adjacent landowners to extend the trail west to Waskatenau.

One of the most attractive features in Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency is the multitude of lakes. Commercial fishing and recreational angling are active pursuits. There is a concern about the depleting fish stocks due to various contributing factors. One area I feel needs to be addressed is the control of the cormorant. Incentives such as the Vincent Lake working group are making sure people who live and participate in recreational activities around the lake are working together so that the future generations will have a healthy lake to enjoy. It is an approach that symbolizes a major strength in my constituency: people working toward a common goal for the community at large. The residents of the area have showed they're willing to take a proactive approach to protecting their environment for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, the Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency has lots to offer in the way of tourism. There are lakes, campgrounds, trails, rodeos, agricultural fairs, jamborees, and cultural events to be enjoyed. Plan to sample our community's hospitality in the future, and I guarantee you will be impressed.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the residents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency for their support and their faith in my abilities to represent them in the Alberta Legislature. I am truly honoured to be here, and I thank you all.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

8:30

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this evening on behalf of constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry and provide some thoughts and insights with respect to the Speech from the Throne. Each year we look forward to the proposals put forward by the Lieutenant Governor in that document. Albertans also look forward to the throne speech. They look at it in terms of being a very important document setting the direction for our province for at least the next year and often for much longer terms than that. They look for thoughts and ideas that will reflect some of the issues important to them. There is also an expectation on their part that the speech will provide some leadership from the government in terms of some of the new direction and provide some new ways of addressing challenges and a plan for achieving their success.

The throne speech talks about the government's vision for this province. All Albertans are happy to see that as a province we will soon be debt free. This part of the vision is good. But I was also struck by the corporate focus of this budget and the lack of a social focus on certain segments of our population. I also noted that great attention was placed on economic development in this province. There was not a strong emphasis placed on the protection of our environment. The problem is that with their attention to the economic and corporate agenda, they are not dealing with the job that government in this province or any other province has the responsibility to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, there are sections in this throne speech that imparted some of the concerns that I have identified. I don't think it is a conscious effort on the part of this government to neglect people, to see the differences and distinctions, to see the divisions grow larger despite our positive economic situation. I think it has happened to some extent because they tend to think that while the province is experiencing good times, all of its people will share equally in that success.

All Albertans want to share in the abundance of Alberta. Recent announcements indicate that our provincial surplus could reach \$10 billion this year, allowing us to pay off the debt sooner than we had expected. If we are to take full advantage of our windfall profits while they last, then the plan must be set now and not only talked about in vague terms in the throne speech.

I recently had the opportunity to attend the AAMD and C convention in Edmonton. In one of the sessions participants were divided into groups and asked to identify their greatest concerns. The number one concern of all groups was the protection of our air and water quality in this province. These people fully realize the importance and long-term advantages of a healthy environment. In the throne speech under the heading A Clean Environment I read that

the government of Alberta will strengthen its reputation as a leader in environmental issues with a number of new initiatives to enhance environmental stewardship and ensure that economic growth is responsible and sustainable.

I refer back to my earlier statement on differences and distinctions. On further examination of the above quote is the distinction that our environment in this province will be considered only after the economic growth and sustainability is considered.

Recent announcements continue to support the notion that our environment is not a priority of this government. We see the province indicating that more coal-fired generating plants will be brought on-line within the next five years. We see where some industry would like to switch their gas-fired plants to coal-fired. We hear of applications by electrical transmission companies to build export lines to the south, yet we do not see a plan or commitment for the conservation of energy in this province.

I welcome the commitment by the government to introduce a new policy dealing with intensive livestock operations. On a recent tour to southern Alberta we had the opportunity to visit a number of intensive livestock operations, and I was quite struck by how those operators realize the importance of the environmental concerns in the operation of their feedlots. Also at the AAMD and C convention, Mr. Speaker, they want to see regulations concerning the intensive livestock operations in this province, and they also want their local governments to be in control of land use and planning.

In the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, I was also quite struck by our continued commitment to the north/south trade corridor. Now, one of the great advantages of this corridor will certainly be a safety aspect, that we will have a twinned highway all the way to the north. This will also facilitate the movement of exports to the United States and Mexico, and I think we should also note that our exports to Mexico from 1996 to 1999 increased a whopping 640 percent, from \$8.9 million to \$66.1 million. As well, the twinning of this highway will increase the amount of tourism to the north, and we have to respect that since tourism is our fourth largest industry in this province. Yet it still outlines the great problem that we do have in tourism, and that is getting tourists who enter our province at gateway locations to travel north. For example, for someone that enters at our southern border, it would take them roughly 12 hours of driving to get to Peace River. Certainly one of the hurdles we can help our northern providers of tourism with is to have affordable flights in this province.

Another thing that we have here in this province, Mr. Speaker, is the development of a large greenhouse industry. Now, we know that energy costs are certainly eating up those profits, and this is one of the hurdles that this industry will have in continuing to grow in this province. As well, one of the drawbacks of this huge north/south trade corridor is the fact that cheaper products from Mexico and the southern United States will be able to come into Alberta, thus

putting much pressure on these already sensitive markets because of their high energy costs.

Another area that I want to refer to in my speech this evening, Mr. Speaker, is health care in this province. I was very happy to see in the throne speech that we are going to have a commitment to access health services, illness prevention, and effective regional governance, but I still want further clarification in this city of the Legislature on what this government means by access to health services. Is this access to private facilities paid for with public funds? Does that mean that under this particular plan we are going to see more and more private health care facilities in this province? We have seen from 1993 to 1999 a 10 percent increase in the use of private facilities in this province, and I don't see anything in this throne speech which tells us we are going to continue to provide our public health care system with adequate funding to keep it operational, and this is totally not understandable when we currently have hospital beds and operating facilities in our public facilities which remain closed at this time.

I want to continue on the throne speech and talk a little bit about education. We had certainly a number of recent announcements which indicated that we are going to have an increase of funding in education. This is certainly welcome news and a long time coming. Increased funding will certainly allow us to decrease the size of classes in this province, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately, we still have what is called a utilization formula.

Now, in northeast Edmonton we have a booming population. We have a huge amount of residential development. Our schools in that sector of the city are well above the 85 percent utilization rate that has been set out by this government, yet we have areas of land which have been set aside for school development that continue to remain vacant even though the need is there. Certainly I would like to see in this session of the Legislature that we at least modify the utilization formula so that when we have overcrowded schools, such as we have in the northeast sector of Edmonton, we can use the utilization rate as a sector formula and not one for the total city.

8:40

As well, we have in this province, Mr. Speaker, a shortage of teachers and health care workers, but this is because of lack of planning. It is not something that we didn't know of. All the indicators were that we were in this position. What disturbs me most about this is that we see where recent raises in this province to our health care sector workers and anticipated raises to our teachers are coming in, and what is going to happen here is that we have the Premier saying: well, these raises will allow us to attract teachers and health care workers from other provinces. Why was the planning not there five years ago so that we opened up our educational institutions to train the necessary people to run those facilities

in this province? We had a huge announcement about an increase of MRIs in this province, yet we don't have the trained personnel to operate those. I say that when we have those types of situations happening in this province, it certainly is lack of planning on the part of this government.

As well, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this speech certainly does raise distinctions and divisions in this province, and I can't think of any other group where these are raised and where the divisions are growing than with the people that are the most vulnerable. We talk about people that are on AISH. We talk about our seniors. I read through the throne speech on many occasions and certainly didn't see any programs directly related to our seniors. I also didn't see any legislation or any mention of how we are going to set standards in all nursing homes that cater to our seniors in this province.

Now, then, something that we hear in this Assembly quite often in this new session is that we have to think outside the box. I think that is a very good statement, but I think when we think outside the box, what we have to do is look at who is going to benefit. Certainly I think that we have to return more to a social agenda where we can help these people who are the most vulnerable in our society.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are some of the challenges that I think we face as legislators in this 25th session of the Legislature. I hope that over the course of the next four years we will be able to reduce the divisions and the distinctions between all members of this province.

In closing, I would like to thank the constituents of Edmonton-Glenarry for once again giving me the opportunity to represent them here in this Legislature. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that we adjourn debate on this particular item for this evening.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the fact that we have such a heavy agenda tomorrow, when we're going to be hearing the address from the Minister of Finance and the budget for this province, and the need to prepare ourselves to digest it, I would move that we adjourn for the evening and return at 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 8:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 24, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition signed by dozens of Edmontonians from every constituency in the city urging the government "to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation" suit.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, do you have one?

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday to this House regarding Stockwell Day's defamation litigation now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented yesterday regarding Stockwell Day's defamation litigation be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow, Wednesday, April 25, I will be moving that written questions as well as motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm giving oral notice of motion.

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Be it further resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Bill 203

Residential Care Housing Committee Act

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Residential Care Housing Committee Act.

Bill 203 will ensure the protection of vulnerable and adult Albertans living in residential care homes.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table with the Assembly today five copies of the 1999-2000 annual report as prepared by the Alberta provincial board that is responsible for persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD as we so frequently refer to it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today five copies of a letter from the Opposition House Leader pursuant to the House leaders' agreement wherein she designates Health and Wellness for Wednesday evening, May 2; Learning for Thursday afternoon, May 3; human resources for Wednesday evening, May 9; Children's Services for Thursday afternoon, May 10; and Seniors for Thursday afternoon, May 17, as the designated departments for supply consideration on those days.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of an article from the *Globe and Mail* dated April 24. This article is by Sinclair Stevens, the minister of regional industrial expansion in the Mulroney government. This article is titled A Police State in the Making, with the disturbing conclusion that "the police action in Quebec City, under orders from our government, was a provocation itself – an assault on all our freedoms."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from the Alberta Craft Council giving a number of statistics underlining the funding deficit that the organizations in Alberta are under regarding funding from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, a very well-written letter.

The second tabling is from a constituent, Mr. Bill Daly, who is striving to provide some alternatives for seniors regarding taxes, and he has done up a graph.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table five copies of 152 letters received from people across Canada and the United States who want the provincial government to protect the Castle-Crown wilderness area in southwestern Alberta from industrial activity and motorized recreation.

I would also like to table a copy of a letter written by Nancy MacBeth to the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition responding to their letter-writing campaign and supporting a review of all industrial and commercial development in Alberta special places.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this national Volunteer Week I'm pleased to introduce on your behalf, Mr. Speaker, special guests who are seated in your gallery this afternoon. As you know, within our Legislative Assembly ceremonial and security services and visitor services branch we have volunteers who assist with school groups, educational programs, train new recruits, and work special events. Our guests today are Jean Yates with nine years of service, Doreen O'Callaghan with seven years of service, and collectively with three years of service are Myrna Grimm, Rita Alfrey, and Jeanne Siu. I'd also like to mention two individuals who are unable to be here this afternoon: Clive Lomax with six years of service and Pat Foster with three years of service. I'd ask those that are in your gallery now to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you a fine constituent of Calgary-Buffalo and a friend of mine. Mr. Bob Lang is a respected consultant in the oil industry in Calgary and is also president of the Cliff Bungalow-Mission Community Association. I'd ask Bob to stand and the Assembly to provide a traditional warm welcome to Mr. Lang.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce today a very special lady who actually has traveled from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to be here today. She certainly calls Alberta her second home, but she's here to listen to the budget speech later on this afternoon by the Minister of Finance. She is an educator. She has a very active part in Alberta as well, but it also just so happens she's here to verify that I was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and tell my father. My sister is here today, and I'd like to introduce Debra, who is visiting from Nova Scotia, and to say: yes, Dad, I am in the Alberta Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a delight for me to introduce a number of guests to you and through you to the House. The first guest I'd like to introduce is a wonderful constituent of mine. His name is Rabbi Ari Enkin. He is a spiritual leader to a congregation of over 500 people. He is a very active and

positive force in our constituency. He also happens to have a great sense of humour. I'd like him to stand in the gallery and be welcomed.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 56 students from Meyonohk elementary school in Edmonton-Mill Woods. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Pei and Mrs. Rother and parent helpers Mrs. Hynes, Ms Schenk, and Mrs. McGregor. They are in the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

MR. NORRIS: With apologies, Mr. Speaker, I have two more. Not many, just two more. I'll be brief.

I would like to introduce to you and through you two guests of mine who are seated in the members' gallery. They are constituents of mine, Victor Horseman and Paulette Neigel. Both are labour market program directors for the Oteenow human resources aid and training society. They are involved with aboriginal urban labour market employment services. Would they please rise and be recognized.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my hon. colleague from Wainwright, it's an absolute delight to recognize two gentlemen who just slinked in, my brothers Tony and Mike, who are a fine economic driving force in the Wainwright area. I'd like them to stand up and please be recognized today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all of my colleagues in the House two gentlemen who are seated in the public gallery observing today's proceedings of the Legislature. They are Mr. Kenneth Heathfield, now retired, former publisher, and Mr. Alex McEachern, a former Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and now a much-valued resource person volunteer to our caucus. When Mr. McEachern is not spending time assisting our caucus, he is busy attempting to best Mr. Heathfield on the tennis courts. I would ask both of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Robert Fisher. Mr. Fisher is a former constituent of Edmonton-Glengarry and has advocated on behalf of many Albertans in regards to social issues. He is seated in the public gallery, and with your permission I would ask that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise before this Assembly and recognize Dr. Lou Francescutti, director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research. Dr. Francescutti and his organization play a vital role in injury prevention and awareness in the province of Alberta. Over 1,300 Albertans die each

year from injuries, and 360,000 visit emergency rooms to have their injuries treated. In an effort to combat these statistics, the Centre for Injury Control and Research has launched a provincewide advertising and promotional video to raise awareness of injury in Alberta, which we are pleased to be supporting by funding this important initiative through our regional health authorities. I would ask Dr. Francescutti to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Child and Family Services Authorities

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Sakaw-Askiy child and family services authority March newsletter indicates that that authority is in a deficit position and will have to institute cost containment strategies. For a government to run billion dollar surpluses while authorities serving children are forced into deficits is an appalling state of affairs. My questions are to the Premier. With the government in a billion dollar surplus position, why are children's authorities forced to curtail services to children and families in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I thought our surplus position was better than a billion, but we'll see later this afternoon.

Relative to the specifics of the question, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The child and family services authorities are not allowed to run deficits. Simply put, when we come to the year-end, where some have shortages and others may have surpluses, according to the funding allocation the children's authority co-chairs and CEOs sit and determine with ministry staff how reallocations can be made. We make every effort to ensure that the best interest of the child is maintained.

Over these past two years we have found a significant increase in the number of handicapped children's services that are delivered throughout the province. We are working very hard to make sure that that funding allocation for each authority recognizes both the demographic as well as the very specific needs of every child. Mr. Speaker, in doing so, we're also working with a number of partners in the community, the Ministry of Learning, the people that are at the field level who are working in schools and with school boards, and with municipal councils through family and community support services.

Mr. Speaker, this is still relatively a new ministry, with local authorities doing their very best to make the allocations and develop the interauthority protocols that recognize not only what the children's and communities' needs are but how we can best serve those communities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how many children and families needing help will be rejected when cost cutting is a major criterion for workers?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are no children that are rejected. There are no children that are given a no services ap-

proach. We are not cutting anybody to the extent that there cannot be services delivered for children. We're trying to get a cost-effective administrative structure in place in all the authorities. We're working with the agencies that have been assigned delivery of service. The answer is: no child will lose. We will have to make reallocations. We are doing that, and we have added significant additional funds since the formation of this ministry. I'll be pleased to discuss that more fully after the budget is tabled later today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister might want to read the newsletter.

How is the department's responsibility to children served when limiting the number of children and families served and cutting services to clients become the goal?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to the attention of this House something that I find a bit of a dichotomy but very interesting. When I was first elected in 1997, there were 42,000 children born in Alberta, and at that time there were considerably less children that were part of the child welfare system. There were probably somewhere between 8,000 and 11,000 given certain months. Today with 36,000 plus but not 37,000 born last year, we have over 13,000 children as part of the child welfare caseload.

As such, we've added staff. We've improved conditions and workload standards. We've added considerable support at the community level, where they need it. We are meeting our challenges. We are not reducing. In fact, if anything, with the growth of handicapped children's services we are identifying and assessing the needs of those children, putting them in touch with the agencies as needed.

Mr. Speaker, although from time to time a newsletter may stress some of the things that are not working as well as they might, provincially we are doing better than ever to look after our children in need.

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

Child Care Workers

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Children's Services. Will the minister confirm, please, that she has recently received on her desk an important KPMG report, prepared by Mr. Jordan Cleland, a former executive assistant to the current Minister of Learning, which finds among other things that day care workers in Alberta are the lowest paid in Canada?

1:50

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, from time to time information comes out in a fashion that does not serve anybody as well as it might. Simply put, what we have been attempting to do is find out just what the state of the art is in terms of the dollars that are paid and the issues that are created in communities with climbing enrollments in day cares and issues that are created where there are higher costs, such as in Calgary and in Fort McMurray.

Mr. Speaker, much of what is used as the baseline data is from a You Bet I Care study in 1998, that cited that our child care workers were among the lowest paid, but it also failed to note that although we have a 44 percent turnover rate, there was a 40 percent vacancy rate in the day cares in Alberta. Simply put, some of the day cares were not operating in an economic fashion.

Many of the day care providers tell me that training programs are important for beyond level 1, which we do mandatory training for, to training programs for level 2 and level 3, that if in fact we are going to look at some of the solutions which are being brought forward in co-operation with the child care network and day care providers, we cannot simply look at one circumstance to aid and approve the conditions for children in day cares.

Mr. Speaker, beyond that, one of the things that I suggested when we were discussing this with the group is that if we are going move in terms of any type of additional return to the day care provider, we have to be sure that it would be targeted in such a way as to achieve the results that we want for children and to provide for strong workers and strongly trained staff.

MR. MacDONALD: Will the minister, again, table the Cleland report for the benefit of the entire Assembly? Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, this is interesting, because I have day care workers on that committee that do not believe that the time is right to table that until such time . . . [interjection] Excuse me.

That report is not yet finished. That report has not yet been viewed by some of the day care providers themselves. That report has not been viewed by my colleagues. That report is still in draft form, and although I personally wanted to see whether we could release it, they cautioned me that to do that would not be wise until they were absolutely confident that it should be released. In due course that report will be released.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. Given that all hon. members of this Assembly since 1995 have received a 13 percent pay increase, does the minister agree that child care workers in this province deserve a compensation increase now?

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about the child care workers. They are workers that are employed by employers that are businesspeople that run their own establishments. They are private agencies. This government is not in the position of supplementing private businesses. We are in the position of trying and doing our best to improve the lot for children and high-risk children that are in day care, but that does not preclude us looking at other options rather than looking at supplementing salaries of day care workers.

THE SPEAKER: The third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Postsecondary Student Housing Costs

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents are students living at the University of Alberta, and they are concerned about reports that they may be facing a 15 percent increase in student housing costs. This is of course in addition to increases in tuition costs. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Will the minister confirm that student rents at the U of A residences are going up to cover the increased costs of electricity, even though the government has issued utility rebates to the U of A students' housing services?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I can neither confirm nor deny the member's detailed question, but I'm more than willing to accept a letter or piece of correspondence from him asking any questions that he may have with respect to anything that would be appropriate to the Ministry of Energy.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the Minister of Learning. In principle is he in favour of low-cost housing for university students?

THE SPEAKER: Hold it. The question period is the time for the seeking of information with respect to government policy, not for the seeking of opinion.

Hon. member, please proceed with your third.

DR. TAFT: Okay. Will the minister take steps or is he planning to take steps to ensure that university student housing costs do not rise faster than inflation?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The university housing costs are something that are run on a cost recovery basis. As the costs go up for the particular student housing, the university assesses the costs and builds the fees in accordingly.

In response to the first question with regards to the energy, there are energy rebates that have been made available to the universities. There are continuing energy rebates for the universities. The universities have more than the ability to utilize them for their own buildings as well as student housing buildings. How they pass that saving on to their students is up to the autonomous board of governors of the University of Alberta.

MR. SMITH: I did want to add to the Minister of Learning's comment about how the students as individuals will also be receiving the second installment of the \$300 energy rebate cheque.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Coal-fired Power Production

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech under debate in this House states that the government will try to get a handle on electricity prices by streamlining the approval process for new generation projects. The government's deregulation scheme first brought Albertans skyrocketing prices. Now it may lead to more strip mining and more air pollution. In recent months three new coal-fired generating plants have been proposed for the Wabamun, Genesee, and Brooks areas. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister please explain what parts of the approval process will be eliminated in this mad rush to bring new coal-fired generating plants onstream? Is it the requirement for full public hearings, or is it the requirement to conduct a comprehensive environmental impact assessment?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. I'd like to assure the member and all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, that no part – no part – of the process will be eliminated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister assure Albertans in clear language that any new coal-fired electricity generating plants will undergo a full review, including public hearings with funding for affected intervenors, and a comprehensive environmental impact assessment and that no parts of the approval process will be short-circuited?

DR. TAYLOR: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member and all Albertans that the process will be fully public, with opportunities for public input either in written form or at public meetings.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Premier. Will the Premier make a commitment that a joint federal/provincial panel will be asked to review and hold public hearings on the proposed coal-fired generating plants given their impact on transboundary air sheds and interprovincial waterways?

MR. KLEIN: No, I can't give that commitment because I don't know whether there will be appropriate rationale for the federal government to become involved in this particular process, Mr. Speaker. If the federal department of energy sees fit to become involved for some reason or other, I'm sure that they will notify our officials, and appropriate steps will be taken to make sure that their involvement is recognized.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Pasture Insurance Program

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the drought situation in various parts of the province created difficulties for many Alberta producers. In the past livestock producers were able to use pasture insurance programs as a risk management tool, but last year that program was no longer available. Earlier this year the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties passed a resolution, presented by the county of Smoky Lake, calling for the reinstatement of the pasture insurance program. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister tell us what is happening with pasture insurance and if this option will be available again?

2:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. We did have a pasture insurance program in place, and any rural members that were involved will remember clipping cages, placements of clipping cages, measuring, weighing of product. The program was complex. It was designed to respond to the needs, but the take-up from the producers was very small, I think probably because of the complexity, so it was decided to cancel the program.

However, because of the changes in our weather and our climate and particularly the drought that has occurred in the southeast part of the province, under the crop insurance review this issue was raised again, and there was a recommendation made that we implement at least a pilot to see if we could establish a pasture program that would be responsive to producers' needs. That has been established with selected risk areas in the southeastern part of the province. It will use the latest technology, GPS, or global positioning satellite, information. Through that pilot, Mr. Speaker, we hope that we can establish a provincewide program for the next year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question, again to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: can the minister advise whether or not the producers in the constituency of Redwater and the Smoky Lake area will be able to participate in this pilot project?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we have, as I indicated, established the pilot projects in some selected risk areas in the southeastern part of the province. One of the purposes of having those

projects in place is to determine the relationship between pasture yields and the pasture vegetation index generated by satellite imagery. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient information for the majority of the province, including the Smoky Lake area. So for this year and for this pilot project it was not feasible to include that area.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will the minister tell us the cost of running this pilot program and what the plans are for the future of pasture insurance?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the provincial costs associated with this program or with this pilot are less than \$1.5 million. They include the costs of the satellite imagery data and the administration of it. As I indicated, if we're successful – and we're hopeful that we will be – we will be looking at implementing this program province-wide in 2002.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Rossdale Power Plant Expansion

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. In Alberta's current state of electricity deregulation, Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Energy and Utilities Board has a strange role. It provides regulations for a deregulated industry. Residents of downtown Edmonton or any person interested in our river valley wonder what that means for them and their city as they try to work through the EUB to stop the expansion of EPCOR's power plant in Edmonton's river valley. My questions are to the Premier. While there are mechanisms such as the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, does the EUB have any real authority now to stop the power plant expansion in Rossdale?

MR. KLEIN: Interesting question. Do they have authority? Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure of the process relative to the adjudication of the environmental worthiness of this particular project, whether that project is before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board or whether it's through the Natural Resources Conservation Board or whether it is a matter for a joint hearing by the two boards. Perhaps the Minister of Energy can shed some more light on this matter.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment will have an important role in this, and maybe the Minister of Environment might like to comment on it. Specifically to the EUB, they would not have a specific regulatory application in the EPCOR plant.

MS BLAKEMAN: Again to the Premier. Well, since it's unclear what role the EUB has in this matter, who then should these Albertans be approaching if they want to oppose the expansion as responsible citizens?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's a two-pronged question here. One certainly is a matter for adjudication by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, and that is the whole issue of electricity supply. The other issue, of course, is protection of the river valley and what steps are being contemplated to ameliorate the environmental impact. That would be a question for the Minister of Environment on the power side. On the supply side that would be a question for the Minister of Energy. So I'll ask these two ministers to respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Premier, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member. There is a fully open process that one has

to go through with these approvals and with these plants. It's a fully public process. It could either be an environmental review or an environmental impact assessment. If the public that she's referring to is somehow unhappy with the decisions out of that fully open process, fully public process, then they can appeal to the Environmental Appeal Board. That is a separate board, that is independent and receives appeals of this sort.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. This last question is to the Minister of Community Development. Given that Rosedale is the site of the proclamation of Alberta's provincehood as well a key site for First Nations people and early settlers, what has the minister's department done to urge the abandonment of expansion of the plant?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. I'm very pleased to receive that question because it is a very important issue. I think the hon. member and her constituents would be happy to know that after we heard about the proposed expansion, we did require the EPCOR group to undertake two historical resource impact assessments. There have been some significant finds, as you're well aware, of an archaeological nature that go back centuries literally. There have also been some discussions with respect to the low-pressure plant building and which parts of it could and should receive historical designation. So we're reviewing that right now, in fact literally, in our department. One of the issues that we're also looking at is the response that we're expecting back from EPCOR and from the EUB in that regard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Rural Electricity Costs

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans generally have been very appreciative of the energy rebates they've received so far to offset rising energy prices. However, there are still many small businesses using over 250,000 kilowatts of electricity, such as intensive farmers, greenhouses, and retail businesses, whose electricity costs are still double after receiving the rebate. These extra unexpected costs are threatening their economic future, and the expected market development of electricity has still not occurred in rural Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. What is the Minister of Energy planning to do to encourage competitive electricity market development in these areas of the province?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, if you look at the broad electricity market in Alberta since the introduction of the new competitive market model, we've seen a 48 percent drop in price off the market side. We have seen progress made in the market developing itself, and we've seen progress made in the 80 percent of the electricity that is bought and sold and used and contracted outside the Power Pool market.

There is absolutely a recognition that we have to do more on this particular aspect, this particular market segment, where we are moving to look at competitive issues inside this marketplace. We have as one device, Mr. Speaker, a retail issues subcommittee, formed in the Department of Energy, that will be addressing this

specific question. Members of that committee are consumers, such as the independent Senior Petroleum Producers Association of southern Alberta, the city of Calgary, and of course Jim Wachowich from the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we will identify barriers to a more active retail market in this part of the market. We will develop recommendations to encourage competition, and of course the key towards offering service and offering low-price power is more power.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that there's currently a maximum of only one market choice outside the default rate, which seems to be more of a monopoly than any market choice, when can rural Albertan businesses expect to have real market choices in electricity?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I would expect from the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, he went right to the heart of the issue and examined it critically. We do know that smaller businesses currently have limited market options and that retailers focused on larger firms in the initial months of deregulation. In fact, when I look at the market behaviour of the large retailers that did sell customers to other retailers, they did it at a time when they needed more market knowledge out there, and I think that they've got to pull up their socks and be more responsive to their customers. We want to put that forward not only here in the Legislature but outside in the marketplace. Those customers are the key to their prosperity, and they have to respond to them.

Mr. Speaker, I just now picked up 22 registered retailers that are available to sell power in the province to all users. We think that their attention will start to focus on the smaller businesses as this industry matures, and I would like to table this with the House.

From the consumer side, Mr. Speaker, small businesses also are good conservers. When a product becomes a commodity, two things happen: innovation and conservation. I'd like to compliment the businesses of Alberta who have taken their own hand in encouraging new conservation practices for power consumption.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, it's good to table when one quotes from it, but there need to be the appropriate copies to meet the rules of the House.

The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question, again to the same minister: what kind of support can small businesses in rural Alberta expect from this government until such time as real market development does occur?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you. It was the surprise of the question, Mr. Speaker, that prevented me from having the appropriate copies, and I do apologize.

Mr. Speaker, the rebates program as it's structured, of course, is the electricity auction rebate of 3.6 cents per kilowatt-hour that is funded from the proceeds of the power purchase arrangement through the auction. The rebate continues to the end of this calendar year. They will also have in default customers, those who do not have a retailer, the market transition credit. This market transition credit is not being used now because of the low price of power in the pool, at 10.5 cents, but can be worth up to 4 cents per kilowatt-hour.

This, again, will help facilitate action and will be reviewed prior to the end of June. Again, the impact of the rebates does help cushion higher electricity prices, and we're reviewing these prices as the market starts to unfold.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me not to mention that there are over 600 megawatts of new electricity generation expected to come on-line this year, as we have noticed with the announcement from TransCanada of 80 megawatts and last week, while we were on break, another 80 megawatts from PanCanadian Petroleum.

Youth Justice System

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I met recently with concerned members of my community who have a number of questions arising from recent incidents of violent crime. They have been told that only 18 to 20 percent of young offenders are responsible for over 80 percent of the youth crimes in our community, and they are concerned that repeat, serious, violent, and high-risk young offenders are being released back into the community without adequate supervision and support. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Given that the administration of youth justice in this province is his responsibility, from the hiring of sufficient numbers of provincial Crown prosecutors and the decisions made by them to the sentencing guidelines for judges, would the minister please tell this House why his department supports a philosophy that just does not do enough to stop these young people from falling back into their destructive habits?

MR. HANCOCK: That was an incredibly long question, Mr. Speaker, but on a very important subject. The subject is how we ensure that our communities remain safe and how we provide appropriate sanctions and atonement for youth in our community who commit crimes, but more importantly how we deal with the underlying root causes of those crimes. It's important that we look at justice not as just a matter of police and the courts but as a matter of how community embraces the problem of crime in our community.

In New York, Mr. Speaker, Mayor Giuliani did a good job of cleaning up New York by dealing with what we call the fixing-broken-windows theory. That's a theory which suggests that it's not just a matter for the courts and for the police, although they are a very important part of that component, but it's a matter for the community itself to embrace the whole question of why youths join gangs, why they get involved in criminal activities. It's a question of ownership of the community. It's a question of making sure that there are appropriate recreational opportunities and leadership opportunities for our kids in our communities. It's a question of proper supervision by families in the community. In short, it's a matter of our whole community embracing the problem of youth and their proper place in our community and making sure that there's proper, positive, appropriate activity for those youths to be involved in. Of course the justice system through the courts and the police will play their appropriate part.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, since young offenders have a better chance than adult offenders to be rehabilitated and become law-abiding citizens, why aren't these young offenders receiving the necessary treatment and programs to change their behaviour and return safely and successfully to the community? This is a major concern and feedback this minister has received from the community.

THE SPEAKER: And I appreciate all of that. I just want to remind hon. members this is question period, not debate period.

MR. HANCOCK: And I won't debate that question, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we properly treat young offenders so that they can be returned to the community and the communities can be safe. It does absolutely no good, in my opinion, to keep people in jail for 48 days, which is the average length of stay in our provincial correctional institution, if we don't deal with the alcohol addiction, the drug addiction, and the mental health issues. That's precisely why this government has moved – in fact, in the last fiscal year \$10 million by way of supplementary estimates was put forward to co-operate with the Alberta Mental Health Board. A recent announcement that a new head for the program was coming in from Texas, a well-respected psychiatrist to deal with children's mental health issues, is one major step forward in that very issue of dealing with the root causes of youth crime and dealing with the problems behind youth crime, including one of the major ones, which are mental health problems, but also moving forward on the other areas of alcohol and drug addiction issues, which are also root causes in the area.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, what is the minister specifically doing to provide adequate supervision and support to ensure that these young offenders do not go back to their previous patterns of behaviour? We haven't had that information shared with us this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my enthusiasm to answer the questions, I was remiss, of course, in not pointing out that it's actually the Solicitor General who's responsible for corrections and correction procedures in the province at this stage.

However, I would answer the question anyway and then invite the Solicitor General to add appropriate responses, because we're working very actively, as I indicated, in the treatment of mental health issues, in terms of the domestic violence project in Calgary, the court project in Calgary – it's now called HomeFront as of yesterday – and other issues which are at the root cause of why children get into trouble in the province. Again, I would suggest that on the crime prevention side, the community needs to reach out and embrace crime prevention programs, which include proper activities for children after school, proper ways for children to be involved in a meaningful way in their community so that they're not encouraged to join their other family, the gang.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

National Pollutant Release Inventory

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A new web site has come on the scene which is causing a lot of canola producers some heartburn. This web site is called PollutionWatch, and it uses data from the federal government's national pollutant release inventory to compare pollution releases in their communities. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. How reliable is the data used from this national pollutant release inventory that is being used on this web site?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I'll invite you to respond if it is within the jurisdiction and the responsibility of Alberta's Minister of

Environment. If I understand the question, it had to do with a national web site.

2:20

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, and because it does apply to Alberta and Alberta is affected by the web site, I would reply, Mr. Speaker.

It is important to realize that the web site and the inventory provides that from a positive perspective, industry does account for and report on the pollutants they release. However, it does not recognize or attempt to measure the quality of the environment, Mr. Speaker. For instance, it does not demonstrate the effects of these releases on the environment. It does not demonstrate how these releases are handled. If I might use the example of asbestos: asbestos, when it's decommissioned, is put into very specific landfills that are very safety oriented, designed specifically for asbestos. Yet this web site includes those as industrial releases into the environment, when in fact the asbestos is not released into the environment. So in fact to be kind and charitable, it could be said that it's a bit misleading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do apologize for not being specific to Alberta in my first question.

The second question that I have is: bearing in mind the information that this inventory produces in relation to Canbra Foods in Lethbridge, processors of Alberta canola oil, does this information indicate that they are emitting more N-hexane into the atmosphere than any other company in Canada?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. A very good question because it does affect canola producers, Mr. Speaker. This question in fact gives a clear indication how a simplified web site like this and a simplified inventory can oversimplify complex issues. What they don't tell us on the web site is that Canbra Foods errs on the side of caution. They have to provide an estimate of their emissions. Now, erring on the side of caution, they overestimate what they will emit. In fact, this year Canbra Foods will not probably come close to emitting what their estimates are. So that's one thing that doesn't show up on the web site.

The other thing is that in the worst case scenario, if they did release as much as they estimated, they would still be far under the most stringent releases for N-hexane in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. To the minister: what is your department going to do to ensure that Alberta's air and water continue to be protected from industries whose emissions are high or web sites whose information is inaccurate?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member and all Albertans, quite frankly, that our rigorous environmental approval and monitoring is one of the most rigid, not just in Canada but in North America. We have some of the most stringent requirements in North America. Not only do we have these requirements, but we monitor these requirements. So if somebody doesn't live up to the conditions of their environmental approval, they are monitored, and if they still do not live up to them, they will be fined. Last year there were almost a million dollars of fines placed on companies in

Alberta that did not live up to their environmental approvals, and we will continue to do that.

But it's not just a matter of fining, Mr. Speaker. We constantly work with companies to improve their environmental quality, to improve and help them improve their environmental emissions so that they do meet these stringent standards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I had the pleasure of introducing Mr. Robert Fisher to members of this Assembly. There are approximately 10,000 Albertans in the Edmonton region receiving AISH. Mr. Fisher brought it to my attention that people receiving Canada pension plan disability payments and AISH face claw-backs of their provincial benefits when the federal government increases its allowances for Albertans who are unable to work because of a disability. My questions today are to the minister of human resources. Why does this province have a dollar-for-dollar claw-back policy?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the responsibilities, I believe, that any elected official has in Alberta is to be both cognizant of the needs of the people within their community but also to be stewards of taxpayers' money. In that situation, then, we have a juxtaposition of a federal disability program and a program that we have called assured income for the severely handicapped. So the way in which we have traditionally dealt with this matter is that we want to see that people like Mr. Fisher are provided with income in order that they can try to get by, then, with their everyday needs. So there is a combination, then, based on what the level of Canada pension plan is, and of course we will then supplement that with AISH.

We're very proud in this province of our AISH program. I would remind all members and perhaps inform them for the first time that, as a matter of fact, the federal government and through the provincial ministries in their In Unison document, where they look at all of the programs across this country, has specifically indicated the benefits of the Alberta program and see it as leading this nation.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to Nonmembers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry to go forward with his next question, I'd just provide a caution. The naming of names in this Assembly can lead to some interesting scenarios. It is not uncommon for the Speaker to receive correspondence and letters from individuals who are saying: "Well, a Member of the Legislative Assembly raised my name in this Assembly, and I did not give that person the right or the privilege to raise my name. I'm quite surprised my name was raised. What are you going to do about it?"

The chair has no mechanism of dealing with it other than to provide caution that one should deal with a great deal of caution in raising individual names in this Assembly, because those individuals are not in a position to provide any information to members of the Assembly or to correct anything if there's any misunderstanding with respect to the naming of their name, and in particular, for individuals dealing with private files under the laws in this Assembly, that this Assembly passed. I want you to be quite cautious when dealing with particular cases and examples.

The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for those wise words. I can assure all members of the Assembly and yourself that Mr. Fisher and I did have conversations and that I did have permission to use his name here today.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped
(continued)

MR. BONNER: My second question is also to the minister of human resources. Given the minister's acknowledgment in this Assembly that living on \$855 per month would be difficult, when will the policy requiring a dollar-for-dollar claw-back be changed?

MR. DUNFORD: As far as our AISH program is concerned, those items that we consider to be exempt from deduction and those items that are partially exempt and then the ones that of course are fully deductible, as is being discussed here today, are under review on a periodic and timely basis. As a matter of fact, we will be announcing in a more formal way a discussion about programs and services for low-income Albertans, and certainly this would be one of the programs and one of the services that we'll be looking at. So I congratulate the member on his question and the timeliness of it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Does the minister not see an inequality when MLAs in this Assembly receive a review of their salary annually but AISH recipients do not?

MR. DUNFORD: I simply want to point out to the hon. member that in October of 1999 we increased the AISH payment, if my math serves me correctly, by about 16 percent, but we certainly can check that.* The hon. member in the question, Mr. Speaker, is asking whether or not there will be an annual review of these payment levels. I'm going to leave that to the discussion that we'll be currently having as we review all of the programs and all of the services for low-income Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

2:30

Crown Prosecutors

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past few months 14 Crown prosecutors have left the Edmonton and Calgary offices, forcing prosecutors to shoulder an even higher workload than they are today. We all know the old adage of justice delayed is justice denied, and that is exactly what could be happening if the government doesn't take action. My question is to the Minister of Justice. Why has the government failed to complete a pilot project, that was part of a response to the all-party committee on justice, that would address court delays?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually this one is my department, so I'll be pleased to answer that. In fact, the question raised is an important one. First of all, we do have a situation happening where Crown prosecutors have left the service of the provincial government and the people of Alberta over the last six months in both Edmonton and Calgary, and we are dealing with that. It's my understanding that most if not all of those positions have been filled to date. But it does speak to a longer term issue that we have to deal with in terms of making sure that we keep people within

the employ of the department so that we build that experience that we need to deal with long-term manpower concerns when some of the senior Crowns begin to retire. So it's a very, very important issue for us.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to an all-party committee. I assume he means the subcommittee of MLAs to the justice summit. The justice summit was more than an all-party committee, of course. It was a consultation with a wide range of Albertans about their concerns about the justice system, which was set up and conducted by my predecessor, the hon. Jon Havelock, and a very successful consultation process, which we have turned into an ongoing process that formed the basis of the Justice business plan last year and will again this year.

We've taken the steering committee from that justice summit and asked them to continue on as the Justice advisory committee, and the members have done so. They provide an ongoing monitoring and ongoing report card with respect to the recommendations coming out of the justice summit and how we're proceeding in terms of making justice accessible to all Albertans.

Now, specifically with respect to the pilot project, I presume that he's referring to the pilot project that we had in Edmonton with respect to the new case screening unit. That pilot project has indeed been concluded, was concluded very, very successfully. It's now been expanded across the province. We've hired seven Crown prosecutors specifically for the new case screening unit, and it means that we are able to deal with those cases which should be dealt with early in the process quickly and appropriately, with appropriate recommendations being made to the court, which allows the time to trial to be shortened for the court cases that have to go trial.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring to the all-party committee set up under Minister Havelock and chaired by the Member for Calgary-North Hill. I would like to know why the government did not address the issue of Crown prosecutors' pay or workload in its response to that committee?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the committee that he refers to is the subcommittee of the justice summit, and in fact we did address the questions that he referred to. They may not have been addressed directly with respect to a written response to the justice summit, but they were addressed by a review of prosecutors' salaries and in fact an increase of prosecutors' salaries. I might say that we do that on an annual basis now. We review salaries to make sure that prosecutors are appropriately paid in comparison to their compatriots across the country. We're doing a review of salaries now. We were last year in midrange with respect to prosecutors' salaries across the country. We have a bit of a concern about it now, because some of the provinces, particularly Ontario, have had recent raises, so we're going to have to deal with that issue in the short term.

With respect to the workload, we did have a problem in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, in terms of our case file load being one of the highest in the country. We responded to that by hiring 11 new prosecutors, as I said earlier, seven of them being dedicated to the early case screening process so that we can take those cases out of the system early that are appropriate to take out of the system, leaving those cases which need to go to court appropriate lead times and appropriate preparation times.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister give such a vague answer when our prosecutors earn anywhere between 58 and 72

*See page 118, left col., para. 7

percent of the income of Ontario Crown prosecutors? How does the minister plan to attract new graduates to the Crown prosecutors' office to replace those moving to other positions?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is a valid concern in terms of how we attract and keep good Crown prosecutors. We're going to do that as we always have, by continuing to look at the workload requirements and the salaries, by making sure that working for the government of Alberta and for the people of Alberta in the Crown prosecutors' office is a profession and an occupation that people aspire to.

It will always be a bit of a training ground for those who want to get into private practice, and we'll have some turnover in that area, but there will always be people who consider being a Crown prosecutor to be an avocation and who want to do it. One of the things that I was proud to do shortly after being appointed Minister of Justice was to award a 20-year service award to one of my classmates in law school. We have Crown prosecutors who stay for a long period of time. We have good prosecutors.

I took the liberty of giving the answer that I did now because I answered this question previously in anticipation. We do monitor the salaries of Crown prosecutors. We understand that Ontario's salaries have gone up recently. We're going to have to look at adjusting salaries in this province. I'm not going to prejudge what that process is going to be, but we are committed to paying our Crown prosecutors fairly and to keeping good Crown prosecutors in place so that we can achieve the goal of Justice and the goal of this government, having safe communities.

THE CLERK: Members' Statements.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we move to that particular item, a bit of clarification just arising out of the question period. I'm going to recognize the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment for a correction of a number.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (continued)

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I said 16 percent. Upon sitting down and doing the math, it's 6 percent.*

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds from now, hon. members, I'll call upon the first of four hon. members to participate in Members' Statements. Prior to recognizing the first hon. member for Members' Statements, I'm going to call on the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for an introduction.

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a very patient group of 40 students from the Kitscoty elementary school. They're accompanied here today by their teachers, Mr. Kim Aitken and Mrs. Eleanor Parr, and teacher's aide, Mrs. Cindy McCormack. I would like them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary-Fort Election Campaign Workers

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our democratic election has taught me to be humble and to be ever alert to the fact that my constituents are my bosses. They sent me here to represent them. In us Albertans entrust the leadership and the work to improve their lives, and also they entrust the implementation of their aspirations and choices. I do not believe that they want us to impose our own views on them.

During the last election there were many people who participated directly and openly, but there were many more who provided assistance indirectly and behind the scenes. On our campaign team we had the participation of young children, seniors, our friends from all walks of life. The amazing part is that we all did it on a voluntary basis.

We had participation from whole families, such as the Tennenhouses, the Fergusons, the Campbells, the Argotas, the Poiriers, the Trangs, the Reimches, the Snashalls, the Has, just to name a few. We had participation from seniors, such as Ted Sawkins, Ken Calder, Bill Hopkins, Loc Dang, Chinh Vo, Derek Spooner, Don Smith, John MacDonald, Ron Lachica, John Brown, Gerry Bautista, Shirley Boyce, Chuck Libbey, and many more. We had participation from young children such as the Poirier brother and sister, Daniel and Cecilia, seven years of age; the Tennenhouse brother and sister, Aaron and Tracey; the Trang brother and sister, David and Julie; the Reimche brothers and sisters, Jonathan, David, Amanda, Bonnie, Tamazene; and young individuals like Uyen Nguyen, Shaun Unger, Candice Campbell, just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, additionally I want to take this opportunity to recognize a number of individuals who spent their own effort and time in the democratic process. Eleanor Art, Kim Hoang, Sandy Wilson, Sandy Matthews, David Gaskin, John Brown, Vinh Nhan, Lorne Gogal, and so many more.

The outstanding leadership and the collective wisdom of our government caucus will help Alberta to move strongly into an even brighter future. Yes, it is the truth of proven leadership for a positive future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Two-minute time limit. The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

2:40

Bruno Engler

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with regret but with many fond personal memories that I stand today to remember a longtime Banff-Cochrane resident and local icon, the late Mr. Bruno Engler. I recently had the opportunity along with hundreds of family and friends to celebrate his life and his immeasurable contributions to this province.

Born in 1915, Bruno was a man of many qualities with a contagious capability of sharing his zest for life with the world. He was a respected filmmaker and photographer, an experienced mountain guide, an accomplished skier, a storyteller, and a genuine romantic, who touched the lives of many who lived in and visited the Canadian Rockies. In the 1940s he taught survival and mountain warfare with the Canadian army and in the 1950s was hired as a photographer for the province of Alberta. For over 40 years Bruno worked in Banff as a freelance cinematographer and film consultant on some of the most popular and famous films ever made and became well known to two generations of Hollywood stars.

He shared his passion for skiing and climbing with many, teaching them to love the mountains and enjoy them as he did. But his passion for the mountains was shared best through his ability to

*See page 117, left. col., para. 6

capture what he saw and felt through the eye of the lens. His images span more than half of the last century, depicting both the pristine beauty of our landscape as well as our history. Bruno's accomplishments will be more than remembered; they will be cherished. We will never forget his lively warmth and easy smile and his joie de vivre.

Bruno will be missed by his wife, Vera, his family, his many friends, and the mountains. He charmed everyone he met into believing that we should enjoy each and every day simply by leading through example.

Your life will be celebrated, Bruno. You have forever changed the lenses through which so many people see, and for that we thank you.

Please join me in remembering a great Albertan and a wonderful man, Mr. Bruno Engler.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

National Day of Mourning

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to mark the National Day of Mourning, which this year falls on Saturday, April 28. This is the official day observed every year to commemorate workers injured, killed, or disabled on the job or those who suffer from occupational illnesses.

I know that we all share a deep concern at the number of lives lost as a result of accidents in the workplace. Our heartfelt sympathy is with the families and friends of the victims, although no words can take away their sorrow.

We continue to strive for a safe and healthy workplace. According to the Department of Human Resources and Employment's most recent figures, in 1999 there were 35,000 workplace injuries and diseases serious enough to have workers miss at least one day of work. According to the WCB's own figures, every four minutes a worker is injured on an Alberta worksite, and 27 workers a day were injured in their first six months on the job.

I wish at this time to commend the current Minister of Human Resources and Employment for his recent efforts to help prevent workplace injuries and fatalities, from the hiring of six additional worksite inspectors in December to the establishment of a new call centre in January for information about safety standards, to report accidents, or to lodge complaints. I hope these efforts make a difference in the workplace statistics that have become far too common in this province.

I would also like to recognize the WCB's recent Heads Up safety awareness campaign directed at inexperienced workers and their employers. Unfortunately, young people are the most likely to be killed or injured on the job. We must continue to make our young people aware of occupational hazards and hazardous working conditions. We must inform them of their rights and encourage and teach them to work safely. Young people are the future of our society, and a healthy society needs healthy workers.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Kodiaks

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the hockey focus at the provincial level centred on the outstanding Oiler/Dallas series, my constituency and Albertans following the Alberta Junior Hockey League are now focused on the Camrose Kodiaks. The Camrose Kodiaks junior hockey team recently defeated Drayton Valley in the Alberta Junior Hockey League playoffs to capture the Alberta championship. As Alberta's representatives they are presently

competing for the B.C./Alberta Doyle cup on their way, hopefully, to the Canadian championship in Flin Flon. Indeed, we are proud of the accomplishments of our Kodiaks. They are only in their fourth season in the league, and they are already number 1.

The Kodiaks are owned and operated by the Camrose Sport Development Society, a nonprofit community organization whose purpose it is to promote and develop a strong sports program in the community. The development of junior A hockey in Camrose is our first project. The Camrose Sport Development Society stresses the importance of combining a successful education with sport. This is no doubt paying off, as eight of this year's Kodiak players are receiving scholarships to various universities and colleges.

The Kodiaks are proud to be members of the Alberta Junior Hockey League, a league of 15 teams including Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Bonnyville, Lloydminster, Brooks, Crowsnest Pass, Canmore, Olds, Drayton Valley, St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan, and two Calgary teams. The Alberta Junior Hockey League started in the 1960s with only five teams and now provides a high level of hockey for many Alberta players at a very high level of competition. The league itself encourages further education for all players. The AJHL should be commended for its work with players and for its success over the past 40 years. To president Kim Marsh and chairman of the board Bob Clark I say a heartfelt thanks.

Congratulations to the Camrose Kodiaks, head coach Garry Vanhereweghe, and general manager Boris Rybalka, the Alberta Junior Hockey League champions.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 202 Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate April 11: Mr. Jacobs]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have no further comments. I've concluded my comments, so I would pass to the next member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak against Bill 202, the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001, which is sponsored by my colleague the Member for St. Albert. Regrettably I cannot support this amending legislation for a number of reasons, which I will describe, and in doing so, I would urge all hon. members not to support this legislation. While it is well intended, I do believe that it will result in worsening the very situation that it is meant to cure.

This bill would amend the existing Insurance Act as well as the new Insurance Act, yet to be proclaimed, by adding a section which reads as follows: "No insurer shall provide automobile insurance with a premium, tariff, rate or condition of coverage that discriminates on the basis of gender."

Now in our insurance legislation there is no such prohibition, but the sponsor of this bill has proposed this legislation because, as I understand it, she wants to stop insurance companies from charging higher automobile insurance premiums to young males under the age of 25 than what young females under the age of 25 are charged. She

argues that it is both unfair and discriminatory to treat the two sexes under the age of 25 differently based on gender despite the very obvious evidence of a vast disparity in claims rates experience between males and females under 25 and the amount of the damage caused in these collisions. So in effect, Mr. Speaker, the sponsor of the legislation, by virtue of this legislation, wants us to tell insurance companies how to determine premium rates for auto insurance.

2:50

At first blush, Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation by the hon. member, as it is described, eliminating discrimination does sound very persuasive. As we all want to attempt to eliminate discrimination wherever we see it, as I say, at first blush it seems very persuasive. However, the matter is more complicated in my respectful submission and, when taken to its eventual conclusion, will not achieve what the hon. member I know would like to have achieved.

I know the hon. member is a very fair-minded and well-meaning member. However, when one looks at the likely impact, it becomes evident, I believe, that Bill 202 will in fact cause premium inequities for all drivers and possibly will even result in young male drivers paying more, paying higher auto insurance premiums than they do now, which was the very so-called mischief that this legislation I know is intended to eliminate.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, when one analyzes the change which would be brought about by this legislation against the existing system of automobile insurance rating criteria, it is clear that the differentiation based on gender as it exists now for drivers under the age of 25 years is both reasonable and justified.

Just to pursue that concept at this point, there have been a number of court decisions, one from our own Court of Appeal in 1993, which have looked at the question of whether or not gender discrimination or gender differentiation is in fact discrimination and whether it is allowable in the calculation of auto insurance rates. In every case all of the final decisions have held that while it is discriminatory to do so, the discrimination is both reasonable and justified because of the claims experience relative to young male drivers under the age of 25. To do otherwise would discriminate and transfer the burden to young female drivers under 25, which is not justified based on the actuarial and evidentiary evidence. So we have in this country plenty of jurisprudence which would say that this type of so-called discrimination is justifiable.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, following along from that and which was part of the reasoning, that in all of these decisions it is a basic principle of the calculation of premiums for insurance of any sort. It is based on a measure of the risk, and that can include a lot of different variables depending on the type of insurance. But when it comes to auto insurance in this province, the way it is done right now is by way of the driving experience and the claims/conviction record of the individual. Both age and gender are used as criteria for drivers under the age of 25 years, that is for primary drivers. After age 25 or at the age of 25 and over the use of the vehicle becomes the prime rating criteria.

So that is our existing system, and our Canadian private insurers believe that groups of drivers with lower risk should pay less for car insurance, while those with higher claims should pay more. The evidence is pretty clear, Mr. Speaker.

I can quote from some statistics provided by the Insurance Bureau of Canada, which is the organization that operates in this province representing 85 percent of the insurance companies involved in the provision of property and casualty insurance. Their records indicate that when you compare the number of claims per 100 vehicles for males 16 to 20 years of age, it is more than three times higher than drivers over the age of 25 years. Young female drivers between the

ages of 16 and 20 are just over two times higher than drivers over the age of 25 years. So a substantial difference there. They also indicate that the amount of the collision claims are 20 percent lower for young females under the age of 20 than for young males. Similar statistics apply for individuals from age 21 to 24, although the figures are not quite as stark.

So that being the case, if this legislation were implemented and insurance companies were legislated and required to charge the same premium rates to all individuals, male and female, under the age of 25, the effect would be very serious, very negative for young female drivers. It is estimated that approximately 24,000 young male drivers in the province would enjoy a 27 percent decrease in their premium rates, but by the same token almost the same number of young female drivers, 25,000 to be exact, would suffer a 45 percent rate increase due to this change, and this is in the 16 to 20 age group.

This would just be the initial bump in premium rates that would be experienced by young females. In my submission what would then happen would be that there would be more young males on the road, because price is a determinant of the number of drivers on the road. If they can afford the insurance, they will be out there, so we will have more young male drivers out there. Based on their driving pattern, there will be more accidents and there will be more accident claims, and insurance companies, because this is the only way they can cover their costs, will have to increase the premiums. So over time not just young female drivers will experience increased rates, but each and every driver on our roadways and highways in Alberta will end up paying more. That is just the simple result, Mr. Speaker, of this legislation, which sounds like it will do a very good thing but in fact will have a negative consequence in the final analysis for all drivers in Alberta.

I've been advised that our insurance rates here in Alberta are amongst some of the lowest in Canada, that is auto insurance, but there is a lot of pressure for insurance companies to start increasing those premiums for all of us. So I don't think that we as a Legislature would want to give a reason for insurance companies to start raising premiums. I would submit that we certainly open the door to that very thing happening.

I think it's fair to say, Mr. Speaker, that there hasn't been a great deal of consultation in preparation or as background work for this amending legislation. There has been a six- or seven-year consultation under way on the rewrite of the Insurance Act. For the four years that I was involved in that, not once was this proposal brought forward, albeit this aspect was not the subject matter of that initial consultation, and there may well be a consultation in the future dealing with insurance contracts. Nevertheless, there hasn't been, as best as I can see, a thorough consultation. But we have been advised, all of the members in the Legislature, that the Insurance Bureau of Canada and its member companies – which, as I mentioned, are 85 percent of the property and casualty companies operating in the province – are very much opposed to this legislation, which would bring about a fundamental change in how insurance premium rates are calculated.

3:00

So having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I believe we all share with the hon. member, the sponsor, the desire to see auto insurance premiums kept at a stable rate, kept low for the benefit of all of us. I would submit that that is where our energies need to be directed and that there perhaps are creative initiatives that the insurance industry together with legislators could devise which would help to make young drivers better drivers so they don't have accidents and so premiums can be kept down.

It is my information that a graduated licensing system has proven

to be effective in this regard in other jurisdictions, where collisions have been shown to be reduced overall by 30 percent after the implementation of graduated licensing. We here in Alberta are slated to see that come into effect in January of 2002.

So these sorts of things, Mr. Speaker, I believe are a better method, a better way to achieve what we all want to achieve, and that is better drivers, lower collision rates, and therefore lower claims and therefore lower premiums. This is not something that you can legislate into effect, because it just will not work.

For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members in the Legislature to defeat this bill. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to make a few comments about Bill 202, the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001. I started off looking at the proposal, and my first inclination was to compare the proposal for the insurance industry to our health care system. I think it's accepted, then, in health care that everyone will pay the same premium, and it's done in order that those who have to access the system more frequently than others will not find themselves in a financial situation that is untenable.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

But the more I thought about it, the more the differences between the two systems I think became clear. Health care is an essential service. It's something we have no control over. It's a combination of genes and health practices and a lot of other factors that go into the state of health that we enjoy. That is in sharp contrast to driving an automobile and, of course, what goes along with that, seeking insurance to cover that driving.

It may not seem so these days, Mr. Speaker, but driving an automobile really is a decision that we make and one that is not a necessity, particularly for most very young drivers. So it's optional; it's something we choose to do. I think the argument that can be made is that being that it's something we choose to do, then it's something that we should be responsible for ourselves.

There are a number of assumptions under the act as it is here, and of course the basic assumption is that there is an unfairness, an inequity in the rates that are charged and that that inequity is based on age and on gender. That's a powerful assumption, and it's usually enough to persuade members on this side of the House that something should be changed. However, there are some other assumptions that I think come into play.

There's the assumption that performance is unrelated to the kind of insurance premium you pay, that regardless of your behaviour on the road, that should have no impact on the rates that are levied for your insurance, and I think that's an assumption that many of us find difficult to accept. We spend a lot of public dollars trying to convince young people in driver training courses and in schools to be responsible for their actions and that there is a price to be paid for not being responsible, and in the case of young male drivers that seems to be the case.

The other assumption, of course, is that those rates that are charged the under-25 male drivers are discriminatory, that they shouldn't be charged, that it's not fair to levy that kind of a fee.

One other and I guess final assumption is that the accident rate of young males is irrelevant or should be irrelevant in terms of their insurance rates. That's a hard assumption to support when those drivers are responsible for two and a half to three times the number of accidents and deaths on the highways compared to older drivers.

They have a very high accident rate, and some of the investigations into their behaviour raise questions. It's not often the ability. They're young in their ability, but they're skillful drivers in many ways. It has more to do with the kind of age group they're in and the kind of ethos that pervades that group. There's a need to find attention in a group of peers in terms of being a risky driver. There's a feeling that they're invincible, that nothing can happen to them no matter how they drive, and that makes them, I think, a risk to themselves and to all of us that has to be recognized.

When you look at the proposed bill and ask yourself, you know, who gains and who loses, I think a number of other speakers have already indicated that males under 25 would obviously gain and I think would wholeheartedly applaud the bill. I'm sure we've all been aghast at the rates being paid by some drivers under 25, particularly those that have been in accidents, in more than one accident. Their rates really do skyrocket. So they would certainly gain under this, but more importantly – and I think it has been pointed out – safe drivers, people who do drive responsibly, particularly older drivers and young female drivers, would be the losers should this legislation pass and be instituted. They would pay more, and they would pay more not on the basis of their performance but on the basis of someone else's performance. There's an unfairness in that that I think can't be overlooked, Mr. Speaker.

3:10

When you look at the insurance industry, they've tried to address the problem. I think they've looked, as I understand it, at all of the aspects of driver-related risk and tried to come up with some measures of risk, and those measures aren't as simple as age and gender. I think they would be the first to admit that. The number of years that you've been licensed is related to the risk you are on the road. Certainly the age range you find yourself in is related to what kind of a risk you are. The kind of driver training you've had has an impact on how risky you are as a driver. The kind of vehicle that you use – there are some vehicles that are more prone to accidents than others – and the age of the vehicle and also what the vehicle is used for, if it's used for pleasure or if it's used for business, has some impact on the kind of risk you are on the highway.

They also indicate that another measurement of risk is the number of claims you've had in the last six years – I think many of us have experienced that with our own rates, having had an accident that broke an accident-free period to find our rates in the years subsequent are raised and reflect that accident – and of course the number of years of claim-free driving.

So there's an array of risk factors that the insurance industry has looked at, but they come back, I think, to the basic ones, and that's age and gender. The insurance industry here is not alone in that. I think, if my information is correct, that throughout most of the United States insurers are permitted to use age, gender, and marital status to determine the price of car insurance. There are some of those states that restrict the use of those categories by insurers, but for the most part all of the American states find themselves using age, gender, and marital status as a determinant of the insurance rates.

So to look at the bill itself, Mr. Speaker, I think as imperfect as using age, gender, and marital status is, that's really all we have at this point. I think the previous speaker remarked on the kinds of difficulties that this legislation could pose if it were to be passed and implemented and that, on balance, those difficulties outweigh the advantage that would be gained by passing this particular bill. I agree.

I think the mover of the bill is to be commended. I think it's consistent with that member's seeking of fairness and justice and I

think reflects the basic beliefs of the member that discrimination of any kind, no matter where you find it, should be eliminated. Unfortunately, I don't think I can support this bill. I think in this case, until there's a better identification of risk factors and until some other actions are taken, the use of age and gender is an appropriate practice and one that shouldn't be interfered with.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to support the concept of this bill, and I would ask, certainly, that the members move it to committee. There may be some parts of the bill that need working and that, but let's be sure to give it a chance.

I want to think back, Mr. Speaker, to when the Insurance Act was started. There is no question that the collection of the data to determine the rates and that was compiled much differently than it is today. Obviously the groups and that that were used to develop these rates had to be based on gender numbers and larger numbers and probably weren't as accurate as we could be now with on-the-spot Internet communication and records of your history.

Mr. Speaker, I'm saying: why would the insurance companies want to keep these rates like this? Not because there is a sinister plot out there to charge young males more, but because it's easy. They don't have to look into the driving records or the individual patterns of a young man or young woman when they can prorate them 200 or 300 percent without question. So it's an easy way out.

Things are changing. In the last 10 or 15 years the numbers of women entering the workforce and starting out on their own would probably bring these rates into order by themselves, but I'm not sure that we'd like to wait that long. And, Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that just because I have four sons doesn't mean it's influencing my speech.

I really believe, Mr. Speaker, that an insurance premium you pay should be based on something that you have a direct bearing on. Simply being male or female does not make you a good or bad driver automatically. I think the focus from the insurance industry should be: what has this young person done? Have they had their learner's permit for the required time to learn to drive adequately?

My nieces are in the States. They're required to keep a learner's permit logbook that shows the driving time they've had, that guarantees they've spent time with an adult driver. They are not allowed to go beyond this point until they've filled in their logbook, much like a large trucker's logbook. I think that's a great idea, and it shows commitment to the learning process. Now, maybe that's not addressed in this bill, but it certainly will change the focus of what the insurance company looks at to set the rates. I think it's very important that all young people take the proper driving, defensive driving, and prove to the insurance companies that they can be good drivers.

Now, we very simply say here that we sentence all of the other good young men drivers to a 40 or 50 or 200 percent increase in insurance without question. Well, good young men drivers probably don't like that much either and where we're not willing to say all the people in that age can bear the brunt because of some bad male drivers, I don't think that's too fair either. I think bad drivers, male or female, should pay the premiums they have earned. I think good young male and female drivers should get a break, and until they've at least got a demerit or done something wrong, I think they should certainly get the benefit of the doubt.

Our hon. member has said that we're trying to make accidents and driving records irrelevant, and completely to the contrary, Mr.

Speaker, I think that makes it completely relevant. What you have done with your driving record is what should count. I would like to think that it's not gender that makes the insurance company want to have you or not have you as a customer; it's your driving record.

I don't want to take a lot more time on this, but I really think we have to look at this seriously, as seriously as we would look if it was an age discrimination or gender or any physical disability. It should be what you present on the road that costs you, Mr. Speaker, and not what figures from history have proven to be. I don't dispute the figures from the insurance industry. I agree. There are a tremendous number of irresponsible young male and female drivers, and I believe they should be targeted and they should pay. Generally I believe young people should all get a good, clean slate to start.

I think we should move this bill to committee, and I would really ask for your input and your support to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to rise to speak to Bill 202, the Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001. I have always respected the work of the hon. Member for St. Albert, and I do want to make a few comments and observations about this bill. As I understand it, the main purpose of this bill is to restrict the use of gender as an automobile insurance rating criteria.

3:20

Now, then, Mr. Speaker, as a parent who has a son and two daughters, this certainly is an issue that we discuss around the kitchen table from time to time, and I can tell you that when my son's accident rate comes up in comparison to the sum of both daughters', the daughters do smile. I'm not trying to cause any family problems here, but I think that is the reality of this whole situation.

As well, we know that the insurance industry is based on risk. If I were to ask the hon. Member for St. Albert if she and her son went to apply for life insurance at this particular point, would they pay they same rate, of course we know that this is not true.

Now, we also heard a speaker a few minutes ago that referred to the collection of statistics. Certainly the insurance companies who represent some of the bigger companies in the world and some of the most established and long-lasting companies rely heavily on statistics, and they certainly rely on their ability to gather those and to make certain they're accurate. As well, when they are gathering statistics, they are looking at probability and measuring that probability as to an event occurring or not occurring, and those people who fall in the higher categories certainly do pay more. Those who fall in the lower risk categories are treated more favourably.

What they do when they gather these statistics is that they group the people. Age is one of the criteria they use. Others certainly are gender and marital status. Over time this has been challenged. It has been challenged in many of the courts here in Canada; the Supreme Court, for example, and provincial courts. What has happened is that in all cases this system, although it is not a perfect system, has been upheld by the courts when human rights have been looked at in this particular issue. Now, then, when we look at insuring people and we take two individuals, certainly we have to consider these statistics and these records in assessing their rates, and what the courts found was that it was quite all right for two different individuals to be charged differently when it comes to rating factors.

The insurance industry, Mr. Speaker, also is constantly looking at ways that it can restructure the way it does business. It wants to look at its classification system in a manner that will eliminate discrimination of any kind to any particular group. Now, then, when we look at what is happening in the insurance industry today, we certainly look at this from a winner and loser standpoint, and if you are the parent paying those rates or your child is paying those rates, you certainly at that point hope you have daughters, because they are much cheaper to insure.

What we have to also look at here is: what is the long-term effect on this? If we were to eliminate gender as one of the criteria in insurance rates, then premiums for young female drivers would increase approximately 45 percent, and premiums for young male drivers would decrease initially by about 27 percent. This information, Mr. Speaker, was supplied to me by Royal & SunAlliance insurance agents, and again this is information that to the best of my knowledge is correct. I can table copies of this if the Assembly would like.

Now, then, the males in this situation are being charged premiums which are as appropriate to their risk of collision as are young female drivers, and certainly the young males do get into more accidents, as statistics do point out. As well, the courts have acknowledged that due to this the present method of rating drivers is fair. In the interest of fairness and consumer pricing we find that insurance rates do provide a certain degree of fairness when we look at the three criteria of age, gender, and marital status. As well, we do take in other situations that the insurance companies look at, and certainly one is a driving record, but we can look at those things later as well.

I also notice that there are some provinces that do restrict the use of gender when we look at insuring young males and females. These, of course, are British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, which tend to charge less for young male drivers and charge more for young female drivers and older drivers. Now, then, I certainly don't think that anybody here or the mover of this particular bill is suggesting that Alberta get into the insurance business, but I cannot see independent, privately owned insurance businesses getting into this situation.

Now, as well, the industry recognizes that the higher accident frequency of younger drivers is due in part to their inexperience. Numerous studies have also demonstrated that because of their lifestyles and outlooks young drivers still represent a greater risk than older drivers with the same amount of driving experience. It is also well established, Mr. Speaker, that women drive less and under different conditions than men. Studies have shown, however, that female drivers represent a lesser risk than male drivers in similar situations.

So, Mr. Speaker, before I close, I think what the Member for St. Albert here definitely was attempting to get at was certainly a system that would be fairer to young male drivers, and it would eliminate a type of injustice that unfortunately does exist in the way we look at how rates are determined. What we would like to see certainly is a system where all inequalities in this business could be eliminated, but unfortunately I think the present system, although it certainly isn't what we all would desire, is the best system, and therefore I would have to say that at this particular point in time I could not support Bill 202.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have about one more minute to consider this item on this day. May we have unanimous consent to go to the next item of business?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Second Language Education

501. Mr. Johnson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to make the learning of a second language a compulsory component of a high school diploma by the year 2006 and to increase the opportunities for Alberta students to participate in national and international student exchange programs with a second language component.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to move Motion 501. I find it fitting that the first motion brought forward in this Legislature's First Session is about educating our youth, is a motion about investing in the future of our children and the future of our province, but it is a motion whose focus goes beyond our provincial borders. It is a response to the realities of globalization and the importance of being prepared as Canadians and as individuals to better take advantage of opportunities in the marketplace of the 21st century.

There are essentially two complementing parts to Motion 501. First, it addresses the importance of being able to communicate effectively through use of a second language for our students. Secondly, in recognizing the value of national and international exchanges for the education of our students, the motion urges the government to increase opportunities, making it possible for more students to participate. Student exchanges can be particularly helpful in the learning of a second language, especially for our Alberta students who have limited opportunities to practise second language skills in day-to-day conversations.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, this motion is in support of Alberta Learning's business plan. Under goal 3, entitled Well Prepared Learners for Lifelong Learning, World of Work and Citizenship, Alberta Learning has included a strategy of creating learning opportunities to "help Albertans see their place in a global society." One specific project identified is to develop a marketing promotion plan in collaboration with partners to communicate the benefits of learning a second language. Further, under goal 3 Alberta Learning has developed a draft international education strategy of which the first goal is that Albertans will have opportunities to obtain second language skills to participate in international learning opportunities. Possible actions include promotion of second language learning and expansion of education exchange programs.

Unfortunately, today fewer and fewer of our Alberta students are graduating with a second language. Currently only 23.5 percent of Alberta grade 12 students complete a 30-level second language course, which reflects an overall decline of 9 percent between 1995 and 1999. In 1973, 75 percent of our high school students were enrolled in a second language.

Alberta Learning's second language project plan, entitled Enhancing Second Language Education in Alberta, puts forward several reasons for the declining enrolment. First of all, the noncore or optional status of second language courses makes them appear as not important. A second language was once required for an advanced senior matriculation diploma. Secondly, the dropping of a second language requirement for entrance to Alberta postsecondary institutions. Many faculties at various institutions previously required a second language. The third reason: students have competing interests and have more courses to choose from. For

example, compulsory career and technology studies and expanded science course offerings are consuming more of students' time. Whatever the reasons, we have seen an overall decline in second language learning in our schools, yet in these times of globalization it is increasingly important for our people to be conversant with those of other cultures and economies.

This trend and our handling of second languages is no doubt the reason for the Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommendations to the Alberta government in 1999. Among the recommendations are the following, and I quote: that the Alberta government establish a new language education policy for Alberta which will reflect the reality that the workforce and society of tomorrow will need to communicate effectively in more than one language; secondly, that the Alberta government create an environment in which alternative language education is perceived as valuable and desirable not just by students and schools, colleges and universities but by parents and the community in general; and finally the fourth recommendation is that the Alberta government develop a language education strategy based in part on linkages between alternate language instruction and changing trade and market opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, as Alberta companies increasingly seek out customers across the globe and international investors come to see Alberta as a wise place to do business, there will be a growing demand for people who can converse in a second language and who have visited foreign lands. There is ample evidence that knowledge of a second language and international travel and experience pays off in the world of business and employment. As we consider the increase in north/south hemisphere trade, this knowledge is certain to be of even more importance in the future, particularly as we consider more opportunities to learn the Spanish language in our schools.

In 2000, Mr. Speaker, 38 percent of Canada's gross domestic product was composed of exports to other countries. By comparison, only 12 percent of the United States' gross domestic product was composed of exports and a mere 9 percent for Japanese exports. Granted, many of these exports were going to the English-speaking United States, but the areas of growth where the greatest number of jobs will be in the future are no longer just in the United States. For Alberta between 1993 and 1998, while trade with the U.S. grew by a modest 52 percent, trade with our other partner in the North American free trade agreement, Mexico, mushroomed a whopping 256 percent. Meanwhile, trade in Asian nations like Japan, China, and Korea has held strong.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that Canada and Alberta are unique in the degree of international interaction that composes our economies. With the signing of trade and investment deals with the Americas, Asia, and across the world, this interaction promises only to grow. The result will be more jobs that demand a familiarity with different cultures and second languages. Canadian businesspeople are aware of this point and have in fact advocated for increased second language and cultural familiarity. A 1997 report from the Conference Board of Canada entitled *Employability Skills Profile* cites amongst its most desired skills an employee who is able to, and I quote, understand and speak the language in which business is conducted and write effectively in the language in which business is conducted.

But beyond the world of economics and trade second language education in primary and secondary schools improves the overall quality of a student's education. Tests have shown that students who have taken a second language for a period of several years performed better on tests of both verbal and nonverbal reasoning. Through enhanced listening and memory skills that evolve from studying a second language, students are better able to perform tasks, from reading to language arts to mathematics. Simply, students of a

second language have an improved development of learning strategies and an increased ability to transfer skills to other areas.

In an ongoing study being conducted by the Edmonton public school board, the marks of students who participated in any of its six bilingual programs are being compared against students in the regular track by means of looking at standardized test scores. Thus far there has been a very distinct mark differential in favour of the bilingual program students. This even follows for students in special-needs programs. The more years students participate in the bilingual program, the more pronounced their superior performance has been on the standardized tests.

It is clear then, Mr. Speaker, that increased second language education and the promotion of cultural exchanges would also serve the very basic function of improving the learning process itself. Supporting this motion thus would be a demonstration of Alberta's continued leadership in providing better, more creative ways of providing education.

Beyond the very real benefits that interaction with international cultures and languages has in improving career potential and affecting overall education performance, a familiarity with different languages and places leads to a wider understanding of the world. It leads to a population of informed critical thinkers. It leads to an increased appreciation of different customs and ways of looking at the world.

I'm always amazed at how quickly young people of different cultures and languages learn from one another even though they may not always have a common language with which to communicate. Student exchanges provide wonderful opportunities to increase greater knowledge and understanding of one another and of our cultures and way of life. It improves us as citizens of our province and country, and it makes our world just a little bit better.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, a government body that reviewed the status of education across the United States, concluded that second languages belonged with the other basic disciplines that schools should teach: mathematics, computer science, social studies, and natural sciences. The power of a second language is a universally recognized force.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, in the fall of 1999 language services and the curriculum standards branch undertook a study of 29 school jurisdictions from across Alberta to determine, among other things, factors affecting enrolment in the second language courses and their recommendations for improvement. Two conclusions relevant to Motion 501 are as follows. Number one, they conclude that the fact that second languages are not required for high school graduation or university entrance has greatly contributed to enrolment decreases. Students focus on core subjects to improve their marks, or they choose other options that are less demanding and less time consuming. Secondly, they conclude that student exchanges and tours and other efforts to make various cultures and languages visible to the school community helped to increase interest and consequent enrolment in second language programs. I conclude that the optional nature of a second language program is having a negative effect on second language participation and that exchange programs are having a positive effect.

The same study addresses second language mandatory programs, and I quote from their conclusions. It states: respondents highly recommended having a second language mandated by the province, the jurisdiction, or the school. The school boards' recommendation coming out of this particular study is as follows: to make second languages as a part of basic education for at least some part of the 12 years of schooling: in grades 4 through 12, grades 4 through 9,

grades 7 through 12, grades 10 through 12, or in at least one of the elementary grades.

The long-term strategy of Alberta Learning's project to enhance second language education in Alberta mentions the key elements, which include discussing university entrance requirements and reviewing the high school diploma requirement. Motion 501 will be timely input as Alberta Learning and all stakeholders review the role that a second language will have in our curriculum and what role it will have in our high school diploma.

Motion 501 is worded to provide for wide flexibility and application. A compulsory second language component could mean a course or courses such as a minimum 10-level course under the present one high school diploma plan, or it could mean the equivalent of a 10-level course taken in elementary, junior high, or high school. For example, B.C. has a grade 5 to 9 compulsory language component, and I would assume that that would be at least equivalent to a grade 10 course. It could mean a part of an international study high school course involving trade and culture in addition to language, or it could mean a 30-level course for a special type of high school diploma, such as a language-enhanced diploma that could be considered in the future. And there are other possibilities that Alberta Education and various stakeholders will no doubt be exploring.

The point is that until a second language is given compulsory status in some form, it will not be considered for the importance of time and effort that it surely warrants.

I'd like to add to this point, Mr. Speaker, that international exchange programs especially are strengthened by the involvement of government. Many countries are more receptive when exchange initiatives are taken in a co-ordinated manner. While the efforts of individual schools, districts, and businesses in the past have had some great successes, a strong and consistent provincewide campaign is crucial to maximizing the benefits of these initiatives.

Indeed, government involvement has been the keystone of some of the most successful programs set up to promote exchanges. Certainly the governments of Japan and New Zealand and Australia and several other jurisdictions have actively been involved in creating and co-ordinating exchanges. These are examples of some of the best programs. In a province of exceptionally high standards it only makes sense to consider some of these very successful international programs.

Mr. Speaker, I presented to the members today many good reasons why they should support this motion to make second languages a compulsory component of our education system and to increase the opportunities for Alberta students to participate in international exchanges. First, it makes economic sense. Alberta is becoming truly engaged in the global economy. Investing in second language programs and exchanges will pay off by assuring that Albertans have the skills needed to remain competitive players in the world economy. Secondly, second language education has been proven to improve the cognitive abilities of students, impacting their overall performance. Learning another language such as French, Spanish, German, Japanese, or Mandarin leads to accelerated intellectual achievement, and surely this is a worthy goal. Thirdly, languages and exchanges promote a higher level of cultural awareness. Students get to see what unites human beings across the world, a process that leads to increased global harmony and understanding.

For those who doubt that government involvement is needed to promote what are clearly positive objectives, they need only look at the levels of participation in second languages while they are voluntary. Not only do disturbingly few students take these courses, but attendance is declining. As well, passing Motion 501 will serve

to strengthen international and national exchange opportunities for our youth.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope it's now clear to all members of this Assembly that increased exposure of Alberta students to language and culture will be immensely beneficial to Alberta, and I urge them to vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before we call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to join in the debate on Motion 501, may we have consent from the Assembly to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a former member of this House, Shirley Cripps, who was the MLA for Drayton Valley, I believe it was. She was here before I got here in 1982. She served as associate minister of agriculture. I believe it was from 1982 to '86, or somewhere in that area. I would ask that Shirley rise and we give her the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

(continued)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to be able to speak to Motion 501, the second language requirement that's being put before us this afternoon, and to support that motion. I think it has a great deal of merit, and I'd like to spend a few minutes indicating why I think that's true and also to point out some reservations I have about putting into practice this compulsory language requirement for high school students.

The bill indicates, and the Speaker elaborated a bit on, the reasons for having a second language requirement. It's interesting if you look back historically at the reasons why second languages have been included in school programs. In the Middle Ages the requirements were in schools so that the Scriptures could be read. At that time, of course, the language requirement was Latin. Throughout the years, various schools and various learning systems have made arguments for the inclusion of a second language.

I think one reason that permeates or abridges all of the reasons given is the notion that to be an educated individual, to be truly educated, you will be able to express and to learn in at least a language other than your native language, that a mark of being educated is being able to speak another language, and that is a consistent reason, I think, given in all proposals for including a second language. In the case before us, I heard the Speaker talk about the economic reasons for having our students be fluent in another language. Given the change in how business is being conducted and the involvement in parts of the world remote from Alberta, it's a great benefit to our students to be able to carry on commerce in a language other than their own. I agree with that.

3:50

I think it's interesting to put against that argument the counter-

argument, however, that English is fast becoming the universal language of the world and that the Internet is hastening that. Attempts by other governments, governments where languages other than English are spoken in their countries, have tried to take action to stop the march of English. The government of France, I understand, has an arm that's particularly devoted to trying to make sure that French is preserved and that the number of English words being incorporated into the French language is limited. They had trouble, for instance, with the space program. Being an American program and the French adopting all of those space and space-science words into the language, they went about trying to get some translations and ensuring that at least government departments in France used the French descriptions and not English.

There's that sort of notion that somewhere down the road in the future you may not need a second language to do business elsewhere, that we will all be speaking in English. However, I think that's a while in the coming, and in the interim this is a good idea.

One of the problems – and I look back, as many of us must do, to our second language experiences. I'm afraid mine weren't always with fondness. I'm not quite sure what I learned from three years of high school French and how proficient it made me. I certainly wouldn't dare try to do business in another country with the kind of French that I learned there. Nevertheless, I think it probably did serve as a useful basis, and I was able to squeak through an exam at university to get the second language requirement out of the way based on what was done in high school.

The proposal opens the door to a whole host of issues that would have to be addressed. Certainly in my case, in my high school experience, teaching and the quality of the teaching that would be available: are there teachers available to make this kind of proposal a reality? I think it would be a question that the Department of Learning would have to struggle with.

I think the value of a second language program has long been held by Albertans. I look at my experience here in Edmonton with the Edmonton public school board and the heritage language programs that saw Ukrainian, Cree, the Arabic program, the Mandarin program being introduced. In fact earlier this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Pei from Meyonohk school and her Mandarin students were introduced to the Assembly. They're a group of students who are receiving Mandarin instruction at the 6th grade level, and that will continue.

So I think that there's a great deal of support amongst Albertans for learning language programs for a number of reasons. A lot of it is heritage. There are many of those Albertans born elsewhere or whose parents were born elsewhere who desire the language that they were raised in, their family was raised in, to be perpetuated. So they argue from that perspective that a second language is needed.

One of the difficulties, of course, they've had is maintaining the class enrollments of those programs. They start off with great enthusiasm, and then it's my understanding that it takes at least a student body of 60 or 60-plus students to have a cohort that will see it through until 12th grade. It's very difficult to maintain that kind of a cohort, particularly once they hit high school and the pressures to take other courses and the pressures to keep their marks up become more evident. So maintaining those language programs has been a problem. I know at one point the Cree program had to be discontinued for just that reason. I think it's being reinstituted again, but keeping those programs in place is difficult.

One of the things this motion would do is that by making the language requirement compulsory, it would stress the importance of the language, but it would also mean that there was a reward for those students who stuck to it in terms of getting their high school

credentials. They would have contributed to that by taking a language program throughout their school career.

One of the other concerns I have about motions like this that come before the Assembly – and I'm not sure I've been guilty of it, Mr. Speaker, but I may have – is the notion of curriculum tinkering. That is taking something like second languages, even though we all say it's great and of huge value, and adding that to an already burdened program of studies without stepping back and saying: what are we doing to schools? What are we doing to students when we make these kinds of proposals?

One of the proposals we had and have put before the Assembly is the need for a review of K to 12 education in the province, much like the review that was done in 1971 by the Worth commission, an opportunity to stand back as they did at that time and to look at the program of studies, to look at the kinds of goals they thought were important, and then to come up with a comprehensive plan. Since that time we haven't had that kind of overview of education in the province. I'd still argue, Mr. Speaker, that's really a necessary thing to be done and probably a prerequisite to something like this. However, I still support this and am desirous that it be put in place, even if we don't get that kind of review.

The other concern I have with it – and maybe it's a department-specific problem – is that I look at the difficulty that the students have experienced with mathematics programs lately, the applied math and the pure math in high school, and I worry a little bit about the government's ability to implement this kind of a change or any kind of a change, given the kinds of things which seem to have happened to students with that program being implemented with little regard for students in the 65 to 80 grade range bracket.

So I have some reservations. Those reservations aside, I have some more things I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, but I think at this time, with permission, I would like to adjourn debate on Motion 501.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House is recessed until 4:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:59 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.]

Transmittal of Estimates

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order! Please rise in the galleries.

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2001, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

6. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the messages of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2001-2002 estimates and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

7. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

8. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2001-2002 lottery fund estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

9. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(2.1) the number of days the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2001-2002 lottery fund estimates shall be one day.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

10. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2000-2001 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 10 carried]

11. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2000-2001 supplementary supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 11 carried]

12. Mr. Hancock moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 12 carried]

Tablings

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table certain budget related documents. In February, when the House was not in session, our government published its 2000-2001 quarterly budget report. Now that the House is in session, this document is being tabled to comply with section 8 of the Government Accountability Act.

On behalf of the Minister of Revenue I am also tabling the Alberta heritage savings trust fund quarterly report also published in February. This complies with section 15 of Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.

Mr. Speaker, I am also tabling the third-quarter activity report,

which describes the government's major achievements during that period.

Mr. Speaker, before moving Motion 13, I also wish to table the 2000-2001 supplementary estimates, No. 2. When passed, these estimates will ratify the special warrant passed in March as permitted by section 6 of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. This special warrant was based on the quarterly budget report, which served as the revised consolidated fiscal plan as required by section 8 of the Government Accountability Act.

Mr. Speaker, I am also tabling the Legislative Assembly estimates and the government and lottery fund estimates.

In addition, I am tabling the consolidated fiscal business plan as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act. Budget 2001 also includes business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of this act.

head: **Budget Address**

13. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, several years ago Premier Klein stood in this Assembly and said: given the choice between the past and the future, Albertans will choose the future every time. On March 12 Albertans did just that. They chose a positive future. They chose the proven leadership of our Premier, and they chose a proven team to help lead the way.

By putting their trust and confidence in our government, Albertans sent a clear message: stay the course, get rid of Alberta's debt, spend what we can afford on things that count most, and when the debt is gone, reduce our taxes again, and leave more money in our pockets. We heard the message loud and clear, and all 74 proud members of the Ralph Klein team are here today to make sure the job gets done.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, budgets are complex. They're a mix of plans and ideas, economic forecasts and fiscal realities. Budgets take our dreams of tomorrow and match them with the dollars we have today. This year's budget is about meeting priorities and sharing benefits. It's about keeping our eyes firmly focused on the future.

Before I get into the details, Mr. Speaker, I want to answer the simple question most Albertans have, and that is: what does this budget mean for me and for my family. This is what Albertans and Alberta families can expect. They can expect to live in the first debt-free province in Canada, and with the lowest taxes in Canada they can expect more money in their pockets this year and every year. If they own a small business, the income taxes they will pay will be cut in half over the next three years. The combination of lower taxes for businesses, large and small, plus Alberta's well-known reputation as a place that's open for business, means they can expect more jobs, highly skilled, well-paying quality jobs, for themselves and for their children.

With this budget Albertans can expect quicker access to essential health services like MRIs, transplants, and major surgeries. With new seniors' lodges there will be more choices and hundreds more places for seniors to live. With Budget 2001 Alberta's children will continue to be at the top of the class. With added funding their school boards will have more flexibility to meet important priorities like reducing class sizes and providing more support for children with special needs. Young Albertans and people with sons and daughters at college or university will see automatic remissions on student loans, more scholarship opportunities, and no big jumps in tuition fees.

Mr. Speaker, the federal government may not be listening to

western farmers, but we sure are. We'll provide urgently needed support to Alberta's farmers and ranchers. If we face droughts this spring, they can count on us to respond.

For people living in our small communities and rural Alberta, more funding will be made available for RCMP. That will mean more active policing and safer communities.

Thanks to onetime accelerated investments Albertans will be able to travel on better roads and highways. Older schools in many communities will get the renovations they so desperately need, and more money will be spent on leading-edge health facilities and equipment.

Albertans have our guarantee that we will step in and take action if energy prices soar again in the future.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Albertans can expect to live in a province that's alive with energy and activity, a place that's leading the rest of the nation in economic growth. Almost everywhere you turn, there's positive news on the economic front. Alberta is the shining light in Canada's economy, and we're determined to keep that light shining brighter than ever.

Those are just some of the benefits we can share with Albertans, benefits that are a direct result of this government's careful fiscal plans and our determined agenda to create a positive future for our province.

If all goes well and as planned, Mr. Speaker, thanks to Alberta's strong economy we'll take in close to \$22.7 billion in revenues in 2001-2002. We'll spend the majority of those revenues where it counts, on top priorities like health, education, and onetime spending on infrastructure. We'll set aside a cushion of \$817 million to protect us in case oil and gas revenue drops, and at the end of the year at least three-quarters of that cushion will go to the bottom line, paying down Alberta's debt.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans understand that predicting provincial revenues is a Finance minister's nightmare. Last year a combination of strong oil prices and unprecedented increases in natural gas prices put the province in an outstanding financial position. We used that exceptional boost in revenues wisely: to pay down debt, to make onetime payments on improving infrastructure, and to shield Albertans from the full impact of spikes in natural gas and electricity costs. But the reality is that we simply don't know what might happen to oil and gas prices tomorrow, let alone three years from now. No one does. Every time the price of oil goes up or down a dollar a barrel, the province gains or loses \$153 million. Every time natural gas goes up or down by 10 cents an mcf, the province gains or loses \$142 million. So depending on whether you're a wild-eyed optimist or a hard-nosed pessimist – and believe you me, I've heard from both – the impact on forecasts for the province's bottom line is huge.

If you listen to the positive forecasts, three years from now we could take in \$8 billion in resource revenues. If you're more convinced by the lower forecasts, we could get half of that. That's a lot of money, Mr. Speaker. The \$4 billion difference between the highest and the lowest predictions comes close to what we spend on basic and postsecondary education in a year, and it shows the problems we can get into by pinning all our hopes on forecasts that may or may not come true.

Budgets aren't about pinning your hopes on forecasts. They're about acting responsibly. Forget the wild-eyed optimists. Take the responsible course and count on reasonable revenues. If we're wrong, Mr. Speaker, if oil and gas prices are better than we expect, no one will be happier than this Finance minister to be able to stand here next year and say to Albertans: "We've got great news. We're taking another giant step to our goal of a debt-free province."

We've taken the tried-and-true conservative course since 1993,

Mr. Speaker. So what have we got to show for it? Well, we have a fiscal record that's unmatched in Canada: seven consecutive years of balanced budgets, our debt reduced by nearly two-thirds, and \$750 million in permanent interest savings to spend on Albertans' priorities.

Mr. Speaker, oil and gas prices may be uncertain, but there's one thing we can say with absolute certainty: if oil and gas prices stay higher than we expect, at least three-quarters of that extra money will go directly to Alberta's debt. That's the law in Alberta. The higher the prices, the quicker we'll fulfill our promise to Albertans to create Canada's first debt-free province.

This year we'll also take a close and careful look at the longer term future for the province's revenue picture. We'll examine our investment and revenue frameworks to give us a better idea of what we can expect in the longer term, particularly after our debt is retired, and we'll use that information to help guide our budget decisions in the coming years.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn from the big picture to some of the details, especially in four key areas: keeping taxes low, continued growth in Alberta's economy, spending on Albertans' priorities, and creating a debt-free province.

Let's start with the best news first. Mr. Speaker, in 2001 Albertans will pay over a billion dollars less in personal income taxes to the provincial government. That's over a billion dollars less. Basic and spousal exemptions will be the highest in the country. In every income group people will pay less. In fact, 200,000 low-income earners will be removed from the tax rolls entirely.

4:50

On the business tax side Alberta's taxes may measure up to the rest of Canada, but when you look beyond our country's borders, we simply are not as competitive. In today's world of highly mobile businesses, people, and capital, it's simply not good enough to be just among the lowest in Canada. Thanks to the work of the Business Tax Review Committee, we're taking major strides to put Alberta in a solid competitive position with the rest of the world. The first cuts began on April 1. Income tax rates for all businesses have been cut. Capital gains taxes were reduced. The railway fuel tax is being reduced, and we're the only province in Canada to eliminate the financial institutions capital tax. Mr. Speaker, in the next five years the combined effects of cuts to both personal and business taxes will add \$4.3 billion to Alberta's economy.

Mr. Speaker, when you look around the province, the economic picture is truly breathtaking. In the last year, Alberta's economy grew by 6.1 percent, leading the rest of Canada and ranking right up there with leading economies around the world. We're looking at \$31 billion in major new construction projects on the books and ready to go, a sure sign that Alberta's economy is rapidly on the move. Alberta today is a much different place than it was 10 or 15 years ago. Unlike the past, our economy is no longer tied completely to the fortunes of the oil patch. The oil and gas industry now shares office towers in downtown Calgary with high-tech companies, thriving telecommunication industries, and new companies providing business and financial services. Gone are the days when Edmonton's fortunes were tied to the growth of the public sector. Today people are putting Edmonton and Calgary at the top of the list of cities that will lead the country in economic growth.

On top of growing grain and raising livestock to ship to markets outside the province, Alberta's agriculture industry is increasingly looking at ways to produce new products and add value right here in the province. The same is true for the forestry industry, for petrochemicals and a whole host of new business ventures that are adding strength and diversity to Alberta's economy.

This new and exciting economy is transforming the traditional image of Alberta from a producer of raw materials to a producer of

new ideas, new products, and new ways of doing business. The result is an economy that continues to fire on all cylinders. Spurred by tax cuts, we expect Alberta's economy to grow by 4.8 percent in 2001, far outpacing the rest of Canada. In the medium term we're expecting a healthy and sustainable pace of 3.2 percent per year on average. But perhaps the best news for Albertans is that solid economic performance should translate into over 150,000 new jobs in the province by 2004. Thanks to a strong and vibrant economy with more Albertans working than ever before, we're in a good position to target spending where it is needed most.

Mr. Speaker, when we decide how much to spend, it's not much different from a regular Alberta family. We start with how much we're likely to earn not just this year but for the next three years. Right now our earnings are at a peak, but we expect they will go down over the next few years, so we can't let ourselves get caught with spending more than we can afford. We have to look carefully at where we spend our money and make sure it's on top priorities like paying off the mortgage. We have to assess how much we spend on big-ticket items when we have cash on hand. Can we afford to buy a new car, fix the roof, or add a garage? In the province's case it's the question of paying for roads and highways, fixing schools, or building a new health centre.

The numbers, Mr. Speaker, in the province's budget may be bigger, but two key questions are the same. First, how do we take the money we have, pay our bills, and build a better life for our family? Secondly, are we better off to pay down the mortgage as fast as we can, spend money to meet pressing needs, or do a little of both?

In this year's budget we're doing a little of both. We'll spend over \$18 billion on priority programs, we'll invest more than \$3 billion in onetime spending to meet pressing needs, and we'll plan to make a major payment on the mortgage at the end of the year. By far the biggest proportion of this year's budget goes to Albertans' top two priorities, health and education.

In Health and Wellness base spending will increase by 13.5 percent this year and a total of 28 percent over the next three years. By 2003-2004 spending on health will make up 35 percent of the province's total spending. Mr. Speaker, Albertans can expect to see direct benefits from this spending in the form of more funding for provincewide services such as transplants, heart surgeries, and kidney dialysis; better access to MRIs, with the highest per capita rate of MRI scans in the country; a provincewide meningitis immunization program; more funding for drugs used in treating cancer; and an enhanced program for breast cancer screening.

In Learning, spending will increase by 7.7 percent this year and 19 percent over the next three years. With additional funding Alberta school boards will have the flexibility they need to meet their students' needs. The achievement of Alberta students ranks right up there with the best in the world, and our continuing investment in education will make sure it stays that way. To put the budget increases for basic education in perspective, in the year 2000-2001 budget the province provided every school board with over \$155,000 in total funding to support the education of a class of 25 students. By 2003, funding for the same class of 25 students will increase to \$180,000. That's an increase of \$1,000 per student.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economy and the success of young Albertans depends directly on their ability to get the education and training they need to pursue their career goals and dreams right here at home. With Budget 2001 colleges, universities, and technical institutes will be able to add 1,200 more spaces each year for the next three years in key areas such as health, business, teacher education, and information and communications technology. We will also add spaces in the apprenticeship programs to meet the need

for more skilled workers. Starting this school year we'll provide targeted funds to attract and retain the best faculty members in critical areas such as medicine, computer science, engineering, and business. By next school year this targeted funding will increase to \$40 million a year.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, as a parent we all know that one of the growing worries about postsecondary education is: will we be able to afford it for our children? Well, this government will not allow cost to be a barrier to postsecondary education. It's too important to our province, and it's too important for the future of our young people. With \$70 million in this year's budget, steps will be taken to automatically reduce the debt load of student loans for eligible students after they've successfully completed their first year and even further when they've completed their studies. On top of that, scholarship programs will be increased by 43 percent over the next three years. That will provide a direct benefit to about 20,000 Alberta students annually.

I want to quickly mention a couple of other areas where Albertans will see direct benefits from Budget 2001. New funds are being added this year to address problems of children at risk. Albertans will see expanded outreach, treatment, and prevention programs for children involved in prostitution, children with fetal alcohol syndrome, and troubled teens. At the other end of the age spectrum additional funds will be provided for Alberta seniors' benefit programs. We'll increase funding for the AISH program by 18 percent over the next three years, and we'll provide targeted funding to address the problems of homelessness. Mr. Speaker, these commitments are a sign of a government that cares not just about the bottom line but truly cares about the people of the province and especially those who need our help.

On top of ongoing funding for key program areas Budget 2001 continues our commitment to a number of onetime spending programs. During the recent election campaign Premier Klein and my colleagues, especially those from rural Alberta, learned firsthand about the growing challenges faced by Alberta's farmers and ranchers. Whether it's the threat of disease sweeping through their herds, the very real possibility of droughts, high input costs, or market conditions beyond their control, farmers and ranchers across all of western Canada face uncertain and very trying conditions.

For those of us who spend most of our time in the cities, it's easy to forget how difficult things can be for farmers and ranchers, but we made a commitment that we would not forget. With Budget 2001 we will add to the base budget already in place for farm safety net programs. This spring we will provide support to producers across the province to help meet urgent needs, and we'll continue to pressure the federal government to take the plight of western Canadian farmers to heart.

Mr. Speaker, our government is also taking action to protect Albertans from high energy costs, which includes individual Albertans, businesses, farmers, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, schools, postsecondary institutions, and health facilities. Our Alberta government will not stand by and let high energy prices cut into the strong Alberta advantage for individuals and businesses.

In fact on April 10 Premier Klein introduced new legislation to protect Albertans from high natural gas prices. Budget 2001 commits \$125 million to cover the cost of this protection program. If prices are higher than our forecast, further assistance will be provided. Each year we'll reassess the situation and decide if rebates are needed.

The final area of onetime spending is infrastructure. With the additional revenues available we will double our regular spending on

upgrading Alberta's infrastructure. In fact, from the year 2000 to the year 2004 we will have spent a total of over \$8 billion on roads, highways, and public transit, on new and renovated schools, on expanding our postsecondary facilities, building two new health centres of excellence, one for cardiac care and one for bone and joint care, providing support for water and wastewater facilities, and, of course, on Supernet. Supernet is the new high-speed Internet network linking 420 communities across the province and bringing the world literally to our doorsteps.

Mr. Speaker, those are the highlights of our spending plans for Budget 2001.

Let me turn from spending to saving, specifically to our bold plans to make Alberta the first province in Canada to be debt free. As the Speech from the Throne pointed out, the dream of a debt-free Alberta was once only a pinpoint of light on the horizon. Now it's in full view, and there is a very real possibility that Alberta's debt will be completely gone sooner rather than later.

However, we're taking a cautious approach. We can't and we won't make promises on debt retirement that we might not be able to keep, not until we have the money in the bank. But here is a promise. If prices stay high – and many think they will – we won't search out new ways of spending taxpayers' dollars on new spending programs. Instead, every dollar we can spare will go to pay down Alberta's debt. That's our promise to Albertans, and nothing would make us happier than to burn the mortgage before Alberta celebrates its 100th birthday in 2005. That's my goal and that's our Premier's goal.

Mr. Speaker, that's an overview of Budget 2001. It's a budget focused on meeting priorities and sharing benefits, reducing taxes and leaving more money in Albertans' pockets, spending what we can afford on priorities, and maintaining our promise to wipe the slate clean, to eliminate Alberta's debt once and for all. It's the kind of responsible budget Albertans have come to expect from this

government, and we have never let them down.

Mr. Speaker, giving a Budget Address is a humbling experience, and I have a long list of distinguished predecessors to follow. Each of them put their own stamp on budgets, and I thought: in my first Budget Address what would be my stamp? What is it I stand for in presenting budgets to the people of Alberta?

In my personal and family life I've lived by one model, and that is to thine own self be true. I've come to realize that this is what Alberta is all about. It's definitely what budgets are about, telling things like they are, not beating around the bush, doing things in our own unique way, tackling problems head-on, trying in spite of all odds to do the right thing while building an even stronger future for ourselves, our children, my son, and our great province.

5:10

Winston Churchill once said, "There is only one duty, only one safe course, and that is to try to be right." Mr. Speaker, who am I to disagree with Winston Churchill? I firmly believe this is the right budget for Alberta. It's a budget that makes no promises we can't keep, a budget that keeps us on a steady course to the brightest vision we can imagine: a debt-free Alberta, a proud and thriving province with jobs, opportunities, and an undying spirit that says to the rest of the world that there's no stopping Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:12 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, April 24, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/04/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 23: Mr. Coutts]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to offer my comments on the Speech from the Throne. I found it a very interesting document, and I would like to relate it this evening to the campaign run by the government party in the past election.

We looked very carefully, of course, during the election at what the government party, the Progressive Conservative Party, was saying in the election, and it was very difficult to discern a clear and coherent program that was being offered to Albertans. To my knowledge the government party never issued a comprehensive platform document, and they certainly never issued any kind of clear policy plans. This is contradicted in the Speech from the Throne, which says: "Albertans already know what the plan is. It's the plan they voted for." I submit, Mr. Speaker, that Albertans did not know the specific policies and programs that the government intended to use to run the province of Alberta over the next four years.

So the closest thing we could come up with in the throne speech of the government's vision was

a vision of low taxes, no provincial debt, a strong economy, new jobs for our young people, sound infrastructure, good health care and education systems, stable agricultural communities, safe streets, and reliable social programs.

Well, that's all fine and dandy, Mr. Speaker. That's all fine and dandy. Even the New Democrats could support that kind of vague, feel-good program. But, as they say, the devil is in the details. If the government didn't want to give exact details about its plan in the election campaign, I have to ask myself: is there a real mandate here for the few specific policies that are mentioned?

Now, there are a few specific issues in the speech, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I need to take issue with the proposal to streamline "the approval process to bring new generation projects onstream." I've made the point before that the EUB has been turned into a toothless tiger by the policy of this government. I suspect that the government is about to gut further the ability of the EUB to protect environmental and consumer interests. It seems that the next victim of the government's disastrous deregulation scheme is going to be green power and the environment. When deregulation was begun, one of the arguments for it was that it would open up access to the market for producers of alternative power. As it turns out, the prices have been driven up so much that producers and consumers are forced to switch to the cheapest form of energy, which is of course coal.

Second, the government has made a major announcement

regarding MRIs in the public sector. Normally one would expect a party to put these kinds of plans out in front of the public for scrutiny and debate. Not this government. So while the new public MRIs are welcome and in fact overdue, we're still stuck with a policy that gives a \$3.2 million bailout of public dollars to private, for-profit providers. This is a government, Mr. Speaker, squarely in the middle of being in business. Although the government says that this bailout is only a onetime deal, I have absolutely no faith that this is the case. At every turn the government has made it priority number one to cut the private sector in on Alberta's health care system.

Thirdly, I would like to make some comments regarding the government's plan to offer protection to consumers for rising home-heating costs. Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that there's a bill on the Order Paper dealing with this and which was in fact already passed at second reading, so I won't try to delve too much into the details of that. I just want to make a few short comments.

We in the New Democrat caucus have put forward many times a way to protect consumers from rising home-heating costs by adjusting royalties to a slightly higher level to fund the cap. In that way you're not using general revenue to protect consumers. The government, by funding its program from general revenue, is letting the oil and gas industry off the hook. Now, remember that for every \$1 in additional royalties the government collects from higher natural gas prices, the industry collects three additional dollars in windfall profits. In my view, it's only fair to expect industry to participate in protecting the consumers from higher prices.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about what's not in the speech. We could talk about what the government ignored in the election campaign and what they have again ignored in the Speech from the Throne. First of all, rising tuition fees get absolutely no mention in this speech, even though they are one of the most difficult problems faced by youth and Alberta families today. Within the space of 10 years Alberta has gone from the third lowest tuition fees to the third highest, and there's no end in sight. How can this government be serious about building a successful economy for the future when the doors to education are being closed to many promising young people?

The throne speech also does not address the shameful state of our social assistance rates nor, might I add, does today's budget speech. We are currently competing with the Maritime provinces for the distinction of having the lowest social assistance rates anywhere in Canada. I was listening the other day to the comments made by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, who stressed the importance of family in the 21st century, and I couldn't agree with him more. One way that we can build healthy families is by increasing assistance to those who need it the most.

I know that one of the major issues the hon. Minister for Children's Services is dealing with is the increasing number of children in the care of her department. By far the biggest reason that those numbers are increasing is that the parents of these children are unable to provide the necessary care. By boosting those social assistance rates, we can provide a solid foundation for the children and their families. The minister said today, Mr. Speaker, that the number of children in care has gone up to a very high level, and I would see very clearly a direct correlation between the number of children in care and the level of poverty in this province, which is absolutely shameful. One in five Albertans lives at or below the poverty level, and Edmonton is amongst the highest.

The minister over there might be interested to know, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta municipalities just a year ago released a comprehensive report dealing with poverty levels in families in communities, over 21 communities in the province of Alberta, and found that between

15 and 23 percent of families in various communities lived at or below the poverty line. Those are facts that any member of this House can research and find out for themselves. There's no question that under this government the rich are getting richer and that even the middle class is doing very well as long as oil and gas prices remain high. As long as the economy based on energy remains booming, this government can look good when it comes to the high-income and even middle-income Albertans, but I tell you there are many, many thousands of Alberta families that are worse off than they were before. They're paying higher rents, and their income has not gone up.

Now, take the social assistance rates, Mr. Speaker. They were cut dramatically a number of years ago, and there has not been one attempt by this government to restore even an iota of the level of support, notwithstanding the fact that food prices have gone up, notwithstanding the fact that rents have skyrocketed in a number of Alberta communities. This government has turned its back on those people. They're not on the government's radar screen at all. There's a very significant number of people in that boat. As I said, up to 20 percent of Albertans are in that boat. I would challenge members opposite to come up with their own reliable estimates of the extent of poverty in this province. I've made the offer before, in my maiden speech, that they could come and I would take them on a tour of my constituency, and they could see it firsthand. There's plenty of it out there, and there's plenty of it in Small Town, Alberta, too. It's just a little bit less visible than it is in the big cities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to make a short speech this evening. I want to indicate that while it was difficult to find a clear direction in the government's election program, it is also difficult to find a clear direction from the government in the Speech from the Throne. It is an abbreviated, feel-good document that has no specific concrete proposals to better the lives of Alberta families, and I think that the government could do much better.

Thank you very much.

8:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you for the opportunity to speak in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour and privilege for me to be here today, elected by Edmonton-Castle Downs in a fair and open process, endowed with the duty to bring forward concerns of my constituents, and empowered with the means to take effective action on these issues.

I have the utmost respect for the democratic process and take my duty to listen, to become informed, and to take action always in the interests of Albertans very seriously. My respect comes in part from experiences I had when I was younger, growing up in Poland. There I witnessed how self-interest, closed-door deal-making, and absence of a mechanism to hear the people's concerns could lead to many dark and dangerous results, ranging from denial of educational and economic opportunities to denial of basic human rights.

As I understand it, I am the first Polish-born person ever elected to a provincial or federal level of government in Canadian history. I hope this allows me to make a unique contribution to this Chamber in many ways, but especially I hope that one of those ways is to serve constituents as a reminder of how important democracy is and how important people's voices are in this democratic process. It's a privilege not to be taken lightly.

Before I address some of the points from the throne speech, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say thank you to a number of groups and individuals for the contributions that they have made in the past months and years. First, thank you to everyone who helped me get

elected in Edmonton-Castle Downs. I feel especially privileged to be here today because I know how hard-fought the campaign was. There were a number of excellent candidates, and I want everyone to know that their efforts were appreciated. Also, I want to thank all of the constituents who voted. Whether you voted for me or not, your participation in the electoral process strengthened the community simply by being aware and taking the responsibility. I would encourage all constituents, no matter what political stripe, to be comfortable in approaching me with whatever concerns they may have over the next few years.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I think gratitude is owed both to the hon. Premier for providing this province with clear vision and strong leadership and to the hon. Lieutenant Governor for the grace and dignity that she has brought to her office.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments to introduce my fellow members of this Legislature to the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. The first thing to note about my constituency is that it is mostly a residential area. As a result of this, Edmonton-Castle Downs has a strong sense of community spirit.

A large number of the people that compose the residential population are directly or indirectly employed by the Canadian armed forces. One of the most striking landmarks adjacent to my constituency is the Griesbach military base. This base has served the Canadian military for many years. Over the next five years, however, this base will be shutting down step by step and be turned into more residential space. It is estimated that homes for over 2,300 families will be made from this space, a very exciting development that will bring the need for more schools and infrastructure but will also strengthen the community with new homes and neighbours.

Another noticeable aspect of Edmonton-Castle Downs is the rich ethnic diversity. So many nations are represented within the constituency—Arabic, Italian, Ukrainian, Polish—amongst the many varied religious buildings that have been built. Edmonton-Castle Downs, Mr. Speaker, can soon boast being the home of the largest Buddhist temple in Canada. This diversity results in a strong community spirit, making Edmonton-Castle Downs a shining model of the society and the harmony that we have in Canada.

Now that I have acquainted my fellow members with the Edmonton-Castle Downs constituency, I would like to address some points of the throne speech directly. I want to draw on some of the aspects of the speech that relate directly to my constituency and others that address concerns of all Albertans that I consider especially important issues to maintain prosperity and a high quality of life for future generations of Albertans.

First, allow me to address education. The throne speech indicated that education continues to be a top priority for this government and that Albertans need and deserve a lifelong learning system that provides the best possible start in the early grades. I could not agree more. To give every child a fair chance at pursuing their potential is surely the most important duty any person or any government could pursue. Surely if we do not care enough for our children, we have to re-evaluate our values and visions for the future. As well, looking after our children is an investment. Studies have shown time and time again that when people are well cared for at the early stages in their lives, they have greater opportunity to become hardworking, contributing members of our community. Mr. Speaker, they will demand less time and resources of justice, education, and health care in the future.

One way in which Edmonton-Castle Downs would be well served to create better opportunities for its young people is through the establishment of a new high school. As I mentioned, Castle Downs is enriched with a growing residential population that promises to grow only larger in the next few years with the conversion of CFB

Griesbach. I am pleased to see that funding is going to such effective targets, programs in general classroom size reduction and early literacy initiatives, the \$60 million program begun in 1998 to provide better opportunities for young people to achieve basic literacy.

Yet even with these very positive and effective programs, the government needs to keep the basics of education important, and having access to a high school when there is a looming demand is key to keeping with the basics. It will be a top priority of mine and I hope of this government to help get a high school in Castle Downs over the next few years.

Education is important to bring up children right, but it is not the only area that this provincial government can and should become involved in. I strongly believe in the role of Alberta Children's Services programs and the impact they have in breaking cycles of family violence and shielding children from the effects of abuse, violence, and poverty, that prevent some children from becoming strong, sound individuals. I am encouraged that the budget for Children's Services has increased nearly 9 percent over the last year to allow for a greater number and more comprehensive programs. I believe firmly that this is an area that the government must continue to support in its mission to provide for a fair and strong future.

The throne speech also proclaims that Alberta values a caring society, where those who are vulnerable receive the support they need. Sadly, seniors very often end up being the most vulnerable members of our society. Often they are subject to a fixed income when costs such as energy increase dramatically, causing them to have income difficulties. Often they are merely neglected after committing their lives to being hardworking employees, mothers, and fathers. Seniors deserve our attention and protection through whatever means may be available to the government.

One of these means is to find a way to provide affordable housing. I am pleased with some of the initiatives that have been taken in this direction over the past few years. Seventeen projects were selected last year to receive funding for supportive housing units or modifications to existing projects to accommodate the aging in place of low- and moderate-income seniors as part of the seniors' supportive housing initiative program. As a result, 630 new supportive housing units will be available to Albertans. I know this is a step in the right direction, but I also know from many seniors I have met in my constituency that more is needed.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I trust that my background as an educator combined with the strong support of the constituents that I have will allow me to positively contribute to the future and strength of this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

MR. VANDERMEER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride and honour that I rise today to deliver my maiden speech as the new MLA for Edmonton-Manning. I'd like to start by congratulating the new and returning MLAs to the Legislature. I would also like to thank the great people of Edmonton-Manning for giving me their support. There are just under 40,000 dynamic people living in the constituency, so there is a lot of work to be done.

I would also like to thank the volunteers of northeast Edmonton who helped me throughout the campaign and up until the election on March 12, 2001. From the beginning of the campaign I had a large number of volunteers who worked very hard. There were dozens of junior and senior high students who were very curious about government and the election process and looking for ways to help.

It was great to have the excitement of the youth in the office. You could feel it as soon as you walked in the door. I would like to thank those students for making the election more enjoyable and for working so hard on the election. I would especially like to thank my wife, who not only worked on the campaign but kept our businesses and our household running as well.

Mr. Speaker, I know the constituency of Edmonton-Manning very well. I was raised in Edmonton-Manning, and I still live in Edmonton-Manning. I was raised in Belvedere. Later as a teenager my family moved to Steele Heights, and after Trish and I were married in 1985, we moved to Horse Hills, all in Edmonton-Manning. Our first home was a mobile home, 564 square feet of luxury living. We paid \$250 a month rent and \$6 for the phone, which was a phone still on a party line. I said to Trish: "We should live here five years. Think of the money we could save." We almost made the five years.

In 1987 we started Vandermeer Construction, and in 1988 my first son, William, was born. In 1989 our daughter, Charlene, was born. We were quickly growing out of our humble home, and it was time to build our home. I was going to say our first house, but in a sentimental way it may just be our last home. Kind of boring you say, living in one area all your life. Not really. Edmonton-Manning is a great place to live.

Edmonton-Manning is located in the northeast corner of the city. Our little pocket in the north is very diverse. Along with the dynamics of Edmonton-Manning district is the farm community on the outskirts of the city. I have the challenge and the pleasure of meeting the needs of both rural and urban issues. I am honoured to represent the small farming community in Edmonton-Manning. During the campaign I enjoyed talking to farmers and listening to their concerns. One of the biggest issues facing farmers not only in north Edmonton but in all Alberta is promoting the idea of value-added products for the farming industry. There are rich farmland and market gardens that would benefit from a shift toward value-added products. We need to work with the federal government to give farmers the flexibility to create more value-added products.

I believe the race for MLA in Edmonton-Manning was very close, as it was a reflection of the diversity in the area. I look forward to proving to the constituents that they made the right choice to create a better future. People in Edmonton-Manning are excited about Alberta's success and look forward to thinking in a new direction.

I feel this government must reflect on the past as today is budget day. Many provinces have natural resources and a growing economy. The difference in Alberta is that we have had a courageous government, a strong-willed populace, and a natural leader who have all worked very hard to make Alberta the best province in Canada. We streamlined funding for services and restrained ourselves from squandering our fortunes. Now the rewards seem endless. Our past success was due to the simplicity of this government's direction.

I believe in a less-intrusive government. The people of Alberta are a responsible people and don't want a government looking over their shoulder, telling them what they can and what they cannot do on every minute situation dealing with their personal lives.

We must remember our roots in these prosperous times. Even though we are in the middle of an incredible economic upswing, we still need to exercise a safe level of fiscal restraint. We must also be on guard from interest groups. Rewarding people who sacrificed in the government services is necessary; however, as a government we must decide which groups want money from those who need money. Taking care of those less fortunate should take precedence. For example, the assured income for the severely handicapped is an income support program for adults who have permanent impairment that substantially limits their ability to earn a living and who have

few resources. This program is offered through Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and I believe it should receive more funding. I'm glad to hear in the budget speech today that there will be more funding for this program.

With Alberta's strong economy we need to look beyond the issues of the day and solve other problems that do not get much attention. Complacency is a dangerous thing. Alberta's surpluses will not necessarily last forever. We must focus our attention on paying off the debt and lowering taxes as much and as soon as possible. These actions directly benefit our constituents.

Too much government spending may eventually worry Albertans. The government of Alberta and Albertans have invested years of hard work that could be undone by losing our perspective and allowing government to expand into another unmanageable, ineffective bureaucracy. Sustainability is a word we hear a lot lately. We know that economies go up and down, and knowing that, we need to make sure that our programs are indeed sustainable in good times and in bad.

I agree with this government's goal to reduce taxes in Alberta. There is one more Alberta tax that should be dealt with: health care premiums. Health care premiums, in my opinion, are a tax that is a huge load on Albertans. If we can afford it, and I think we can – we say that taxes are going down. This is the first tax we should eliminate altogether because it is simply the right thing to do. It also reminds us of past governments, who were always looking for new ways to tax and create new revenue. We are not like that anymore, nor should we ever be like that again.

I share concerns regarding the education system with the constituents of Edmonton-Manning. Increasing funding should improve the condition of schools and resources for teachers and students. We need to learn to work together to make sure that we see results in excellent and well-educated students. We need to continue the tradition of staying the course of the mid-1990s. We must maintain fiscal responsibility and a positive vision for the future. We need to be compassionate and disciplined with Alberta's surplus, fair and understanding toward different views and perspectives, as well as honest and accountable to our constituents.

I am confident that this government will earn the respect of many more constituents of Edmonton-Manning very soon. I will show them my passion to this government and especially my dedication to Edmonton-Manning, to their concerns and issues. There is a great deal of work to be done, and I look forward to the future of Alberta.

One thing that I'd like to share with you too. I told you a brief history of the beginning of my life with Trish and our marriage. Two years ago we were also blessed with Samuel, our youngest boy. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I'd like to move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

8:30

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

Second Reading

Bill 3

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to move second reading of Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This act strengthens our ability to protect and manage provincial fish resources and is consistent with promoting the Alberta advantage in sustainable natural resources. This amendment act brings with it changes that deal with administrative and technical issues that have arisen since the Fisheries (Alberta) Act was proclaimed into force in November of 1997.

The existing act does not have provisions to license and regulate fish derbies and tournaments. The Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001, will establish those provisions, Mr. Speaker. The derbies and tournaments can potentially reduce the health of our fish population, and they can lower the available harvest of traditional recreational anglers. Regulating derbies and tournaments of course will lower their impact on the overall fish resources of our lakes.

The Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001, will also establish provisions and operating standards for guides and anglers.

Changes to the act will also allow us to appropriately regulate game fish that are held in aquariums or other contained waters. These changes, Mr. Speaker, will require game fish from all sources to be kept only in licensed and approved facilities.

In addition to focusing on sustainable resource management, a number of revisions to the act are in support of Alberta's commitment to enforcing these laws. Anyone who does not pay a fine under the Fisheries (Alberta) Act or the Wildlife Act will be suspended from sportfishing until the fine is paid up. This new authority will allow items used in the offence against the act to be seized by the fisheries officers.

This amendment also aligns this act with the federal Fisheries Act. An amendment will create a clear exemption to protect employees who, while performing their duties, are in violation of the act. Conservation officers use these authorities when enforcing the Fisheries Act. Through this amendment, Mr. Speaker, these new authorities will be incorporated into the Fisheries (Alberta) Act.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to speak.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with interest to the hon. minister's introduction to Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act. The first thought that occurred was the discussion I had last night with the 161st Scout troop from Forest Heights. They were questioning me on the role of an MLA and the new government, and I told them that the government had grown so large, the cabinet had expanded to 24 portfolios. I said that the only thing that is not there is a minister of fisheries. I believe, after listening to the hon. minister's comments, that this must certainly be part of his portfolio, minister of fisheries.

Now, we have rules here, and the highlights of this bill concerning competitive fishing tournaments and derbies will be brought in under regulations. We also see here, Mr. Speaker, that a person convicted of an offence under this act will have his or her fishing and hunting licence revoked until the fine is paid. The hon. minister talked about penalties, and if not in this bill, I wonder if this is not the appropriate time to deal with the whole issue of poaching in Alberta. There are certainly cases where freshwater fish in the lakes here are winding up in commercial establishments, restaurants. [interjection]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister assures me and other members of this House that this has been dealt with, and I am very pleased to hear about that because it should be fair for everyone. If the product is coming, for instance, from fish farms, well, then that's fine, but what sort of controls are there in place to ensure that is exactly what is going on whenever the product comes to market?

There are some changes to definitions of types of fish and the

rules for keeping fish in captivity here, and this appears to be developing as pay-for-what-you-catch private commercial fishing opportunities. I hope I never see the day in this fine province where individuals can buy or lease the fishing rights along either side of a stream or river. I certainly think that would be the wrong message to send, particularly for those who enjoy the sport of fly-fishing. In committee I believe I will have some comments regarding that.

I have questions regarding the definitions in this bill, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully we can get a clarification on what will be defined as a fish-handling facility, particularly whenever this concerns fish-farming. What exactly is a fish-handling facility? What are the anticipated differences between fish and game fish? I'm assuming this is all going to be explained, and hopefully it will deal with fish-farming. The definition of sport fishing: now, I'm curious about that. Also, will fishing with a bow and arrow or spear be allowed in all lakes, and how will this be monitored? Will sport fishing guides be regulated by the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society? Will all the tournaments and derbies require a licence, or will certain ones be exempt? As I understand, there are different derbies and different tournaments in the north end of the province and in the south, in the foothills. We all know the importance of the bull trout not only to the sport fisherman but also to the Liberal caucus. That is a very, very important fish in the ongoing history of our caucus.

8:40

In closing, I have one final query for the minister, and I look forward in due course, Mr. Speaker, to his answers. What does the minister anticipate the fees will be for a tournament licence?

With those comments on Bill 3 at this stage in second reading, Mr. Speaker, I will await in due course the response from the minister and I will cede the floor to one of my colleagues.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak briefly on Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001. The truth is that I did try and contact the great white fisherperson in our family, which is my father, to find out whether he had any knowledge of what was being proposed in this bill, because I'm sure he does. He seems to belong to every club, the trout fishing club and all of them. But I didn't get back to him, so I guess I'll have to rise and speak to this again in Committee of the Whole once I hear back from him.

This strikes me as a very reasonable bill. It seems to be addressing problems that have been raised over a long period of time, both on the sportfisher side of things and somewhat on the environmental side.

Now, the part that I was interested in was whether the minister has addressed the recommendations from the Auditor General's '99-2000 report on the fish management system. Obviously, there has been some back-and-forth around fish stocking management. The AG report also reviewed this in '93-94 and has been watching it for some time. There is a specific recommendation in here about "regional and area Action Plans used in the planning process" not being completed on a consistent basis. "There are 17 areas covering the Province for which Action Plans are prepared by the Department's Natural Resources Service." He goes into quite a bit of detail about what's happening. Essentially these plans are "to recover collapsed and vulnerable populations and to sustain stable . . . ones." That's a quote directly from the Auditor General's report. So the department is able to prioritize the activities to make sure that it is helping collapsed fisheries to recover and being able to keep the viable ones viable.

I'm wondering what the minister has done, seeing as this bill is

about fish management – is anything that the Auditor General has brought up repeatedly being addressed through this bill? It's a little hard to tell because once again – you know, I'm beginning to think that if I had a magic wand, the word I'd remove would be "regulation," because I see far too much of it appearing in proposed legislation from this government. Everything gets referred to and defined in the regulations, and the regulations are established by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is really the cabinet, which really means that the good decisions, the ones that people really need to know about and would probably like some input on, are all decided behind closed doors.

Once again in this bill, as I looked through it, there are a number of things that are being defined in the regulations, including what a competitive fishing event is, competitive fishing event participant, fish handling facility, which again is part of what I was addressing with the Auditor General's concerns. Then the bill goes into adding some different kinds of fish that weren't covered by the act previously.

Essentially we have a bill that is trying to put in rules around competitive fishing events – fishing derbies is what I would have known them as – deal somewhat with how people that are convicted of an offence under the act are actually dealt with, change these definitions, additional types of fish that are added in, and rules for keeping fish in captivity, which is where my primary source of interest was, what the department had done to address the requests and concerns brought forward by the Auditor General. I'm sure that the minister can address those for me when he speaks again on this bill.

As I say, I haven't heard back from the great white fisherperson, but I'm sure I will. As far as I'm concerned, at this point I have no problem supporting this bill. I know there are others who may well wish to speak to it at a later date, so at this point I would like to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 4

Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased tonight to move second reading of Bill 4, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill will increase compensation to landowners or occupants facing damages. This is for areas of their property not covered by leases to energy companies or included in the right-of-entry orders. This bill will increase the amount of compensation that can be dealt with by the board for damages, raising it from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Surface rights legislation is administered by the Surface Rights Board. This is a quicker and more efficient channel for dealing with compensation than the court system. Currently section 33(2)(b), the amount of compensation claimed by the occupant concerning damages, cannot exceed \$5,000.

Mr. Speaker, this limit has been in place since 1983, and it is generally outdated. The amount is too low to effectively deal with damage claims at this time. Unless the limit is raised to \$25,000, landowners must apply to the courts, a process which can be expensive and time-consuming for everyone. By proposing an increase in the compensation, this bill will reduce the time spent or court expenses of an owner or occupant in recovering damages and

allow an owner or occupant to receive full value for damages.

Let me just take a moment to tell you how compensation arrangements are made at this time. Should negotiations between the landowner or occupant and the operator for a surface lease fail, the operator may apply to the Surface Rights Board for a right-of-entry order. Once the right-of-entry order is issued, a compensation hearing is scheduled to determine the amount of compensation the landowner or occupant is entitled to. The landowner receives annual rent or a onetime payment for leasing the land. Additional compensation is rewarded if land not included in the surface rights lease or right-of-entry order is damaged as a result of the energy company's operations.

There are three ways that section 33 of the act provides compensation for damages. Damage to land off the right of entry: a good example is contamination off the right of entry. Trespassing by energy company employees on land not covered by the lease. Another is the loss of livestock and the owner's time and expenses in recovering livestock; for example, if the energy company leaves a gate open.

By increasing the compensation amount and allowing the Surface Rights Board to continue administering compensation, landowners and occupants can receive full value for damages in a quick and affordable manner.

Thank you.

8:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few brief comments this evening on the Surface Rights Amendment Act, Bill 4. It looks like it's quite similar to what was proposed by my colleague from Lethbridge-East, the hon. Dr. Nicol, in the last session, and it's certainly, I think, necessary.

The minister recently concluded his comments and said that it's 1983, I believe, and \$5,000 went a lot further in 1983 than it does now. This is quite a logical step, I believe, from \$5,000 to \$25,000, as the maximum level of appeals for surface rights compensation claims. The Surface Rights Board is certainly going to have its work cut out for it in the future as our urban communities grow larger and grow closer to producing oil and gas fields. It is necessary for the government to have legislation that's reflective of this, and I believe this document goes in that direction. At this time I generally am supportive of this legislation, but the mediation process, as I understand it, between the affected landowners – the Surface Rights Board is in the middle, and the oil companies or the petroleum companies are on the other side.

I represent a constituency certainly that would not be nearly as affected by this issue as some colleagues from other centres across the province, but there are people in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar who own land, and they are affected by this. They've had problems in the past. I don't know if this is specifically going to be able to address their problems. Their problems were to deal with water, contamination of surface water, and also air and noise pollution from the activities on the leases themselves, but that's to be dealt with in another statute.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I think I would be in support of this bill, but I will have to wait and hear back from some officials of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Landmen.

At this time again, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor to one of my colleagues. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I am glad to be able to speak in second reading to Bill 4, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001. Once again a fairly straightforward bill, very simple, very short – I think it's a whole two pages long – and obviously something that's been negotiated and coming for a long time.

As my colleague made note, in fact the first time we saw this issue raised was in Bill 229 in 1999, brought forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. So interesting how all the good Liberal ideas end up getting taken, but my compliments to the government side for indeed flattering the Liberal caucus by implementing the bill ideas that we do indeed bring forward, almost an identical reading of the bill.

If the landowner and the company that wants to do exploration or drilling or whatever can't come to an agreement on the amount of compensation, then they end up going to the Surface Rights Board, and obviously the amount of money that was in the legislation previously just doesn't hold up in this day and age. I mean, \$5,000 is the existing amount of money, and that just doesn't go very far in 2001. I don't know if that's a good comment on how expensive litigation is getting or not, but certainly it seems reasonable for damage or water contamination and various other issues that are being raised that \$25,000 is a more appropriate amount of money to empower the board to be administering.

One issue that's been raised with me is not so much around surface rights. Well, no. It is, because it's around noise, and it's around damage from almost an earthquake effect. Some of folks are buying acreages in these small developments on the edge of cities and smaller centres, and they start up these little acreage communities. Then you end up with a drilling rig pulling in across the road. They don't get a lot of warning. There's not a lot time where they get given any notice that this is about to happen. So if you did know it was going to happen, you could maybe arrange to be taking your holidays while the particular work is being done so it wouldn't be so troublesome to you. But they're also complaining about that sort of shaking affect that you get when somebody is not too far away and moving large amounts of dirt around and drilling into the ground.

AN HON. MEMBER: Vibrations.

MS BLAKEMAN: Vibrations, thank you.

It does affect you. I think if any of us have ever had any kind of construction done nearby to where our homes are, you certainly feel it. It comes right up through the foundation and starts shaking the dishes that are on the walls and in the cupboards, and there can certainly be damage from it, never mind the sort of nuisance factor. I'm not sure if this sort of thing is covered under what the board can look at or compensate for, but maybe it should be. I know that issue has been raised with me. I've been asked to bring it forward. I've brought it forward.

I know there are a lot of new members in the House with us, and I think it's important that it be outlined that being in opposition doesn't mean that we automatically oppose everything. If we've had enough time to have a reasonable look at the bill, to be able to contact some stakeholders and get some feedback and it appears to be a reasonable thing that has been a long time in coming, we're not going to oppose a bill. We're going to speak briefly to it. Certainly in second reading we're speaking to the principle of the bill, and I have no problem supporting the principle of what this bill is putting forward. However, I do realize that there are others who may well wish to speak to this on another day. So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we adjourn debate on second reading of Bill 4.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:00

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of the new members, this is called Committee of the Whole, and I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order. It's the informal session part of the Legislature. People are able to remove their jackets and indeed are able to move around and visit quietly with others, so there's no need for long-distance conversations. We have the convention that only one person is standing and speaking at a time. Although you can move around, if you wish to speak to any of the issues before the committee, whether it be in Committee of the Whole or in Committee of Supply, you are obliged to speak only in your place. That's where you can speak from and be recognized. So if somebody is moving around, they hopefully are moving purposely from the place where they had just been sitting to another place where they'll wish to sit.

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: We would call upon, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar first of all to offer any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to Bill 1.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this time I am anxious to enter into the discussion at committee on the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, that, I believe, as I said earlier in second reading, is largely symbolic, is unnecessary. But a person has to take a bad thing and try to make the best of it. Hopefully, at some point we're going to get the opportunity to make amendments to this bill.

Certainly if we look at the existing Natural Gas Rebates Act, that came into play in 1974, Mr. Chairman, if hon. members were to read that bill, they would certainly agree that this bill is not necessary and that it is a public relations exercise. There are so many things that are in the old legislation that are not in this legislation. Anytime that legislation comes forward – and we look at supplementary estimates. We see that there is, I believe, \$403 million or \$406 million in here that is to be spent on gas rebates. That is a substantial amount of money. There are mentions of the definition of industrial raw material in this bill that we have to examine very, very closely, particularly whenever you think of ethane and its value to the petrochemical industry in this province.

You look at price protection. Naturally it is an interference in the free-market system whenever you talk about price protection. We have to examine this very, very closely, Mr. Chairman. However, when you look at this legislation as it exists, this slogan piece, this public relations exercise, we're discussing rebates to vendors, yet we are not going to have a definition of what a vendor is or is not. In this case a vendor could turn out to be a natural gas electrical generating station.

At this time I would have to question: is it in the best interests of the taxpayers of this province to subsidize a natural gas fired generating station? How are the coal-fired generating stations to feel about this? We know there is a certain economic advantage. Also, how do people who are concerned about conservation feel about this, Mr. Chairman? I think it is very, very important that the whole idea of who a vendor is is made clear. Certainly in section 3 there is no discussion of a definition of a vendor.

Now, who is going to be eligible for the gas rebates? This is very interesting. What sort of control is going to be on the money? How will we know it's to be going where it was programmed to go? The calculations of rebate payments, the applications for rebate pay-

ments, the point at which rebate payments are made: these are all vital questions whenever we're considering spending millions and millions and millions of dollars.

People in the province of Alberta are of the impression that these are just short-term rebates, but when you look at the gas supply in this province, perhaps citizens are right whenever they conclude that there is no shortage of natural gas. My question to all members of the Assembly is: if gas is so plentiful, why are the Americans currently spending \$75 million on an engineering study to bring gas from Alaska down through Alberta to Chicago and to distribution points south of Chicago and throughout the continental United States? It makes sense, if there is so much gas in Alberta, to develop it here and save the billions and billions of dollars that these pipelines are going to cost to build. But no. They seem very determined to get at that gas, because they realize that in the western sedimentary basin the supply is not endless. We obviously have to be concerned.

In America the weather conditions are the reverse of this province and our country, Canada. Natural gas is used to generate electricity, and in America in the summertime air conditioners run more often than our heating systems in the winter here. The idea that it's not a heating season and the price of natural gas is going to go down to levels of 18 months ago – I don't believe that is possible, particularly this summer. There are rivers that are used to develop hydropower. They have very low levels, unfortunately, so the natural gas price is going to stay high.

Mr. Chairman, I realize we're debating Bill 1, not the supplementary estimates, but we are talking in the budget of spending a very modest sum, whenever we compare it to previous rebates, of a little over \$100 million in natural gas rebates. The whole idea in section 4 of who is going to be eligible for these rebates has to be clear. It can't be left to the regulations in section 7.

9:10

Now, the civil remedies in section 6. I note that there is no dollar amount for an offence or a penalty. In the legislation that I prefer, the existing legislation, there is a figure, and it is \$10,000, Mr. Chairman.

If we're going to look at power generation – and this is where I'm afraid we're going with this – what kind of subsidies are we going to wind up paying with this bill? Obviously, unless it is fixed, unless the repairmen come along with amendments, there is going to be the potential here for unlimited subsidies. Now, power generation comes to mind, as I said earlier. Mr. Chairman, who is going to decide the degree of sheltering if it is necessary? We look at this: the minister. The minister is going to do this behind closed doors.

If this natural gas rebate is to be used for feedstock or a fuel source for power generation, there are many studies that indicate that gas-fired plants are better for the environment, but we have to have a detailed comparison of the economies of existing gas- and coal-fired plants. This is very complicated because of the differences in ownership – some of them are public; some of them are private – the differences in accounting procedures, the age of the plants, the mechanical condition of them, the load factors of the plants, and there are many, many other factors including location.

Now, I really don't think it's fair. For instance, there is, I believe, a 275-megawatt gas-fired generating station being built on the outskirts of Calgary. It's gas-fired. It may even be larger than 275 megawatts. It's owned by a large American corporation. If this bill, this slogan bill, this public relations exercise which has nothing to do with the consumers of the province, were to be lining the pockets of the developers of this at the expense of Alberta consumers, I would be very, very disappointed. But, hopefully, it will be not necessary to provide rebates.

I have my problems with this electricity scheme that has been developed. I have problems with losing control of an essential natural resource like natural gas, that I think has gone on in this province. Earlier I discussed this, Mr. Chairman, and during this term I intend to discuss this at length. When we look at this bill and the improvements that can be made to this, I think it's time to get started.

Now, Mr. Chairman, it was novel for me to read *Hansard* from past legislative debates. It astonished me that when the hon. member Mr. Farran introduced the Natural Gas Rebates Act, the Premier of the day, Mr. Lougheed, participated actively in the debate. I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly, if they want a quick lesson in the history of this province, to review that discussion that occurred in *Hansard*. It's remarkable, and it's not that long ago. I think all members need to have a look at this.

Mr. Farran provided all members of the House with a draft copy of the regulations, and I know that I'm not going to get a draft copy of the regulations of this bill or any other bill from this government. Now, maybe they're going to surprise me, Mr. Chairman, and do that, but this hon. member Mr. Farran back in 1974, so that all members of the Assembly could understand the regulations, so they could have a better understanding of the technicalities of the application of the rebate bill, introduced the regulations and circulated them with the members before they were debated in the Assembly, as I understand it.

Now, I don't have a problem with the objectives of gas shielding, as it's called. The objectives of the system would be to shelter the residents and commercial establishments from the effects of significant gas price increases.

Of course, we can say that this is a North American phenomenon. But we can look at the Alaskans and what is not only going on in Alaska but in the U.S. Senate. I've heard an argument put forward that: oh, goodness, we can't protect the resource for Albertans because of NAFTA. Well, that doesn't seem to be bothering the state legislators in Alaska. It doesn't seem to be of any concern to the U.S. Senators. A number of them have cosponsored a bill. It is very interesting. This bill is to protect the energy and security of the United States and decrease America's dependency on foreign oil sources. Well, guess who that foreign oil source is? It's Alberta. Collectively it's Canada, but it's Alberta.

Now, getting back to Bill 1 here, Mr. Chairman, should we be sheltering industry from the escalating price of natural gas? Small industry is landlocked in Alberta, it stands to reason. But they've been forced to compete at disadvantages as compared with industries in central Canada and the continental United States, and naturally they should have the benefit of the resource here.

I don't believe this bill is the long-term solution to this. Now that the horse has escaped from the barn, our economic position is not what it used to be when the Natural Gas Rebates Act was discussed and debated in 1974. We suddenly find ourselves with a diminishing supply of a product, natural gas, which we rely on. I find it unfortunate that this has occurred, because we're going to have to have a very public discussion on how much further we're going to allow the resources of this province to be shipped out unprocessed.

In conclusion, I would remind all hon. members again of the *Calgary Herald* editorial from May 4, 1974. They discussed that instead of the rebate plan, this bill could easily be called the gas price protection plan. That is essentially what this bill is. So when you think that this is the flagship piece of legislation from this government, I have to caution the consumers of the province and I have to caution all hon. members of the Assembly: we cannot accept this bill in this form. It is a blank cheque. It's like giving the government a credit card with unlimited spending: here; go for it. Anything could happen here.

Policies must be designed to produce maximum returns to Albertans, and this doesn't do it. I don't believe this is the right way to do it. I don't understand why the last legislation was allowed to lapse in regulation. It was certainly needed this winter. The concept of gas rebate programs is not bad.

9:20

We all understand that natural gas prices are strongly influenced by supply and demand, but this is beyond reason, Mr. Chairman. You know, the consensus forecast is that natural gas prices in Alberta – we discussed this before – are going to remain quite high. We look at the take-away capacity and the opening of the new pipelines. The situation, if anything, may get worse, and this blank cheque is not the long-term answer.

So I think we're going to have to try to improve it. It's the only thing we can do, and the first thing is to find out the whole concept of what a vendor is going to be. Is a vendor going to be someone who is going to be generating electricity with this natural gas? We also have to find out if a vendor will be someone that is going to be using natural gas for other industrial purposes: a fertilizer plant, gas used for fuel or for hydrogen generation or for other purposes connected with the upgrading of bitumen. These are very, very important. The volume of gas could be huge, and the rebates to these outfits could cripple the Treasury.

Gas used as compressor fuel. Hopefully we're not going to be subsidizing the fuel gas for a compressor that is rocketing our natural resources, including the unprocessed gas to Chicago. This could possibly happen, and there are no answers in this. Now, perhaps hon. members across the Assembly are going to allay my fears here, but somehow I doubt it.

Gas used for municipal floods in connection with the secondary recovery of crude oil. We have to look at this, but at this time I hear the bell. My time, Mr. Chairman, has run out.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, yes it has.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm looking forward to pursuing debate again in committee on this slogan bill.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On Bill 1 I've consulted a number of esteemed economists and businesspeople. There are some serious concerns with its implementation. It looks very much like it's a system that will disrupt completely the market signals that can be successfully achieved in a workable market for natural gas. Rather than allowing price and supply and demand to determine the consumption of gas, the risk with Bill 1 is that through a mismanaged rebate system the true price of gas will never be known to consumers.

Gas is unlike electricity in that it does function well as a commodity. Electricity does not function as a commodity, as we are seeing in the electricity deregulation business, but gas has characteristics that allow it to be a more successful commodity. Gas, for example, is storable. It can be stockpiled, unlike electricity, so that at times of low price stockpiles can be built up, and at times of high price those stockpiles can be released and the price brought down. Electricity, of course, doesn't function that way.

There are also many reasonable substitutes for gas. In households, for example, gas is primarily used for heat. Of course, you can simply turn down the heat and wear a sweater. You can switch from gas to coal or to wood heating, as some people are doing in their

homes, so there's a substitution there. On the other hand, of course electricity is much more difficult to substitute for. You cannot power a microwave without electricity. You can't power a computer or a cash register without electricity. Electricity does not respond to market signals, so it's not a commodity, while gas is more of a commodity. Another difference, of course, is that with natural gas there are large numbers of wholesale suppliers, which is necessary for a successful market. In electricity there are not, and there's no sign of that developing in Alberta.

One of my concerns with this bill is that it in fact violates all the rules of the free market, which is a bit ironical coming from a free-market government. It is a double standard, and as a result, of course, we're going to get into yet another mess, kind of the flip side of the mess we're in with electricity deregulation, which should not be turned over to the free market.

At the same time, of course, I recognize that the fluctuations of a free market can drive the price of natural gas up to punishing levels, so I am not in principle opposed to some kind of transitional sheltering for consumers of natural gas. I'm not reassured on that account in Bill 1 because there are, in fact, no time constraints in Bill 1. This bill goes on and on indefinitely in contrast to the bill that is in place that was introduced 25 years ago, which laid out a time limit to its applicability. This, without any time limits, clearly is not intended as a transition but could become a permanent and a kind of addictive program which could have a profoundly negative impact on our Treasury.

I would also point out, as my colleague has pointed out, that this bill is unnecessary. There's a bill on the books now that does everything this bill does and indeed more. It does it well and presumably is the authority under which the current rebates have been provided. So this bill seems very odd as a flagship bill, being really redundant, unnecessary.

I'm also concerned that it emasculates the Legislature. Literally half of this bill is regulations. There's almost no substance to the bill that the Legislature is being asked to approve. All the substance will be in the regulations, which will not be debated in the Legislature. As a result, that removes a substantial and important power from the Legislative Assembly.

Finally, I would express my concern that the bill risks discouraging responsible conservation of an important resource by disrupting market signals. If the rebates are tied, for example, to consumption – the more you consume, the higher your rebate – then there is a risk, especially if it's a permanent kind of rebate or a long-standing rebate, that people won't bother conserving because their price will be subsidized. That, of course, is a dangerous precedent to set.

I would say that it may well be that the intent of this bill is good. I'm not opposed to transitional sheltering for Albertans as they face higher natural gas prices. I'm also not opposed to the idea of sharing Alberta's wealth from its natural resources with all its citizens. If this bill were to achieve that, it might be commendable. But I am very concerned that the execution of this intent is very poorly presented in this bill and that indeed, as I've said, the bill is unnecessary because there's an existing piece of legislation on the books.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 1 in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

9:30

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes. Thank you. I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 1.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

head: **Government Motions**

MR. STEVENS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to withdraw the sessional adjournment motion brought before the House earlier today under oral notices and substitute in its place the following motion:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess each sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We'll just take a moment, hon. Deputy Government House Leader, to distribute these to both sides.

[Unanimous consent granted]

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly once again, in this case to waive Standing Order 38(1)(a) regarding one day's notice to allow for the consideration of the sessional adjournment motion just brought before the House by oral notice.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few comments regarding this motion. The first one. I'm interested in the fact that the previous motion as it was circulated in the Assembly this afternoon used the word "current" sitting of the First Session. It read: "Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the current sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature." I will stop there. This motion states, "Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess each sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature." I have a bit of a problem with that. I would prefer to see the word "current" used instead of "each" sitting.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, if you would do us the honour of moving the motion. We've asked for permission, but we need to now move it. Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar can continue with his comments.

MR. STEVENS: I'd be pleased to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Adjournment of Session

16. Stevens moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess each sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm disappointed that this motion is going to be for "each sitting of the First Session of the 25th Legislature." In the past I can recall where we at one point had a special sitting to deal with the whole issue of Quebec and the unity issue and the issue of Quebec within the Confederation of Canada, and each member of the Assembly had an opportunity to express their views. That was sort of a special sitting of the 24th Legislature.

I don't agree certainly with the word "each" in this specific motion, because I think it should be just the current sitting of the Legislative Assembly. The motion we have now for the adjournment of the spring session should not follow through to the fall or any other sittings of this First Session of the 25th Legislature that may be necessary.

So I'm disappointed in the wording of this, and I'm also disappointed with the speed with which this motion has been presented to the Assembly. The election is over. We've just received the budget. There are billions and billions of dollars. It's going to take time to scrutinize this. I know the legislative agenda is light. I see, you know, the slogan bill, Bill 1. This is a light, light legislative agenda,

but we have issues to be discussed here. I can only question: where's the fire? What's the reason for the hurry?

With those few comments and particularly the caution about the wording of this motion – I would have much preferred to have seen the word "current" in there instead of "each" sitting. I'm very disappointed in this motion, but that's life. You can't always get what you want, as the Rolling Stones would say. With that I will cede the floor to anyone else who has comments regarding this motion.

Thank you.

9:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am very disappointed in the nature and the intent of this motion. It's my first day in debate here, and I'm already finding myself debating a request by the government to facilitate adjournment of the session. It's only the fifth day of the session. A large number of members have not had a chance to speak at all, and I think it's very disappointing that the government is in such a hurry to hustle along and facilitate adjournment. I think it also reflects poorly on the state of democracy in this province that we're in such a hurry to rush through with the debates.

So with those comments I would just really strongly register my concern that this is disappointing, and I'm sure my constituents would share that concern.

[Motion carried]

[At 9:43 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 25, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/25

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome. Please join me in the prayer.

O Lord, on this day we pray for those taken before their time and those who have suffered through workplace tragedies. We reach out to the families and friends most immediately impacted. Life and health are precious. When they are lost, all of us are impacted. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a gentleman who has had a life of high adventure and who has given great and good service to his country and to the cause of freedom. He was first commissioned into the Coldstream Guards in 1939. The second Earl of Jellicoe fought with distinction in special air services regiment and with the special boat section. For his brave and gallant conduct he was at various points during his wartime service awarded the Distinguished Service Order, the Military Cross, Legion d'honneur, the Croix de Guerre, and three times Mentioned in Despatches.

In the postwar era he was a diplomat and in a subsequent career a minister of the Crown. He was Lord Privy Seal and Conservative government leader in the House of Lords from 1970 to 1973. He is now dean of the House of Lords.

Earl Jellicoe addressed Edmonton's Sir Winston Churchill Society at their memorial banquet last night and will deliver speeches to the Churchill societies in Calgary and in Vancouver in the next few days.

Earl Jellicoe is accompanied today by his wife, Lady Jellicoe, and by Mrs. Alana Dunne and Robert Dunne, president of the Churchill Society in Edmonton. Mr. Speaker, our visitors are in your gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition I presented yesterday from 40 Albertans requesting that no public funds be used to settle Stockwell Day's defamation litigation be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 6

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001. This

being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 7

Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 7, being the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill will allow contribution limits to be established for candidates for election in regional health authority board elections, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Bill 204

Medicare Protection Act

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Medicare Protection Act.

Bill 204 fulfills a commitment I made to my constituents to repeal the government's Bill 11. It does much more. It replaces Bill 11 with real health care protection legislation, including enshrining a patient bill of rights, ending queue-jumping, and banning private, for-profit hospitals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to table the requisite number of copies of a calendar with respect to the Committee of Supply designating the dates on which certain estimates of certain departments will be considered before the Committee of Supply of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a petition I previously presented to the Assembly under Presenting Petitions. The petition is from the Society of Bowness Residents, which calls for the government of the province of Alberta to preserve the Paskapoo Slopes from housing development; 5,459 Calgarians from all communities throughout Calgary signed yes to preserve, 31 signed no to preserve, and one was of no opinion. I'm tabling five copies of this petition as required.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. I've got five copies of a letter from Mr. Don Wales of Red Deer. He is concerned about the impact of logging and industrial development in the Bighorn wildland park area by Nordegg. He would like the government to put a moratorium on all development until this area is protected in legislation.

The second tabling is five copies of a letter from Trish Evans.

Trish and her family live near the Strachan gas plant, and Trish is concerned that she's been unable to get any help from the Member for Rocky Mountain House to help her deal with her children's health problems that she believes are being caused by the gas plant.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, both e-mails from constituents. The first is from Brian Blair – this is dated April 11, 2001 – expressing concerns over a double standard the government has with MRIs and also expressing concerns about the government putting school boards in the position of increasing teachers' wages or decreasing class sizes.

The second e-mail is from Linda Pushor expressing concerns about business tax revenues decreasing, personal tax revenues increasing, and this is around subsidization of big business with the rebates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time for the convenience of the Assembly I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the Ottewell community patrol program open house program, which myself and the Hon. Gene Zwozdesky attended on behalf of all members of the Assembly. In here for the interest of the Assembly are the statistics on the crime prevention program that works so well in the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter that I received from Ms Perdue, president, Calgary Society of Bowness Residents, asking the government of Alberta to preserve the Paskapoo Slopes from housing development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of the program for the sixth annual Kids Kottage breakfast, which was held this morning. Kids Kottage is located in the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry and provides a 24-hour crisis nursery, supporting families and preventing child abuse and neglect.

Thank you.

1:40

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature two bright, young people seated in the members' gallery along with their mother. Both worked in my office as STEP students at different times, and both aspire to be medical doctors. I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly Ryan and Farrah Yau and their mother, Helen, and I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to other members of the Legislature it gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce a group of 53 students and two teachers led by Mrs. Pat Smith and Miss Gina Paron from the Sweet Grass elementary school. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce a group of wonderful young Albertans and their teachers joining us here today: Miss Monica Murphy, Mr. Umberto Miceli, and Miss Hilda Schroeder, who acts as an interpreter, as well as their parent helpers, Mrs. Rowles and Mrs. Brandingen. These are all students at St. Martha school. I've had the pleasure of joining them. They're brilliant young Albertans. I would like you now to join me and ask these people to rise and receive the welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a family from the Wainwright constituency. Mr. and Mrs. Chris Pfisterer, daughter Paige, sons Ryan, Kurt, and Derek. Chris is the owner of Meatco, the meat processing plant in Wainwright, and his wife is a nurse in the Wainwright hospital. They also are my family and my grandkids. I ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to all colleagues in the Assembly one of my constituents, John McCoy. He is a second-year political science student at the University of Calgary and has plans to go into law in the future. He is here today to observe the proceedings of this Legislature, and I would ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

National Day of Mourning

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, the 28th day of April, is our National Day of Mourning for Canadian workers who have been killed or injured on the job. We honour those victims by remembering them and by renewing our commitment to safer workplaces.

Workplace accidents injure not only the worker. They also leave lasting scars on families, friends, coworkers, and employers. On our National Day of Mourning we need to think about the families of workers who did not come home safely at the end of the day. We need to think about the human cost of workplace accidents. This will always remind us that all accidents are unacceptable and all accidents are preventable. On April 28 we must think about preventing future accidents and about the health and safety of our families and those around us. By learning from the past, we can help to make this a safer world.

Ceremonies honouring our fallen workers will be held in communities across the province. I would ask that all members of the

Legislature take some time today and of course on Saturday to reflect on our losses and to commit themselves to improving workplace safety.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to take this opportunity to mark the National Day of Mourning, which this year falls on Saturday, April 28. All members of the Official Opposition share a deep concern at the number of lives lost as a result of accidents in the workplace. I am pleased, as are all Albertans, to hear of the renewed commitment to safe workplaces by the hon. minister. Our heartfelt sympathy is with the families and friends of the victims. Although no words can take away their sorrow, we continue to strive for a safe and healthy workplace.

In addition, work-related accidents are very expensive to our economy. Nationally, compensation paid to work accident victims or their families is about \$4.65 billion each year. Adding indirect costs, this amount doubles to about \$9.3 billion. These figures do not take into account the pain and suffering of the victims and their families, which are beyond measure.

Prevention is the cure is the theme of this year's North American Occupational Health and Safety Week. This week happens to occur between May 6 and 12 this year.

In Alberta there were 118 workplace fatalities in 1999. Unfortunately, the deaths on the work sites bring to focus to all Albertans an immediate snapshot of the dangers that employees have to work under and with. There are as well, unfortunately, many workers in this province who are exposed to chemicals or radiation that can and do have some long-term implications on the workers' health, and although it is not instantly reported that it is a workplace death, we know in the long term that there are many unfortunate workers who have succumbed to such intrusions into their health.

Again, I call on all members of the Assembly to join in marking the National Day of Mourning. Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The first Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget 2001, unveiled yesterday, includes about \$3.2 billion of onetime spending. My questions are to the Premier. What policies or guidelines has the government given to departments to accommodate this onetime spending into their three-year business plans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the direction given to the various departments involved in onetime spending programs is really quite simple: the money is to be spent on priority areas. Those priorities have been identified not only by the government but, I would suggest, by members of the opposition, who have encouraged us over the years to spend more money to upgrade our schools, more money to upgrade our hospitals, more money to build sound and meaningful infrastructure. Those are the priorities that have been identified, and that's precisely where the money's going.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, how does the government's policy of onetime spending accommodate the continuing costs of maintenance and upkeep into the ongoing budgets?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is all accommodated in the three-year business plans. We aren't about to embark on any onetime spending that can't be sustainable through appropriate operating moneys.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: would it not be more appropriate to take the additional dollars when we have a high revenue, put them into an endowment, carry that money to a time when the economy is not quite as robust as it is now, when prices are not so high as they are now so that we could make better use of our dollar and help to stabilize the economy rather than contribute to a possible overheating of an already robust economy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's a good idea in theory, but it doesn't work that way. The simple fact is that we have got to accommodate the phenomenal economic growth in this province. We need, for instance, to complete the Canamex; that is, highway 43 as it leads to highway 16 and highway 2 and the upgrading south of Lethbridge to the U.S. border. There are safety factors, and there are factors relative to the safe movement of goods and products.

We know that we're experiencing pressure on our school systems and we have to put in new schools, new postsecondary institutions, upgrade classrooms, and we know that we have to do the same thing with our health care facilities. I've often said that economic growth and economic prosperity are great, but they create some challenges. Fortunately, in this province through prudent fiscal management we're able to provide the funds to accommodate that economic growth and prosperity.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

1:50

Teachers' Salaries

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In yesterday's budget a new policy of the government was implied. My question is to the Premier. Is it now government policy to intervene in the collective bargaining process, as is implied in the separation of the teachers' salaries component in the budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any details in the budget that allude in any way, shape, or form to the government becoming involved or interfering in the collective bargaining process. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Finance can shed some more light on this matter.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to. In the budget this time there is a line item under the Department of Learning that identifies a salary line that has a salary picture of 6 percent over two years. In addition to that, of course, there is in that budget a 6 percent increase in base funding for base instructional education. Those two lines certainly give our local school boards the flexibility they need to deal with at the local level. They are going to have the flexibility to deal with the priorities within their own school jurisdiction.

There is absolutely no way that the government is going to get involved in the collective bargaining process at the local level. That will be left up to the bargaining unit, which is the local school board and the local ATA.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. If you didn't want to be involved in the collective bargaining process, why did you not roll those two line items together so that the true choice is left to the school boards at the local level, where they're dealing with the ATA locals? By putting a cap on it, it creates a message out in the public that that is what you expect settlement at.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, people may speculate as to what that means, but I have to reiterate what the Minister of Finance has already stated, and that is that it does give the school boards, the local school jurisdictions, the authority and the flexibility to deal with these matters.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is: by putting in this cap, is it now government policy to move from local to provincial bargaining for teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is not in the books.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Care Premiums

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Government figures indicate that the department of health expects to generate some \$700 million in revenue from health care premium tax. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that an Alberta family earning \$12,620 will pay \$816 in health care premiums each year and given that a family earning \$80,000 or even \$800,000 will also pay \$816 in premiums each year, will the minister confirm that health care premiums are a regressive tax on middle- and low-income earners?

MR. MAR: I'll not confirm the same, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're recognized.

DR. TAFT: Okay. Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the minister's department wrote off 76 percent more in unpaid health care premiums last year than they expected, exceeding \$50 million, is the minister finding that more Alberta families are having difficulty paying health care premiums?

MR. MAR: No, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Premier, given that yesterday in this House the Member for Edmonton-Manning in an eloquent speech called health care premiums a tax that is a huge load on Albertans and said that this is the first tax we should eliminate altogether, will the Premier allow a free vote in this Assembly on the elimination of health care premiums?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, that's a health policy. I would imagine that this item, this matter, will be an issue for discussion at the Future Summit in a postdebt environment in the province of Alberta. Certainly we heard that they would like to see a reduction or an elimination of premiums, and it's something that might – I know there's danger in using that word "might" because we all know that in politics yes means yes and maybe means yes and no means maybe – come up for discussion at the Future Summit.

THE SPEAKER: The leader of the third party.

Supports for Independence

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's provincial budget contained some good news for children at risk who are in government care but nothing at all for children living in poverty. The Minister of Children's Services is doing her part by more adequately resourcing the child welfare system and putting more resources into early intervention. However, the minister of human resources has failed to effectively address woefully inadequate monthly rates for social assistance and AISH recipients. Children go hungry and live in substandard housing because their parents are poor. My question is to the Premier. Why does the government think spending up to \$400 million on Alberta centennial projects is a higher priority than providing even modest increases in the woefully inadequate monthly allowances provided to families who are forced to rely on social assistance?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the expenditures relative to centennial projects are not frivolous by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, all of them are legacy programs, programs that will leave in place a legacy for Albertans to enjoy and to appreciate for many, many, many years to come.

Relative to the situation with respect to SFI, supports for independence, and various programs relative to children and children at risk, I'll have the two ministers respond.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addressing the question again, we've talked here in the House previously about supports for independence being a program of last resort. It's also a program that is considered temporary in nature. I would want to point out to the hon. member that when he focuses on the cash numbers that are provided to various people that are on our client list, he is ignoring a number of other benefits that are provided. We certainly want to point out that there's a national child benefit that these people are entitled to. Of course, there are tax credits that are available. Should the client be working then and have children, there are employment tax credits. We of course have a GST credit. They were entitled to the energy rebates with no deduction. So when we take everything into consideration, then of course we have felt that we're providing them the proper support for Albertans who truly need our assistance.

Now, I would remind the hon. member that in the Speech from the Throne there was a reference made to the fact that we will be reviewing all of the programs and services that we provide for low-income Albertans, so whatever input he would like to make certainly would be appropriate when that is announced.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The inadequacies of social assistance rates are well known. They don't need any more reviews. My question to the Premier: how can he justify not addressing this urgent need in yesterday's budget? That's the real question.

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I disagree entirely with the hon. member. Everything that we do in government is subject to review, and that's precisely what the minister plans to do: to review not only the levels of payment under SFI, supports for independence, but all other things associated with SFI.

I think that the hon. minister has done a good job in spelling out some of these added benefits: the GST credit of about \$400 a year; financial support for clients and their children for prescription drugs, optical care, dental care, ambulances, and other health needs; full

subsidy of health care premiums, premium-free Blue Cross; energy rebates, that are available to all Albertans but certainly meaningful to low-income families, of something like \$1,100 a year; the Alberta family employment tax credit of up to \$1,000 a year; funds to cover \$100 worth of school expenses per child; emergency assistance for expenses such as baby-sitting, day care, special dietary needs, and unforeseeable circumstances that put a client at risk; and supplementary benefits are available for those with special problems, Mr. Speaker. In addition, there is the ability for a person receiving SFI to enter the workforce and, I believe, earn up to \$125 a month before any penalty is assessed.

So, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister pointed out, this is not a permanent program. Certainly to those in society who truly need our help and cannot work we will give that hand up, and we will provide sufficient resources to sustain that person or their family. But SFI is, as the minister pointed out, a temporary program that is designed to support people in need but also give them a hand up to get off welfare, now called SFI, and into the workforce.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity in Question Period

THE SPEAKER: We've now spent over six minutes on these last two questions, yet that's double the time we spent on the first three sets. Now, the question period is the question period, not the debate period.

Please proceed.

Supports for Independence (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that Alberta's woefully inadequate assistance rates are at least partly to blame for the huge increase in the number of children in government care, what actions is she planning to take to convince her cabinet colleagues that increases in these rates are long overdue?

MS EVANS: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I cannot agree with the assumption the hon. member has made. Many people try to associate the number of child welfare cases as a direct correlation with poverty, and it leads society astray to believe that in fact those people with resources are not contributing to the child welfare caseload.

I'd like to just add one simple comment to the supports that we provide for families and children who are attending day care as one example of places where we do provide additional supports. Two parents with two children who are earning less than \$44,000 a year receive a partial subsidy so that the children can attend day care with that kind of support and provide extra service to them.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous areas in which we are adding dollars for the child in need program and other programs that can sustain children who may be living in impoverished situations.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, this government has been very proud of the Alberta advantage and how this province is leading the rest of the nation when it comes to fiscal responsibility, low taxes, and debt pay-down. During the last provincial election Albertans told us to stay the course. To the Minister of Finance: can she explain why, then, in Budget 2001 government spending has increased by 22 percent?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I certainly can. This year we looked at two elements. Our ongoing program spending increased in the budget by 6.3 percent. That meant that the programs that continue year after year after year increased by 6.3 percent. In the out-years that drops down to 4.3 percent. However, in this year, because of the banner year in revenue that was created from oil and gas, we were able to look at the list of priorities that had been left there in infrastructure that hadn't been dealt with.

We made a choice to blend together program spending and look at the onetime funding requirements that were sitting on the table: things such as the extension to the Deerfoot Trail in Calgary, things such as the completion of Anthony Henday Drive here in Edmonton, things such as the start of the new Children's hospital in Calgary. We felt those were priority areas that needed to be dealt with, and because we had the additional cash flow, we felt we should deal with them now, because we don't believe that in the next year or the year after the revenue base will be as strong as it has been. So we've made the determination to deal with those elements today because next year we likely won't be able to.

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can she tell this House why the government is embarking on what I understand is several billion dollars in onetime spending when the province still has debt on its books?

MRS. NELSON: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, that's a very, very good question. We made choices this year. The \$3.2 billion in onetime funding, the decision to use that this year was because in fact we were in a position to be able to do it. It's called catch-up. A lot of these projects have been on the table for a very long time. In fact, when I was elected in 1989, I heard about the difficulties with the Anthony Henday road here in Edmonton, and I'll be very pleased to see that project finally completed.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the Premier said earlier that there was a report done and work done quite some time ago, as we were looking at different forums such as the growth summit, that we were behind on our infrastructure, and we were. We, quite frankly, were behind. So we made the decision, again, to play catch-up. Some of the things we're catching up on are the modernizations of our school facilities, of our postsecondary institutions. These things need to be done, and we're in a position this year to look at doing them now. But let's keep in mind: our ongoing program spending stayed at 6.3 percent. This is onetime spending.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Finance tell us when Albertans can expect their province to be debt free and why we hear two to three years on one hand and then up to 14 years on the other?

MRS. NELSON: That's an excellent question as well. Mr. Speaker, as Albertans will remember, we put in place a legislative framework that put our feet to the fire to clear the debt in this province. Our goal is and will be to have the first debt-free province in Canada. At this point in the 25-year plan we are nine years ahead of schedule on our debt retirement scheme. That should send a clear message to all Albertans that the goal of our government and our Premier is to see that debt cleared off sooner as opposed to later. So we have accelerated our debt retirement payment. Now, in saying that, we have a goal to have that debt fully retired before the 100th birthday of this province in 2005.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Municipal Financing

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has announced long-overdue changes to education property taxes in Alberta. It is wonderful to see the government finally moving towards the opposition's suggestion that K to 12 education should be funded 80 percent from provincial revenues and 20 percent from education property taxes. They are not there yet, but they are getting there. However, if we look at the government's track record on municipal financing, they cut \$335 million in grants to the municipalities between 1992 and 1999. We see that this tax cut is really just tinkering at the margins. My questions today are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will the minister explain why this government continues to tinker at the margins rather than committing to a new partnership with Alberta's local governments based on clear definitions of roles and responsibilities and sufficient sources of revenue to meet those obligations?

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you very much, and I thank the hon. member for his question. He raises a good point. This government, Mr. Speaker, has always taken the approach that we can do better, and we are taking that approach in terms of dealing with municipalities and school boards. I'm pleased to say that he has brought up the fact of a reduction in the \$135 million in education tax. I know from the mayors and councillors I've spoken to that municipalities are very pleased with that initiative in working with them in partnership, and we're going to continue to work with them in partnership.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can this government on one hand rail against the injustices of program-specific federal grants and on the other hand have no problems making our local governments jump through hoops to receive program-specific provincial funding?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government and our ministry are working very closely with municipalities. We are always collecting feedback from them. I just recently had the opportunity to attend the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, where we were talking about important partnerships. That's going to continue. We're not there yet, but one thing for certain is that we're listening to municipalities, we're taking their feedback, and we're acting on the input from them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to working with our local governments, starting today, on a responsible plan for long-term funding arrangements that will provide our communities with predictable, stable, and equitable municipal financing and infrastructure planning?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much. Clearly, Mr. Speaker,

sustainable, long-term certainly is something this government will continue to work on with not just municipalities but with all aspects of our government. We're doing it, and we're going to continue to do it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Inland Cement Limited

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about an issue that has been brought to my attention by a number of my constituents. They are very concerned about Inland Cement's plans to switch from using natural gas to coal in its Edmonton plant. Specifically, they're concerned that this proposal will not be subject to an environmental impact assessment by Alberta Environment. The perception in the neighbourhoods and in the community is that this project is being fast-tracked and that the proper environmental review is not being done as a result. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why isn't an environmental impact assessment going to be done on Inland Cement's plans to burn coal?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I assure you I understand the member's concern and the concern for his constituents, but what we have to recognize in this case is that Inland cannot automatically change and go to burning coal without a complete environmental review process being done. They have to have an environmental approval. To get that environmental approval, they have to have an environmental review process, and this environmental review process will look at all aspects of the project and its cumulative effects on the environment. We only do an EIA, or an environmental impact assessment, if we go beyond the jurisdiction and expertise of our department, and this proposal that is coming forward from Inland is one which falls within the purview of the departmental review and departmental expertise and departmental jurisdiction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Inland Cement is inside the Edmonton-Calder constituency and that the neighbourhoods are directly downwind of the plant, when Inland is planning an increase in particulate matter emitted by the plant, my constituents are very concerned about the impact on the environment and human health. Accordingly, what is Alberta Environment doing about controlling particulate emissions coming from the plant?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. We do not anticipate that in this particular case particulate emissions, or dusting, will be a real problem. The reason I can say that is that dusting only occurs when certain equipment shuts down that's called a precipitator. When the precipitator shuts down, then you have the dusting. We have already had discussions with Inland to indicate to them that they have to provide technology, that if the precipitator does shut down, they have to have technology in place that will prevent dusting. So in fact we expect that there will be fewer opportunities of dusting with this new technology and the new proposal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is for the same minister. I'm wondering what the next steps will be. Before we have an answer on whether or not Inland can switch to using coal, will the public have an opportunity to be heard on this important issue?

DR. TAYLOR: As I have said before in this House, Mr. Speaker, the public certainly will have an opportunity. We still do not have a formal application yet from Inland, but once that formal application comes in, there will be advertisements placed in the newspapers telling the public what is happening and giving the public a response period of about 30 days, which is normal. When the public responds in various forms, we will review those comments, and we will be consulting with Alberta Health and Wellness as well during this whole environmental process. So the public process is quite clear.

There have been two open houses. There is a public meeting that is happening tomorrow night, organized by the constituents of Edmonton-Calder, in the constituency there. With the Member for Edmonton-Calder we will organize a meeting that I will attend and my officials will attend. There is opportunity for public input anytime during this process through either statements of concern or statements of support for the project. So I believe there's lots of opportunity for public input.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Children's Advocate's Report

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report of the Children's Advocate indicates that many of the problems of the formerly centralized child welfare system still exist. What is happening to some children under government care is absolutely unacceptable. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. How is it possible for a young person in care to be unaware of their case plan and to have never seen their social worker?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to serve notice today that if any member in this House ever has information that pertains to the best interests of the child, where they are not immediately contacting our office to make sure that we do follow up – if there is such a situation that children and their caseworker or that people are not getting the proper attention, I would like to know. I would be very much a welcoming minister and a welcoming ear to hear people tell me if there are ways that we can do things better. We work very hard through these decentralized authorities, all 18 authorities, to make sure that the caseworkers, the supervisors are there to address problems.

If you will notice in our budget tabled yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we have over the past year added 396 staff positions to look after the commitments to the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, to make sure that we have the right number of staff in place to look after the needs of children, and we continue to work at improving our practices with the teams that are out there in the communities. So if in fact there exists a child today that has needed care, needed access to a caseworker and that has not been provided, I'd like the details at once so we can follow up and find out why.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why are young people being warehoused – that is, kept in short-term care facilities – for long periods of time?

MS EVANS: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I do require more detail. My hon. friends on this side of the House are yelling, "Where?" I'd like to know as well. Where are they being warehoused? We've made every effort, for example, in the capital region to move children from facilities such as hotels, that were not the most appropriate place for them to be placed, to look for additional facilities outside the city if necessary. We have looked all over Alberta where we could find proper placements for children. We are adding treatment facilities, for example, for children who have very special needs in co-operation with our partners in AADAC as well as with facilities that are currently in existence. So, again, if I could receive some specifics from the hon. member, I'd be very happy to follow up.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, the specifics are in the report that she was given.

My question is to her – and I repeat a question that I previously asked in the House – will the minister undertake to report publicly the action that the government has taken on the advocate's recommendations before the end of this session, not about the advocate but about his recommendations?

2:20

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, of course I will report. I indicated we would report previously, and we will report whatever we can as soon as possible. We have consistently tabled in this House the annual reports and the business plans of the child and family services authorities, and I'll be very pleased to respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

North American Energy Working Group

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a recent speaking engagement in the city of Calgary the Prime Minister of Canada announced that he had created a task force of senior federal ministers to address issues related to what has been referred to as a continental energy policy. Further to that, at the conclusion of the Summit of the Americas held last weekend in Quebec City, our Prime Minister together with the Presidents of the United States and Mexico announced the creation of a further body, the North American energy working group. I think it is critical that the province of Alberta, as the owner of our natural resources, be involved in any discussions taking place about our energy resources; namely, oil and gas. My first question, then, is to our Minister of Energy. Can the minister please inform the members of this Legislature whether or not the federal government has indicated any role or participation for Alberta on this task force of federal ministers?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member alluded to the principle of Alberta resource ownership and that has, of course, also been confirmed by the Premier publicly and been on record about not being able to be included. It's impossible not to include this government as it is the owner of the resource and acts as custodian for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, there's been great interest in the continental energy plan since the election of President George Bush and subsequent appointment of Vice-President Cheney. This has spilled over to indicate a whole new level of interest from our federal government in the province of Alberta, and of course we're responding gladly and warmly to the overtures that they're giving us.

With respect to a specific role being played in either the cabinet

committee that's been created by the Prime Minister or, secondly, the North American energy group, there is at this stage no formal role offered to the province of Alberta. However, in the first minutes of the North American energy working group, the working group has been told very clearly that the work will respect the energy policies and jurisdictions of participants: federal, provincial, and state. So it's clearly embedded in the initial minutes of the first meeting. We have started to speak with Minister McClellan and the Alberta connection . . .

MS CARLSON: This is a speech.

MR. SMITH: It's not a speech as much as it's a very important part of the energy policy of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and the recognition of the importance of the resource ownership issue that the Liberal opposition seems to want to neglect in this discussion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that no formal role has been offered to the province of Alberta, I'm wondering if the minister and/or his ministry has initiated any steps to ensure that Alberta in fact does play a role on this new task force.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you. In fact, on April 5, Mr. Speaker, we were able to adjoin in a conference call with all ministers in Canada to talk about these issues: the opportunity that is represented to resource-owning and resource-producing provinces and also the tremendous role that Alberta can play as a processor of natural gas that can be piped down from both Alaska and the Northwest Territories and the fact that we can now capitalize on this very important petrochemical and natural gas infrastructure that exists in the province.

On the international front, Mr. Speaker, I was very fortunate to be able to meet briefly with the ambassador of Mexico to Canada, who was here in town to express regrets to the Premier for President Vicente Fox's inability to arrive here. There are companies now working in Mexico on developing gas projects: Precision Drilling, Paramount Resources, and Canadian Hunter. That's going to indicate a tightly knit co-operation not only between Canada and Mexico but also in the entire NAFTA area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister advise whether Alberta will have a role of any sort in the North American energy working group created out of the Summit of the Americas?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that is of critical importance to Alberta. As the Premier has stated and I have followed up with written communication to the federal government, we very strongly have indicated our desire. Our obligation we feel as a province is to be part of this overall process.

Now, we understand that Alberta will be included as part of the Canadian delegation to the working group that will be working with the overall initiative, and we will of course commit all necessary resources to make effective representation on this very, very important topic.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Swan Hills Waste Treatment Facility

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past 12 years Alberta taxpayers have forked over \$441 million to support the Premier's hazardous waste treatment plant located in Swan Hills and are on the hook for an additional \$22 million in cleanup costs. On July 28, 1995, in reference to turning over Swan Hills to the private sector, the Premier said, and I quote: it's the philosophy of government to get out of business; the plant is moving now into a commercial stage, and as of December 31, 2000, Swan Hills is back in the hands of the government. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Will the minister explain why the government has broken the terms of the Financial Administration Act by not getting the approval of Albertans before getting back into the business of hazardous waste?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask the Minister of Infrastructure to respond to the question.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I think that when you look at the history of the treatment of hazardous waste within this province, the Swan Hills plant has played a major role in that. As a matter of fact, when you look at what's happened in Canada, there is no plant in North America that can meet the standards of the Swan Hills plant. So we believe that it still has a very important function to play within the province, particularly as the petrochemical industry is further developed and, also, there is some waste that will be generated from other economic drivers within the province. It's extremely important that that plant be here to protect the environment.

You know, I get a kick out what the Liberals continually do. They pretend that they want to protect the environment, yet when we've got a plant within Alberta that is capable of destroying even the most hazardous of wastes in Canada, they want to shut it down.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the terms of the Financial Administration Act have been broken, will the Minister of Finance commit to bringing any deal made for the purchase of the Swan Hills waste treatment centre before this Legislature and Albertans before going ahead?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, this plant has a very important role to play in environmental protection within the whole of Canada, never mind just within Alberta. So we will be working to involve the private sector as much as we possibly can, but once again, this plant is critical to Alberta.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, one more time to the Minister of Finance: will she please explain why they broke the terms of the Financial Administration Act, and will she commit to bringing that information before the Legislature?

2:30

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Infrastructure has clearly identified that this plant has had tremendous benefits for the province of Alberta. We have put in place . . . [interjections] Well, if the hon. member opposite will keep quiet for a minute, I will go through this program. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, ignoring the chitter chatter from across the way—we have answered this question several times. We will be dealing with

the private sector to put a new arrangement in place. When that is completed, we will bring it forward and let the members of the House and Albertans know what it is.

Clearly, this facility has been instrumental in cleaning up the environment and some very, very bad hazardous wastes in this province, and anyone who thinks it would be worth while to shut this facility down is absolutely mistaken. I'm going to give one example, Mr. Speaker, of something I know that occurred this last year in the Nanaimo secondary school district. The high school in that community, which services all of central Vancouver Island, it was discovered, had blue asbestos. The only facility in Canada that could take the hazardous waste and dispose of it effectively was in fact this facility. It got that hazardous waste out of the community, off the island, and disposed of. So people from other jurisdictions have also been able to clean up their environment.

For this member to stand up one day and plead the environmental case and then the other day to want to shut down the facility is ludicrous but typical of that side.

Speaker's Ruling Improper Inferences

THE SPEAKER: The chair is going to review some of the words used in that last series of questions. Suggestions have been made by an hon. member that laws are being broken. Then that hon. member has a responsibility to pursue that matter by way, I suspect, of a privilege point or a contempt point, and the House will have to deal with the matter. Words should not be taken lightly unless they can be followed up on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is continuing to play shell games with the people of Alberta in its budgetary practices. This year they are predicting a surplus of \$817 million. What they aren't telling Albertans is that they have funneled \$2.3 billion of future infrastructure spending into this year's budget to make the surplus lower than it would seem otherwise. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Why did the government pour \$2.3 billion of future spending on infrastructure into this year's budget if not to underestimate the size of the surplus, which was really over \$3 billion?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, sometimes the zingers come across the room here, and that's got to be one of the best zingers I've heard. Let me go through this one more time. Please pay attention on the opposite side or in the third party.

The projects that are being funded under the onetime spending element, \$3.2 billion, have been on the table for a very long time. Just to make it perfectly clear, one of the projects that this hon. member, who was a former city council member, should be abundantly familiar with is the completion of the Anthony Henday Drive ring road. I've heard about that since 1989. So that wasn't something forward; that's something from the back. I can tell you that right now.

Then we look at the redevelopment of the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton to add 160 beds. We've heard from these members opposite: we need more beds. Well, here's coming 160 beds. So we're going to move on that project for your community. You should know about that; you've been complaining about it for years. Then we get into another one. Oh, here's another one that he should be familiar with, the University of Alberta in your own

community. We're going to look at the connecting construction of the engineering building here at the University of Alberta, something that's been asked for for a long time. Now, let's get into the rest of Alberta and get into the list of things that are going on. We're going to look at the construction and the design of the Children's hospital in Calgary. That was announced last year.

As you can see from this list, Mr. Speaker, some of these announcements were made a year ago, some of them six months ago, some of them five months ago, some of them 10 years ago. This is called catch-up. So to suggest that we're looking at things to eliminate a potential surplus from this year is ludicrous.

MR. MASON: Why is the minister not answering the question which was put to her, which is: why is \$2.3 billion worth of spending which will be spent in future years being put in this budget?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. minister, as I understand it, the schedule for the next number of months – two, three, four, five, six – has a lot to do with time allocated for the debate of the budget. This is the question period today, not the budget debate period, so I'm really having difficulty. Questions have to be pointed rather than leading to debate, so let's go on to the third one. I really suspect that between now and probably September or October – we'll probably still be sitting here – we'll be looking at certain aspects of the budget.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope this one goes better. [interjection] On the members opposite, I mean.

Why is the minister abandoning modern and accepted budgeting practices in favour of hiding money under the mattress?

THE SPEAKER: Well, it's pretty much the same type of question.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

School Transportation Guidelines

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents in my constituency have expressed concerns about how far children are expected to walk to and from school on a daily basis. I understand students who live within 2.4 kilometres of a school are not eligible for transportation funding. My constituents would like to see this policy changed to 1.6 kilometres, 2 kilometres, and 2.4 kilometres for elementary, junior, and senior high school students respectively. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Will the minister consider changing the distance formula to better recognize the age and needs of students?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is an excellent suggestion. One of the issues that we're up against is that this particular suggestion would cost us \$75 million to do. At this present time I felt it more important that the \$75 million be directly into the classroom. However, I will undertake with the hon. member to take a look at perhaps expanding the high school distance even more in order to have the elementary distance even smaller. So I will undertake to work with the hon. member to come up with a cost-neutral solution to this problem.

MRS. JABLONSKI: My second question is again to the Minister of Learning. Computerized maps are used to calculate the route with the shortest distance. The computer does not consider the safety of a route; it merely calculates distance. The computer does not recognize that walking next to the river or on a trail through a wooded area may be unsafe. Would the minister consider adding a clause to the urban transportation grant to ensure that the route is calculated based on distance and safety so that students are not walking in unsafe areas?

DR. OBERG: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again for the Minister of Learning. Can parents in Alberta expect to see changes to the distance requirements for transportation funding by September of this year?

DR. OBERG: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the answer for that one is not as simple as the last question. As I've said, what we have to take a look at is the cost neutrality of this, and I've committed to sitting down with the hon. member to ensure that this is indeed cost neutral.

As I stated prior to this, the original question asked for around \$75 million in transportation grants. I feel that that \$75 million could be better used within the classroom. However, Mr. Speaker, I certainly will sit down with the hon. member, and if there is a cost-neutral way we can do this, we certainly will, and it would be effective by September 1.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of seven members to participate in Recognitions. Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

2:40

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly approximately 50 parents and students that work with the School of Hope. Now, this school is based in Vermilion but truly teaches students throughout every part of Alberta. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Helene Prediger, Mr. Brian Prediger, Mr. Chuck Marple, and Mrs. Claudia Evans. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you two residents of Whitecourt in my constituency. First of all, Town Councillor Willard Strebchuk, a fellow colleague for 10 years; and a very successful businessman and a great local volunteer, Don Guenette. I'd like you all to welcome these two individuals to this Assembly today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour and a privilege to rise today to recognize a former member of this

Assembly, who was first elected, I think, if my memory serves me correctly, in 1979 and re-elected in 1983, I believe, and was the first representative from the riding of Edmonton-Glenarry after it was created in a redistribution, and if I might put in a fairly partisan comment, the best member that that particular riding ever had. He held that riding for the Conservative Party for those two terms. I'd like to ask Mr. Rollie Cook, a friend for many years, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get the pleasure to introduce a guest, so I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly today a very good friend, a fine fellow, former law partner, Mr. Peter Pastewka. Peter is sitting in the members' gallery. If he would please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of seven to participate.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Pat and Alice Smith and Family

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to commend the Camrose county for their yearly farm family of the year award and recognize the 2001 award winners. The farm family of the year award serves to raise awareness of the agriculture community and was created to recognize outstanding community involvement and the family's role in agriculture.

The winning family is that of Pat and Alice Smith of Bittern Lake. The Smith family spans four generations, and all have been active in their community through numerous organizations such as 4-H, recreation, co-ops, and the church. Family farms are of vital importance to the communities of Alberta. They are food producers and community builders. Family farms provide our communities with the enthusiasm, dedication, and open arms that make Alberta such a wonderful place in which to live and raise our families.

Congratulations to the Smith family of Bittern Lake, their eight children – Donald, Joseph, David, Charlotte, Sharon, Annette, Anita, Janette – and their extended families.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Cadet Honour Band of the Prairie Region

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday evening, April 21, I had the honour and the pleasure of attending the cadet honour band of the prairie region's Salute to Canada's Peacekeepers performance at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. The program performances included a swing band, a symphonic band, a stomp group, and a pipe band, and they were indeed entertaining. Four of my constituents were some of the performers: Flight Sergeant A. Fleming on the flute, Flight Sergeant R. Lawrie on the clarinet, Petty Officer Class 2 E. Hunt performing with the trumpet, and Warrant Officer Class 2 M. Duffley on the French horn. It was a wonderful evening, a terrific salute to our peacekeepers and indeed a very enjoyable evening performed by very talented young people.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Erik Pedersen

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to recognize Mr. Erik Pedersen, who celebrated his 75th birthday on April 22 of this year. His accomplishments are many. He immigrated to Canada from Denmark in 1951, and in October 1952 he successfully cofounded a weekly Scandinavian program on a volunteer basis broadcast over CKUA radio.

The first program aired on October 26, 1952, and the last program was broadcast on December 31, 1994. The format was music and news from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, 20 minutes to each country. Mr. Pedersen's program was the longest running ethnic program in the world.

In his distinguished career at Woodward's he turned customers into lifelong friends with his courteous and cheery manner.

Mr. Pedersen lives in Edmonton-Gold Bar with his lovely wife, Therese, and has a son, Paul, and a daughter, Anne-Marie, and two grandchildren, Mikella and Madelena.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Wentworth Manor

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am proud to recognize in this Assembly Wentworth Manor, a wonderful facility built for seniors in Calgary-West in 1996 by the Brenda Strafford Foundation Ltd. and which due to a recent major expansion truly offers over 200 Calgary seniors a safe, supportive environment to age in place.

Last Friday, April 20, the Premier, myself, local dignitaries, and residents celebrated the grand opening of Wentworth Court. Now there are four distinct levels of living for seniors: independent retirement; private assisted living with four levels of care contracted on a private pay basis; third, designated assisted living, which is 40 beds contracted with the CRHA; and, fourth, a traditional nursing home care level with 73 beds also contracted with the CRHA.

Wentworth Manor under the leadership of visionary and humanitarian Barrie Strafford, chairman and COO of the foundation, is truly an example of an innovative, supportive living facility that brings health care services to seniors through a business partnership. My congratulations to you.

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

Portage College Sports and Education Dinner

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to recognize the first sports and education dinner which was held at Portage College on Saturday, April 21. The college's mandate is to stretch out into the community and meet educational and training needs within the region. They accomplished this with their main campus in Lac La Biche and 12 service centres reaching 1,600 students.

President Bill Persley stated at the dinner that the purpose of the event was to raise awareness and money for scholarships for students enrolled at Portage College that demonstrate a financial need. Attendees had the privilege of hearing guest speakers Walter Gretzky and Henry Gizmo Williams.

The dinner raised approximately \$20,000, and I would like to congratulate all those involved on their successful efforts and the commitment shown to those constituents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul who will access the scholarship. A great effort, a great cause, a great job.

Thank you.

Kelsey MacMillan

MR. FISCHER: It is my pleasure to recognize a very talented young lady from the Irma 4-H beef club who recently won the provincial 4-H public speak-off on April 7 in Wetaskiwin. Kelsey MacMillan, a grade 11 student from the Irma high school, won over 13 others from regions across the province. She had short notice to prepare her six-minute speech on what she envisioned rural life to be in the future. She will be competing in the national speak-off in Toronto in November of this year. Also she will be master of ceremonies for the 4-H provincials next year in Calgary. Kelsey has been a member since grade 5 and feels 4-H has been an excellent influence on her life.

I've had the wonderful pleasure of being neighbours of the MacMillan family since 1937 and knowing well Kelsey, her mom and dad, her grandparents, and her great-grandparents, who are 1906 homesteaders.

Congratulations, Kelsey. We are all very proud of you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Ann Nicolai

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize Ann Nicolai, the former co-ordinator of the Beverly Towne Community Development Society. Ann Nicolai's contributions to the communities of the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands are many. The large number of groups, associations, coalitions, and societies that Ann has been involved with know her to be a hardworking and dedicated person who put much time, energy, inspiration, and practical ideas to work improving the areas they call home.

2:50

Ann Nicolai was a key person in the development and implementation of Beverly's redevelopment plan. Everything from the development of the Beverly Towne farmers' market, the annual spring cleanup, a couple of community gardens, and the Beverly Towne job fair owe their births to Ann.

I would like to add my personal appreciation to Ann, who was a very valuable resource to me in my service as city councillor in ward 3. Ann resigned from her full-time position at the Beverly Towne Community Development Society just this past March and is now working part-time with another wonderful association, that being the Candora Society of Edmonton.

I know her colleagues and associates along with the neighbourhood she served in in her capacity as Beverly Towne's co-ordinator will join me in applauding her commitment and contribution to their communities and wishing her the best in all that she endeavours in the years to come. Ann has been able to join us today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: All hon. members, the time allocation for that particular segment of our routine is one minute.

Now, today is also the 63rd anniversary of the birth of the hon. Member for Highwood and the Deputy Speaker.

head: Orders of the Day**head: Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following notice given yesterday, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, following notice given yesterday, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 202
Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity)
Amendment Act, 2001**

[Debate adjourned April 24]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to be able to address private member's Bill 202, presented by the MLA for St. Albert. While I appreciate very much her desire in bringing it forward and empathize with the reasons for bringing it forward, I don't actually agree with the bill. There are a lot of reasons for that, particularly from my perspective. We live in a province that does not have government-controlled insurance, unlike British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. We have private insurers that take the risk along with the rest of us when we all have to have insurance for our vehicles. The only way to accomplish what the hon. member is trying to do is to in fact raise the rates for other people who have proven that they have a lower risk level.

Insurance agents or companies currently employ many factors when pricing automobile insurance coverage; however, the use of the three criteria, which are age, gender, and marital status, have in fact been challenged by human rights commissions. At issue is the practice of providing similar insurance coverage to two individuals but at different prices due to one or more of those rating factors.

To date all final rulings by the Canadian courts have been in favour of current practice, including the 1992 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Bates versus Zurich Insurance* and the 1993 Alberta Court of Appeal's decision in *Waters* versus Co-operators*. A leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada was denied in that latter case.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In addition to that, the relationship between driver age and accident frequency is well established in Canada and a number of other countries as well. Younger drivers under the age of 25 are involved in a greater number of both fatal and injury-producing accidents than their older counterparts, and the relative risk facing younger drivers can be 2.5 to 3 times higher than that of other drivers.

The evidence is also clear that female drivers typically demonstrate a lower accident risk than male drivers. As the mother of two sons, while I would love for them to have lower insurance rates, I do in fact understand why there might be a difference between my sons and someone else's daughters.

Presently insurers are permitted to use a variety of rating criteria, including age, gender, and marital status. In most Canadian provinces and territories for the principal operators in the range of 16 to 24 years of age insurers typically charge a premium which

decreases with increasing age, the premium level being lower for female or married principal operators. Many insurers also use the same pattern of premium reduction with increasing age for principal operators 30 years of age and over, with premium levels for female principal operators being lower than that for males.

What would happen today if we were to pass this law would in fact be a decrease for male drivers on a short-term basis of about 25 or 27 percent and an immediate increase of up to 45 percent for our young female drivers. Further, the Insurance Bureau of Canada indicates that while that would be the initial reaction, it would in fact go up again in a very short period of time because one of the side benefits of having lower insurance rates for young male drivers is that we would in fact have more young male drivers on our roads. With the accident rate still being 2.5 to 3 times higher than that for young female drivers, we would have the risk of having more accidents on our highways, and there are enough accidents now, Mr. Speaker.

The only Canadian provinces that restrict the use of age, gender, and marital status as auto insurance rating criteria are in fact British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. I was living in British Columbia back in the '70s when they got rid of all the private insurers and brought in British Columbia insurance. I was out there when the people voted en masse because insurance was going to be so much cheaper for everybody. There was an amazing experience, because in about a year insurance rates were as high or higher than they had been when the private companies had been there, but the government got to own it and run it. That's not actually what we do here in Alberta.

By comparison, in 1988 the Ontario Automobile Insurance Board proposed changes to the auto insurance classification plan that would have disallowed the use of age, gender, and marital status as a rating criteria. Insurers were required to make costly modifications to their computer systems in preparation for those changes; however, the proposed uniform classification plan was dropped by the government due largely to opposition from older drivers who would have faced substantially higher premiums. I think that we would have exactly that same scenario here.

Canadian insurers establish the price of car insurance to reflect the risk of an accident, and the truth is that these young men do have a higher risk of accidents. It's sad, and I feel bad for them. I feel bad for my sons as they struggle to pay for their insurance, but at the end of the day we've made it to the point where they're 23 and 24 now, and with my help and some help from their father they've been able to make their insurance payments and learn that you cannot fool around in your car. You have to take this as a very serious responsibility, and all in all it's not been a totally bad experience for them to have to realize that their peers, members of their sex in their own age group, have created this scenario.

I'm hoping that all drivers will take their privilege of driving seriously, including our young male and young female drivers. When the young female drivers have as many accidents and get as many speeding tickets as their male counterparts, I'm pretty sure their rates are going to go up correspondingly. It's not what I would wish to have. As somebody who's on the highway on a nonstop basis, I would prefer everybody to take it seriously. So I'm not going to support 202, and I would urge this Assembly also to not support it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to rise in second reading and speak to Bill 202, the

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001. This is an interesting bill for me. I think what's brought out in this at first look is that, well, this is a bill about fairness or about equity or about human rights, and I think that is inaccurate. This is not a bill about human rights. This is about what one does, not who one is. It is performance based, not identity based. It's not about identity. It's about a disparity in conduct, essentially.

It's interesting for me to note that when we look at the early Charter challenges that came forward under section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a number of them in fact were not based at all on what we would typically call human rights. But I think that was part of the process of sorting that all out, because one of the ones that comes to mind for me was a group of duck hunters who wanted to go up against the bear hunters because the duck hunters got a shorter hunting season and felt that this was discriminatory and wanted to apply it under section 15 of the Charter. Of course, it did not take very long, but it did take us a while to sort through all those cases to come to a better understanding about what the issues are around human rights and what the dividing line is when we look at fairness and equity regarding people and their activities.

3:00

Human rights is not about treating everyone the same; it's not. That's why we have the subsection under section 15 which allows for programs that ameliorate conditions of the disadvantaged. Human rights I think are about fundamental participation in institutions. In this province we had the Vriend decision that went to the Supreme Court, and that was about an individual's ability to access the Alberta Human Rights Commission, to hear their case heard. That was of course a government agency, and that government agency refused to even hear the case. So that was about access to and participation in a government agency or service. In fact, the Supreme Court did rule that basic human rights had been denied there, and the province was given instructions on how to handle that.

In this case we have a question of whether able-bodied young males are a discriminated-against minority. Under the criteria I've just outlined and certainly the criteria that have been put forward by the Supreme Court – and the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View very thoroughly outlined what some of those cases are, so I won't repeat that information, and I thank her for bringing it forward – these young men are not considered a disadvantaged minority, so this is not a human rights issue. So what is it?

Well, the next question is: is driving a right or a privilege? I think we've already answered that question in society. Driving is a privilege. Driving is not like boating. It is indeed a privilege that is earned, frankly. We demonstrate that already by licensing some people and not licensing others. For instance, we don't license the blind to drive, and there are other people, based on medical conditions, who are not granted a licence to drive.

Indeed, we take away licences from people in this society. Chronic defaulters on maintenance enforcement payments can lose their licences. So we as society have the ability to pull the privilege, to revoke the privilege that has been granted. Obviously, driving licences are also revoked as a result of criminal charges. For example, drunk driving often comes with a provision in the sentencing that the driving licence is removed from the person for a period of time or forever. I mean, essentially we do not supply a driving licence in every 16-year-old's birthday cake. They have to go out and earn it, and they have to pay for it. We have even gone further in this province and recently instituted graduated driving licences. So on the question of whether driving is a right or a privilege, I think it's quite clear that it in fact is regarded as a privilege here.

The question that we're really looking at is that we have a group

of individuals who are assessed a risk factor by their conduct, which has a cost attached to it. The question is: do all people share in the costs that are incurred as a result of the behaviour of those individuals, or do we assign that cost and the risk to the individuals who are in fact exhibiting the behaviour? Thus far the insurance companies – they're the assigners of risk – have certainly said: no; we charge the individuals based on their behaviour.

Now, I think what some people could argue – and perhaps it's true – is that in assigning it to the entire group, we do capture some young males who in fact are very good drivers with a good driving record who always obey the rules, stop at the stoplights, are careful and considerate drivers. They are caught in this as a result of being a young male, and they have to pay the higher rate as well. I think that could be argued.

How do we separate out those good drivers from the others that are causing the problems and are raising the cost for all involved? I think there may well be ways, in this day and age of computers and the ability to store vast amounts of information and to sort through it, to collate and analyze that. There may well be ways for the insurance industry in fact to be able to be more specific in how it's assigning that.

Now, I think the answer that comes out of it is that we prefer that the group that incurs it pays it. Certainly in the other provinces where this has been challenged – in one province there was enough of an outcry from the individuals who would have had to share in the cost, that being older drivers and young female drivers, that the government of the day pulled the bill or did not institute the program.

I appreciate that the member who proposed the bill was doing so in all good faith and was trying to correct an imbalance as she saw it, but this is not an issue of human rights. The unfairness that is inherent in this system is unfair because of the behaviour and conduct of a certain group. That behaviour and conduct is voluntary, as is the kind of behaviour they're engaging in; in other words, driving.

So we have that driving is a privilege, that you have to earn the right and to conduct yourself carefully. Hopefully the insurance companies will begin to take that into consideration and be able to bring those rates more into line and more specific to the individuals who incur them.

I'd like to leave enough time for the proposer of the bill to speak to it, and I will close my comments with that. I do not support the bill, and thank you for the opportunity to comment on it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming in the two or three minutes left.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and say a few words with respect to Bill 202. At the outset I would like to say that I'm very much in agreement with the comments made on this matter by the hon. members for Calgary-Lougheed and Airdrie-Rocky View.

It seems to me that the principal argument here is that basing premiums on gender is discriminatory. That is definitely a true statement, just as it is to say that premiums are based on age or marital status, but the fact is that those are the bases of establishing a premium in most of the jurisdictions in North America. The fact is that in each of those cases there is a measurement of risk that is statistically valid. The fact is that in our society we do recognize discrimination as being valid if it is for a valid purpose. That is recognized in the Constitution Act of Canada. The fact is that much of the legislation that we pass is discriminatory in some nature, but the reason it stands the tests of time and of our courts is that there is a rational purpose for it.

I think most people that I have talked to intuitively understand that there is a reason for looking at age and gender for the determination of insurance premiums. What I would like to do is just refer to some statistics in Alberta which establish that that intuitive reaction to the validity of using age and gender for determining a premium is in fact valid. It's a comparison of the 1999 third-party liability Alberta claims results. In the category of 16- to 20-year-old females – and these are females who were the principal operators of vehicles – there were some 24,839, and they had 2,188 claims. Compare that to the same age group for males. There were in fact fewer males, 23,998, but they had more claims, 3,023. More importantly, the frequency of accidents per 100 vehicles for males was 12.6 compared to 8.8 for females. That's a 43 percent increase over females. Here's the real statistic that makes sense as to the reason for the difference. There was almost \$25 million in total claims paid on account of females and \$43 million, almost \$44 million, on account of males. That's a 75 percent increase.

So I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the statistics relative to Alberta experience clearly justifies that there is a reasonable basis for treating young males differently than young females.

Thank you, sir.

3:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Standing Order 8(5)(i) provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate. The time has run out for other members to participate, so we'd invite the hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate on Bill 202.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask everyone in this Assembly, through you, Mr. Speaker, to consider why we vote for something in principle. That's why I believe the second reading of Bill 202 is what we have before us for consideration right now.

What is the intention of Bill 202? The intention is to eliminate a discriminatory practice by virtue of gender designation with insurance premiums for car insurance. What I'd like people to think about right now and what I would ask the members of the Assembly to consider is the aspect of group consideration here, which is what the insurance industry is doing with this discriminatory practice.

For instance, the best example I can use is taken from my teaching experience of years ago. Many of us will recall being asked to work on a project as a group. Often there are people who don't pull their weight in a group, and do we appreciate those people who don't pull their weight? No, because some of us are penalized through marks; some of us are not given adequate acclaim for the work that is done. I say to everyone here that my concern is that we understand what is the feeling of the young male drivers right now who feel that they are discriminated against because they are thought of as a member of a group.

In this day and age, it's also my understanding, we're going to ask individuals and young people to consider what it is like to take responsibility for their own actions, yet we acquiesce and accept insurance premiums being delivered to them and asked of them that are unequal because they have to pay according to the group that they belong to.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, I urge everyone in this Assembly to vote in favour of the passing of the second reading of this bill so that you can speak for the young males in this province who don't like to, don't appreciate, and don't want to continue to pay for, if you will, the sins or the misadventures of other members of their group, a group that they cannot freely dissociate themselves from. So that's why I say that it is not something that is discriminatory by virtue of

– we're not talking about human rights. We are saying, as one of the members mentioned earlier, yes, this is based on behaviour and conduct, but these premiums are high because they're based on the behaviour and conduct of a group, not of an individual. It's the individual whom I'm asking everyone in this Assembly to give acknowledgment to.

I'd also like to make reference, Mr. Speaker, to the insurance industry's response to my proposal of this bill. Many of them have written us, and I know they've written other members of this Assembly, and their response is what I call a ledger response. They have said: if we're not going to get this amount of money, then we'll just put it onto somebody else. Quite frankly, I think that's simplistic. I think it is unfair, and I think what they are doing in response to it is an easy way of making sure that their industry stands up for what they want, and that is the bottom line. I say: don't accept what the industry tells you. What they've done is they've made just a ledger calculation right across the board.

So, quite frankly, I ask everybody here to speak to, vote for what I consider is against a discriminatory practice and for the right of the individual male to have access just as the female does to the same equal rate for their auto insurance. Let the intention of the bill determine how you're going to vote now, because this is second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

Bill 203

Residential Care Housing Committee Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak today for the many overlooked voices in Alberta. We all have constituents who need supports in their daily living, and these individuals are not always able to advocate for themselves. I'm here to bring the concerns of many of our vulnerable adults – the elderly, the infirm, the permanently disabled, and the mentally ill from well-to-do to lower income – regarding their need for flexible, reliable, and appropriate housing options.

Currently there is an unregulated market operating in Alberta, a market where the consumers are people at risk of being taken advantage of. Many of our disabled and elderly are finding themselves paying for substandard living conditions with no assurance against abuse or neglect, and the housing is provided by owners or operators who are not required to be trained in any way whatsoever.

Many residential home operators are often well-intentioned individuals sharing their home with a person or persons in need of special care in their daily living activities. However, other operators are not as philanthropic or compassionate and exploit the elderly, clients of AISH, and the permanently disabled who really have nowhere else to turn.

Municipalities and other key stakeholder organizations have contacted me as an MLA asking for help to deal with residential care homes that operate without standards. Currently the operators of these homes are doing nothing illegal, so municipal authorities can do nothing to prevent them from taking in people in need of supports for living. They are therefore seeking a solution that provides safe and appropriate housing options that are community-based outside of institutions. Bill 203 addresses this need directly.

A new trend of demand for care in the community is emerging, care in an environment that deals with the whole health and wellness of the individual, going beyond acute care. Medical and health care

needs are important, and this government has recently done and continues to do an admirable job of providing quality home care and institutional care to Albertans. However, the concept of wellness also includes a strong component of supports for daily living to maintain the health and independence of those who need it. A segment of this market is not being assured of standards of care and safety in their daily lives.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 has the specific purpose to identify, list, and eventually regulate residential care homes which house three or fewer clients who are unrelated to the operator and which are homes that do not receive government funding. The process outlined in the bill entails the creation of a residential care homes steering committee. One key task of the committee will be to identify existing unlicensed care providers with the purpose of creating a voluntary list. This list or registry will serve to help the steering committee formulate regulations that will best maintain stable, high-quality housing for the elderly and disabled in Alberta.

3:20

The steering committee members will represent key stakeholder groups including the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, regional health authorities as well as representation from the Legislative Assembly, from the government departments of Children's Services, Community Development, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, Justice, Municipal Affairs, and Alberta Seniors. The steering committee will be chaired by an appointee of the Minister of Health and Wellness and will be provided with adequate staff support during its four-year mandate.

Mr. Speaker, the issues to be addressed by the steering committee are broad, and the policies they are intended to formulate will be equally so. There needs to be a system of consistent, broad-based standards in place to ensure quality care. As I have said earlier, there are currently no standards for or monitoring of residential care homes with three or fewer clients. Operators have been able to dance around the existing gaps in the laws by appointing clients as building superintendents or resident managers when municipal authorities try to enforce current legislation such as the Protection for Persons in Care Act, which regulates facilities receiving government funding, and the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act, which is designated to only regulate care facilities of four or more tenants.

Bill 203 will bring an end to this lack of provincewide standards in this area and bring accountability to providers who are currently operating beyond the pale of good reason and good conscience. The lack of law has left many of our society's at-risk citizens unprotected, and that is something I find very troubling, Mr. Speaker.

The elderly, a segment of the population which is both aging and rapidly expanding, must have more quality housing options, ones that provide them with safety and the necessary supports needed for daily living. There is a shortage of appropriate housing in most of Alberta's urban centres and rural areas, particularly for housing that provides some level of support. There are many fine lodges and institutions throughout the province. I don't dispute that. But many aging Albertans, for example, want to maintain their independence and also have the option of living in a house or home in their community and near their loved ones. Larger urban facilities do not always provide this preference in choice. This bill helps our need to address the realities and needs of rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, this government has always made a point of respecting the dignity and importance of personal choices of Albertans. We have respected the rights of people while at the same time ensuring the choices they have are safe and viable. The Latin

phrase, though, *caveat emptor*, or let the buyer beware, has always been a fundamental tenet of free-market economics. I would submit that this principle does not operate soundly when one party is consistently in a position of need and has extreme difficulty serving his or her own best interests in the marketplace.

Such is the condition of many of the people who choose to live in residential care homes, and they need protection from exploitation that is enshrined in law. The difficulty for these people is their vulnerability, that they cannot just pick up and move out of a residential care situation on their own. They are captive to their frailty or to their disability. They may have psychiatric conditions, brain injury, or high needs, such as the frail elderly. Presently the general market does not have to provide competitive standards of service but, rather, a minimal level.

Mr. Speaker, there is also very little stopping the care provider from abusing his clients, be it financially, emotionally, or physically. As I said, it is hard for the client or resident to change or to escape from an undesirable situation when there are no guiding principles in law for these clients. I would like to remind everyone that even bed-and-breakfasts are regulated in this province and others in order to meet standards of care and cleanliness for their customers. Why is it not the case for residential care homes which house society's frail and vulnerable citizens?

Yes, we are talking about at-risk or vulnerable adults in society who require help to take care of many things the rest of us take for granted. Many residents are bedridden and need health care and personal supports to be turned, cleaned, fed, and treated with decency. There are reports, for example, of residents being removed finally from residential care facilities with bedsores or suffering from malnutrition because there were not minimal staffing requirements nor any enforced standards of care. There is also no assurance in this province that residential care home operators maintain a standard of basic cleanliness for their clients, nor that it is their responsibility to even facilitate social activities so important to basic mental health.

The CHA, the Capital health authority, and the Calgary regional health authority have established their own personal care homes systems of standards, which include a registry with specific qualifying criteria such as fire inspection, liability insurance, single-room occupancy, and food handlers. A database posts vacancies and lists homes. Indications are that families truly value this approach. However, these are limited to health and home care supports and are not provincewide.

There is a profound need and right, Mr. Speaker, for all at-risk citizens to live a clean and dignified existence, and when they cannot provide it for themselves, they may turn to a residential care home. Also, I think a very significant point is that many citizens may not yet be frail or vulnerable but still choose to not live alone, preferring a more social atmosphere that provides critically nutritious meals with a room. It is true many seniors or disabled persons could be placed in a lodge or an institution such as an acute care hospital or a nursing home, but many people in this province want their home to feel like a real home, and they also want to have their individuality and independence preserved to the greatest extent possible. We must respect this wish, which is so fundamental to a person's wellness. The elderly and those with special needs must be treated with respect and dignity.

Mr. Speaker, these are problems that Bill 203 seeks to solve. We are looking to act right now to serve the best interests of many vulnerable people seeking residential care housing options. By providing them, their families and caregivers with information about the market, knowledge of resources available to seniors and the disabled when they're seeking a residential care home as well as a

mechanism to listen to the concerns of clients, we will eventually provide vulnerable or at-risk Albertans with quality, independent, community-based living.

Through an intensive public education component Bill 203 sets out that Albertans should be informed of the choices they have in residential care, such as where they are located and which services are provided. I would also like to point out that the voluntary registry is only a temporary measure until the framework for licensing and monitoring is in place. Also, the need for education and representation is very urgent. We should not wait one more minute to act.

Mr. Speaker, voluntarily registered home operators will not be recommended by the steering committee without first demonstrating good faith in caring for their clients. They and other key stakeholders will be consulted in this process on the best ways to ensure quality service in this industry. Care home operators who try their best to provide good value and service to their clients welcome this legislation. For too long they have been competing with residential care providers who cut corners, provide substandard care, and treat their clients like a commodity.

It is important we realize that residential care homes do exist in Alberta, homes that receive no direct government funding and are paid directly by the client and which house three clients or fewer. Further, they operate without the benefit of accreditation, monitoring, or even acknowledgment of any authority. Their clients are typically on a fixed income such as AISH, CPP disability, or Alberta seniors' benefits, and their limited resources often restrict their ability to advocate for themselves. This condition, which has persisted in Alberta, must be ended.

Would it be the intent of this Assembly to have neighbouring provincial jurisdictions know that we are content with these types of housing conditions for our elderly and those with special needs? Would you be proud to say that Albertans have more regulations to protect tourists than the elderly in residential care?

There are two trends in Alberta that greatly affect the need for legislation like Bill 203. First of all, there is our growing aging population, which affects more than seniors. There are recent recognized studies that address this issue including the well-respected Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care report, better known as the Broda report, and also the Alberta for all Ages: Directions for the Future report, better known as the aging population study.

3:30

I also want to quote – not directly quote but refer to – some recommendations in the long-term care review such as that it is important to shift the focus so that the first priority is for people to remain in their homes and other types of supportive living arrangements; expand home care services substantially and also encourage the private and voluntary sectors to expand the range of supportive living options available across the province; expand supportive housing to include light- and medium-care cases, people with mild dementia, and young people with disabilities; set provincewide standards for supportive housing developments and also unbundle other services such as personal care and food services and housing arrangements; give people a choice in the specific package of services they need to meet their assessed needs wherever possible; bring services to people rather than requiring them to move into facilities or travel to where services are provided.

Also, I would like to refer to Housing Alberta's Seniors in the Next 30 Years, by the Urban Futures Institute 1999, who reported that the demand for seniors' accommodation in Alberta will increase faster than the population as a whole and the seniors' population

itself. Also, the demand for collective dwellings will increase by 129 percent, and the demand for private dwellings for seniors will increase by 136 percent. As our elderly population booms, we must plan for a positive future by developing innovative solutions to housing with some value-added services and assurance of safety.

The second trend I have to acknowledge is that innovative housing solutions to housing and health needs are occurring. I talk about a specific area within housing. Basically, it is unreasonable and certainly not desirable to relocate massive numbers of aging Albertans into long-term care centres or acute care hospitals only because they require a home with a greater degree of personal security and assistance. Albertans deserve and want to have accommodations that facilitate their independence and their well-being within a community setting, regardless of their age or station in life.

Mr. Speaker, institutional living does not necessarily serve the best interests of all individuals, nor is it their first choice, so we must work to provide safe housing options for all Albertans. There must be more than the conventional institutional health care system. Many elderly and handicapped Albertans do not have a safety net of friends or family to support and care extensively for them. Bill 203 would provide a trustworthy option for their housing and health needs.

If vulnerable Albertans cannot find community-based supportive living that provides for their independence needs, their wellness can't really be assured. Take into consideration a few of the most common illnesses of older Albertans: depression and dementia. People with these common conditions want a smaller and familiar home setting, but they should really not live alone unassisted. They need someone to facilitate recreation, social activity, transportation, and ensure proper diet and exercise. The depressed or those suffering from dementia often need help remembering to take medication or just someone to motivate them daily and remind them of important personal goals.

Mr. Speaker, these are the kinds of services that would be ideally serviced by a small residential care home setting. Keep in mind how common the illnesses of dementia and depression are for the elderly. Also bear in mind the potential cost if the wellness of these individuals is allowed to slide. Then remember seniors will increase from 10 percent of today's population to 20 percent or more in just 20 to 25 years. If we just assure the quality of residential care facilities for Albertans, the free market will provide a housing solution of much lower cost than that of our nursing homes, lodges, or hospitals. If we do not provide a structured market, we are restricting the housing options for Albertans and continuing a system where many Albertans are treated unfairly and without dignity.

Bill 203 is not looking to impose an enormous enforcement and monitoring system upon Albertans. The steering committee can and will facilitate an efficient free market, working collaboratively within existing structures. It will also bring information to potential residents so that they can make informed decisions, and operators will be forced by standards and the market to give good value for money.

The alternative is very bleak, Mr. Speaker. If we persist in providing limited housing options with no standards for our at-risk Albertans, we can expect them on our doorstep. If we choose a responsible course and provide the leadership role in developing regulations for safe, quality housing options, we can then expect them to enjoy their lives, living with a dignity so well deserved. I encourage all members of this Assembly to support Bill 203.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the work that the Member for Calgary-West has done to bring forward this Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act, and her very nice introductory remarks.

Essentially, my issue and my concern with this bill is that the proposal here is to create a committee and that's all. It's outlining what the committee would do in that it would develop standards of care, establish a registry, and develop educational programs, but there's nothing in the legislation that then says what will happen with that. So potentially we can have a group of people come together, do this work, and after four years it's over. Nowhere in here does it say that this will be implemented. It just says that they'll report to the minister. It doesn't say that the minister has to do anything with this. So that's my disappointment in the bill.

There's been a lot of work done here, and it's work that needs to be done. It's acknowledging and opening up an area that we have neglected here in Alberta and an area that needs attention to it, frankly, and needs some regulation and some monitoring and some enforcement. But all this bill does is give us a committee that's going to have meetings, which is fine. That would be a nice thing, to have a committee, but I wish for so much more, and I think it's possible to do so much more. So I haven't decided whether I'm going to support the bill at this point in time. I'll listen to the rest of the debate around it, but my initial reaction to it is that we have a committee established here that doesn't have to go anywhere or do anything. They can just meet for a bunch of years and talk to each other and then it's over. This is an issue that could use a lot of work and a lot of attention.

It was first brought to my attention by the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who had started to work with a number of groups out of Calgary and specifically the group called FAIRE, Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare. I also started to work with this group and have referred people to them and have great respect for the prodigious amount of work that they have done. In essence, Sessional Paper 976/99 is, in effect, all of the standards of care that it's possible that this proposed committee in Bill 203 would, in fact, come up with. They're done; it's here. They have gone through all the legislation across Canada. They've looked at all the issues that are arising from the family members and from the individuals themselves who are in care. They've done all the work. It's right here.

So you can understand my impatience, then, when I hear that there's going to be a committee that's going to look at examining developing standards of care when I know that, in fact, it's out there already. It's out there in more than one place, because the previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo working with the previous Member for Edmonton-Manning in fact proposed a bill in the fall session of 2000. [interjection] Yes, because the Liberals continue to bring forward really good ideas which the Conservatives are kind enough and smart enough to recognize and take advantage of.

3:40

The bill was entitled Bill 224, the Seniors' Care Enhancement Act, 2000, and is very thorough in what is being proposed: amendments to the Protection for Persons in Care Act, quite specifically, but also going beyond that and talking about standards, staffing standards, licensing for employees. In order to get a licence, they have to ensure there are sufficient employees on duty, that those people are trained, that their responsibilities are in conjunction with their training, staffing patterns, ratio of care staff to residents, that care staff will not be required to provide other duties such as food preparation or housekeeping or laundry. If they are an individual care attendant, that's what they do. They don't mop the floors and

peel turnips. They look after the individuals that they are supposed to, and other people that are doing those support service jobs are not included in the ratio of staff to patient care. Very appropriate.

We've got nutrition and food services standards. This is something I've always found really interesting, where we do bother to mention it, and I'm not speaking specifically to Alberta at this point. Often where we do see it, it says: well, you know, patients or people in care have to be fed. Uh-huh, but I think we have to go further than that and actually put things in like fed from the Canada food guide or adhering to the Canada food guide, because when we just say, well, they have to be fed, you can in fact get away with feeding them bread and water, and there are people who do. If we want to be really responsible and lay this out in a very clear fashion which is able to be monitored and enforced, then you do start getting very specific with standards of care.

So this Bill 224 went through nutrition and food services standards. It's very specific. Fruits and vegetables: a 225-millilitre serving of vegetables. I mean, they actually get down to detailing that kind of thing, and frankly I think that's the level of detail that is needed here. I mean, we're talking people's lives, and it's too easy to just slough it off, and frankly down the road you see people who have been quite abused as a result of it.

Bill 224 also talked about oral health. It talked about having a residents council, having social activities, and recreational planning standards. It talked about administration of medication and, lastly, a task force including gerontologists and members of seniors' advisory groups and board members that would review these provisions and make recommendations on the standards. It talks about confidentiality, telephones, accessibility, room temperature, privacy, visitors, reportable investigations, neglect and abuse, restriction on the use of restraints – which is a really important area for us to be looking at – emergency restraints, monitoring, reassessment of standards. So all of that work has been done in Bill 224, which is certainly available for the Member for Calgary-West and in other places.

Earlier this week I tabled Sessional Paper 62/2001, which was from the Elder Advocates of Alberta group with recommendations about the Protection for Persons in Care Act and the Dependent Adults Act and what could be done there to strengthen the acts. They talk about an Alberta-wide registry. Now, they're specifically talking about a registry that's listing abusers, and Bill 203 is talking about a registry of accommodation that's available, but it's been raised before. This is dated January 2, 2001. They're quite specific on what abuse means and detail it in great depth. They put forward that abusers have to be held accountable and disciplined for their actions as does the care facility in which these people work. They're recommending that the act states proposed penalties, that they publish reports on this.

One interesting thing I picked out of their document was that complainants who are persons in care, shall not be subject to alteration, interruption or discontinuance of services to which they are normally entitled, because of a report of abuse or neglect.

Very good point, yet we do that in many other areas of social care. When we're not sure what's going on and we want to investigate something, all service stops until the investigation is complete, but for somebody who is frail or vulnerable, that can be devastating.

So there are three documents that I've now referenced, all of which have done work on standards of care. I'm frustrated by the idea that we're going to set up a committee that's now going to look at developing standards of care when so many people have already done the work. Yet do we actually see standards of care implemented as a result of this bill? No. We see a committee that produces a paper. It doesn't even insist on that actually. It just says

that they'll develop these things but not what else happens with it, how much further it goes.

One of the other issues that I have with what's being proposed here is 20 members being proposed for the committee and nine of them being directly accountable to government. Now, there's sort of an open category of Members of the Legislative Assembly. It would be interesting to see if an opposition member got appointed to this, but something tells me no. I don't know why. There are also members from the departments of Children's Services, Community Development, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, Justice, Municipal Affairs, Seniors, and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta or the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, both of which councils have completely government-appointed people sitting on them. So that's nine of the 20 positions potentially, and I'll note that it's Members of the Legislative Assembly, so there could be more than one member that's appointed to this. But a minimum of nine of these 20 are government employees or directly responsible to government, in effect.

Then they go on to suggest a regional health authority, Urban Municipalities Association, Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. Those are the three additional agencies that they suggest, so that's taking us to 12. Now we're left with eight people; we're not sure where they come from.

It is allowing for members of the committee to be eligible for remuneration and expenses and also is appointing another government person to be the executive director of the committee. So I'm wondering why there isn't something in here that says that there'll be somebody from the Alberta Council on Aging or there'll be somebody on here from the Kerby Centre or from the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired, all recognized, well-respected groups that advocate for and deal with seniors.

I'll stop here and note that it actually does not specifically say that we are talking about seniors in this bill. It doesn't designate that, and though I notice that the member proposing the bill spoke at length about seniors, frail seniors and vulnerable seniors, in fact the bill talks about "a residence in which personal assistance, lodging and meals are provided for compensation to persons who are 18 years of age or older." So this is meant to capture more than seniors or seniors needing assistance obviously, but according to the mover of the bill it's obviously intended specifically for seniors. So I'm questioning in that case why there isn't some attempt to capture the expertise that we have in the community through those very well-established and well-respected organizations.

3:50

One other issue around this. I heard the member saying that these were for private residences, but one of the interesting situations that's arisen recently is that we have a situation certainly in Edmonton – and perhaps it's different in other centres. When you have subsidized housing for seniors, it's a situation where both the individual and the location have to be subsidized, have to be approved, and we're short of seniors' housing right now and for the foreseeable future. We have a situation where there are some other nonprofit organizations and even private providers who would like to be offering services that are in demand, particularly for individuals who are requiring assisted care. In other words, they'd like to be living independently, but they can't quite live totally independently. They might well be in an apartment, but they're needing significant home care or assistance to get going or feed themselves, dress themselves, get out and about.

Those individuals, even if they qualified for subsidized housing, can't take that subsidy and go to another nonprofit agency or go to

a private provider and take that subsidy with them. It's only attached to the building, and I think that's an area we need to look at. I think there's some flexibility that is necessary there at this time. I would be uneasy if this were to become a permanent state of affairs, because I think that where you have private corporations offering service, I get uneasy when there's public money going there. But certainly where we know that there is a gap in housing for seniors, where we know that there's housing available, I think there could be a shorter term plan worked out.

Certainly in my constituency I have people who want to go to a certain facility, and they can't because if they leave their current residence, they will lose their housing subsidy. With seniors on a fixed income, that is absolutely critical; it is life or death; it is do or die; it is eat or not eat. Those subsidies are really important to them.

If we're going to be talking about flexibility, if we're going to be talking about care, if we're going to be talking about opportunity for different kinds of housing, I agree very much with the Member for Calgary-West that it needs to be carefully scrutinized. We don't want vulnerable people in a place where they can be taken advantage of, and if we're in a position to put in place regulations and particularly standards of care, we should be doing that. The onus is on us to show the leadership to do it.

I look forward to the rest of the debate on this bill. It's caused me some hard thinking about whether to support it or not. I think I will and that I support the concept that's there. I just truly wish that it had gone far enough. The committee is not enough. Nothing in the bill says that what the committee produces is going to go anywhere, and that's my disappointment.

So thank you for the opportunity to speak to the bill. I'm aware that some of my colleagues also wish to get involved in this debate. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to speak to Bill 203. I believe our focus on this issue has been a long time coming.

Bill 203 would benefit and protect many vulnerable Albertans. I support Bill 203 in concern for the elderly, the infirm, the permanently disabled, and the mentally ill. This legislation would help all of those who are in need of constant yet flexible care. It would protect them from many of the crimes that they may be vulnerable to right now in private care facilities.

In recent years there have been a lot of developments in residential options for individuals who require nonmedical care. These facilities provide constant care outside a hospital or institutional-style group home. This is a great step in the direction of providing people with a more family-style residential care and helping these residents remain in a community and retain a sense of independence.

At present there is a problem facing the residents of some of these facilities. The system of care they have chosen to live within is not protecting their safety or providing them with the standard of care they were promised. These individuals may be abused, neglected, and stolen from.

As more personal care facilities become available to a greater number of people, our government must react in order to ensure that people in our communities are getting the responsible care they deserve. There are currently no legislative guidelines that protect the residents from any possible misfortunes. The law does not set certain standards to which these care facilities must hold. It is the objective of Bill 203 that the province recognize certain standards for these small care facilities in order for them to be considered fit for providing people with safe living conditions and proper care.

These private care facilities and residences are also privately owned homes. They offer lodging, meals, and personal assistance for one to three elderly persons or adults with extra needs. These private care homes are special because they provide care in a familylike setting for individuals who need some assistance and cannot live alone but do not need nursing or medical support. They're operated on a fee-for-service basis that should provide a safe environment, support, protection, supervision, and assistance in relation to individual needs of the residents in that home.

Currently the department only licenses those facilities which house four or more adults. There are no licensing requirements if care providers keep their client base under four, nor is there approval for program standards. While residence owners have different written guides which are available to them, they can only be encouraged to follow the guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, the Guide for Private Care Home Operators is one such guide that addresses issues like the training necessary to be a caregiver, environmental and building requirements and safety standards, food preparation, and selection of residents. Also suggested are the rights and privileges of residents and other concerns. But this book is only a guideline. Operators have the choice not to follow the book, which has no legislative standing. These types of books also help to guide individuals and their families to choose which type of facility is best for their needs and to make informed decisions. It educates seniors and those in need of extra care to help them avoid potentially harmful situations.

These guides fill the need of educating seniors and others to make a better decision, but the problems facing our seniors have not adequately been addressed. There needs to be an enforcement of these guidelines by appropriate regulations. The current situation holds no obligation except the moral decision to uphold the standards listed in the guides. People are being fooled into the standard of care they are going to receive because they have no way of knowing how they will be treated inside each private residence.

The specific purpose of Bill 203 is to identify, list, and eventually regulate care home operators housing three or fewer clients. To begin these developments, a steering committee would build a voluntary list of private health care providers. Then it would use this voluntary list to help formulate regulations. The standards and the regulations that ensure private care facilities are being maintained at a high quality would be based on the findings of the steering committee.

Mr. Speaker, the committee would be made up of a number of representatives of departments from within government and others who have a key interest in the direction of the committee. They would play a direct role in developing the framework that would become the regulations and standards in private care facilities.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, the main reason we should pass Bill 203 is the problem the lack of standards is creating. As stated, there are no legal standards to protect those living in private care facilities, leaving operators to run their businesses outside the bounds of any regulations. This leaves a large segment of our society extremely vulnerable.

The main concern is the possibility of abuse of any sort, be it financial, physical, or mental, which can occur because of a lack of accountability. Clients who want residential care are faced with the fear that their need for care would lead to horrifying experiences that they cannot control. These vulnerable persons, because of some sort of disability, may have difficulty expressing or acting on their wishes and ascertaining or exercising their own rights. These people need regulations to protect them, because in many cases they are unable

to protect themselves. Mr. Speaker, when individuals with any kind of disability rely on others for their safety and well-being, they should have the right to be protected from abuse. I believe it is time we take responsibility to ensure the safety and protection of residents in these homes.

It is an unfortunate truth that there are a number of residents in these care facilities in our province that are subjected to these abuses. Being in a vulnerable state, they do not have the ability to up and leave the situation they are in. Families may not even be aware of the suffering and cannot help them because of the lack of ability to communicate. When signs of any sort of abuse surface, it is already too late, and a vulnerable resident has already suffered its effects.

The lack of standards to regulate these new types of services in our province is perpetuating the abuse of its consumers. Bringing forth the necessity for standards these services must provide would educate its consumers about its hazards and who is rightfully acknowledged as a regulated care provider. Providing the consumer with a list or a registry of monitored caregivers gives them the ability to make an informed decision about the care that they will be receiving. Residents will no longer have to rely on the possible moral standards of their operator. But to ensure that the care they receive is of a high standard and their rights are protected by law, it is important in this situation for them to know that there is a system in place which will watch out for them.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, there's a great deal of work that needs to be completed before the long-term effects of Bill 203 are to be felt. By weeding out those who do not meet prescribed standards of care for their clients, legitimate care providers will no longer have to compete with substandard facilities. Furthermore, those that are left will provide the steering committee with a true framework for developing licensing and monitoring policies. The client would be provided with a measure of care that they can trust in a market that could be overwhelming and easily misleading. It is unfortunate that those who are being taken advantage of in this market are those who are vulnerable and in need of constant care.

The process of finding someone that can be trusted to provide for their needs is a difficult task. This type of personal care at one time would have been provided by the family, but we must face the truth. The rapid growth of these facilities shows that there's a definite need for this type of care. The development of personal private care facilities has broadened the choices which are available to our loved ones now and for all of us eventually.

Not everyone has needs which are suited to a more medical-based facility and not everyone likes the idea of living in a large group home. Yet at the moment those places hold the security of knowing that there are standards of care which are necessary to provide for its residents. The development of personal care facilities came out of the demand for more of a need to move away from the conventional system of care.

A study of the change in family demographics would also prove that the trend towards an even greater demand for such places will soon be upon us. Increasingly more people have chosen to only have two or less children, which places the large burden of aging parents on a small family. People work, and there is often no one to look after the full-time needs of an aging adult. Many aging adults have personal reasons for not wanting to depend on their families for full-time support. Whatever their reason the creation of more residential facilities will alleviate the problem of going into an institutionalized-style home for care, which isn't always necessary.

Also, there has been a greater amount of community support for those who are handicapped. More people are gaining confidence in having a style of life that was never an option for them before. They are able to live in a home which better provides for their needs and gives them the freedom and independence they want to have. If our province does not step forward and provide these people with a system that they can trust, then the progress that they have made in living a life of independence will be degraded.

In future the results of the steering committee would help our government provide our citizens with a valuable tool by listing the names of the facilities that have proven to the committee that they meet regulated standards. It will provide consumers the information and education they need. It will help residents make an informed choice about the place that will be caring for their needs and what grade of standards they should be expecting from this care.

I urge all my colleagues here to support Bill 203. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to have an opportunity to discuss Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act. I'm somewhat torn in my thoughts about this bill as we see it before the House. On the one hand, it's a barely there kind of bill. It scratches the surface of where we need to go. On the other hand, I know from experience in this Legislature that the more times we bring these kinds of issues back to the floor of the Assembly the greater chance there is that the time that a bill that deals with an issue like this is passed comes closer.

This is, in fact, the third time in very recent history that we've had some opportunity to discuss and hear about the kinds of needs and requirements there are for people who are in residential care housing. Of course, I'm talking about the Broda report that came out in November of 1999, which was really, I think, the first concrete position that the government took on this issue in terms of the kinds of needs there were for standards as a fallout of some of the feedback, I'm sure, that MLAs have heard in their constituencies, and certainly I have lots of those stories too. It was a start there. We would have liked to have seen something that was a little more concrete in terms of an implementation strategy for bringing standards in place.

Then, of course, our former colleague brought forward Bill 224, the Seniors' Care Enhancement Act, 2000, which we felt was a fairly comprehensive review of the needs of seniors in residential care and talked about the issues that were outstanding at that time and continue to be outstanding to this day, Mr. Speaker.

So now we have before us another private member's bill, Bill 203, that certainly takes this forward in terms of where we need to be going. It's very important, I think, that we make some progress on this issue. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Centre I'm a little frustrated by the prospect that what we really get here is the establishment of a committee to develop some standards. While there are some strict rules for how long the committee should sit and how many members should be on the committee, there are no strict rules for what happens with those recommendations or, in fact, that they come forward as recommendations or something that could be incorporated into government policy and passed. We would hope that that's where this would go. It would be beneficial if that were stated in the bill. It's great to set these benchmarks in place, but if we're not actually measuring the success after they've reached the benchmark, then what? It goes nowhere, and we don't accomplish anything. It doesn't take very much time or effort to go the extra half a step and complete the process, and that would have been really good to see in here.

4:10

It's a little discouraging to see this come forward as a private member's bill, Mr. Speaker. It would have been really nice to see this kind of legislation being brought forward by the government at this time. It is progressive in nature. It is a step in the right direction, and it's certainly an area that needs to be addressed.

I know that in my constituency there are a number of small residential homes, the unlicensed kind, and they provide a great opportunity for people to operate businesses, Mr. Speaker, but a great opportunity to operate a business isn't necessarily also a great opportunity for those who are receiving the services, those who are in care. We are dealing with people who are vulnerable for whatever reasons, and we need to be especially mindful of the responsibility we have as citizens and particularly as legislators in that regard. We need to ensure that people are taken care of in all aspects, not just meeting the basic needs of a roof over their head and being fed and clothed but compassion in how they're dealt with and humanity in terms of what happens within the households.

I think particularly of two of these homes that I'm aware of. One is specifically for mentally challenged young people, and to me the folks in the home, those in care – it would seem that things are really great there. It seems that they're happy and that all their needs are being met, but if you take a look around the building, you see that one of the residents is housed in a bedroom that hasn't got a window and doesn't have a closet door. Well, maybe that's not a really big deal, but I think that if you're paying for care, those are minimum kinds of standards that should be met. The families like this operator, and they're willing to put up with some inconvenience for their family member that's placed in that house. I don't know if that's reasonable or not, Mr. Speaker, and I think those are the kinds of issues that we should be talking about.

The other home that comes to mind right off the top of my head is a mixed home. It has some seniors and some other people in the home who have other kinds of interesting challenges that they face on a day-to-day basis, and they aren't very mobile. The operator again in this instance is a very compassionate person and tries to do an excellent job, but there are some issues in that home too, and a lot of them have to do with the ability for the personal care attendants to actually be personal care attendants and not turnip peelers, as my colleague for Edmonton-Centre talked to. Somebody's got to clean those bathrooms, Mr. Speaker, and when you talk about the ratio of staff to people and the kinds of expectations there are, I don't think that we're actually meeting the requirements of most people in most instances.

So what are we going to do with this bill? A committee gets struck, and they talk about the kinds of standards that are needed. We have had lots of talk about the kinds of standards that are needed, Mr. Speaker. I have before me today two documents that were tabled in this Legislature at points in time that speak specifically to the standards that have been talked about and are needed. One went to the Minister of Community Development in January from the Elder Advocates of Alberta, which talks about some very specific requirements that are necessary and that they are recommending. Very, very good stuff. Zero tolerance regarding elder abuse. It's very important that something like that be done.

The registries that we've heard some discussion about, that care facilities and its officers must be held accountable for the care performance within the facility, the basic kind of assumption that people are making is happening, that isn't always happening. Some specific recommendations with regard to sections of the act being rewritten, really excellent recommendations, things like defining time lines for investigations to be held and access to medical and financial information, which I think is also very important. Then

they deal with a section on dependent adults, which is very important. A short document, not very hard to incorporate into regulations that can come forward, but something that needs to be addressed.

Another document I have in front of me is entitled *An Initiative Addressing the Needs and Rights of Alberta's Nursing Home Residents*. This, Mr. Speaker, is much more substantive in nature. It's organized by FAIRE, Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare, and it goes into very specific uses. The use of sanctions, which is something that needs to be talked about. How reporting of unusual occurrences should be addressed. Once again, access to personal records. Notices and posting of information. I'm talking about a residents' council where it's possible to have that.

Standards for dietary services, as my colleague had mentioned. In those, things like not only food production but how it's handled and stored and minimum standards being met in terms of them being able to eat well, where food isn't rationed and where it does meet Canada's food guide needs.

Resident care. The personal hygiene care of them in terms of dental care, skin and nail care, communication and sensory function, and cognitive and intellectual stimulation. If you've been in these homes, you know that people have different needs and can really require a wide range of abilities from those who are taking care of them.

So an excellent document that outlines staffing responsibilities, restraints that can be used, conditions under which they should be limited, the nursing care aspect of it in terms of dispensing medical care and medicines, and a bill of rights. What a great idea, Mr. Speaker, to have a residents' bill of rights. So very, very good ideas.

What I am concerned about is that if we just call the committee together and they are to redo all this work, then perhaps some of this really good information isn't brought forward and sifted through and there isn't a genuine outcome here that will be beneficial for the province. I'll support this bill, Mr. Speaker, because I think it's one step in the process of where we need to go here. But I'm hoping, if it gets passed by this Legislature, that it doesn't reinvent the wheel, that we see it compiling the really good information that is out there, that even if all they can do with the information that is compiled is put in their final report just those issues there is consensus on, then on those issues there is a recommendation made to the government that they adapt them through regulations or through bringing in a bill or whatever process the government wants to do, and that there is some concrete action called for within a specific time frame.

You know, it's a real problem, I think, that some of the information we see developed through the various vehicles the government has access to we don't get timely reports and subsequent action on. The Broda report of November 1999 is a good example. We're in April 2001, and nothing's happened with that. Why is that? It was a good report, something that we supported at the time and continue to support. What we need are not just the recommendations but time lines on when they'll be implemented, at least a time line when the government will report back on what it is from those recommendations that they can implement.

I would suggest that we can't waste any time. We're talking for the most part about people who are in need of assistance from us, be they seniors or be they mentally challenged people, seniors who are needing some form of assisted living or people who fall in between that area who want to live in a secured environment. We need to ensure that their needs are met in a timely fashion. The clock is ticking day by day, and I don't think that we should be trying to waste any time on this. So while I will support this bill because it is a step in the right direction, I hope the real outcome here is some concrete action taken by the government.

Now we've heard from private members on both sides of the

House, Mr. Speaker. Good for those people who have brought these issues forward. Excellent work done on the Broda report but not nearly far enough, certainly not anything concrete that we can take to these people and say: here's some security for you to ensure that your lives are going to be enhanced to the best of our abilities. So I am hoping that we will see some action from the government in that regard and that this is just a small step in the right direction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to enter the debate on Bill 203, which has been proposed by my colleague for Calgary-West. I am also very pleased to pledge my support for this bill. By passing Bill 203, the members of this Assembly would let vulnerable Albertans know that we have their best interests at heart. Bill 203 recognizes that Alberta is in dire need of a legislative framework concerning residential care facilities that house fewer than four patients and receive no provincial funding. It also calls for the establishment of a voluntary registry system of care providers. From this registry we can develop standards to protect all Albertans who are dependent upon the care of others in order to lead a quality life.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 follows the precedent set by Motion 505, which was passed unanimously in 1995. Motion 505 called upon our Assembly "to ensure that health and safety standards are being met in all personal care facilities by establishing regulations and a comprehensive monitoring system." Bill 203 is calling for the Assembly to live up to the sentiment of Motion 505. This Assembly must make the safe care of at-risk Albertans one of its fundamental concerns.

In this province we have a history of caring for others in times of duress, and many laws do exist that make the care of the vulnerable an aim of our government. For example, the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act and the Protection for Persons in Care Act do protect vulnerable Albertans – seniors, disabled adults, and adults with mental illness – but this protection only extends to those who live in facilities which care for four or more patients. The question is therefore rather obvious. Are Albertans living in facilities which provide care to three or less patients less deserving of being cared for via provincially regulated standards? Of course not. This is why Bill 203 is so important. It says to Albertans in a voice loud and clear that no matter who provides care to you or a loved one, they will be held accountable to firm standards designed to protect the dignity and self-respect of their patients. Bill 203 would therefore seal over the loophole left by the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act and the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

Imagine just for a minute if you would, Mr. Speaker, a person in the care of a facility that did not feel that it should follow rules to protect the dignity of its patients. We've all heard horror stories about patients who have been starved or physically and mentally abused in facilities in which they were supposed to receive care or heard reports of patients whose cries of pain have gone unheeded, and this in facilities in which they have paid to receive care. Yes, we've even heard stories of patients who have not received help for something as necessary as going to the washroom, only to be left with the shame of having soiled themselves. When we refuse to help and protect people in such vulnerable straits, we are effectively telling them that they are less than human. This is simply not right. By passing Bill 203 we take seriously the precious government role of being an advocate for those who are truly in need of our assistance.

I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta is not the first jurisdiction to consider this sort of legislation. In Saskatchewan, for example, care providers are bound by the Personal Care Homes Act, which binds all care facilities, no matter how many patients it holds, to a firm set of standards. That legislation was enacted in 1989, making this initiative long overdue. How long will Alberta have to wait before we get it right?

Mr. Speaker, while the intent of Bill 203 is surely not going to be contested, there may be a few logistical concerns. One of these is whether or not smaller care facilities will have any motivation to sign up for a voluntary registry. Some will argue that they have no motivation at all. I disagree, for when I think to the future and consider that I may one day find myself in a care facility, I'd want to feel and my family to feel certain beyond any doubt that the facility follows standards that are safe and that are considerate of my needs. If I did choose to enter a smaller care facility, perhaps because such a facility would be the most comfortable for me, it would be more reassuring to find myself in a home that is registered with the province than one that is not. I would bet heavily that most Albertans feel this way and that this is motivation enough for small care providers to get on board.

Mr. Speaker, if we do not pass Bill 203, we will be robbing peace of mind from Albertans who do enter smaller care facilities. As citizens of this province, our aging population is entitled to first-rate care regardless of where they choose to receive it. Passing Bill 203 not only provides Albertans with the comfort of knowing that the care they receive will be excellent but also gives them the true freedom to choose where they will receive quality care.

There are undoubtedly other concerns, but we must not forget that the dignity of Albertans is at stake, and the dignity of the people of this province must not be forsaken under any circumstances. Further, Mr. Speaker, if logistical concerns are a primary focus, let us consider another matter. It is no secret that Alberta's population is aging. Soon more and more care facilities will be needed to take care of our growing senior citizen population. By passing Bill 203 right now, we'll put ourselves ahead of the game and make progress towards ensuring that Albertans can age with the same grace and dignity with which they made our province prosperous.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think I have to remind this Assembly that this is a bill with the best interests of Albertans at heart. We have always been a province with citizens that have taken pride in helping each other. By extending the standards of care to facilities with three or less patients, this bill merely continues that tradition. I therefore endorse Bill 203 and would strongly urge the members of this Assembly to do so as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to rise today and speak to Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-West. There are a number of issues and a number of comments and observations that I would like to make today about the bill. I think the reason we have this bill coming forward at this time is that there are many, many complaints and there have been many investigations of maltreatment in homes where we do take care of seniors, where we take care of people that are mentally handicapped, where we take care of people who have been brain injured or have serious physical disabilities.

Now, as well, Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill because we are speaking about protection for the most vulnerable people in our society. These are the frail and dependent Albertans. What I see as

I glance through this bill is that again we are gathering information. We have had many, many reports not only in this province but in this country that have dealt with this very issue. I look back at the annual report of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. This was the report that ended the year March 31, 1996, and I'll quote from here: "However, concern continued to be expressed about the lack of provincial standards and the resulting potential for abuse of the elderly." Now, we're not only talking about the elderly here. We're talking about all individuals who require assistance. We're talking about people that do have pride, they do have dignity, and they certainly want to live as independent a life as they can. I know that all members of this Assembly and all Albertans realize that the goal of this particular bill is that there is zero tolerance and that people that do require this assistance will be treated with the utmost care and concern.

4:30

Now I'd like to make a few comments about the bill, first of all. Glancing through it, I see that we're going to have a registry system here that's going to be operated on a voluntary basis, and this will include those residential care homes that do not receive government funding. It will also be those residential care homes in which one to three people receive residential care. So, again, we have situations here where this bill will not cover those vulnerable people. We heard the comment earlier: why don't we have an Alberta-wide registry? Why don't we have any residential care home that is providing these types of services? Why are they not all compelled to join this registry?

MS BLAKEMAN: No commitment: if, maybe, possibly.

MR. BONNER: Yes.

Again I see here in the bill that we also have to develop education programs for residential care operators. Now, what I think we need here is not to develop programs as much as we need regulations that are enforceable and will make these people accountable to someone.

Now, then, I see again in section 4 of this particular bill: "In carrying out its purposes, the Committee may . . ." Again, this lacks commitment, this lacks enforceability, and it certainly lacks where we do need protection for vulnerable people. So in carrying out their role, it says that they may "receive and hear submissions from individuals and groups respecting the views and concerns of persons living in residential care." So does this mean that they again get to select who they're going to receive submissions from? The submissions from all cross sections of this society are not going to be included.

It also says that they may "provide information to the general public on the purposes of the Committee and matters affecting residential care." Once again, when I read this statement, what happened to openness and accountability? All members of any family are very concerned about any members that may be in these types of facilities. So why is this not an open and accountable reporting?

Again, they may "access research and data on which to base studies and make recommendations on matters of concern to persons in residential care." As a number of hon. members already have mentioned, there have been many, many reports and many, many reports right here in this province that have provided much research, but it seems that we're going to reinvent the wheel and go through it again with a new committee.

It also indicates here that this committee may "appoint subcommittees consisting of members of the Committee and other persons." Now, again, this doesn't seem to be a very timely procedure after all the work that has already been completed.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly made many very good observations about the selection of committee members, where they are from, but I think one of her major observations here was that other agencies that should be included or have some representation on this committee were certainly forgotten. These are people that are directly on a daily basis involved with people who will be filling these residential care homes. I won't spend any more time on the makeup of this committee, Mr. Speaker.

Since we have identified that this is a major problem in this province and in this country, I look at the bylaws and meetings, and I see that "the Committee shall meet at least 2 times in the year this Act comes into force and at least 4 times in each of the following calendar years." Now, I would think that we require certainly much more involvement by this committee on this issue that is of grave importance to so many Albertans. If we have to meet only two times in the first year, again, what is the importance that we are placing on people that are in these facilities who are presently being abused? We have identified that as the issue as to why we require a committee, yet we are doing nothing about it. We are meeting only twice in the first year.

I also note here, Mr. Speaker, that there is an expiry date, a sunset clause: "4 years after coming into force unless it is continued for a further period by the Lieutenant Governor in Council," this act will expire. Again, does that mean, hon. member, that after four years we are still going to be back to where we were in the annual report of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta for the year ended March 31, 1996? That is going to put us, if this does come into effect – and, again, we still have no guarantee that anything is going to be implemented as far as standards in this province – so that we will be to the year 2005 and we still won't have these after a nine-year effort to get some standards in this province.

As well, there are some other very important issues to be discussed here. We did have projections as to how our demographics were going to be affected as the years progressed, and certainly these statistics that I'm quoting here, the population projections of seniors in Alberta – they start in the year 1995, and at that time our senior population only was 9.7 percent. In 2001 we have a total number of seniors projected at 311,635. I would assume that with the influx of people into this province over the last four to five years, this number would be higher, but certainly the overall percentage would not be greater than the 10.4 percent that was forecast at that time.

We must also note, when we look at these statistics, that compared to the rest of Canada, this figure of 10.4 percent is very, very low. If my memory serves me right, we do have the lowest percentage of seniors of any province in Canada. So we don't have a great problem as far as the percentage of seniors. Our big problem is how we treat seniors and others who are in the care of these residential caregivers.

Now, then, as we go through here again, it has been said and pointed out that there has been a tremendous amount of work done by many, many different people. Of course, one was the former Member for Edmonton-Manning, who introduced Bill 224, the Seniors' Care Enhancement Act. This would have been a bill which had many, many excellent recommendations for the vulnerable and frail persons in care in this province.

4:40

MS BLAKEMAN: If they would have actually implemented it instead of just talking about it.

MR. BONNER: Yes, and I agree fully with the Member for Edmonton-Centre that many, many of these recommendations in here, if they would have been implemented at that time instead of

just talked about, would have enriched the lives of so many in this province.

Now, I think there are some critical questions, Mr. Speaker, that we have to look at when we are dealing with public policy. Certainly we have to look at some of the assumptions that underlie this position or this policy. Again, as I said, we have in Bill 203 only the start. We don't have a commitment to actually do anything about this problem. We have also left guidelines in here that allow this process to continue for four years, for the entire length that we will be sitting in here until the next election, and still no commitment. So if this is such a critical problem in this province, if we do require legislation to look at this, then certainly we would assume that there would be some commitment, there would be some enforcement of these regulations, and we certainly haven't had these.

I would love to have seen in this bill some strategies as to how the recommendations of this committee were going to be implemented. This is a very time-sensitive issue, Mr. Speaker, and many of the findings of this committee are going to parallel those findings that the hon. Member for Redwater found in his report. So I think we have to certainly take a look that there are too many assumptions in this bill. I think, as well, that we have to look at the assumption of what is happening to people who are in resident care, in facilities where there is only one to three people, and that any guidelines that are implemented will not affect these people.

As well, I think what I would love to see in here, again, when this committee is meeting, is that if in fact people are in violation of the standards that this committee would find, there would be some type of penalty that would be imposed. This is how we as a province could certainly provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

As well, we have to assume that abuse is happening. We have to assume that this abuse occurs in many, many different areas if in fact we are bringing legislation forward. So we assume from this legislation, then, that residents of these facilities are undergoing emotional or psychological abuse. We know that any behaviour that produces debilitating emotional stress, fear, or mental anguish is a form of abuse. We make the assumption, Mr. Speaker, that there is, as well, financial or material abuse. We do know that for people who are in these facilities, quite often when the family gets to visit, it is not uncommon for articles of clothing or personal items or little things that they might have in their room to have gone missing. Again, this is not a knock on the staff in these facilities. I think more than anything it is because of the type of person who is inhabiting those facilities, whether they are suffering from Alzheimer's, dementia, or mental incapacities, that in many cases these things go missing.

Now, then, I think as well that what we have to do here is to look at whose interests are served by this particular bill. I don't know whose interests are served by this bill, because again we are doing work that has been done a countless number of times in this province and in this country. Again, what are we going to gain by one more committee doing the same work that has been done on countless occasions before? Is the interest behind this policy just to create work for people? Are those who are going to gain by this those people who do sit on a committee? I do believe they get remuneration. Is that correct?

MS BLAKEMAN: Possibly through the bill, yes.

MR. BONNER: Possibly through the bill, yes. I can't see why people who are benefiting in this manner at taxpayers' expense here in the province do not have the authority to implement their findings.

Now, then, I think, without looking too hard at what all could be

improved in this bill, we do have to look at who are going to be the people that gain from this bill as well. We would certainly hope it would be those people in these facilities who presently are undergoing this abuse. We would certainly hope that their families, many of whom cannot visit on a regular basis because of living in different locations or having been transferred or whatever reasons, would gain.

So in closing I just want to say that I don't know whether I will be able to support this bill or not. It certainly doesn't go anywhere near far enough. I know that the people in this province would love to see some type of strategy that includes not only the implementation of these standards but also their enforcement. I look forward to hearing this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, comments from other members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to speak in support of Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act, sponsored by my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-West. Before I start, I want to congratulate the Member for Calgary-West for the work that she does on the Seniors Advisory Council. I think she's chaired this committee for some time and has done an outstanding job. She chairs it with compassion and with care. I also know that when this hon. member speaks on behalf of seniors, she is well researched, has done her homework, and knows what she's talking about.

Having listened to the debate that has taken place today, I find it rather interesting that you can listen to debate and have some members stand before us starting off with "I support Bill 203." With other members you must wait until 19 and a half minutes of debate to find out if, in fact, they do support the bill because, I'll tell you, the dialogue and discussion that has taken place is not indicative of it. I think that some of the votes on this bill will be strictly for political reasons. I heard time and time again about how many reports have taken place regarding this issue and all of the work that has been done.

One motto that I live by is that today is the first day of the rest of your life. I live in the present and look forward to the future. I applaud the Member for Calgary-West for having the tenacity to once again bring this forward so that we can progress and move forward on the issue and deal with it, hope that it passes in the Assembly, that it is proclaimed, and that at long last we can see some implementation.

4:50

The statement was made by members opposite that it is very discouraging that this is being brought forward by a private member. Private members are supposed to bring forward ideas from their constituents, ideas from their professional backgrounds, bring forward their expertise, and again I applaud the hon. member for doing so.

It's a well-known fact, Mr. Speaker, that Alberta's population is aging rapidly. I think back to the day when you talked about the average age in this Assembly as, I think, 51 years. We are baby boomers that are moving quickly.

AN HON. MEMBER: Say it ain't so.

MRS. GORDON: Except for the hon. member right behind me.

As a result, we must be proactive as a government in how we deal with the need for long-term, assistance based care. It has been

widely acknowledged that there is a need for consistent housing standards for care homes in Alberta, especially in those with three or fewer adults.

My hon. colleague from Red Deer talked about how we don't have a problem with five or more. She is right. So why do we have a problem with three or fewer adults? For community living to be effective, there have to be basic standards for supports and services. These are the very characteristics that make up Bill 203. Currently there are residential care homes that are not covered by comprehensive legislation, and this has resulted in circumstances where Albertans have to live in intolerable situations with intolerable abuse. Thank goodness these cases are few and far between.

As the population in Alberta continues to age, we must pay attention to the projected demographic changes and what effects these will have on our elders. Thus, Mr. Speaker, it is very important to examine how the aging population will affect provincial government programs and services. We're seeking the government to be more involved in the provision of care and housing. In 1997-98 Community Development initiated a governmentwide study of the impact of the aging population. This program assessed the impact of the aging population on provincial government programs and services and recommended policy directions, strategies, and program changes to assist government in meeting the changing needs of Albertans as they age.

As a result, Alberta developed a strategy, one that entailed an annual increase of \$23 million in financial assistance for people eligible under the Alberta seniors' benefit and special needs assistance programs. I believe government should be proactive in this regard, as I said earlier, passing, proclaiming, and implementing Bill 203.

It has been said by several members of the opposition that there are certain things they would like to see changed. If this bill is not voted on and accepted in second reading, we will be denied amendments that could be brought forward in Committee of the Whole.

Talk about a registry within this piece of legislation: the government can develop a framework within this registry that would protect Albertans who are dependent upon others to care for them. I say all Albertans, Mr. Speaker, because currently the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act and the Protection for Persons in Care Act only regulate facilities with four or more clients, government-contracted facilities for handicapped adults, and residential care homes for seniors. I strongly believe that it is essential that government not only maintain but increase our interest in the well-being of Albertans who are living in residential care housing. Our ability to react proactively is what will ensure the safety of these very individuals.

One of the areas where government has been working to effectively anticipate the needs of Albertans is in protecting those who are most vulnerable. Throughout the latter part of the '90s, Community Development led a working group to implement the Protection for Persons in Care Act. The scope of the act is to better protect the health, safety, and well-being of adults who receive services in facilities governed by specific Alberta legislation. These facilities include approved hospitals, nursing homes, lodges, government-funded group homes, vocational skill development facilities, and women's shelters. Bill 203 proposes to take this issue a step further, a step into the homes of those which are currently not governed by such provincial legislation. Bill 203 will help raise awareness for the Protection for Persons in Care Act. Though it is true that there are a number of Albertans who are aware of the act, there are an equal amount of Albertans who are not.

In accordance, for example, Community Development promoted and operated a toll-free telephone line for reporting abuse and for obtaining information on the act. During the three months of

operation in the latter part of 1998 the department collected and forwarded an appalling 190 reports of alleged abuse to the appropriate provincial government departments for investigation. To further its involvement with abuse, an elder abuse strategy was developed to focus on educating seniors, seniors' families, and service providers about the Protection for Persons in Care Act. Community Development also worked very hard to promote amendments to this act to include protection for all cohabiting family members. As a result, seniors can now use this legislation if they are experiencing abuse at the hands of family members.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is still not enough. The safety of individuals in residential care settings that are not currently governed by provincial legislation must be maintained. We must ensure that all Albertans have access to the support that they need to live in a secure and dignified way as independent and contributing members of society.

Bill 203, Mr. Speaker, would protect the health, safety, and well-being of adults who receive care in small, unfunded – that's unfunded by the province – residential homes through the development and implementation of broad-based standards in co-operation with key stakeholders. But perhaps education is the most important portion of Bill 203. Albertans who are well informed about programs and services available to them from the government and community have a much better opportunity to live independently, more safely, and with a greater sense of well-being.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I wish to restate my support for Bill 203. In my opinion, residential care and community living are essential to the well-being and quality of life of aging and vulnerable Albertans, regardless of where they live. However, for it to be truly effective, there must be a set of mandatory rules, regulations, and standards. I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support this essential piece of legislation. I look forward to further debate if and when we move into Committee of the Whole, and possibly we will see some amendments that will further enhance this particular bill.

I thank again the hon. Member for Calgary-West, and thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take a few minutes to make some observations on Bill 203, Residential Care Housing Committee Act. The bill is essentially about striking a committee and setting it up and outlining what the committee will do. I do want to commend the efforts of the Member for Calgary-West for bringing the bill forward.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Two or three issues that I want to comment on have to do, first, with what the committee is charged to do. I was looking at section 2. The bill does specifically mention that the committee will be struck

- (a) to develop standards of residential care governing
 - (i) the level of care,
 - (ii) the type of accommodation to be provided and maintained,
 - (iii) the safety and security of persons in care.

When I read through this third line, what came to mind was what was missing. In my view, what's missing here is some assurance, some responsibility that the committee takes to make sure that we specifically address the question of the residents being treated with dignity and respect. I think that mentioning those words is very important. Physical security and safety are important, but so is the whole issue of the dignity and respect with which the residents must

be treated, keeping in mind that the residents of such facilities are dependents. They very much depend on those who provide the care, the caregivers, and it's a trust relationship. So the whole issue of dignity and respect is something that needs to be addressed explicitly in the bill.

5:00

Lots has been said and some very good points have been made by my colleagues across party lines here, so I just want to focus on things that I think need a little more attention. I am concerned about section 2(2)(c), which states that the registry will be established "on a voluntary basis." I think that's a serious shortcoming in the bill. Anyone who wants to enter this area of business and wants to have one to three residents, I guess are covered here, must be obliged – it should be mandatory for such operators of businesses to register themselves and have the information available on a provincewide registry for them. So the voluntary part is something that I think needs to be fixed.

The second point that I want to make has to do with the reciprocal obligations between the minister and the committee. The committee is obviously required to report to the minister once a year, but I think we need to strengthen the implementation part related to the recommendations once they're made by the committee. I think what will help in strengthening the role of the committee in getting the recommendation implemented is if the bill provides for an obligation for the minister to report within a specified time both to the committee and to this House as to the status of action taken by the minister on the recommendations. Without this kind of accountability mechanism provided for in the bill, the bill loses its effectiveness as presently proposed.

So I will be certainly recommending to the member to make note of it, and hopefully she'll come forward with some amendments to this effect. But the minister must also be obliged within a six-month period, in my view, to report back to the committee and to this House as to the recommendations and their status.

The next point that I would like to make has to do with the composition of this committee. I notice that there are 12 different categories of persons or organizations or departments from whom the membership will be selected. The membership is made up of 20, so there's a fair bit of room for a particular category of persons to be appointed in numbers which are more than one. I'm concerned about the fact that we haven't specified a reasonable number of representatives from two groups that are mentioned in part (f) of that section 3(2), "the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta or the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities."

In my view, the presence on the committee of these two groups needs to be increased and the numbers should perhaps be specified. I think these are the two groups that would be recipients of the care and the recipients of the quality of services, and these are the people to whom we owe guaranteeing quality of service that's acceptable and that these services are provided under conditions of dignity and respect to all of them. Their presence needs to be strengthened here. The way the composition of the committee is outlined here doesn't give me confidence that that will happen. What we need to do – I would hope that the member will consider this – is to strengthen the presence in terms of the numbers of these two groups for whom the bill is designed to give some assurance and guarantees. So that's the second point I want to make.

Another related point in terms of membership composition has to do with one category here of seniors. With the exception of seniors, all other membership categories are fairly specific in that these are organizations or departments. It's easy to see how a person could be

appointed as representing a department of the government or an organization such as the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta or the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. These are identifiable organizations, and they can either nominate their own members or the minister can appoint from the organization.

But the one category of seniors, a very broad one, a very unspecified category – there are tens of thousands of seniors. Simply to say that seniors will also qualify to be appointed I think is not enough in my view, and this point is related to the point I made earlier, that the representation, perhaps, of the Seniors Advisory Council should be strengthened in terms of numbers. Maybe that's a way of addressing this. But I would like to see certainly more seniors appointed to the committee and more persons representing the persons with disabilities appointed.

So these are some of my comments. I hope these are helpful to the Member for Calgary-West, who is the author of this bill. As we go through the bill, I'll have perhaps a few more things to say.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill 203. I think it's very important that the Member for Calgary-West brought forward an issue which is extremely important to Albertans.

Governments, in my view, should do very few things. We need governments to do things on behalf of all citizens in the area of education, obviously, and in the area of health care, but one of the primary things governments can do is to help protect those who are in need of protection, help protect those who are infirm or unable to care for themselves.

We find in our society from time to time very unfortunate situations where people are taken advantage of, where people are treated inappropriately and are not in a position to care for themselves or to protect themselves from predators essentially. I'm not a big proponent of regulation, particularly where regulation is not necessary, but it is important to put in regulatory frameworks, to put protections in place so that those who can be preyed upon by others and who are not in a position to defend themselves can be protected. That's one of the essential roles that we as government I think play. So I am very pleased to see the proposals being brought forward by the Member for Calgary-West in Bill 203.

I don't wish to speak to the details of Bill 203. I think there may be all sorts of items that could be discussed in committee, if it should get to committee, with respect to how the process could be improved if people have concerns about that. But in second reading we speak to the principles of the bill, and I think it's extremely important that in speaking to the principles of the bill, we recognize that elder abuse is a problem in our society, that people do take advantage of elderly people, do take advantage of infirm people, and that happens all too often in our society. It's something that we don't talk about enough, it's something we don't shine the light on enough, and it's something we hide away and pretend doesn't happen, but it does happen. It is particularly insidious, Mr. Speaker, because it happens to people who can't care for themselves. So again I go back to the principle of the bill, which is that governments have responsibility to take care of those who can't take care of themselves.

5:10

In particular, this bill deals with a very small portion of that whole subject. Some could argue and I think I would argue that it doesn't go anywhere near far enough in terms of the whole range of elder abuse and the range of concerns that we have with respect to how

elders are treated in our society. But it does deal with a very important corner of that equation, and that's the situation where people are providing accommodation, housing, providing care, if you will, to people in small settings outside the normal process which could be reviewed, what we'd normally know as institutional care or institutions, away from the light.

I certainly don't want to cast aspersions on those many good people out there who are doing it, doing it well, providing good accommodation, providing a wonderful living situation, a good quality of life for people, but there are circumstances where that doesn't happen. We don't want to encumber unnecessarily the operations of those people who do a good job and who do it well and who do it fairly and get fairly compensated for it, but we do in fact need to have rules and regulations in society for those people who do not willingly follow what we would consider to be good moral guidance or who are prepared to take advantage of people in order to make a dollar or who in fact go further. Mr. Speaker, there are many cases in our communities where it does happen, where they go further, where they abuse seniors, where they treat seniors in a manner which is totally disrespectful, totally harmful, and they do it because they can, because nobody is watching, because there aren't any rules in place.

I would commend the member for bringing forward this particular bill. It's one small piece of a puzzle. Perhaps with a bill like this we can have more public discussion about the areas of elder abuse. In fact, it's something that does happen all too often in our society. One instance is more than enough, and, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage members to support the bill.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Justice, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Calgary-West to close debate on Bill 203.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would first like to close debate by thanking all the government speakers today who spoke and supported the essence of this bill, even an additional member, Calgary-Buffalo, who was sitting here ready to speak when we ran out of time. I appreciated his willingness. We could have heard from this member firsthand his experiences in his past career with this situation as we've been discussing today.

What I heard was that all members in this Assembly who spoke today agree on the need. I won't go into that. I think basically we do all agree, and the facts are out pretty much on the table. But I do feel that the discussion around the process itself, you know, whether the glass is half empty or the glass is half full – that is your choice. I feel that some of the members across the way decided to look at the glass – i.e., the process as outlined in the bill – as being half empty. However, it was designed with all care to set out and provide guidelines for this committee and that it would be comprehensive, specific, and provide, again, the structure in order to reach the goal as set out in the bill.

A couple of points around the bill itself. It's definitely a multidepartmental committee and includes also, though, key stakeholders. We all know that people who are vulnerable, not only seniors, at-risk younger adults – and we have many of them in society who are also aging, and their parents are aging way ahead of them, obviously. This has to be a collaborative effort from start to finish, from the committee structure to the consultation out in the communities. If you look carefully at the bill, you'll see that as part of the bill structure. As one other member across the way, though,

also did point out wisely, 20 positions is the maximum. It could be less. I think it was 11 or 12 that are specifically designated, and the remaining are at the minister's discretion, so this bill allows not only structure but flexibility for the minister.

I want to just make a comment about FAIRE. I feel that FAIRE certainly has identified a major problem within our long-term care centres with adults who suffer from advanced dementia. The hon. Member for Redwater and myself and I know a minister have met with FAIRE. I have attended their workshops. I do identify with their concerns, and that is probably that we need more training and more staff in long-term care centres for people with advanced dementia. I just want to make it clear today that this government has certainly listened to their concerns, but I do feel, again going back to the content of the speakers, that Bill 203 addresses more mild dementia and certainly the other groups that were mentioned and not the one that FAIRE refers to.

Demographics and an aging population are very important

Canada-wide. Everybody knows Alberta has a young population, but we are going to age. It's just that we're going to be a little behind the others. So we would be very wise to listen and hear from other jurisdictions, including Scandinavian countries, as to how they address housing options and how they have already looked after, say, the aging population concerns.

I just want to say again that there is a real history with this government having identified this need, and I really feel it is time that we addressed this need. It's time that we acted and planned positively for the future. I just say that it's time for this Assembly to commit by supporting this bill so we can move forward in planning towards a positive future. The time is now, not down the road.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a second time]

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:18 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 25, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/04/25

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

Committee Membership Changes

15. Mr. Stevens moved on behalf of Mr. Hancock:
Be it resolved that the following names be added to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: Dr. Pannu and Dr. Taft.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Being that it's the first evening of spring, there seems to be a certain levity in the air.

Members will note that there is a new person at the table this evening. Ms Tan McAra will be assisting Parliamentary Counsel during this session. She's a lawyer who was formerly Deputy Chief Legislative Counsel for the province of Alberta before moving to New Zealand, where she was the chief law drafter for the Inland Revenue Department. She has recently moved back to Alberta, and we're extremely fortunate that we'll be able to rely on her many skills and abilities. Please join me again, then, in welcoming Tan McAra.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mrs. Nelson moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate April 24: Dr. Nicol]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure tonight to start the debate on the budget for the year 2001-02. One of the interesting things. I guess everybody had a little experience as they picked up their package and the little black book fell out. It's kind of a question as to whether or not this is a signal that it's a little black book talking about our future or should it be a nice bright, spontaneous, cheery colour that talks about our future.

I want to just begin by congratulating the Minister of Finance on her first budget. With the revenue opportunities that our province is experiencing right now, from many aspects this was quite an easy budget to put together. On the expenditure side probably it was a little harder, mostly with the idea that we had to look at how to limit expenditures on a lot of programs where individuals and groups were asking for more money. So it was kind of a balance, and in the end the budget that was presented I think addressed a lot of the issues in health care, in education, in some of the areas that we heard during the campaign where Albertans were asking for more support and more involvement financially by the government.

Tonight we'll begin our debate – and this will probably last over the next few weeks – on the budget. What we'll be dealing with tonight is a general overview as we talk to this motion, and then we'll get into the specifics of each of the departmental budgets and the line item issues as we go into Committee of Supply.

I want to start tonight by just outlining to everyone here kind of

the criteria that I want to look at and that I suggest we look at as we deal with the budgets and look at them to see whether or not the budget fits the needs of both Albertans and those of us that are participating in the House as legislators. First of all, I think the main thing that we have to look at is whether or not the budget is sustainable, whether or not the expenditure patterns that we're putting in and the revenue projections we're making are consistent with a long-term degree of sustainability. We have to look at that specifically in the budget from the fiscal sustainability aspect, but when we look at how the programs are being developed and how the dollars are being spent, we also have to look at the social and environmental sustainability that comes from these programs. You know, are we contributing to the long-term viability and sustainability of Alberta?

The other thing that we want to look at and which becomes a real issue as we look at the large revenue future that we had last year, whether or not it's going to be continuing on, is how the budget promotes stability. This is: basically, is the budget contributing to both economic stability in the context of its opportunities for individuals and the businesses in the province and also is it creating stability for the decision-makers? Is it giving long-term plans for those administrators and those decision-makers that are dealing with specific programs and specific activities and services that are being provided for the province?

We also have to look at that stability type of an issue specifically as to how it affects Albertans. One of the things that we heard about a lot in the election campaign was how some of the actions of government and some of the actions of the economy were really causing some concerns for low- and fixed-income Albertans. They were seeing some of these actions that we were experiencing as being really destabilizing for their decision-making, for their livelihood, and for their ability to look to the future and feel comfortable and confident.

The next thing that I want to look at is also the equality of opportunity that's provided by the budget. This again is in terms of looking at it from the perspective of individuals. Do they have access to the programs? How are they treated in the context of the programs? Do the programs build to promote and encourage their confidence in us as legislators and in the government as a provider of those services? When we look at it also in terms of the business community or the economic aspects, you know, how is it dealing with the equality of opportunity for the different sectors of the economy, the different opportunities of trade-offs that occur there? Are some individuals or some parts of the economy getting a competitive advantage by the new legislation or the new expenditures? Are others becoming disadvantaged?

I guess that's kind of from the economic point of view, but the thing that I'll be looking at and I'm sure almost all of us will be looking at is the compassion that comes out of the budget, the compassion that comes out of the programs that were put in place. Are we really directing our dollars to the benefit of Alberta and to provide services for those who are in need, who really want to help themselves to grow and to become vibrant participants in our economic system and in our social and cultural communities?

Mr. Speaker, another thing I want to look at is: are the proposals being put forward in the budget and the particular programs consistent with good government? That I'm looking at in terms of: are they built around proper planning? Is the process that goes into the decision-making open? Is there an accountability component in it? Can we figure out whether or not the dollars are being truly spent well on behalf of Albertans? Are the performance measures truly showing a response to the investment by the government, or are the performance indicators just actually reacting to other factors in the economy or in our social system?

The final thing that I'm looking at in terms of good government is basic consistency. Are we sticking with our plans? When we do change, do we have a rational reason and a viable reason in the context of sound economic development and sound business programs or business planning to look at why those changes have come in?

I guess that as a start outlines where we're going and how I plan to look at the budget.

8:10

Then as we get into some of the specifics of the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance, I guess the thing we have to look at is her kind of reflection at the start, that it's, you know, kind of easier to budget when there's lots of revenue, but there's also a real responsibility that comes with that to make sure that we're not just spending money to spend money.

With that in mind, I just wanted to raise a point that she brought up on page 6. The issue that she pointed out there was that the \$4 billion difference in the revenue, depending upon the resource price projections – you know, there was a real range of price projections that the government considered. I think that we all have to be really cognizant of this and thank the Minister of Finance for pointing this out to us. We do live in an economic system here in Alberta where resource revenues are really volatile, and they do create a real issue for us as we look at planning our budget and trying to balance our revenues with our expenditures.

The next thing that we looked at basically comes up on page 9, where I had some concerns that I wanted to express, the analogy that the minister used when she talked about the Alberta family, where she started off with, "We start with how much we're likely to earn." Mr. Speaker, I just want to put a caution with that statement. What it does is it basically reflects the idea that if you've got money, you can spend it.

Now, included in that spending component is the possibility of saving, but I think from a government perspective what we should be looking at is dealing with how we can put together a budget that is based on service rather than on available revenues, and to do this, what we've got to do is start and describe our programs and services that we need to deliver. We need to develop costs for these programs which look at the effectiveness and the efficiency with which they're delivered. Are we making sure that we in Alberta are delivering our programs on a cost-effective basis compared to other jurisdictions as a standard? We should be at the top of those levels because of basically our flexibility, our ingenuity, and the observed ability of Albertans to make the best of situations. So we should be really able to deliver our programs in as cost-effective way as anybody else.

The next thing we have to do is basically compare to our revenues the cost of those services that we have been legislated to provide. That's where the balancing part comes in. As I've said before, this year that's quite easy because we have a very rosy and a very positive revenue situation to look at. If our cost of those programs is less than the revenues, that doesn't mean what we should do is just go off and find other ways to spend those revenues. What we've got to do is look at what is in the best interest of Albertans as we do that. Should we pay down the debt? Should we return the surplus to taxpayers? Or should we put it into an investment in current expenditures for future activities?

We saw some of that in the budget where we're talking about the onetime expenditures basically being put in place this year instead of in future years. We're advancing those investments to this year. What we need to do when we're going to make that kind of decision is really look at it from the perspective of: is it cost-effective to basically move those investments ahead in our long-term plan? We

end up, then, dealing with approximately \$3 billion in this year's budget which were classed as onetime expenditures.

What we have to do is look at them within the context of their validity as a current year expenditure, and then they just become infrastructure. You know, given the situation, the demands that are on our infrastructure this year, we see it as important that we actually invest in those infrastructure improvements this year rather than delay them. There's nothing wrong with moving ahead an infrastructure investment if you see that there is now a valid need for it to occur this year rather than a year later. The other option, you know, that we have when we deal with these is basically that if we have the extra revenues to create an endowment for infrastructure, move the infrastructure dollars to the time when it is best to schedule the upgrade of that infrastructure.

Now, in question period today we heard the minister and the Premier talk about how circumstances had changed and it was now more appropriate to invest in those infrastructure activities this year. Then we shouldn't call them onetime investments. Those should just be justifiable expenditures in infrastructure this year because they're needed this year. The fact is that we don't necessarily need to expect to be investing the same number of dollars every year in infrastructure, because it is a capital activity not a service activity or an ongoing cost of operation. So it doesn't necessarily have to be as consistent to sustain service as what we see in the service-based type programs.

We also have an advantage if we take that approach in that we will be able to schedule our infrastructure activities to basically be part of this stability component of our economic activity. If we're going to be accelerating expenditures in infrastructure in a downturn in the economy, we get two benefits from that. It basically provides economic activity to sustain an economy that's slowing, but it also gives us as investors of the public dollar the chance to acquire those infrastructure projects when there is less price competition from the private sector that's currently ongoing in a very robust economy.

So I guess what that's all leading to, Mr. Speaker, is that I think that in the context of the debate on the budget I would appreciate the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Infrastructure providing us with justification for why we are doing them this year. If they are cost-effective this year, then let's not call them onetime expenditures; let's call them needed infrastructure dollars for this year. We can deal with them, then, in the context of appropriate decision-making based on need, not based on revenue, as the implication is in the presentation on page 9.

I guess as we get into looking at the rest of the document that was presented to us as the budget presentation, the minister then gets into some of the specifics that deal with specific departments. We look at some of them, and one of the areas that we talked about was health care. This section of the speech threw out a bunch of numbers about what percentage we're talking about, the percentages in growth. It concluded with the fact that in this budget health care expenditures are 35 percent of the province's spending. Mr. Speaker, I would just suggest that it's more important to talk about the delivery of services.

We saw the critical area services like health and education make significant jumps in terms of the proportion of the provincial budget in the periods when a lot of the other departments were being reduced significantly, because we as a society or as a Legislature on behalf of Albertans were making decisions about what kind of activities the province should be involved in. When we cut out all of the involvement in business, when we cut out a lot of our expenditures that are not directed to basic services, that automatically increases the proportion of the budget that's required to serve those given basic services because the other expenditures have been cut out.

This also happens when we see some of the less innovative, less demographically related budget items basically increasing at no more than, say, the cost of living, 2 or 3 percent per year. When we get into things like education or health care, where we are looking at both a demographic and a technology change – and we all recognize that technologies are costly and the implementation of those technologies is costly – we end up effectively changing the level of service. We get better health care out of it, and we're then having to put more dollars into it, and that is by choice. If it's not by choice, then it shouldn't be approved by this Legislature. In effect, the kind of debate we need to be having is in terms of what constitutes appropriate service definition, not what percentage it makes up of the total budget.

8:20

As we went through the rest of it, we talked about a number of places in the budget where references are made to increases in the specific departments. Yet when we investigate the actual level of delivery, it's constant, and the dollars that are being added are only enough to cover demographic change, not any different level of service. With this talk about percentage increases rather than holding the line in delivery per capita or holding the line in delivery per service recipient, what we in essence do is create expectations for Albertans that have to be met through explanations to clarify what's been said.

One example that I want to bring out is on page 11, where there's a reference to the AISH increases. When people called in and we talked to some of the individuals or when we had one of our research staff in the technical briefing and this was brought up, what we found is that in the context of the increase in the AISH budget it's basically demographically driven, not the level of payment increasing. So nobody is going to get any more, yet when they heard in the budget that there was going to be an increase in the AISH budget, they expected that that meant they were going to get an increase in payment.

All I'm saying here is that we've got to be sure that when we talk about what we're doing, we talk about it in a way so that Albertans are better able to anticipate the impact on them directly. We should have been able to say that there's going to be an 18 percent increase over the next three years in the number of recipients of AISH dollars, but there'll be no increase in the level per recipient. That's basically what is in the budget. That's the way it was explained to us in the technical briefing. So, in essence, people on AISH don't get extra dollars. There are just a lot more people who are going to be coming on to the AISH program, and that's where the increase is.

So that's basically, I guess, a comment or a suggestion or a request that as we continue to develop our budgets and the releases that go out and the debate that's carried on around the province, we talk about it in ways so that the individuals who are involved in the different programs truly understand the impact that that budget change has on them rather than the impact that it has on us as decision-makers in the context of the allocation of the total revenue. We have to meet the needs of Albertans, not those of us that are in this room. We understand the process, we understand the implications of it, and we should be facilitating their understanding as Albertans rather than trying to deal with that.

I guess the other comment that I want to make is with reference to page 12. The government here again refers to the fact that they're going to protect Albertans from high energy prices when in actual fact under Bill 1 and under the items in the budget they're protecting Albertans from the potential for high natural gas prices, not energy. Many people encompass into the term "energy" both their gas and their electricity components.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be up front with Albertans. We have not provided them with any protection from the increase in electricity prices in the last year. What we did was provide them with a \$40 rebate on money that they had already paid into it, and we called it support. That's not true. This is giving them back the money that truly belonged to them in the first place. We had them pay full cost for their electricity. We've got to make sure that when we talk about these kinds of things, it's out there in a way so that Albertans truly understand what the implications of the issue are.

I guess as we go through some of the other aspects that come up in the budget, a question that has already come to me, not so specifically in the role in which I stand here tonight but in one of my critic responsibilities, in agriculture, is: how much is in this for drought payments? Well, what we're able to find out by talking to individuals – and maybe the minister is now listening – is that directly, right now, there are no dollars in the budget for drought. The additional dollars in agriculture are a supplement to the farm income disaster program, not in the context of the drought, other than as it affects the farm income disaster program. Farmers are expecting payment on a drought program based on comments made by the Premier over the past month.

I would hope that in the near future there is some clarification, because farmers are, at least in their own minds, experiencing a drought even though the technical definition has not yet been clarified for them. So what we've got to do is basically talk to them about it and make sure they understand the kinds of things that are in the budget for them and how they'll have access to them. I know the minister is working hard on this, and we all wait enthusiastically for some additional clarification.

The other thing that I wanted to put on the record here are some concerns that come up with the additional infrastructure dollars that are out. It's really great to hear that we'll be looking at renovating and improving and upgrading some of these schools in Alberta. One of the things on which we've had consistent concerns raised over the past number of years by school districts, by parents, and by people involved in the parent councils is: why is it that the government doesn't follow the priorities set by a school district when they send them in to Alberta Infrastructure? Why is it that their number X priority all of a sudden becomes the number 1 priority? It gets the funding and not the number 1 priority that was sent in by the school district. That process needs to be clarified for them.

If nothing more, Mr. Speaker, we have to give them a rationale for why we at this level pre-empt their local priorities and superimpose on it one of ours. I can imagine cases where there are reasons why a priority change might happen, but we owe them an explanation for it. All I'm saying is that we owe them an explanation for why we ask them to go through all of the time-consuming activities that are associated with preparing their priority list, and then we pre-empt them. So we have to look at that in terms of how we deal with it.

I guess the other issue that I want to come up with – I'm getting to the end, Mr. Speaker; I don't have a lot more. As we get to the end, we're talking about the \$817 million cushion that's going to be built into the budget. Here there was a reference made to the fact that if we're going to be dealing with this money in the context of the budget, three-quarters of it would be directed to paying down the debt. Well, I would suggest that if they get to the end of the year and there is a surplus in the budget, under the Financial Administration Act all of it goes to pay down the debt unless in the meantime we have made choices in the first, the second, the third, or the fourth quarter to increase expenditures in some line item or in some ministry, and we utilize those dollars.

Within the context of past practice and my understanding of the act that \$817 million is fully available because it's a cushion defined

in the budget. It is fully available for additional expenditures, not only 25 percent of it. It's not treated like, quote, a surplus would be treated in the context of an estimate at the end of the first, second, or third quarter. So, in that context, I would ask for some clarification so that this poor little old farm boy can better understand what's going on in the budget, whether or not I'm actually really having to deal with this from the perspective of the issues that come up in terms of how we explain the expenditure of that \$817 million dollars to Albertans.

8:30

The other thing I saw in the budget was what I see as a real issue, I guess, for some hope in the sense that on page 6 there was talk about preparing a study for the long-term revenues of the province. I think we have to look here very seriously at the role the heritage savings trust fund could play if we used it now as a source of putting away some of our excess revenues. In the future the interest earned on that can in essence be a substitute for higher income tax or higher any kind of tax.

We have to look at the fact that under today's standard, Mr. Speaker, Alberta is very, very, very competitive in the context of Canada in both personal and corporate tax structure. We have one of the lowest income taxes, in fact the lowest income tax in Canada, and no sales tax, thank goodness. So what we've got is really from a tax perspective one of the greatest advantages of any jurisdiction in Canada.

So if we end up with resource revenues that are very erratic, unpredictable and if we were to take the surpluses from those high years and put them into our heritage fund, over the next 15 or 20 years, when our natural resource revenues are going to decline because we've depleted that resource, we will have a source of funding there that we don't have to increase our taxes. We won't have to look at the issue of: how do we substitute for the lost natural resource revenues? We will have an endowment that will provide us with an interest income that will replace that natural resource.

So as we get into that long-term review of our revenues, I would hope that that is one of the things we look at. You know, we've had a number of studies in the last year, year and a half which have talked about the idea of using the heritage savings trust fund as an endowment to generate interest for us in the future so that at some point in time, if properly managed, we could even be income tax free in this province. Well, that's probably a long-term objective. What we've got to look at right now is creating a situation where at least we don't have to raise our income taxes, and then we can deal also with the possibility of sometime in the future maybe not being in the position of having to raise our tax situation. I don't think any Albertan wants to see that, so if we can use this erratic and unpredictable part of our resource revenue to create that cushion for the future, I think it would be a good thing for us to consider.

I guess as I go through this, to the Minister of Finance, there's one question that comes up in the context of our very exciting economy, our fast-growing, robust economy. On a daily basis almost we hear information that possibly the U.S. economy is not performing as well as people think. I would just ask: is the government looking into the degree of dependence that we have on the U.S. economy. You know, if the U.S. economy really does experience some troubles, how susceptible will we be to a kind of kickback or a fallout, a second round effect from that? This is something that we have to look at, because we are basing our budget and our budget projections and our three-year business plans on fairly optimistic and fairly positive rates of growth in the area of 4 percent for next year, 4.2, 3.4 over the intermediate term. That is very, very positive and very good for Alberta, but we need to be looking at some of the

other things that are going on and how they may impact back on us.

Two more final comments before I finish. The concern that I heard the Premier express today and also the Minister of Finance in a previous conversation where they were talking about how they're concerned that people are talking about, you know, a 24 percent increase in the budget this year when in actual fact they've got a number that they're using that's much lower than that. What we're getting into here is a kind of definition situation in the context of how we look at base budgets. You know, this is one of the issues that comes up when we increase expenditures in response to surpluses at the quarterly level. Technically and administratively those are supposed to be onetime expenditures which disappear out of the budget at the end of that fiscal year. That's how they were supposed to be put in, because they were not supposed to create an ongoing obligation for the government.

If you use that, then the actual base of the budget that we use to compare this year with last year and over the forecast for this year is what was in the budget at the time of the debate last year, and that reflects, I think, the 23.6 or 24 percent increase. If we use the budget that is projected as being the experienced level of expenditure for last year, which incorporates all these quarterly additions, then we're looking at a 12.5 percent increase from last year to this year.

So what we've got to do is make sure that when we talk about the budget, we know and we use a common set of bases and a common set of projections so that when we do go out and talk to Albertans, Albertans don't become confused. We want to be able to go out and say: from last year's budget, this is the increase, or from last year's actual expenditures, this is the increase. They're quite significant. Now, if those quarterly expenditures are truly just onetime issues, or nonrecurring expenditures, last year's actual budget should be an irrelevant figure when we're talking about what is the comparison, because we're talking about the decisions that we made in the context of an ongoing, sustainable, stable budget, which was the amount passed in the debate at the beginning of the year. So all we have to do is kind of come to a common agreement here as to what we're going to use in the context of terms so that we can deal with the issues up front and in the open for Albertans.

I guess my last comment is a reflection of the fact that I don't know whether we should celebrate this year or whether we should all feel, well, not quite ashamed but really concerned, and that is the fact that for the first time this year we're projecting in our budget a billion dollars of gambling income. This is basically a reflection of the direction that we've gone in our province both in terms of entertainment and in terms of reliance on support. We're in the process right now of a review of gambling in the province, the role of VLTs, the role of slot machines, and sometime supposedly in the near future we'll be seeing that report come out.

I guess one of the things I would like to suggest in the context of looking at this is that if the government is undertaking a serious review, we should be looking at how the dollars are proportioned between the government, the operators, and the charities that are out there, in the context of how those dollars get allocated. There's a lot of concern in the context of how the VLTs, slot machines, the casino group are taking away from the community-based options like the bingos, you know, the things that the communities get involved in to deal with supporting their community activity, and we should be looking at that.

One of the other things that's come up and is quite evident: I've had a couple of businesspeople – in fact, Mr. Speaker, more than a couple – who have approached me with concerns about how the possession of a licence for VLTs or for a casino effectively becomes an extreme income generator, which gets translated into a wealth factor. You look at that in the context of how this comes out, and

effectively what we're doing here is basically using legislation to create a new, quote, property concept that then becomes tradable at a market value based on its income-earning ability, and this basically gives us a real ability to create wealth generation through legislation.

What we've got to do is look at whether or not that concept is the appropriate way to be generating wealth in our province. We've got to look at it from the perspective that this is an activity which we as a society have agreed to have publicly supervised. Should that supervision in effect translate into licences which become capitalized and create wealth for the individuals who get them? Or should the excess revenues that get capitalized into that wealth be captured back by us as the society that licensed them? This is some of the debate that needs to go on in terms of how we deal with the transferability of those licences, the access to those licences, and how they in effect share the revenues that are involved.

8:40

Mr. Speaker, this is a very complex issue. We look at the access to the VLTs or the slot machines, the bingos, whatever, in the context of small rural communities. If there isn't sufficient revenue generated by the owner of the licence, then what we end up with is that it's not available unless people are willing to travel the distance. So, you know, there has to be some kind of mechanism there to deal with it from the perspective of providing fair and equitable access, again based on the assumption that this is the kind of province we want. More and more now we're seeing individuals say that maybe they don't want that.

What we've got to do is create an opportunity where, you know, a business that makes a choice to basically invest in a licence doesn't get a competitive advantage over the business which, because of their community commitment, chooses not to, and they can't compete with each other based on service in the direct delivery, but they have to compete in a different way, because one basically has access to that VLT licence or the other gambling licence components than what we're looking at.

Mr. Speaker, that's basically the end of my comments. What we'll be doing in mostly the coming evenings but over the next four weeks is dealing with the individual departments. I have the privilege of standing and speaking to the Agriculture, Finance, and Revenue budgets as the critic. So I'm sorry; you're going to hear from me some more yet before the end of the budget debate. In the meantime I'll give someone else a chance.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the New Democratic Party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to enter the debate on the budget. I have only 20 minutes at my disposal, so obviously I'll have to be very selective. A comprehensive review of the budget is simply impossible during this very limited time, but I want to make a few general comments first.

[Mrs. Fritz in the chair]

There is some difference of opinion on whether or not the 21st century started last year or this year. I prefer to think that it started this year. So we are in the first year of the new century, we are in the First Session of the 25th Assembly in the life of this province, and this is the first budget; therefore, the provincial budget of the 21st century. I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance as a new minister in this position for doing her hard work and presenting the budget, but my congratulatory tone will stop very soon at this

point because there are major differences in the way she sees what the priorities of the province are and what I think they should be. Given the fact that this is a new century, a new minister, a new Assembly, there is some hope and expectation that the government will attempt to make some sort of new beginning, but I think Albertans will have to wait for that.

There's no indication in this budget that there is an attempt to forge a new vision, forge a new path into the future, into the 21st century. Much of what's being presented here is more of the same. It's consistent with this government's policies and positions that it has developed over the last eight years. Clearly there is a commitment on the part of the government to continued rapid and high levels of economic growth, but there is a difference between achieving high levels of economic growth and striving to achieve a shared prosperity. Merely high levels of economic growth should not be equated with prosperity for all. There is, certainly, economic growth, and there are beneficiaries of this process of growth, but there are many, many Albertans who are left out, who don't share in this prosperity. So there is no goal set here in this budget, if this budget is to be set in terms of its vision, its goals, for a kind of social future that's compassionate, that's more just. There is no such indication that this is a budget designed to achieve the goal of shared prosperity.

Social investments are still in many ways seen as expenditures rather than as something that we are investing in our future that is a savings in the future. So the language of these expenditures is still very much prevalent as if we are wasting money, and we need to stop doing that.

In terms of this particular budget and the numbers, total revenues are estimated to be \$22.7 billion, down about \$2.6 billion from the most recent 2000-2001 forecast, and total expenditures are estimated to be \$21.6 billion. Now, while at first blush it looks like the government is ramping up spending, I must note that over \$1.5 billion of this additional spending is for capital infrastructure expenditures this year, which should be seen as an investment, not as a new line item in the budget. So essentially what the government is doing is setting aside money this year for spending on hospitals, schools, and roads that will take place over the next three years, and I must say that it couldn't have come too soon. It was badly needed, so I'm supportive of the infrastructural part of the budget, the commitments made there.

All I'm saying is that it seems to give the wrong impression, that Alberta is moving down the path of spending and spending and spending. If you now add to this the adjustment for inflation and population increase, then the overall budget increase looks even smaller, more modest than it appears on the surface. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is worried that the government of Alberta is beginning to spend and spend and spend. I think they're mistaken; that's not the case. The expenditure side, the total overall budget, doesn't seem to indicate to me that there are any new, bold commitments being made in terms of investing in our children's future and the future of our youth or in any other forms that will benefit us down the road in the long run.

On the revenue side, a few observations. Other than a reduction in the railway fuel tax from 3 cents to 1.5 cents per litre, there are no further tax cuts in this budget. The flat tax, in my judgment, is an unfair way of taxing Albertans on their personal income. There's no change in that. No reduction in health care premiums, much less any sign that they will be scrapped very soon or soon. The hotel room tax stays, and there is no cut in fuel taxes for average families. There is no increase in cigarette taxes, as was being suggested only a short while ago by the minister of health.

The previously announced \$248 million cut in corporate taxes and

the \$135 million cut in school property taxes are mentioned again. The capital tax on financial institutions is also being eliminated on April 1. Those eliminations were announced last September, so that's not really new either.

8:50

On the expenditure side now, Madam Speaker, health spending is forecast to rise about \$737 million compared to last year's forecast. About half will go for remuneration increases, mainly for doctors and nurses, and the rest to arrange for the announced initiatives. It remains to be seen whether this increase will ultimately lead to smaller waiting lists or any lowering of pressure in our hospital emergency rooms.

Education spending is forecast to rise by about \$340 million for a very large system, both K to 12 and postsecondary. Interestingly, provisions for increases in teacher salaries are at 4 percent this year and 2 percent next year, for a total of 6 percent over two years, much less than what teachers were expecting and much less than what teachers were given to believe by the Premier just a short two weeks ago. I suspect there will be a great deal of tension in the negotiations that are forthcoming. That's unavoidable. There could be labour strife. I think it was a shortsighted decision by the government not to include the teachers among public servants who should be paid fairly and who should be compensated for the sacrifices that the Premier himself acknowledged they made willingly over the years in order to assist this government to eliminate its deficit and pay back its debt.

In addition to these increases, modest as they are, the basic per pupil grant will go up 3.5 percent and 3 percent over the next two successive years, from which school boards will be expected to reduce class size and address other priorities. I'm sure school boards are going to find themselves between a rock and a hard place trying to help their teachers remain satisfied and committed to the work that they're doing and to reduce class sizes at the same time, especially when you look at these increases in light of the rate of inflation, which cuts into the real value.

Also, look at the increase in the number of students in the system. There is a great deal being said by the government side about how the growing economy is attracting tens of thousands of Canadians into our province, which is true, but when they come, they also bring their children with them, thereby increasing the demand on our already overloaded education system. So the increases in the budget must be seen in light of these increasing demands and the impact that inflation has on the ability of school boards to purchase the goods and services they need in order to provide quality education to their students.

So I don't think these increases are adequate. They certainly are not adequate if there's any commitment anywhere to decrease class sizes on the part of this government. There is lots of rhetoric and talk that small class size is necessary, but we're going to leave it to school boards to accomplish this task. But unless this government is willing and prepared to give the resources to school boards, it's a goal that will not be achieved. The budget certainly has no evidence in it that this government has any real commitment to the achievement of that goal or commitment to partnering with school boards to achieve that goal.

In terms of postsecondary education there is \$28 million allocated to faculties like computer technology, medicine, and engineering. The rest of the faculties are left to their own devices. If they lose leading scholars to other universities, which they are doing, then so be it. Who will be the losers? Our young, our students, the vast majority of whom enroll in faculties that are being neglected and ignored as a result of this targeted funding that this government is

simply channeling in the direction of a few faculties at the expense of liberal arts and humanities.

Funding for scholarship programs is being increased to some extent, though there is no new money to put a brake on tuition fee increases. That must be a major disappointment to our postsecondary students who in the tens of thousands signed petitions to this government over the years, particularly last year, to give a message to the minister that he must commit himself and work hard on their behalf to convince this government and convince his colleagues in the cabinet that tuition fees should not only be frozen, but it's about time they be rolled back given the resources of this province. The tuition fees in this province are the second or third highest in the country, and this province claims to be the richest, on the other hand, amongst all the provinces in this great nation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So that to me is another great disappointment. It's shameful that we are not able to reduce the burden of tuition fee increases on our students, which is within our reach, within our capacity, but we need to have a minister who really has his heart into doing this, has a real commitment to this goal, and unfortunately we don't have that here. [interjections]

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, minutes are just whizzing by, and I don't need a minister and another member here to be telling me what to say. I would ask them to be patient and listen while I'm speaking.

Moving to another matter, Mr. Speaker, while there is money provided to accommodate increases in the number of cases of AISH recipients, there are no increases in monthly allowances for AISH or social assistance recipients of any real, genuine magnitude. That means that these recipients will be condemned to living in growing conditions of poverty and scarcity.

Government spending on natural gas rebates announced before the election was \$1 billion for the first four months, January to the end of April, the end of this month, approaching fairly soon. However, in this budget only \$125 million is budgeted for natural gas rebates for all of the year 2001-02. This translates, Mr. Speaker, into \$8 per household, \$8 a month. So it's obviously not a terribly significant promise that's contained in the budget and will not relieve the anxieties and the financial pressures that most families are experiencing as a result of the large increases in natural gas prices and electricity prices.

So, Mr. Speaker, what does it tell us about this government's commitments? Where is it going? Where does it want to go? It's clear that it really does not have a very good idea of where it wants to go except that it wants to keep going where it's been going before. Nothing new. Nothing imaginative. Nothing very creative. No promise of charting a new course to show the adventurous spirit that Alberta is known for and to say to Albertans that we are now thinking of a postdebt era, and in this era there are new things that we are going to do, and here are those things, here are the resources, and here is our plan to accomplish those things.

Talking about debt freedom, Mr. Speaker, I heard this phrase repeated again and again and again by the Finance Minister yesterday in her speech: freedom from debt. Well, it's a good idea, but we have been free from debt, not to underestimate the need to be free from debt. We have \$12 billion in cash assets in the heritage fund. We have—I don't know—\$4 billion, \$5 billion, \$6 billion, \$7 billion of debt. So we should be talking in terms of net assets, cash assets, rather than net debt. When you really look at the balance of this strange accounting, when you have \$12 billion in the bank and you owe \$7 billion and then you say that we have \$7 billion in net debt, it's difficult to understand the logic. This is not to justify that this

government should undertake new debt obligations. The point is that we should be frank and honest with Albertans about the real fiscal situation of the province. If freedom from debt was the goal to be achieved, we have achieved it.

I think we need to set new goals: freedom from poverty, freedom from child poverty, freedom from excessive tuition burdens on our young Albertans, who are going to be the source of prosperity in the future for this province. But none of those ideas are permitted to enter the language of the pages of the budget documents as I see them, and that must be a serious disappointment to all Albertans.

9:00

Mr. Speaker, the health care premiums. I want to speak a bit about that. There were attempts made, I guess, at the last Tory convention by some members – there were some motions or resolutions passed there advising the government that it's time to consider scrapping health care premiums. Well, there's no such hope. The government hasn't listened even to its own rank and file on that one. Health care premiums are not only an unfair burden on those families that pay from their own pocket. They can't even use this expenditure for tax purposes. It's not a tax deductible expenditure.

On the other hand, for employers it's a payroll tax, and this government is committed to making business easier for people who want to set up business in this province. Yet it doesn't see the health care premiums as an unnecessary, unfair burden on employers whose costs go up because they have to pay as part of their fringe benefits to their employees these health care premiums on their behalf. On the other hand, the employees who receive this benefit have to pay taxes on it once again. So it's a strange situation, makes no economic sense, yet the government has not moved an inch on the issue of scrapping or reducing or eliminating in a staggered way these taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I know that time is running out. I would like to conclude my comments by saying that it's regretful that the government has squandered a major opportunity at the turn of a new century, at the beginning of a new Assembly to chart a new course. We are living in a time of immense economic growth. I hate to call it prosperity because it doesn't really trickle down to everyone, and markets never are a good mechanism to allow it to trickle down to everyone. The government had the chance to undertake some truly bold and meaningful and innovative steps to leave a legacy for the people of Alberta. They have failed in their task.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this matter.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: **Supplementary Estimates 2000-01
General Revenue Fund, No. 2**

THE CHAIRMAN: First of all, hon. members, before considering the estimates this evening, the chair would like to clarify that the

April 10, 2001, House leaders' agreement is silent on the subject of supplementary supply estimates, and that is what we're dealing with tonight. Accordingly, the only limitations on speaking are those found in the Standing Orders. As this is the only day allotted for consideration of these supplementary supply estimates pursuant to Government Motion 11, which the Assembly passed yesterday, then under Standing Order 59 they must come to a vote no later than 11:45 this evening.

So with that, we'd also remind hon. members that, again, in committee you're allowed to move around, which many of you are taking liberal advantage of, but we still want to have only one person standing and talking at a time. If we could all observe that, that would be helpful.

Learning

THE CHAIRMAN: This evening we're going to start the supplementary supply estimates off with comments by the Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. What we have before us tonight is a supplementary estimate for \$33 million. Quite simply, this is to reimburse the Department of Learning for the tax cut of \$135 million that was applied to January 1 of this year through the Department of Municipal Affairs as it applies to the education component of the property taxes.

Mr. Chairman, \$33 million is roughly one-quarter of the \$135 million, and that is the reason for the supplementary supply, so that the Department of Learning's budget would not have been cut by \$33 million, that we would still have the same amount to spend as was ordered in the previous budget. I'm sure that the opposition members would not want my budget to be decreased by \$33 million.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand and support the appropriation that we have before us, because I have been one of those individuals who has advocated adequate funding for public school boards and have made a plea that the underfunding be discontinued. So any move that keeps the boards at least even and not in a less favourable position, I guess, is one that we eventually have to support.

The requisition, however, raises a number of questions about the financing and the operation of school boards across the province. Although they weren't directly involved in this transaction, they could have been had this requisition not been made and the payments put in place. I think that so often in the last half dozen, eight years the boards have had things done to them and have not been partners of the government as the financial plans and planning for school districts and schools have unfolded. What the requisition does is call into question the kind of planning that's been done, and what is the use of three-year business plans if an expenditure like this could come along and, had the minister not had the support for this requisition, could have totally wrecked school board budgets and put them in a very difficult position?

9:10

The whole notion of planning and trying to plan long-term when these kinds of things occur is very, very difficult. It would be interesting to have a performance measure in the budget plans that gave some indication of the government's success in putting forward a budget plan and sticking to it. I think some of my colleagues are going to spend a few minutes talking about that particular aspect of the budget process.

Boards in general, I think, have had a very difficult time, and there

have been changes that really have weakened them and made them very vulnerable. If this had gone through and they had had their budget cuts, they would be in a position to do little about it but to cut programs or teachers, and that stems back to the loss of their taxing authority. They no longer have the freedom to make up deficits like this to respond to the unforeseen because they have had that taxing authority removed from them, or if they do tax, as in the case of some of the Roman Catholic school districts, their grants are reduced to an amount equal to the amount raised by that local taxation. So they have really no recourse to deal with the unexpected except to cut programs, and they are not alone in this. We're going to see this when we look at the budget requisition for Children's Services. Boards there are caught in exactly the same lose/lose situation.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

A second factor that's making life very difficult for school boards is the earmarking of funds, and as worthy as many of those projects are – the literacy program and some of the other initiatives, the school improvement program – they take control and flexibility away from local boards and make them less able to respond.

I think a third factor that has weakened local control has been the consolidation of a number of the boards. The geographic areas served by some of them are almost impossible.

So I think that over the last number of years boards have been weakened and are at the mercy of changes like this that come from another department or come from a group of other departments. I think that an implication or the curtailment of local authority has resulted in the centralization of authority in Edmonton, and it's a centralization that's unfortunate given the nature of our schools. I think boards are becoming more and more remote from citizens and less and less able to respond to local needs. This is, I think, just a warning flag in terms of how vulnerable our public school boards and separate school boards are to moves by the government, and they have little recourse to moves such as this.

I think that the reorganization that's occurred over the last number of years has minimized local boards. The K to 12 system now finds it's grouped and competing with the interests of advanced education in one department, and the latest move was the split-off of Infrastructure, meaning that now, according to some superintendents that I talked to, the boards are forced to deal with two departments. To make a plea for their building funds and their program funds, they have to first make the case with Learning and then make the case with Infrastructure. So all that's happened with that particular reorganization is that boards have had their work doubled and, again, their authority minimized and life made more difficult for them.

I think boards are made more remote through the chronic underfunding that has been imposed upon them. Local schools have certainly suffered as a result of that underfunding. It's evidenced in the kind of parent fund-raising that goes on. I was talking to a parent yesterday who was here with a group of students from a local elementary school about the fund-raising efforts of their school, and she was indicating how happy she was that they had finally received consent to conduct a casino. My question to her was: what are you going to do with the proceeds from that casino? She said, "Well, you know, we're going to be buying some computers and some software." I said, "Well, I thought some of those were mandated by the province." She said, "They are, but the school can't afford them." Then she said, "We're going to be buying some books for our school." I think that that's unfortunate, that the parents are now forced into fund-raising for basic instructional materials and resources, and their role as the fund-raisers for the special event or the special field trip has been dramatically changed.

I think some of the underfunding has led to the loss of librarians. A teacher librarian in this province is a rare individual. That is a dramatic change from the past when the expectation was that every school library in the province would have if not a full-time then at least a part-time teacher librarian, someone who was schooled in library science but also in pedagogy and instruction and could help children and teachers utilize library resources to their advantage.

I think they've been weakened in other ways in terms of some of the interagency agreements. Some of the boards, I know, have gone willingly into these agreements. I think particularly of the health initiative. I would hope that sometime in the future we're going to have a review of that initiative and find out exactly how children have been served. Certainly the level of speech pathology, speech therapists, occupational therapists, the kinds of services that school boards in the past rendered themselves – and they were able to do that because, again, they had access to some local taxing authority – are minimal. I know the agreement between Capital health and the two local boards exists more in the minds of those two agencies than it does in the classrooms and in the offices of schools. The kind of therapy that's available for children needing help with speech is minimal, to say the least, and – I think the situation still prevails from last year – is discontinued at third grade, which is hardly the way to deal with speech problems, which are often very, very long term.

So a number of factors. The measure before us I guess I indicated I'd support. It's needed. I think it points out the weakness in planning, and I think it certainly points out the vulnerability of schools and their ability to respond to unforeseen, changing financial circumstances. I think it's unfortunate that they have been put in that position. They will continue to be if the upcoming budget is any measure, where we see the encroachment into collective bargaining on a large scale by the provincial government, really a situation where the bargaining has been done publicly by the Premier through the budget documents that are tabled. Again, I think that that's unfortunate. It takes away the authority and the power to act from local school boards and the power to set priorities in terms of the kind of teachers that they can hire and they can set as a priority.

I look at boards who had in the past some forward-looking personnel policies. One board, for instance, had a policy of hiring the best-qualified teacher available. Having to take a policy like that and set it aside because of the nature of the funding, they have to hire the teacher that will cost them the least. It's hardly the criteria that that board would like to use when they're trying to find teachers to take over in their classrooms.

9:20

So it's a series of events that keep chewing away and eroding the authority of local boards, and you wonder if there isn't some grand design behind this to make local boards redundant and make the move, as some other provinces have, to eventually do away with them. I'm not usually that suspicious, Mr. Chairman, but it does leave one to ponder when you see the kinds of moves that have been made.

I think that with those comments I'll conclude and look forward to further comments on the requisition.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's always difficult to follow the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on any debate around Learning because his knowledge and experience is so in depth, but there were a couple of issues quite specific to Edmonton-Centre that I wanted to raise around this issue.

I understand that the \$33.3 million is to replace the January to the end of March loss that the department would have suffered as a result of the change in property taxes. That also makes me question why this was a surprise. I mean, if the government departments are all talking to one another, then this decision and the implementation of it shouldn't have come as a surprise to the Department of Learning, where they would need to be getting supplementary estimates to achieve a zero mark by the end of the fiscal year. I find the entire purpose of the supplementary estimates very bizarre, coming from the nonprofit sector, the thought of being able to present a budget or financial statements back to your board in which you said: "Whoops, went over in X area, but gosh there's a good reason for it. So can we just take money and put it backwards into it?" I don't think anyone would last very long in that sector if they followed the example that's put forward by the government.

I guess when I hear about things like this, I always go back to the Auditor General's report to see what advice he was giving any department prior to this happening. Was there advice given that, if followed, would have reduced the need for additional funds to be put in or would have helped in the management? When I look at the Auditor General's report that led into the year that is under scrutiny here, there are two points that are being raised. The Auditor General is making it very clear that he's issuing an adverse audit opinion on the financial statements of the Ministry of Learning mostly because the school jurisdictions and public postsecondary institutions are not consolidated inside the financial statements of the department.

I also note that he's saying that the link needs to be improved between strategic planning for the delivery of basic education and long-term capital planning for school facilities. Now, this issue keeps coming up. Certainly I've been charged by the constituents of Edmonton-Centre to make it very clear in this Assembly how unhappy those constituents are that they are now facing the closure of one complete school, that being Queen Mary Park, and the partial closure of another school, that being the high school of John A. McDougall. These are community schools. They are deeply tied into their communities; they are very important to the communities. These are inner-city communities.

Now, inner city doesn't mean necessarily poor, down-trodden, or shabby in any way. Certainly those two communities have been working hard to rejuvenate, to attract young families moving into the areas, to get programs in place that would enhance the community and the families that are living there now. So to have a utilization rate that is put in place that supersedes the school board designation and prioritization list of which schools can be expecting infrastructure money – we now have this secondary list that's produced by the Department of Infrastructure about who's in what priority position and for how much money, and the two lists differ in many instances. The entire idea of the utilization rate is deeply offensive to many of the constituents and community members in these communities. The other amenities that the school offers, the fact that they are both keystones in their communities is not counting for anything, yet it counts very much for the people in those communities.

So, you know, once again I'll raise that issue, but I hope it stands as a warning for others who might be thinking smugly that they're fine. Don't be smug about it. It, too, can happen to you, especially if this utilization policy remains in place.

The second point that's raised by the Auditor General is:

Better systems are needed to ensure capital project proposals demonstrate cost/benefits, to manage scope changes and to evaluate contractor performance.

Oh, sorry; that's specific to the University of Calgary. But he does expand that to a number of other systems that cost benefits need to be demonstrated: "manage change orders" and "evaluate contractor

performance." Pretty straightforward, basic information to be considered with any kind of capital project. Now, at this point we have the Department of Learning, and we also have the Department of Infrastructure. That was raised by the previous speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, that school boards and schools themselves are now having to deal with two different government departments, where it used to just be one.

The other issue that I wanted to talk about briefly was envelope funding. I found it really interesting to see that in the February throne speech there was a plea from the government to the federal government to please not give them money in envelope funding, or targeted funding, yet the government has no problem in turning around and doing that to a number of agencies that they work with, like school boards. That really contributes to a chronic underfunding in certain areas. It takes away the flexibility of the school boards and individual schools to offer programming and support specific to what their needs are. We should be able in this day and age of mass communication and computers and number-crunching and all to be much more flexible than I see this government being, especially around assistance to local schools.

The amount of fund-raising that is possible in some schools in this province is simply not possible for the schools in Edmonton-Centre. These are working parents, and they just don't have the time. They are working both day and night jobs, and they don't have the time to be able to go and work a casino or a bingo or to go door to door selling chocolates or Christmas cards or Christmas wrapping paper or any of the other things I've seen happening.

9:30

There isn't additional fund-raising for these schools. I know that the teachers and the support staff have run some fund-raising schemes in order to assist the school and gain equipment and supplies that they're looking for, but essentially these schools just have to do without. I know that the minister feels this is not a problem, but I can tell him that it is. I heard a librarian – one of the few left in Alberta – say that there were something like only 139 librarians left in the province, which again is an issue for the schools that I represent, and I know this must be the case in some of the other metropolitan areas as well. I don't need to belabour this point. I just wanted to raise a number of issues around funding of schools and planning for funding and my surprise that this government wasn't talking between departments so that it was known that it would be an issue and that this money would need to be injected backwards into the Department of Learning as a result of the changes in the municipal property tax structure.

So I'm not going to object to this money, obviously, besides the fact that it's futile because it's already happened. You know, once again we've got taxation essentially without representation in that we're debating this in April. This happened six months ago; it's a done deal. So I think a basic course or a refresher course in democracy might be in order here.

With those comments, I look forward to listening to other observations on this supplementary estimate for 2000-2001. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to respond to the supplementary estimates. Before I speak specifically to Learning, I would like to make a few comments about the supplementary estimates in general. In reviewing the information that is available to us and contrasting that with prior

years' supplementary estimates, there are some interesting points for us to take a look at and take under consideration.

The Minister of Finance has brought in, in total for this year, supplementary estimates of \$1.422 billion. We can compare that to what other Treasurers have brought forward within their mandates. The very interesting thing to see, Mr. Chairman, is that if we take a look at former Treasurers Stockwell Day, Jim Dinning, and Dick Johnston, we find there isn't a single one of them that has brought in supplementary estimates as high as what we have seen in the 2000-2001 year. The closest was Stockwell Day, Mr. Chairman, and that was in the '99-2000 year, when he brought in supplementary estimates of \$1.416 billion. Dick Johnston, who took a lot of heat in this province for the way he managed the budget, never even came close. The very highest year he ever had in special warrants was \$507 million, almost one-third of what we see brought forward in this particular year.

What does that tell us? I think there are a few things we can learn from that. One is that this is the absolute worst government we have seen since the 1986-87 year in terms of being able to budget and forecast, the worst in terms of any kind of planning, the worst in terms of being able to establish any kind of rolling budgetary process where benchmarks and performance indicators can actually be tied back to the dollars spent and the dollars projected to be spent. I think that's very interesting.

We have forever lived in a province with cyclical revenues. Some years are really good and some years are not so good, and governments spend accordingly, but not like this government. It's like a free-for-all out there with the money. It's literally falling off the wagon. They can't spend it fast enough, and they certainly can't plan for that spending. I think that is what we see when we take a look at the kind of spending that's happened in this past year. Clearly a record for dollars spent. Clearly not something to be proud of, Mr. Chairman.

I believe there are ways to account for surplus years, and they come to what we see as being the key fundamental issues when you talk about revenue projections and planning and forecasting and providing wealth for a province long into the future. Those are issues of stability and sustainability and equality. If we take a look at those independent issues here and apply them to how this government is spending, we find there are some huge deficits.

If we talk about stability, there is nothing in the way this government spends when they just earmark specific funds and dump them back into the system without any thought for tomorrow or the next year or the year after that. There is no stability in that kind of spending. What that means is that those people receiving those funds and other areas that would like to have funds have no stability in their funding, Mr. Chairman. So that's an issue we need to talk about and think about. What would provide stability in the system?

If we had a government with vision, what we would have is a government that would try to equalize the moneys coming in into a revenue stream that would be sustainable over the long term. That is where we need to be. How do we get there? There are many ways to get there, to level out income streams in a province that is resource based. How you do it is change the resource base of the province. We don't have to be dependent on resources in this province. We're a smart province. There's a lot of knowledge here. That means we have many opportunities when it comes to such areas as technology or education.

We can be talking about value-added. I know that we hear that buzzword in this Assembly, and there has been some good work done. Organizations like the Alberta Research Council are working on issues like that. We see lots of work happening in agricultural areas. It's all good news, Mr. Chairman, but not enough to stabilize

the kind of revenue stream we have now, so that's an issue that needs to be addressed. That's part of it. That isn't an easy solution, and it doesn't happen overnight; it takes a long time for that to happen. It's something that the government should be promoting at every possible availability, and we don't see that happening to the extent that it could.

What's another way of leveling out that income stream? You build up another major source of income quickly. Well, we have an excellent framework set in place right now, and that's the heritage savings trust fund. Those of us who've been around for a while recall that between '93 and '95 Albertans were asked what they wanted to do with that fund. What they said, Mr. Chairman, was that they wanted to keep it, that in fact they saw value in that. So why don't we build on that value?

I think that's something we could have been taking a look at since we started to see the surplus years hit, which was about 1995. We could have done a few things. We could have taken a look at the debt repayment schemes that the government has entered into and kept with their original mandate, which was to pay that debt down over a longer period of time. What that would have given us was more excess funds that could have been put into the heritage savings trust fund to build it up. It doesn't take long in these kinds of years to build up revenue streams where we could be adding to the general revenue fund in the years when we don't have high resource revenues.

Instead, what has the government done? They have chosen to make it even optional if that fund will be inflation proof. To date, every year except for this current year we have seen that fund at least inflation proof. So what that means is that we're not losing any value in the fund except potentially for this year, but it isn't increasing either.

9:40

What we also could have seen was the government not choosing to stream off the interest income into the general revenue fund in surplus years. That's what's been happening so far. Had they used that to build up the fund, we would have seen it in a position where, when we did hit one of the valleys in this peak-and-valley kind of revenue stream we have, we would have had more interest revenue generated from that fund because the fund would have grown. So I think that's an easy solution to try to level out the fund and help sustain the kind of program funding that could be very helpful to this province.

So those are my comments on that. I will go specifically now to the Learning supplementary estimates, that are under discussion at this point in time, and I think we can talk about the same issues here.

When we have a government that does its planning in such a short-term manner as this government does – real-time budgeting, we would call it in the corporate world – there's no opportunity for people who are affected by the budgeting system to react. That is a problem, I think. It's a very paternalistic way to manage a revenue stream and a budgeting process. It certainly does nothing to empower other organizations that are directly affected by the decisions that are made.

Who in this case is directly affected, Mr. Chairman? Certainly school boards are. When there's a reduction in the provincial property tax as we've seen here, who doesn't have a say in that? School boards. Who doesn't have a say in that? Municipalities. Who doesn't have a say in that? Ratepayers. All people who are stakeholders in this particular process but who had no say in what happened there. The government just came in and said: "This is what we're going to do. Too bad for any discussion on it or any feedback or any ability to participate in the process." So then what

happens? School boards think to themselves, "Where's this money going to come from?" The government is promising to give the money back to them, which is what we see happening here, so that's a good thing. They needed to be brought up to par in terms of what they had expected to get in revenue. But what it takes away from them is any management abilities or any ability to ensure that they've got stability in their planning process. How can you expect school boards to make good decisions if they have no stability in the process? How can you expect school boards to feel like equal partners in this organization if they don't have a say in the process?

MR. DUNFORD: Are you sure you want to do this?

MS CARLSON: Yes, I am sure. Would you like to help me with my comments? Anybody else?

So if we take a look at sustainability and how it affects these decisions, it's impossible to sustain this kind of planning process when we see this ad hoc kind of decision-making happening. That's a real problem and a hardship for the province, and I think certainly that's something that should be taken into consideration when these kinds of decisions are being made. So it's good that they got the money back, but what about what else they need?

If we take a look at what is needed in Learning, there are a lot of things that are needed. We all heard them at the doors during the election. You know, everybody in my community is still doing fund-raising for basic services. They're not fund-raising in my constituency or at my kids' schools for field trips. They are fund-raising for some of the basic necessities that we feel are necessary, fundamental tools for our kids to have. What would those be? Textbooks. In a major high school in this city every student does not have access to a textbook, and some of those textbooks are held together with duct tape, Mr. Chairman. Now, is that the kind of system we should be supporting in education? How do we expect our students to excel, to be . . . I see there's more than one kind of book that's held together or should be held together with duct tape, even in this Assembly. Well, that's too bad, and it's the kind of thing we should look at correcting. Certainly it's a real problem in the school system when the kids don't have enough textbooks or when they have to fund-raise for them or when they're using textbooks that are missing pages or are unreadable because of the graffiti and notes in them or, literally, bindings are falling apart.

The schools in my constituency are fund-raising for computers. I think the Supernet, that the government talks about, is a great idea, but where are those computers, Mr. Chairman? They're not falling off the government money tree; that's for sure. People are having to go out and fund-raise to be able to put them in the schools, and there aren't enough computers for the kids to use. Computers these days are not a luxury. They are a fundamental way of people being able to access information that is critical to their learning, to their succeeding, and to them exceeding any kinds of expectations we would have for them. It isn't happening. They don't even have enough computers, and let's talk about the computers that they do have.

Evergreening, in terms of keeping those computers up to speed or compatible with other processes that are available, is something that people aren't even talking about. It's an impossibility. There is just not enough money in the system to take a look at that kind of process. They've got computers in lots of these schools that are nothing more than word processors, that can't even be hooked up to the Internet because they don't have the operating capacity. So those are real issues. You know, even when you hook up every school on this Supernet highway that we hear being talked about . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: They only run that to the outside of the building.

MS CARLSON: That's exactly right. As my colleague said, they only run that to the outside of the building. The school is responsible for bringing it in, for finding the computers that are compatible to hook up to the system, and for evergreening and ensuring that the students have computers that are workable and are up to standards.

That becomes an issue in the classroom, because then what we see on the classroom side of it is teachers who are not now accepting assignments that aren't computer generated. There are lots of schools who won't take the assignments if they're handwritten. They have to be typewritten or word processed. Well, if you don't have a school that has enough computers, if you don't have computers that have reasonable printers, if the files on the computers are backed up and the kids can't get their stuff printed off or if they can't get access to the computers, how are they supposed to get their assignments in?

Not everybody has a computer at home. Certainly in my constituency it just isn't the case that everyone is at the technological level where the kids can come home from school to a computer. We have many people in my constituency where the kids come home to no food, never mind to no computer. So those are issues that aren't being addressed and that need to be and things that we need to take a look at. If we're taking a look at properly funding these schools, then we need to take a look at doing it in a much more appropriate way than what we have seen with just a little dumping of money in supplementary estimates where the minister sees appropriate. The issue is much broader than that.

Education was, for sure, the number two issue in my constituency during the election. In many households it was the number one issue. The interesting thing that happened there was a change in this election from the last two elections. When I asked people and they said that education was an issue, I said to them: is it an issue for you for K to 12 or postsecondary or both? In previous elections the majority of the people – I would say more than 80 percent of them – said that the issue was from K to 12. This time way more people said postsecondary, but even more than that, the vast majority of people, well over 90 percent, said both. They're seeing it as an issue at both levels.

It is nice that property taxes saw a reduction, nice that the government decided to ensure that school boards had the same amount of dollars, and that's where we see these dollars coming in, but it doesn't address the systemic problems in education that we're seeing that have grown from K to 12 issues to also include postsecondary issues. Those are some issues that we really need to see being addressed in a systemic way, in a way in the budget process that we can actually track and monitor through performance indicators, Mr. Chairman, that will reflect what it is the department can do and should be reporting on.

9:50

There is a real problem, that I will discuss more fully when we get into the budget estimates on Learning, with the performance indicators and the way in which the government has been benchmarking what they've been doing. We have the overall problem with that in that you can't benchmark short-term envelope funding. It's impossible to do because it's onetime funding, and there is no consistency to what happens with those dollars or any sort of reporting capacity. It's just in and it's out, and that's it. There is always a ripple effect when you envelope-fund something. There are implications for that envelope funding. If you do all your funding by envelope funding, which is the direction this government is going in, we find other problems occurring.

One of those problems is that the expectation from organizations and everyone receiving the funding, be it school boards, municipalities, organizations, nonprofits, whatever, becomes that that funding is going to be there forever, and we know in this province that that is not sustainable in the long run. So what we need to do in all these instances is determine exactly how much money it is we need to operate an effective system. That hasn't been done in Learning; that's for sure. All these problems that keep cropping up, all the alternate ways people find to find income indicate that there are still basic systemic problems in the funding proposals, so those need to be addressed.

We need to understand what those problems are, find out how much money it's going to take to fix them. It is not always more money, Mr. Chairman, but smart money. The issue here is not how much money you spend. It's how much value you get for the money you spend. I don't think that's a criterion being used to evaluate how this government spends money. It could be. That could be a benchmark put in every single business plan in these government departments. How much value are you getting for the money? Are you getting more value than you got last year for the same dollars spent? That's the question. You can't tell, that's for sure, in the way that these systems are implemented and the monitoring process that this government has put in place. But that is how the corporate world evaluates systems, and that is a system that this government could use, too, that would be very effective.

I'm out of time. Too bad.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Seeing no other speaker, would the minister like to make any concluding remarks? Okay.

After considering the supplementary estimates of the Department of Learning, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$33,309,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Children's Services

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much and good evening. Previously this ministry requested a special warrant in the amount of \$3.8 million, and tonight I'd like to once again explain why this special warrant is necessary.

During the last quarter of the 2000-2001 fiscal year the funding provided to the child and family services authorities was reallocated between those that had deficits and those that had surpluses. Because of the cost and caseload pressures, however, there just wasn't enough funding to go around to all the authorities, so we were not able to accommodate all the deficits that were not anticipated previously but were reflective of increasing caseloads and several issues such as handicapped children's services and the cost increases there.

First, the grants provided were not increased prior to March 31 of 2000, and it was felt that the authorities would have sufficient funds

to follow through and complete their year without any reallocation. Second of all, because these funds could not be transferred after March 31, the amount that was remaining within the department or the ministry was deemed a surplus. A surplus cannot be transferred to the authorities because the ministry's funds are seen as a part of the government's general revenue fund, and of course with the child and family services authorities this is not the case. They are separate agents of the Crown. All surpluses therefore must be returned to that fund. As a result, the authorities had a deficit. A special warrant was required so the ministry's surplus could be transferred to the child and family services authority fund to which the services and the funds belong. The child and family services authorities needed this funding for their March month-end expenses.

With that, I would just say that removing the recorded deficit allows us to provide a more accurate, complete overview of our 2000-2001 accounts. I hope this explanation satisfies your need for discussion on the special warrant.

I could just add one other thing. Principally the deficit that was covered in that amount of \$3.8 million was for Ma'Mōwe child and family services authority.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to make a few comments about the supplementary requisition we have before us in Children's Services and pleased that the mechanism is here to rid the authority of a deficit. I know from personal experience how difficult it is for board members who have deficits that they have to deal with to eliminate those deficits. I'm pleased for the Capital region board that this is being handled in this way.

But I think what it does is raise a number of questions that have been raised before, questions that have been raised by the Auditor General in particular about the operation of Children's Services and, in particular, these authorities. The minister just indicated that there are other authorities that were having trouble and that they had to make some adjustments among authorities. Some had surpluses and others were running deficits, and there had to be some bookkeeping done to eliminate those. I guess the question it raises is: are we going to see more of this in the future? I know it's a transition time for the children's authorities, but I wonder if we aren't going to see more of this in the next number of years. I say that because of the questions that have been raised about the financing of the authorities.

One of the problems the Auditor General raised was the problem of interauthority agreements, and I wonder if the minister can indicate to us whether those interauthority agreements have been resolved. The problem, as I understand it, is one that was faced by school boards and particularly large urban boards, those that are located in Edmonton and in Calgary, in attracting an inordinate number of cases of children sent here to remain in care of an authority so that they could access education or health programs. I know school authorities billed the home school district of those youngsters to try to recover some of the costs, and that wasn't very successful because what they did was end up eventually claiming residence in the city.

10:00

For children with the authority of course that's not the case. They are under government supervision, so the home authority is easily identified. The child's home authority is easily identified, but the result was that a number of the authorities found themselves being billed for costs that they hadn't realized were being incurred and had

no control over. So the Auditor General was rather clear in pointing out the necessity for that kind of interagency agreement to be solved and for there to be clear guidelines in terms of how those costs are going to be determined and how the home authority is going to be able to accommodate those costs.

The second problem – and the minister referred to it in her remarks – is the status of the surpluses. There was some question as to who this surplus belonged to, and if there was a surplus, what was to be done with it. Now, the minister has just indicated that the surpluses were taken, I take it, from some of the authorities and then redistributed to authorities that were in a deficit position. I think that if I recall the Auditor General's comments, he indicated that there is some confusion and that some of the authorities took those surpluses and used them. In some cases the authorities thought, as the minister has just indicated, that those surpluses belonged to the department. I think that that kind of confusion can lead to what we see before us, our supplementary requisitions.

I think one of the questions we have to ask is: would we see this kind of a requisition if we were confident that the allocations to the authorities were done properly and competently? Would we have before us this requisition if the planning model was in place? Again the Auditor General, at least in his last report, indicated that the department didn't seem to have the systems that they needed to adequately forecast costs. If that's the case, then it puts, I think, the authorities in the rather untenable position of having to work with budgets that there's little confidence will actually work out. It's an issue that I think has to be addressed, or we're going to see more requisitions such as the one we have before us this evening.

The authorities themselves are really caught in terms of the situation they find themselves in. If they incur unexpected costs, they have little freedom to operate. I'm not sure that they are allowed to budget contingency funds for such occasions. They, as we heard, can run deficits that have to be covered. They can reallocate resources, and I think that's an option the Auditor General has mentioned as a possibility for deficit situations, that resources be reallocated. But in the case of Children's Services that's often very difficult, and the authorities to some extent have their hands tied because they are not allowed to refuse service to a child or to a family. They must provide the service, and that service has to be rendered, again, regardless of cost.

So the authorities really are in a vulnerable position in terms of unexpected costs, and they're in a vulnerable position given the kind of planning and the forecast systems that they have to determine their allocations. I think that's probably a function of being early in the operation of the authorities, but certainly it's an issue that I think will come back time and time again until adequate systems for forecasting costs are in place and the resulting budget allocations are reflective of the kinds of problems and situations that the children's authorities are actually going to be dealing with.

It goes back to one of the very difficult situations that boards such as the children's authorities find themselves in, and that's the problem of having no independent resources to draw upon. They are dependent almost entirely on the government for their funding and really have limited options when it comes to trying to respond to the unforeseen, other than what we see before us this evening, appealing to the Legislature for a special budget allocation to cover the costs.

So I think there are a number of problems that the requisition we are looking at tonight raises that I'm sure the department has been working on since the last Auditor General's report. I'll be looking forward, Mr. Chairman, to the next report of the Auditor General to see just what kinds of changes and what kinds of judgments the Auditor General makes about the authorities and the department and their ability to deal with some of the issues that the requisition we have before us raises.

I think that with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll be pleased to support the requisition when it's voted upon. I think it's one that's a responsible request for funds and one that the Legislature certainly has to honour.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. Just a couple of comments that I want to make on this supplementary estimate 2000-01, No. 2, specific to Children's Services, a couple of points here. What's not being brought out is why there are these surpluses. The minister did a quick job of sort of explaining that some of the new regional children's authorities had surpluses and some had deficits, and the money was all sort of put in a pool and everybody was sort of evened out, but it didn't quite even out and this money has to be transferred backwards into the fiscal year in order to make it all come out even.

Again, I question that method of accounting in that I think it disguises what the real problems are, because nothing ever shows up on the books as actually being over budget or under budget, and therefore the questions that should be asked by department employees, ministers, cabinet, other MLAs, and the Auditor General don't necessarily get asked. The whole thing is disguised.

10:10

I think there are some serious questions to be asked here. There was certainly trepidation coming into the children's authorities about how this was all going to work and if it was really in the best interests of the child. I am horrified that there's a \$3.8 million accumulated operating deficit for the Ma'Mōwe region, which is how it's described in the supplementary estimates figures. What is that deficit from? Were they not given enough money to operate the programs in the first place when everything was transferred under their authority, or did they not anticipate some operating expenses? If they didn't, why wasn't the government giving them the advice that would tell them that's what they needed? If something totally untoward happened, then what is that? Why did it happen? Is it going to happen again? All of those questions need to be asked and answered.

I'm looking forward to the Auditor General's report for the 2000-2001 period, which will come out this fall, which will be examining the financial numbers that we're talking about now, because again I think there's a real problem with long-term planning and incidents of planning that this government suffers from. Close scrutiny needed to have been done with these children's authorities, and I sure hope we learn carefully, because we're playing around with kids' lives here.

There are two other issues I want to talk about in connection with this and what is happening with the children's authorities. One is an issue I've brought up repeatedly, and I will keep bringing it up until it's resolved. That is the differential in salaries and fee-for-service fees that are available to those working in the nonprofit sector and those that are contracted with the regional health authorities versus what the going rate is in the government.

There is still a significant differential here. It is really causing problems in that sector. People are leaving those jobs, and we need good people looking after our children, especially when you start looking at vulnerable children, children in need, children under handicapped children's services. I know that there was some attempt made to inject additional dollars to bring those salaries and contract fees up to an equivalency with the government positions, and before that was even implemented, there had been another

agreement with the government employees and they were out of whack before they ever got equalized. I believe that that has since happened to them again, so now there is even more of a differential between them.

In addition, there's increasingly becoming a wider gap between those that are on a salary working for an agency contracting through Children's Services and those that are operating under a fee for service, in the way those organizations are budgeting those two figures. We really need to look at that. This is something that's been brought up by the Auditor General. It's been brought up by PAO and a number of other interested parties.

You know, in the budget that's just been released, we're talking about 1,200 new positions in government. That's great, but those are new positions, and we're losing the people out of the positions that we've got. So that's one of my major concerns around this.

The second is an issue that I've also raised before, and that is the funding for women's shelters, which falls under children's authorities. I still object to them being funded under children's services authorities when it is mostly women that we're dealing with, because exactly as I forecasted, the women themselves become important only in the context of children. I know this causes workers in the area of abused women and operating battered women's shelters some concern. I can't say that that would be everybody, but I know it's certainly causing some people concern.

Truly, a woman without a child will be hard-pressed to find space, because of course the spaces go first to women with children. But eventually what's happened is that the number of spaces are only calculated on those women coming into the shelters with children, and they're just not calculating for the space that's needed for women that come without children, single women.

The funding for the women's shelters has never covered all of the operational costs and programming costs. That continues to this day, where we have women's shelters that are out there trying to raise dollars to pay for core services. I am going to keep talking about that one because it's really critical to us. We haven't even started to talk about services for men, and I don't even think we can get there until we manage to sort out our underfunding of the women's shelters. They need to be funded for the full programming that they are offering now. If they want to fund-raise beyond that for additional things like field trips or something, fine, but to have to be out there fund-raising for outreach programs and counseling programs is unacceptable to me.

So those are the three things I wanted to raise under this supplementary estimate for Children's Services. Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak to it, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time I also have a few remarks regarding the additional \$3.8 million that are going to be provided to Children's Services to eliminate an accumulated operating deficit from the 1999-2000 fiscal year in the Capital region.

Now, it's obvious that there is a dire need, Mr. Chairman, for this funding. One only has to look at an annual report that was recently released, the Children's Advocate 1999-2000 annual report. It's pretty hard to say no to this special warrant. I have a lot of problems certainly with special warrants, which I will address later in my remarks. But when we look at the recent report, there is a significant list of what we could call deficiencies. This \$3.8 million in the Capital region could go a long, long way perhaps to finding solutions to some of the most pressing problems. The hon. minister has to take these reports to heart.

When we look at placements, for instance, the report indicates that there is "a general shortage of placement resources and insufficient spaces for secure treatment." With respect to secure treatment, the lack of mental health services is also involved in the shortage.

Mr. Chairman, there are also permanency planning issues here.

The lack of consistent permanency planning has a negative effect on young people of all ages, but especially on very young children. Some young people are not aware of a case plan; some have never seen their social worker.

Now, hopefully some of this money will be used to make a difference with these young children.

10:20

The "refusal to provide support to older adolescents and refusal to support their transition to adulthood" was clearly outlined in media reports, but

a number of adolescents find their services terminated if their behaviour is less than perfect. Many seeking an extension of care and maintenance have to fight the system to continue support while they finish high school.

Now, these are all points that are listed in the Children's Advocate report. I'm not asking for the hon. minister's promise, but she needs to ensure not only the members of this House but the public that this is going to occur.

There is

lack of support to delegated First Nations Child Welfare agencies and lack of monitoring of service provision. Alberta operates on a model of delegated child welfare authority. The Ministry must ensure an adequate delivery capacity and support agencies in their development.

Again, how much of the \$3.8 million will be utilized in that as people come from different regions to the Capital region, Mr. Chairman?

Now, the adoption of First Nations children is pointed out here, and this is a very important issue. It reflects on families throughout the province.

The lack of mental health services for young people. How much of this money is going to be used to perhaps correct that? Now, the report goes on to say:

Children and youth may come into the child welfare system unnecessarily when timely access to mental health services may have allowed them to remain with their family. Young people in care needing mental health supports often cannot receive help in a timely fashion due to limited resources.

Young people who suffer abuse while in the care of child welfare lack adequate support for legal representation.

Is this problem going to be addressed with this special warrant? Court delays. The report indicates:

Overburdened courts and procedural delays contribute to a lack of permanency planning again. When rulings on guardianship do not occur, the ability to make permanency plans for young people is severely impaired.

The issue of custody/access is addressed here and the child death review.

Now, hopefully this would never have to be used again, but we understand there are not adequate mechanisms for young people who have experienced the child welfare system to provide feedback for improvement.

Young offender services. The report indicates:

Incarcerated youth sometimes lack access to required medical, optical and dental services. There is a need for improvement in joint case planning between the child welfare and the young offender systems. At times emotionally fragile young people are provoked by residential care staff and then charged when they rise to the bait.

This is within the Children's Advocate annual report, and it is astonishing.

Now, the boundary issues between the regional authorities. It's like the regional health authorities. There's no difference. There are issues between various jurisdictions.

The placement of young people from out of province.

There are noticeably more placements from other provinces, for example Nova Scotia, where there has not been a request for supervision by Alberta authorities. This contravenes inter-Provincial protocols and leaves young people in a vulnerable position.

Now, how much of that is going on in the capital region, Mr. Chairman?

The warehousing of children. The report indicates here that "young people are being kept in short-term care facilities for long periods due to a lack of suitable alternatives."

Now, we have an accumulated operating deficit here. Is the minister indicating perhaps – and I question her – that the short-term care facilities in this instance may be motels or hotels? I'm very curious about this. Where are these hotels, and how much are they charging? Surely not, but I'm very curious about this. It was a sensitive subject this afternoon in question period when my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods described warehousing of children. Members opposite were shocked and appalled, but it's the wording from the Children's Advocate annual report: "warehousing of children."

Now, another issue is in regards to timely access to legal aid. We've all heard stories of American prisons where, Mr. Chairman, it is cheaper to use drug therapy to control prisoners than it is to hire jail guards. We see here that the report outlines the medicating of children in care: "Inordinate use of medications as a behavior management tool." This certainly is in need of investigation, and hopefully this special warrant of \$3.8 million, hopefully part of that money, a sum of that money, will be used to investigate that. I would urge the hon. minister to certainly investigate that.

The report goes on to say – and this is again quite distressing:

Disrespectful treatment of youth. Young people in care may be confronted with punitive attitudes by some child welfare workers and more often lack meaningful input into decisions about their care.

Well, if you don't have continuity, if you don't have a staff that's stable, then perhaps this is what you're going to get. And, sure enough, the next item of concern in this report is staff turnover.

They go on to say here, Mr. Chairman, that "excessive turnover of child welfare workers translates to increased instability and discontinuity for young people in care." Now, not only are the children not satisfied, but the staff are also not satisfied. How much of this special warrant could be used or would be used for an increase in the compensation levels of those workers so that there is not this high staff turnover rate?

There is an extreme lack of services in northern Alberta, and now we have this special warrant to eliminate an accumulated operating deficit in the Capital region. That indicates to me that citizens are coming from all over northern Alberta to access services in the region. When we look at special warrants – I think at this time there's no way that a person, after having a look at this report, could refuse the \$3.8 million. I realize it's going to the Capital region, but I think it's essentially going to be used by all the citizens of northern Alberta.

The special warrant is not a habit that I would encourage. A little bit of history for all of the hon. members of the Assembly. Mr. Johnston had a great deal of interest in using special warrants. The only positive thing about this was that there was quite an amount less spent than there was authorized, but there was a significant total here of \$2.1 billion.

10:30

Now, the next individual to operate as Minister of Finance, or Provincial Treasurer, was Mr. Dinning. Again we have special warrants of over \$600 million, and that just doesn't roll off the tongue very easily, Mr. Chairman.

The next gentleman to operate as Provincial Treasurer between 1996-97 and 1999-2000 was Stockwell Day. Before I rose in the Assembly here to make my remarks, I was watching the national news, and the same individual, Mr. Day, was the lead story, as they say. In that time Mr. Day had \$2.9 billion in special warrants. Now, there's a big difference between the hon. minister's \$3.8 million and Stockwell Day's \$2.9 billion.

Dr. Steve West in Bill 28 last year had close to a billion, but we can say \$980 million in appropriation supplementary supply.

We have the current Minister of Finance coming in with a modest \$443 million. But that total is already \$1.4 billion. When you add it together for that fiscal year, it's \$1.4 billion, and that's way off target in my view. But when I think of the children in the capital region and the use of this money to hopefully fix some very serious problems, Mr. Chairman, you couldn't say no, and I can only encourage the minister to work diligently, to persevere and correct each and every one of these items that's listed in this report. It's unbelievable that in this province we have these problems. I think that the majority of them can be solved. I again encourage the minister to take this money and work very, very hard not only in this region but in the other regions across the province, because it's probably the same sort of situation there.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to remind all members of this House that special warrants are not a good habit. The special warrants may seem appropriate at the time, but long-term planning and strategic management are very important. You look at the current government, and you look at the expansion of the cabinet and the different portfolios that now exist, and one by one there is always money needed. I have to question the management as there is this transition.

In closing, I will say to the hon. minister: take the money; take the \$3.8 million; spend it wisely; spend it on the children. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Seeing no other speakers, would the minister like to make any concluding remarks? Thank you.

After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Children's Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense

\$3,800,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Infrastructure

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Last fall and into the winter there was a real sharp increase in the price of energy in all forms. In order to protect Albertans from these extremely high prices, there was a decision made to rebate a royalty that was obtained from

natural gas and also to refund to consumers of electricity money from the Power Pool sale. So out of our department we spent \$406 million, and we need approval tonight in the supplementary estimates for that \$406 million.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not going to talk about the special warrants, but this is the largest one. Of course, it's \$406 million. That's \$406 million? Yes. That's an astonishing figure again. I believe the hon. Minister of Infrastructure described it as a real sharp price increase. Well, I don't consider the electricity policy that was devised as real sharp, and I certainly don't consider that the management of our natural gas resources has been real sharp.

I looked back at *Hansard* – and I said this earlier in the Assembly this week – at past Conservative governments and how they stood up for this province, how they stood up to protect the natural gas resources and the unprocessed derivatives that were in that natural gas resource. Here we see the government of the day with a rebate program.

Now, we all know that the natural gas spot prices have gone up in the North American marketplace, and we must be clear on that, Mr. Chairman. It's a North American marketplace. I don't even know if we can include Alaska now in the North American marketplace. They seem to be going off in their own direction, and it's a direction that has been initiated in their state Legislature, and it has been encouraged by the citizens of Alaska.

We look at this and where we're going to go. Where's the next stop with this 400-plus million dollar special warrant? Bill 1 is certainly going to be debated, and I can't understand why we need that. We've got a natural gas rebates law already, but do we all know about storage levels? Not only in Alberta but also in the U.S., in the eastern and western states, there are a lot of underground storage facilities. In order that this does not happen again, that we're going to be in here maybe in the fall with another special warrant for who knows how much because we forgot to replenish the underground storage facilities, we have to take gas out of the distribution system and leave it there for a future date.

10:40

Now, what price you pay when you inject this gas into the underground storage facilities is the question. It's unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, that in the process of debating this \$400 million figure tonight we could not have some discussion on the prudent use of hedging of natural gas. Hedging: buying when the price is low, storing it in the caverns, and releasing it gradually into the market as prices may spike.

We need to guarantee a supply of natural gas to meet the demand and the prospects for a cold winter in 2002. That's maybe eight or nine months down the road, and in some circles that would be considered extreme long-term planning, but we have to make sure that Albertans' needs are met. Price shielding for this province is not a new concept, and I do not believe that an Alberta consumer should pay the same price for natural gas as a consumer in Illinois. I am concerned that this is not a temporary figure.

We look at what is happening. I'm assured that there's lots of gas in Alberta, but on the north slope of Alaska there's a 100-mile stretch from the Yukon border going west about 30 miles inland. It's a plain. It's probably as level as this floor, Mr. Chairman, and there are ample reserves of gas according to the U.S. Geological Survey. There are trillions of cubic feet of known reserves. Now, if there was so much gas in Alberta, wouldn't it be more prudent to

use all the gas in Alberta and save the \$7.5 billion it's going to cost you to build this pipeline?

We have to be very careful that this \$400 million does not become an habitual expense, a routine. This \$400 million in natural gas and energy rebates is 40 percent of the gaming revenue that's projected. Forty percent. You know, the VLTs and the slot machines are going to be like the gas meters, going around and around and around. The consumers are going to put their money in the VLT machines, then they're going to go at the end of the month and get a cheque in the mail and pay their gas bill. That dial, that meter, that's going around too, but we have to ensure in this climate that we have a source of fuel to heat our homes and heat our hot water tanks that is affordable. If we're going to look at this as the long-term solution, then I don't think we are going in the right direction, Mr. Chairman.

Now, any proposal to shield Alberta residential and commercial consumers from high natural gas rates for the winter season is fine, but when you look at what we use our natural gas for, to heat our homes, our neighbours to the south are using air conditioners in the summer. Air conditioners consume a great deal of electricity, and that electricity is more and more being generated by natural-gas-fueled generation stations.

The cost of gas, as I said before, is determined by the North American marketplace. Since 1985 Alberta has had a policy that allows the marketplace to determine natural gas prices. Sixteen years ago we had a policy. We've never had to use the existing Natural Gas Rebates Act, to my knowledge. In fact, some of the regulations I believe expired in March 2000. But suddenly after 16 years we need a rebate program. There was an election looming, and the cheques were in the mail.

Now, the cost of gas on the monthly bill is calculated in a number of ways. A utility can charge customers this way. It is based on the utility company's projection of the cost of purchasing gas from suppliers for the winter and summer gas seasons. We've all read the reports in the newspapers and listened to the radio about applications that are before the EUB. Utility companies forecast what they will pay to natural gas suppliers for the coming season. Utilities are not permitted to make a profit on the supply cost of gas. There is supposedly no markup to the cost of gas. It is a flow-through cost that is passed on to consumers.

The EUB, as I understand it, has established an accounting mechanism to ensure that customers ultimately pay only the actual cost of natural gas that the utility company pays. I get lots and lots of complaints at the constituency office not about the rebates themselves but how they're administered, the cost of gas. Consumers are getting very, very skeptical about utility companies. It never was that way before, but it certainly is now.

We get into the whole idea here of the deferred gas account, and you can almost call this a deferred supplementary appropriation or a deferred special warrant. There's nothing wrong with comparing the two, Mr. Chairman. At the end of each season any balance in the deferred gas account is carried forward, as I understand it, to the next season and recovered from or credited to the customers at that time.

While most natural gas contracts between utilities and suppliers are indexed to changing market prices, even after the gas cost supply recovery rate is set by the EUB, actual gas supply costs may vary significantly from those projected by utility companies. A utility company, as a result, may apply to the EUB for a midseason adjustment if the variance is above \$2 million or plus or minus 3 percent of the forecast balance. Now, there are also delivery charges. There's the municipal franchise tax. ATCO collects the goods and services tax, GST, and remits it to the federal government.

10:50

There are probably other proposals for an Alberta gas rebate program. Everyone has an opinion on this, but when we look at this \$406 million, Mr. Chairman, one of the issues that's been discussed surrounding natural gas in the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar is this whole idea of allowing ATCO to sell the Viking field. It's in excess of \$406 million. It is not in the best interests of the consumer. Now, this rebate is certainly going to help consumers. Natural gas is such a vital commodity for our economy. We heat our homes. It's used for an industrial feedstock. We derive derivatives that are used in the petrochemical industry.

Where does that lead us? Where will we be next year? I'm not convinced that the price of natural gas is going to return to historic levels. I believe that in the budget it is itemized at over \$5 a thousand cubic feet, but earlier today I believe it was suggested at the media availability that it could go as low as \$2. I don't think that's going to happen. That is not going to happen, or many people who are planning on financing pipelines either through to the Mackenzie Delta or up the Alaska highway are going to have difficulty raising construction financing. Spot prices I think will probably stay in the average of \$5, maybe \$5.56 per gigajoule; that's close to the metric conversion for the thousand cubic feet. But we have to ensure that what gas is discovered in Alberta can be utilized.

Now we're going further and further away. Lease roads are expensive to build. You've got seismic surveys to conduct, and we're going deeper with our wells. Naturally they're more expensive, so there's cost recovery there for the expense of drilling the well. At the price of \$5.50 or so I believe there will be significant investment in exploration and, as a result of exploration, in the development of new fields. There could be as a result of this up to 30,000 natural gas wells drilled in Canada in the next three years if this price level were to be maintained. If that were to happen, could we support a shielding program for consumers? I hope so. I think so, but not in this manner.

I believe the funds should be set aside and they should be set aside in the existing Natural Gas Rebates Act. There is legislation there. There is part of that legislation which will allow for the accumulation of money in a fund, and if the fund grows large and the money is not needed, then I believe it can be directly transferred to the general revenue fund, as I recall. I don't have that legislation before me, but when I had a look at it, that was my understanding of it. Why it's not useful to us anymore is just beyond me, Mr. Chairman.

There certainly are benefits for the Alberta economy when producers can command higher prices for their natural gas in the United States and the eastern Canadian markets, but we've got to make sure – and this is the government's role – that there is enough left behind in this province not only for our use today but for future generations. I'm talking 30, 40 years down the road, and I don't think that is that far in the future.

Budget 2000 projected a natural gas price – and this is very interesting – of \$2.50 per thousand cubic feet and natural gas royalties of about \$2.3 billion. Now, each 10 cents per thousand cubic foot increase in natural gas brings in an additional \$160 million to the Alberta Treasury. If this trend were to continue for the balance of this fiscal year, it is very possible that with natural gas royalties we can plan for consumer shielding, but to come in and just say that there has been a really sharp price increase and we need \$400 million is astonishing, to say the least. It's a good program, but I don't know if this is the way to pay for it. I really don't.

When we think of what would constitute a good rebate program, I think we would have to consider the following factors. I believe the government should provide . . . Oh, I was just getting into this. I'm sorry my time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Speaking in the supplementary estimates 2000-2001 for Infrastructure, the \$406 million, as stated by the minister, is to cover the "natural gas and home heating propane/fuel oil rebate initiatives and the Market Transition Credit for electrical consumers".

Just one issue that I want to raise here, and that is once again the discriminatory rebates that were offered to high-rise condominiums and apartments. With the natural gas rebates essentially apartments were offered \$6 a gigajoule versus the \$150 a month that the single-family, single-metered houses got, and that's a significant difference when those figures are actually worked out. Now, you know, over the last several months, starting back in the fall, many individuals, condominium associations, myself, and other members raised this issue with the government through letters and phone calls and here in the Assembly, that the government was discriminating against people based on where they lived. If they happened to live in a high-rise condominium or apartment, they were paying a higher rate and they were going to get less of a rebate.

That's what's happened here. This is affecting people across Alberta. We have high-rise apartments in every riding in this province. That may not be true for high-rise condominiums; that will be affecting fewer ridings. But certainly the high-rise apartments exist everywhere. So I have yet to get a satisfactory explanation as to why the government feels it's all right to discriminate against people based on where they live.

11:00

I recently brought this issue up again in question period, asking for an explanation of the criteria the government used to determine that these residential buildings would be classified as commercial and therefore would be subject to different rates of costing and different rates of rebating and was not able to get those criteria brought forward. This has certainly affected people in my area, and I'm going to keep raising this until the government is willing to quit discriminating against people.

It has particularly affected seniors in my area. For many of them, who had sold their homes and moved into condominiums expecting that they were going to have a fairly stable rate of condominium fee, this has been very bad times for them. I've had people calling me in tears. I've had their neighbours calling me and saying that seniors are breaking down in the elevators, they're so upset about what's happening to them. Condo fees have been doubling and tripling as they try and cope with the increase in the utility rate, offset by a lesser level of rebate than people are getting that have as their primary residence a single-family dwelling.

It's affecting apartment renters as well, because although the government asked nicely that apartment owners and managers pass the rebates on, there is no way to determine that and no legislated mandate to make sure it happens or to monitor and enforce it if it doesn't happen. Now I'm getting reports of people that are getting their rents going up from \$500 to \$750. I had one the other day from a person on AISH whose rent went from \$695 to \$900.

It's not as though people can just go, "Oh, well, I'll move to another apartment in the same area." We have almost a no-vacancy rate here, and I don't think Calgary is much better. Now, I'm not sure what's happening in Grande Prairie and Lethbridge and Red Deer and Fort McMurray, but I have the feeling it's the same story. So people are stuck here. They can't really move to another location that's perhaps a little less expensive but still safe for them. They're having to look at substantially reduced living circumstances in order to cope with this.

For those on a fixed income, I can't begin to comprehend how

they're coping with this. For someone on AISH, they don't get more money because their utility rate is going up and that's affecting their apartment rental fee. For someone on supports for independence or any senior on a fixed income, whether that's through the Alberta seniors' benefit and the federal benefit programs or whether they're just existing on a pension, this is a serious, serious problem for people. I cannot understand why the government is willing to stand there and discriminate against these people when they know what's going on.

That is specific to the natural gas rebates. The same thing is going on with electricity. I know that condominium associations have approached the government. I've been receiving copies of their correspondence. I forwarded copies of the correspondence. I've asked questions in question period. I've tabled copies of electricity bills from condominiums in my riding, and I know I'm not the only one.

With the electricity rate, again, we had people in single-metered high-rise condominiums or apartments paying a higher price for the electricity and getting a lower rebate as well. It was based on a lesser rate per kilowatt-hour, and the single-family homes were getting a \$40 a month rebate directly on their bill. Well, that didn't happen. When there's only one bill that's coming into a high-rise apartment or condominium, that's what the rebate was being based on. They were being judged as a commercial building, making them no different than Earl's Restaurant or Dow Chemical or Syncrude, and they were having to pay that same rate.

This is unconscionable, in my opinion. It's captured inside this \$406 million. I'm still looking for an explanation as to why this government willingly discriminates against Albertans, and I will continue to ask the question until I have a satisfactory answer that can then go out to all Albertans that are experiencing this. Thank you very much for this opportunity to bring this issue up yet again. This needs to be resolved.

I know that there are plans to continue the rebate program through natural gas, although I notice that in the budget not a word was said about electricity. Those rates are really a concern for people. There are a lot of folks out there that have housing they simply can't upgrade enough to make it R-2000 and have a low bill. The houses just won't take it. They've got two-by-four structure. You can only put so much insulation into it, and they are paying very high utility bills. It's almost the people that have the least well-constructed houses that are paying the highest in electricity and in natural gas. When I'm seeing people that have got utility bills that are literally doubling and tripling, in some places quadrupling, this is a serious concern for people, particularly those on fixed incomes, who are also seeing no relief through any other section of the budget.

Specific to what's going backwards here, where we're now putting \$406 million backwards into last year to make it balance, that money was put out in a discriminatory way with people, and it should be fixed. Thanks very much for the opportunity to bring that up again.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to be able to respond to supplementary estimates in Infrastructure. The Minister of Infrastructure knows that he's one of my favourite ministers in this House, and he has come up tonight with the understatement of the session, I'm sure, that what happened here with these energy rebates was a real sharp price increase. That has got to be the understatement of any statement that a minister in this Assembly is bound to say. You should get that framed, I think. Put it in your office. That would be a real good idea.

What a mess. What a mess this has been. Another \$400 million

to try and fix a problem that they had every opportunity to fix many years ago, starting back in 1995, when they started to talk about deregulation. It's really a nightmare when we talk about the \$406 million that is being assigned here to deal specifically with energy rebates.

One of the problems with what we have here is that we haven't seen any breakdown on the specific costs or other information for each of the energy rebate programs. It's a lot of money, over \$400 million, and I think the Assembly is entitled to see that kind of detail.

MR. MacDONALD: What sort of auditing do we use for that?

MS CARLSON: That's right. What sort of auditing do we use for that? I'm hoping it is something the Auditor General will respond to when we see the next report come out.

This is a completely bungled scheme, particularly when we talk about electricity deregulation, and it's interesting to see that a lot of people in the province think that. They were happy to get the different rebates or subsidies, whatever you want to call them. I think what they should most accurately be called is a debatable point, particularly if these subsidies are going to continue on into the future. I'm hoping we'll get some actual definitions from the minister at some point.

It's interesting to note that many people in Alberta are still puzzled about why we went the deregulation route, and people who I am sure are strong supporters of the government are included in that group. Today our leader was talking to the Alberta Chambers of Commerce on issues, and the issue of deregulation came up, a question from the floor asking about why we needed deregulation and what it has really accomplished, what the problems are with it, and what are the windows out. Concerns for those people, Mr. Chairman, were things like stability in the pricing.

It's really hard for businesses and organizations to forecast their own operating expenses in the short term or the long term when they don't see any stability in prices. It's hard to understand how these companies will be sustainable over the long run when they can't adjust their prices accordingly. One of the big questions they had was why we didn't have a made in Alberta price, particularly for both gas, which we export, and electricity, which we export through the back door to B.C. so that California can buy our electricity and in fact set our prices. That's an appalling situation that is occurring right now and I think is something this government needs to address. What are they going to do about ensuring that Albertans get the first benefit, not the backhanded benefit? What we need to see is not the administration costs of subsidies. We need to see lower prices. It's made here. It's available here. It's exported out of this province. Why are we paying premium prices? You wouldn't with any other kinds of goods or services. So I think that's an interesting question that should be addressed, and I'm hoping that at some point we will see that happen, Mr. Chairman.

11:10

What I really want to focus on this evening, though, in terms of the bungling that's happened here is how having subsidies or rebates actually interferes with the marketplace. There's a cost to what the government is doing here when they give out these subsidies and rebates, and it actually distorts the marketplace. What happens is that when you open up a system for deregulation, the idea is that prices will come down because people can negotiate where they buy their gas or their electricity.

There are a couple of problems here. The first problem is that because the government wouldn't come forward with what the rules were going to be in this deregulated market, companies didn't build

extra capacity, so we're in a short-term supply shortage. That drives prices up. So the government started by distorting the marketplace by not setting out what the rules were going to be for deregulation five years ago or four years ago or three years ago or two years ago or one year ago, when it would have been a better time for the marketplace to respond and ensure that there was going to be adequate supply available so they could compete and consumers, be they individual consumers or corporate consumers or institutional consumers, would have some flexibility in where they went for their power, and that would start to drive the price down. So there's a distortion in the marketplace by not setting the rules out.

There's a distortion in the marketplace by giving the rebates, because what happens is that when you continually suppress the price, you're not giving incentives to organizations, institutes, or individuals to look for alternative power sources. We know that there are other options out there. There's green power that you can buy into. There's research and development happening on all kinds of fronts: methanol, ethanol, fuel cells, all kinds of options. If we continue to suppress the prices, as is happening with these rebates, there is no incentive for companies to invest money in research and development to the same extent that they would otherwise. There is no incentive for them to look for alternative sources, and there is little incentive for them to generate their own electricity. There is no incentive for consumers to take a look at other options. At the prices we're at right now for electricity, options like wind power are price competitive right now. If we didn't have the rebates, they would be at a huge advantage. Solar power is also competitive at the prices we're at right now. Why would the government want to do that? Why would they want to continue to interfere in the marketplace by creating price distortions?

Well, I think that is an issue that hasn't been fully expanded in the discussions we've heard about deregulation and is something that should be brought forward. Either they're in the marketplace or they're out of it. There aren't these half measures. They're not sustainable in the long term. They completely distort the marketplace, and they create a problem for us in terms of our long-term sustainability and stability for people, for planning, and for bringing on new kinds of energy generation. So I am hoping that those are the kinds of issues my good friend will be taking a look at before we see another round of subsidies come through this Assembly in terms of supplementary estimates.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman. I will take my place.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Seeing no other speaker, would the minister like to make any concluding remarks?

MR. LUND: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates of the Department of Infrastructure, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$406,000,000
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THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move that the committee rise and report the votes and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of the 2000-2001 supplementary estimates No. 2 for the general revenue fund for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2001, reports the approval of the following estimates, and requests leave to sit again.

Children's Services: operating expense, \$3,800,000.

Infrastructure: operating expense and capital investment, \$406,000,000.

Learning: operating expense and capital investment, \$33,309,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Bills to allow for the introduction of Bill 5.

[Unanimous consent granted]

11:20

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

[At 11:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 26, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Pawel Dobrowolski, ambassador of Poland, on his first official visit to Alberta. The ambassador is accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Ludwika Dobrowolska.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important visit. Alberta and Poland share many things in common, including strong agricultural sectors and success in public-sector reforms. In addition, there are over 126,000 Albertans who trace their ancestry to Poland, the sixth largest ethnic group in our province. The ambassador's visit is an excellent opportunity for us to learn more about each other and to explore ways to expand our relationship.

Mr. Speaker, they are seated in your gallery, and I would ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present with your permission a petition signed by 39 individuals from Cochrane, Calgary, and Edmonton petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation."

Thank you.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the Assembly today a petition signed by 20 Edmontonians and Albertans. The petition calls for

the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. The first one is a copy of a news release from the Alberta Federation of Labour showing that workplace accident rates have doubled in the past 10 years in Alberta and immediate action is needed to make the workplace safer.

The second tabling is a copy of the May Week Festival calendar of events taking place in Edmonton from April 27 to May 9.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today a letter from the *National Post*, the contents of which may be in violation of the province's fair trading legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the information of the Assembly a report from the Pembina Institute for Appropriate Development entitled A Smart Electricity Policy for Alberta. This is an interesting read because it stresses energy conservation and efficiency. It is one of the cheapest sources of new electricity supply in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Mr. Eduard Zambo, a resident of Edmonton-Rutherford. Mr. Zambo is concerned about how the government determines the number of moose allocations in the province. I'm also tabling copies of replies Mr. Zambo received from the former Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Wickman.

My second tabling is five copies of A Smart Electricity Policy for Alberta: Enhancing the Alberta Advantage by the Pembina Institute for Appropriate Development. The report is authored by Andrew Pape-Salmon in collaboration with Robert Hornung, Rob Macintosh, and Tom Marr-Laing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to attend the annual general meeting of the YWCA of Edmonton last night, and I'd now like to table five copies of their 2000 annual report.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a program for volunteer appreciation which was held last night and which I attended at Rosslyn Place seniors lodge.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 61(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the financial statements as at March 31, 2000, of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Dean Lien, the Alberta Farmers' Advocate. The Farmers' Advocate has a long and proud history as a resource for farmers in our agricultural community in our province. Mr. Lien is seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask him to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all

members of the Assembly 23 special guests from the Milo community school. They were up long before many of us were awake this morning to get on a bus to be up here. Three of our 23 guests today are from our colleague the Minister of Learning's riding in the Siksika Nation. By the way, our Premier has an honorary title with the Siksika Nation, Ootsqui Piks, which means "bluebird." The other 14 are from Milo community school, and with them today are their teacher, Miss Branigan, and helpers from the community, Marianne Armstrong, Yvonne Umsheid, Sheryl Sletto, Mrs. Twyla Thompson, and Mrs. Dorothy Way, who is also the town administrator. I would like them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to introduce 46 students from Win Ferguson school in Fort Saskatchewan. They're accompanied by teachers Miss Joanne Hadley, Mrs. Pat Sprague, Ms Erin Bascello and also helpers Jennifer Kakoschke, Irene Freeman, Mark Parrish, Linda Sarchuk, and Cindy Houghton. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to introduce to you and through you to all the Members of this Legislative Assembly some longtime friends. There's a couple here named Ray and Lynda Enarson. They operate a turkey farm. It's actually in the riding of the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. With them are three very special students. They are kind of being rewarded today. They are in the enrichment class of the Rosebrier school, grade 7. Their names are Madelyn Enarson, Adrian Tinis, and Gregory Johnson. I'd ask if the five of them would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Speaker, it's indeed an honour to introduce to you Ms Halina Madey, who is accompanying today the ambassador of Poland and sitting in the members' gallery. Ms Madey is the vice-president of the Canadian Polish Congress, representing approximately 100,000 Albertans of Polish origin. I would encourage you to extend your warm welcome to Ms Halina Madey.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to introduce to you and to all members of the House a longtime friend of mine and a constituent who is seated in the public gallery today. When I'm out door-knocking and meeting folks in my constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona, many times I'm joined by Anita Kamal. She and her husband, Ted, are hardworking, dedicated volunteers, and I'm delighted that Anita is able to join us today. I'd ask her now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Leone and Paul Cardinal, who are in the members' gallery. Leone and Paul are

longtime residents and very strong and spirited community members of the city of St. Albert. Mr. Cardinal is also the owner and operator of two Dairy Queens in Edmonton, and certainly it's summertime, time to think about their treats. With that, I'd ask them to please stand, and if everyone would give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Admissibility of Questions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling on the Leader of the Official Opposition, I'd like to make a brief statement with respect to the rules governing the admissibility of questions during question period.

Over the past few days the chair has had to intervene on a number of occasions in the Oral Question Period because the nature of the question posed has either violated or come close to violating the rules of this Assembly. In these early days of this session the chair would like to ensure that the First Session of the 25th Legislature begins on the right tone.

The chair would like to highlight for all members the following guidelines for question period. They're outlined in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at pages 426 to 427.

A question should not

- be a statement, representation, argument or an expression of opinion;
- be hypothetical;
- seek an opinion . . . legal or otherwise . . .
- make a charge by way of a preamble to a question.

The chair would also like to refer members to *Beauchesne* paragraph 409(3), which states that a question "must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations."

In recent days there have been a number of questions which have been hypothetical. There have also been questions which have made charges based on legal interpretations. It is clear that questions which seek legal interpretations are not permitted. To use preambles in questions that contain legal interpretations which in some way require the rebuttal or confirmation of that legal interpretation is equally objectionable. In other words, members cannot seek to do indirectly that which is not permitted directly.

Once again the chair would caution members in the way they frame their questions and encourage members to review my memorandum of April 11 and the guidelines for Oral Question Period which are outlined in the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at pages 424 to 431 and *Beauchesne* paragraphs 407 to 414.

The chair realizes that question period is the time when the Assembly receives most of its attention, and this simply underlines the importance of members observing the rules of this Assembly to ensure the dignity and respect of this institution are maintained.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Supplementary Supply

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the second year in a row that supplementary supply has topped the \$1 billion mark. The Auditor General has pointed out that additional funding leads to increased expectations by departments of further funding in the future. My questions are to the Premier. What steps has the government taken to factor in such increases and to prevent those expectations?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you know, this government is committed to three-year business plans, and all expenditures are commensurate with the details outlined in those plans.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. The question dealt with: what are you doing to prevent the expectations of additional funding leading to a continued expectation that those supplementary supplies, the additional dollars, will be an ongoing type of process, part of your planning process?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to supplementary requisitions there was an anomaly this year, in 2001, as there was in 1997. Simply we had to requisition those funds to pay the bills in the absence of a budget. Now that we're down to the normal four- or perhaps five-year mandate of this government and the ability to bring in a budget year after year, the ability to bring in three-year business plans and update those plans, there shouldn't be a need for supplementary requisitions in the future, at least not as long as the mandate of this government runs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: given what you just said, that we should not be expecting these kinds of increased supplementary expenditures or increased requisitions, why do we have an \$813 million cushion in the budget this year?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it's been the practice of this government through prudent fiscal management to budget for cushions to accommodate the unexpected, Mr. Speaker, so we won't have to do precisely as the hon. member alludes to, and that is come back and ask for a special warrant, or a special requisition.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy and Utilities Board

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions again are to the Premier. The Premier has had two weeks since the past question on the role of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board in protecting Alberta consumers. Has the Premier asked the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board why they did not act to protect Albertans from the risk of high price increases last fall?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll defer to the hon. Minister of Energy, but indeed I did receive a briefing on the situation vis-a-vis the responsibility of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to assess a particular application from two perspectives: one is to make sure that there's a reasonable rate of return to the corporation and, secondly, that there is reasonable protection for the consumer.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. SMITH: Thank you. The matter, Mr. Speaker, is before the board now. They are hearing final arguments and will be bringing forth a decision reflecting the pricing differential of last year in due time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are they prepared to table

this report in the Legislature and distribute the results and the impact to Albertans so they can understand why that failure happened?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, all decisions of the AEUB are made public. They're available on the web site, and if it helps the Assembly and the opposition, I'd certainly personally bring a written copy here and table that report.

DR. NICOL: Again to the Premier, please, Mr. Speaker: given the failure of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board last fall, should Albertans forget about the AEUB protecting their interest and enter into their own risk management in the future?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is set up to provide a reasonable amount of protection for consumers and a reasonable rate of return for the corporations involved in supplying energy, whether it be electricity, oil products, petroleum products, or natural gas. That will always be the function of the board. I think the hon. minister has pointed out that the board takes this responsibility very seriously on behalf of both the suppliers and the consumers.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Swan Hills Waste Treatment Facility

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 the Premier said that the government was

out of the business of loans, guarantees, and investments to business . . . From now on if any one of these kinds of deals are to be made, they must be made right here in the Legislature and before the eyes of the public.

Section 49.1(2) of the Financial Administration Act states that the government may not "purchase shares" or

enter into a joint venture or partnership unless that transaction . . . [is] specifically authorized by or under

(a) an Act, or

(b) a subsisting regulation that was in force . . . before the commencement of this section.

My questions are to the Premier. Does the Premier stand by his comments from 1996?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Yes, I stand by those comments. I think I know where the hon. member is heading on this particular issue. She's probably going to allude to the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. The situation relative to that plant is somewhat different, Mr. Speaker, and I can assure the hon. member before she asks the question that we're working as diligently as we possibly can to find a buyer for that plant.

MS CARLSON: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that the government's involvement with that plant is not exempt from any of the terms of the Financial Administration Act?

THE SPEAKER: It was just a few minutes ago that I made a statement with respect to legal interpretations. Please proceed with your third question.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, then, will the Premier table the copies of all documents relating to its reacquisition of the plant and finally bring this deal before the members of this Assembly and the people of Alberta and include in that tabling the information about the compliance or noncompliance with the Financial Administration Act?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I would have to consult with the hon. Minister of Environment, but I can't see why that information ought not to be made public. That is the information relative to why we got the plant back and why we're in the position that we are today. I will have that discussion with the hon. Minister of Environment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Negative Option Billing

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently my family received a letter from the *National Post* newspaper stating that starting next month \$10 per month would be deducted from my wife's bank account for a newspaper subscription she did not agree to pay for. I tabled that letter earlier today. This appears to be negative option billing, which is prohibited by the province's Fair Trading Act. To the Minister of Government Services: what steps will the government take to put a stop to this example of negative option billing?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Edmonton-Highlands is stating the facts in this case. After the documentation that he provided in his tabling earlier today and the courtesy call that he gave to me and my department giving us a heads-up on this particular issue, we have determined already in a call to the *National Post* and to the *Edmonton Journal* – the Fair Trading Act in Alberta is in effect, and it would appear that this is a case of negative option sales and that there would be offences under the Fair Trading Act of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table for the Assembly and for the information of all members of the Assembly as well as the public the Fair Trading Act and what it has to say about negative option billing and negative option sales.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please. It was this Assembly that passed the act. It's really not required to table the document in the Assembly.

Please proceed.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister please indicate how widespread this kind of marketing practice is – and I appreciate very much his response – and how many companies are engaged in it?

MR. COUTTS: This is the first indication that we've heard, Mr. Speaker, of this particular case of negative option billing, but let me tell you that we could hear more of it in the future. Let me point out that sections 20 and 23 of the Fair Trading Act say that it is not an offence to provide goods or services to consumers as part of a free trial offer but that it is an offence to offer goods or services to a customer when they do not request that good or that service. So anyone that receives this letter is not liable to pay at this particular time. But it does make it an offence to supply goods and services to a consumer using negative option practices, which are laid out.

So as assurance for the people out there, our consumer services branch will be continuing to investigate this issue and will be meeting with the *Journal* and the *National Post* to try and resolve this situation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the minister's satisfactory response to my questions I don't need my third supplementary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Drought Assistance

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have had a beautiful winter. That's not an opinion; that's a fact. I think I had to shovel my driveway only about three or four times all winter. Unfortunately, what is welcome to one is not always welcome to another. The farmers of Alberta are facing a possible drought in the year 2001. My question is to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Hon. minister, Alberta is currently experiencing very low levels of precipitation and ground moisture. Farmers entered the fall of 2000 with dry soil and empty dugouts, and the lack of snowfall this winter has many of them very concerned with how they're going to provide enough moisture to their crops and livestock. My question to the minister is: have you toured the potential drought areas and seen the severity of this situation, and if so, what steps is the government taking to help farmers who are facing potentially one of the worst droughts in decades?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. We had relatively low snowfall in most of the province this winter. We've had very low rainfall, again in most of the province, this spring. We were fortunate some two to three weeks ago to get a very heavy snowfall in the mountains, which helped our reservoir levels somewhat. It didn't bring them even to a minimum level but did help.

Have I toured the area? Actually, Mr. Speaker, I live in it, so I drive through it quite often. Living where I do, I can take many routes to the city, and I often do. However, the issue is more widespread than the south, and there are areas of northern Alberta that have problems. We have a lack of moisture now which is affecting dugouts, in some cases wells on groundwater depletion. To respond to that, about March 29 we made an announcement reducing the rates for a water pumping program that we have in place, and because it was before the Assembly came together, I have provided some copies that I'll table with the Assembly.

As for the continuing concern of weather, Environment Canada tells us that we're going to have perhaps above normal precipitation. We'll wait and see.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the water pumping program will help some producers, but many of the farmers in my constituency of Drayton Valley-Calmar as well as in neighbouring constituencies are telling us that the water pumping is not a viable option for them because of a lack of surface water available. My question to the same minister is: what is the Alberta government doing to assist farmers who cannot take advantage of the water pumping program?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things that we can do to assist and are doing. We do have the PFRA, which has a long history in this province in water management, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration. They have some programs of assistance, and we are certainly putting people in touch with them. Our district offices have specialists who can work with producers on

means of conservation and utilization of the best practices for conserving water.

One of the other things that we're fortunate about in this province is that in some areas we've had water co-ops develop. We have reservoirs and systems that we can pump from.

We've been working with Alberta Environment, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and PFRA to look at an overall drought strategy, because Alberta is subject to these changes in weather. I would encourage any producers here who are having those specific problems to contact their district offices or indeed our office or the MLA offices, and we'll put them in touch with the people that are able to help them.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please, no preamble.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question, again to the same minister: I understand that an irrigation fuel rebate is being planned, but how is drought assistance specifically dealt with in Budget 2001?

2:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is of course the opportunity for irrigation farmers to use the rebate on the fuel or natural gas for pumping purposes over the four months of the pumping time. Budget 2001 has some drought alleviation initiatives in it. One is the crop insurance, the safety net program. One is the water pumping program.

It's very difficult to forecast in April a drought. So, Mr. Speaker, the commitment of this government is that we'll monitor this situation, and we'll respond accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

School Utilization Formula

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An arbitrary space/use formula imposed by the government is forcing the closure of schools across the province. In some cases the loss of a school may mean the loss of a community. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. Given that the Minister of Learning tells us there now is money to reduce class sizes and thus more classrooms will be needed, will the utilization rates of districts with small schools now be adjusted?

MR. LUND: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the government does not close schools. That is a function of the board. That is the jurisdiction of the board. The reason that we look at the utilization, as I mentioned once before in this House, is that it is extremely important. If there is an opportunity to increase the utilization of a building, your percentage spent on things like operation and maintenance and utilities is much lower, and therefore you can put more money right into the classroom so that the children have a better opportunity to learn. Really, that has got to be our primary objective, that we increase the opportunity for young people to learn.

DR. MASSEY: I'll try it again, Mr. Speaker. Given that reducing grade 1 classrooms to 17 students could require one new classroom for every three or four that are now in operation, has the government asked school boards for class size reduction space needs? Have you asked them how much space they're going to need to reduce class sizes?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that we've recognized that some of the formula that is currently being used for

capacity needs to be revisited, and we are doing that currently. I personally would like to see us move from looking at so many pupils in a classroom to, rather, a certain amount of space for a student. Of course, that's going to vary depending on whether it's elementary, junior high, or senior high. So that, in fact, would address some of what the hon. member is talking about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the government truly respect local decision-making by allocating school boards block funding for school construction so that they can make the decisions?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what he means by block funding. I think it's extremely important that we work with school boards and we will work with school jurisdictions to make sure that we are, in fact, using taxpayers' dollars to the best advantage. As I said earlier, it's really important that we look at the function of the school and how it is affecting the ability or the opportunity for children to learn, because that has to be the end that we are aiming at: how do we get the best for the child?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

School Funding

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Learning. This week the Alberta government infused an additional \$848 million over three years into education. In addition to the 3.5 percent increase in the basic instruction grant, this government also gave school boards an envelope of funding to address teachers' salaries. Can the minister explain the rationale behind targeting funding specifically for teachers' salaries?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As everyone in this Assembly knows, we just went through a rather long and extensive consultation process with Albertans called the general election. I'm sure everyone in here heard very similar concerns from the people of Alberta about class size, about classroom issues. As a matter of fact, the Alberta Teachers' Association even put out \$250,000 for an ad campaign to raise the issue of class size and classroom issues. Budget 2001 addresses that.

The other concern that I heard during the election campaign as well is that the people of Alberta, myself included, wanted teachers to be compensated fairly. Mr. Speaker, we have put \$135 million into compensating teachers fairly. We put in another \$115 million the first year – the first year – to ensure that boards had the flexibility to deal with classroom issues such as class size, such as literacy, such as numeracy, all these other issues that I heard, that you heard, that everyone in this Assembly heard throughout the last election campaign.

MRS. ADY: My second question is also to the Minister of Learning. Can the minister explain what the basic instruction grant dollars can be used for?

DR. OBERG: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker. In the basic instruction grant we increased the grants by 3.5 percent. This makes it roughly \$115 million this year, \$225 million next year. These dollars allow

the school board to deal with issues such as I just mentioned – class size, literacy, numeracy – but they can also use these dollars for teachers' salaries. The bottom line is that they can use these dollars for what they feel are the most important needs in their school jurisdiction.

MRS. ADY: My final question is again to the Minister of Learning. In this Assembly the minister has spoken about programs such as the Alberta initiative for school improvement, or AISI. Will and can we count on the AISI grants being continued in spite of this increase in spending?

DR. OBERG: The short answer to that is absolutely yes. The Alberta initiative for school improvement program has been an incredibly successful program and continues to be an incredibly successful program. We have 760 different initiatives around the province on how to improve schools. The \$68 million per annum will continue, those dollars will continue, and I look forward to great results from the AISI.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the minister of health's parallel private/public system of MRI service delivery physicians determine whether a patient's need for an MRI is urgent or not. If the physician determines the case is urgent, then the public system will pay for the MRI, but if the physician determines that the case is not urgent, the patient may face a long delay and be encouraged to pay out-of-pocket costs at a for-profit clinic. To the minister of health: will the minister ensure that private MRI clinics charge no more to private customers than they charge the public system, thereby eliminating any possible incentive for physicians to direct patients to their own for-profit MRI clinics?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that it's appropriate that physicians make decisions on a medical basis, not based on anything else.

I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that by December 2001 the province of Alberta will be going to a scan rate of 24 per 1,000. That will be the highest scan rate in the country. That will represent roughly 73,000 scans. That compares with the 20,000 we did three years ago, the 30,000 we did two years ago, some 45,000 that we're going to be doing this year. So it will be a dramatic increase brought about as a result of working with radiologists, working with physicians to determine that this is an appropriate scan rate and the appropriate investment by the provincial government in purchasing new publicly funded MRIs.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the minister's unclear answer, perhaps, I'm wondering once again if his department will take safeguards to ensure that there are no financial incentives for patients to be steered to for-profit clinics.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we have a great deal more faith in physicians than the hon. member does.

DR. TAFT: Would the minister, then, confirm that there is a possibility of for-profit motives entering doctors' decisions on patient care?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the same answer as to the previous question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Electricity Costs

MR. OUELLETTE: Mr. Speaker, much has been said about the increase in electricity prices in Alberta. This morning a report was released by the Parkland Institute comparing the costs of electricity in Alberta and B.C. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Economic Development. Has the rate of business failures increased in Alberta as a result of increased electricity costs?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. NORRIS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My dear mother always told me that when somebody criticizes you, consider the source, and knowing what I know about the Parkland Institute, that's about as much respect as I'll give that question.

However, with regards to the question about electricity affecting business, I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we are concerned about that. The Alberta advantage is paramount to our business plan, and when anything impacts the Alberta advantage, we look at it very closely. As all hon. members know, part of the cost of any supply is the demand for that supply. We're victims of our own success in that Alberta has a white-hot economy, and demand for the supply has gone through the roof. As a result we are looking at that very closely. But I must tell you that Calgary, the great city to the south, has been rated number 2 for growth in all of Canada, and Edmonton, the great city we are currently in, has been rated number 1.

In answer to the hon. member's question, electricity supply and the cost of it are very important to us, but it doesn't appear to be affecting the economy. In fact, it seems to be much better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What evidence does the minister have of increased business activity in spite of increased electricity costs?

MR. NORRIS: Thank you for the question. I have a lot of very substantial evidence, Mr. Speaker, of outstanding growth. Certainly 5.6 percent growth in the year 2000. There's another prediction of 4 and a half percent GDP growth in the year 2001. The number of business incorporations is significantly up. The number of business incorporations as opposed to bankruptcies is now at a 17 to 1 ratio, which is the envy of the nation.

I can tell you that I was very fortunate just recently, an hour and a half ago, to be at a function where a company – am I allowed to mention the company, Mr. Speaker? – by the name of YottaYotta had a grand opening. That company, I am very, very pleased to report, chose Edmonton over five other cities, four of which were American cities. They chose Edmonton – I had a wonderful chat with the president – because of Edmonton's and Alberta's outstanding vision and growth. It's a wonderful place to do business.

I'd like to turn it back to the hon. the Premier.

THE SPEAKER: No. We don't work that way.
The hon. member.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the hon. Minister of Energy. Does the minister know the estimated impact of electricity deregulation on Alberta's economy?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, we do know that a competitive marketplace occupies now an efficient marketplace for 75 percent of the electricity sold in Alberta. We know that there are consumers that make up the remaining 25 percent we're working with. We need to move and find new and easier solutions that drive down the rates of power.

Mr. Speaker, one is, of course, more power: more power like the 80 megawatts announced last week by TransCanada; the 80 megawatts announced by PanCanadian Petroleum; the over 600 megawatts that were announced for 2000 in distributed generation and cogeneration; the tremendous jobs; the investment that that creates.

I think that when you compare the investment profile of this province to the investment profile of the province next door that's going to an election, there's a tremendous amount of difference. This province has surpassed the gross domestic product of that province with 700,000 fewer people, Mr. Speaker. There are 25 percent less people.

To talk more about the specific differences of government, there are others that are going to comment.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Supports for Independence

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To quote Delbert McClinton: many people worry about being rich and skinny but wind up poor and fat. Unfortunately, the poor in Alberta do not have that luxury because of our low SFI rates. My first question this afternoon is to the Premier. Why is the Premier forcing the poorest of the poor in this wealthiest of provinces to have to wait until the budget year 2002 before they will see even a pittance added to their welfare rates?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, "a pittance." First of all, there's no such thing in this province as welfare rates. We have as a matter of policy a change in name from welfare to supports for independence, and it means exactly that. We've always said in this province that we will do what we possibly can to protect those who truly need our help in society, those who cannot work. We have Aids to Daily Living. We have assured income for the severely handicapped. We also said that for those who want a hand up rather than just a handout, we will do all we possibly can. We will provide a reasonable degree of subsistence. We will provide numerous additional programs to get people back into the workforce through skills upgrading and job retraining. We will offer subsidies for education and subsidies for day care. We will look after the essentials of life such as health care premiums and Blue Cross premiums and other unexpected expenses. But the philosophy of this government – and believe me, most jurisdictions believe in what we're trying to do philosophically and from a policy point of view – is to get people away from the dependence of welfare and back into the workforce and to become productive citizens.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Given that a key issue identified by the social economy sector at the Alberta growth summit in 1997 was to improve our quality of life, Albertans must have an active and meaningful participation in the decision-making process. Will the hon. Premier please allow

recipients of SFI, or welfare, to be part of the review of the very rates that they depend on for their family income?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'd be surprised if they weren't part of the review. The hon. minister is not with us today to respond, so I will take the question under advisement and provide the hon. member with a response.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Given that natural gas rebates are to expire any day soon and energy costs are so high, can the hon. Premier, please, instead of waiting until next year to increase SFI or welfare rates, do it whenever the weather turns cold again, perhaps as soon as September?

Thank you.

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not true. Yes, the current rebate program, the rebate program on natural gas that provided each and every household consumer with \$150 a month from January through to the end of April, comes to an end, and the \$6 a gigajoule program that provided relief to farms, institutions, businesses and so on, that comes to an end, but as of July 1 a new program kicks in that is geared to the anticipated price of natural gas. As you know, the electricity rebate goes until the end of this year. At that time, it will be reviewed.

This gives me an opportunity to also comment on the Parkland Institute study. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: You'll have to find another opportunity.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Judicial System

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The long delays in Alberta courts are causing unnecessary hardship to victims and their families and are creating the risk that charges might be dismissed because of the delays. Underscoring the seriousness of this problem, Justice Gary Cioni made the following statement in a Calgary courtroom last week: there's going to come a point where charges are going to be dismissed because of institutional reasons. To the Minister of Justice. Does the minister share Justice Cioni's concern, and will he outline what these institutional reasons are or might be that are responsible for these delays?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, we would always be concerned if charges were dismissed because of institutional delay or for any other reason other than an appropriate hearing within an appropriate time. We would be concerned about that type of delay and that type of a reaction to delay by the courts. In fact, we've seen the length of time to trial in our provincial courts being reduced year over year, so we don't anticipate that type of a problem.

We're certainly trying to improve the time to trial by bringing in new programs, such as our early case resolution program, which was the subject of a very successful pilot project in Edmonton. We've shortened the time to trial. One of the ways we're doing that is by hiring seven new Crown prosecutors to look at files early and determine what files can be taken to an early resolution. We have an early resolution court, and that project has been expanded across the province. All of these are administrative processes that we're taking into account, which are aimed directly at getting cases to trial that need to go to trial as early as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for taking the questions seriously, but I have a serious concern here. In his own business plan there is something stated here which I hope that he is aware of . . .

THE SPEAKER: Let's get to the question, hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The business plan says that the department is trying to match the national median time with its delays. The national median time is 84 days. Our median time in 1999 was 80 days. Is the minister in agreement with the business plan?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please recognize that we're having a debate on the budget as well and the business plan. This is the question period.

MR. HANCOCK: With that admonishment, Mr. Speaker, I would say that this is something that would be appropriate to be discussed during estimates, and I thank the hon. member for pointing out something which is a very appropriate concern to raise.

We try and have appropriate standards to measure success, but some of our statistics are quite frankly too old; 1999 numbers are not appropriate anymore, so we're working very hard to be able to get statistics and across-country statistics which are more current. At our last meeting of ministers of justice in Nunavut in September we addressed this question and asked – I forget the name of the institute, but it's the national institute which deals with criminal justice statistics – if there couldn't be a process whereby we could have the crime rate earlier, have the rates across the country earlier for comparison purposes. So one of the reasons why we're aiming at the national median, which is lower than what we already have, is that we expect the national median to be much lower than it currently is in those old statistics.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I just want to seek the assurance of the minister that he will recommend that his department drop the national median as a guide if the national median happens to be higher than the provincial median.

MR. HANCOCK: We're only aiming to get better, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Organized Crime

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent gang-related murders, shootings, and firebombings in southeast Edmonton have prompted concerns among all Edmontonians and all Albertans about their safety. They fear for themselves and for their children, who might tragically end up in the line of fire. My question is to the hon. Solicitor General. What is being done to protect innocent Albertans from these gang members who seem to have so little regard for human life?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, let me say clearly that these shocking crimes have no place in Edmonton and they have no place in Alberta and actually they have no place in Canada. We as a government will not stand idly by and let these criminals steal our sense of peace and well-being. We believe our communities are safe

places to live, they're safe places to work, and they're safe places to raise our families. Alberta has the lowest crime rate in western Canada.

There are three ways the department is going right now to keep Alberta safe. First, we are targeting organized crime; secondly, we are addressing serious and violent crime; and thirdly, we are playing a strong role in encouraging the federal government to toughen up youth justice legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These recent shootings are a visible indication of the growing problem of organized crime in Alberta. Outlaw motorcycle gangs are now established in Alberta along with other crime organizations. Through you to the hon. Solicitor General: what is being done to fight the serious threat of organized crime in Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government takes the threat of organized crime very seriously. Under the provincial organized and serious crime strategy the department provides \$2.4 million annually to the Criminal Intelligence Service, commonly known as CISA. Since 1998 CISA's joint-force operations have resulted in numerous criminal charges against key figures in organized crime, one of which I was a part of two weeks ago, Operation Shadow, which was a very successful operation in Calgary. We remain confident that the police are doing everything they can to investigate these crimes and bring justice.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, without a preamble this time, please.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of these recent shootings and the increasing gang activity and organized crime in general, many Albertans feel less safe. What does the Solicitor General have to say to these Albertans?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, the crime rate in Alberta is decreasing. Again, Alberta has the lowest property and violent crime rates in western Canada. There has been a drop in youth crime. While it's good to see that the crime rates are going down, we can't become complacent. The Solicitor General will continue to work with partners in policing, the judicial system, and the communities to reduce crime in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Water Quality Testing

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the key concerns expressed by municipal officials at the recent convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties was the sustainability of the quality and quantity of Alberta's water supply. An important part of protecting water quality is the government's support of water quality monitoring and testing. In May of this past year the government was approached at the standing policy committee on agriculture, environment, and rural affairs to get out of the business of being in the business of water testing. My questions today are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What is the status of the government's plans for increased private testing of Alberta's water supply?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises an important issue, I believe, that's important to all Albertans in terms of the quality of water that we all enjoy and certainly we don't take for granted. But both my colleagues the ministers of Environment and Agriculture, were working in partnership on this important initiative, and I wish to inform this House that as soon as we get our findings back, we'll be reporting back to this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:30

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What level of increased costs should municipalities be budgeting for in the face of more responsibility for water testing?

MR. BOUTILIER: Again, the prime objective here is safe drinking water, and we will not in any way jeopardize that principle of safe drinking water. Working again with municipalities, we are endeavouring to ensure that, number one, that principle is achieved, which it is being achieved, but also the importance of working together with our municipalities, which I'm very proud to say is continuing each and every day.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Will the minister make a commitment to Alberta's local governments that they will not face increased costs for testing their public water supply?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, the member raises an important point, and it is that of the partnerships. Really a partnership is about: what can we do for you that you can't do, and also, how do we work together in helping each other? We're endeavouring to do that. I'm going to be meeting with municipalities across this province, and as we continue to do that, I'm going to be listening very closely to what municipalities have to say and their feedback.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary Courthouse

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Increasingly I am questioned by various people working in the judicial system in Calgary, including constituents of mine in Calgary-Lougheed, about the progress of the long-awaited consolidated courthouse in Calgary, which has been in the works for as long as anybody can remember. The fragmented system of courts has 54 courtrooms found in six separate buildings spread out over downtown Calgary. With ATCO trailers soon to be used for criminal proceedings and the Court of Appeal Building shut down recently due to toxic mould, there is no room for expansion. Technology is outdated, and there is duplication and inefficiency and inconvenience and confusion caused to the users of the courts. Clearly, Calgarians are not being well served. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Justice. In that one of the core businesses of Alberta Justice is to provide Albertans with access to courts, can the minister advise if there is a commitment by this government to proceed with the building of a new Calgary courthouse?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been working very diligently with Infrastructure, which of course is responsible for building. Justice and Infrastructure have been working very long and hard with the courts, with the stakeholders in the Calgary community towards a resolution of the problem. It is a serious problem when we have six different facilities. We have duplication in prisoner handling services and duplication in law libraries, duplication in services. More importantly, as was pointed out by the justice summit, access to justice and access to the courts by Albertans needs to be simplified. There needs to be a straightforward process, and access needs to be improved.

So, yes, we're working very diligently on resolving the problem. It's not a simple problem. Because of the process and the way the courts have built up over the years in Calgary and the way it's developed, it's not an easy problem to resolve. It's not a quick resolution, but it's one that's in the works. It's one that we're working on, and it's one that we're working with the stakeholders to resolve.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS GRAHAM: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Given that the minister acknowledges the obvious need for this new facility, why is it that the project appears to have reached a complete standstill?

MR. HANCOCK: Appearances are deceiving, Mr. Speaker. The project is not in fact at a standstill. There has been ongoing development in it. There have also been ongoing problems. As the hon. member pointed out, the Court of Appeal problem surfaced in January of this year, and the Court of Appeal had to vacate the building they were in. That created some problems. We've got problems with respect to renovations of the existing building that's being used for the family and youth court in Calgary in terms of the ability to do renovations within the existing code and those sorts of issues. Those types of issues have come forward to cause some problems in the process, but we're working very diligently with Infrastructure, with the stakeholders to take this project forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister. Given that even if construction for a new courthouse began today, it would take several years before the courthouse was finished, what is the minister and his department doing to solve the immediate problems of the Court of Appeal Building that's closed and the overcrowded Provincial Court?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're attempting to work co-operatively with the Court of Appeal and the Court of Queen's Bench in Calgary to provide appropriate interim accommodation for the Court of Appeal. We're hoping that the facilities within the Court of Queen's Bench can be made available for courtroom facilities. We'll obviously have to locate the Court of Appeal in terms of office space elsewhere from the existing Court of Appeal Building in the interim, but we're hopeful that both of those will be interim solutions and that the long-term solution will be in place as early as possible. We're going to have to work co-operatively with all three levels of court in the interim period of time.

We're going to have to ask for some out-of-the-box thinking, quite frankly. We may have to ask for some accommodation in moving

around the court sitting times, for example. We have court facilities, Mr. Speaker, that sit empty in the summer. We should be able to use those court facilities at other times by other levels of court. We need to look at how effectively we're using our courts. The Court of Queen's Bench is being used very, very actively, and it's very, very difficult to ask them to accommodate the Court of Appeal. But I think if we all get together and use our heads and look for the opportunities, we can provide an interim accommodation and do that on a basis which will be entirely satisfactory until the final project is completed.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members. In a few seconds from now I'll call upon the first of four hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, but first of all, just a brief comment with respect to one section of our Routine today, and that is the section known as Tabling Returns and Reports. It's not required that two members table the same report in the House. One tabling is quite sufficient, and I'd ask members to perhaps listen to see who has tabled what so that the next member doesn't stand up and table exactly the same report. That's simply a waste of time of the Assembly.

Might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a distinct honour and privilege to introduce a member of my constituency who is a former page of this House. She is seated in the public gallery. I'd ask her to rise and for us to give the traditional greeting to Erin Gurnett, who's with us this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you three young ladies from the wonderful constituency of Calgary-Shaw. They are grade 6 students at one of the few schools in the Calgary-Shaw constituency, Midnapore elementary, which also has the distinction of having my own children present at it. Their names are Jessica Berry, Heather Casson, and Alanna McInnes. They are seated in the public gallery. I would like to ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak about Alberta's teachers and Alberta's 2001 excellence in teaching awards. Alberta teachers are highly motivated, dedicated, and the best trained in this country. Their constant focus on improving student achievement shows in our results when compared nationwide. Alberta teachers are some of the most generous citizens in this province in giving their time to the life of their school outside of their classroom assignment. Their commitment to cocurricular and extracurricular activities and the exceptional amount of time

they volunteer to their community is invaluable. I believe it is most appropriate to recognize their contributions during Volunteer Week and on the eve of Education Week.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the creation of the excellence in teaching awards program by this government in 1989, students, parents, colleagues, and community members have been given the opportunity to recognize outstanding teachers. Since the inception of this recognition program nearly 5,500 teachers have been nominated. Anyone who has ever been nominated for an award knows how appreciated and valued one feels. This year 445 teachers have been nominated across this province. From that group 131 finalists have been selected. Twenty-two teachers will be honoured with provincial certificates at a dinner and awards ceremony in Calgary on May 5, next week.

2:40

I want to congratulate all of the nominees, finalists, and the provincial certificate award winners. They are fine examples of what the teaching profession is all about. I want to thank all of the teachers of Alberta for their dedication to the education of our children.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not point out to the hon. members why Edmonton-Meadowlark is Alberta's premier constituency. Edmonton-Meadowlark has four of the nominees. These outstanding teachers are Zenia Nemish at Meadowlark, Bob Nerenberg and Shawn Peterson at J.P., and Magdalena Tundak at St. Justin Catholic. Finally, three of the finalists are from Victoria School of Performing & Visual Arts, a school that I've had some association with for a number of years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Bulk Removal of Water

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Council of the Canadian Federation of University Women represents six CFUW clubs in the province with a combined membership of over 400 university women graduates who are active in public affairs including health, education, environment, peace, justice, and human rights. They are affiliated with 124 additional clubs across Canada with a total membership of approximately 10,000 university women. Membership concerns led them to passing a resolution and establishing a policy that urges the government of Canada and the provincial and territorial governments to take all measures necessary to prohibit the bulk removal of water from any ecosystem.

The Canadian Federation of University Women, Alberta Council fully supports this policy and wishes to express their concerns regarding the need to protect Canada's fresh water. They do not use the word "export" as they do not condone the sale of water as a commodity. As the world's population and industries continue to grow, demand for fresh water will escalate. They believe that the transportation of water could cause a shift in the global water balance, affecting not only local, regional, and global ecological integrity but also the health of Canada's people and would endanger our communities for future generations.

Their resolutions are as follows: they urge all levels of government to

1. be an advocate for and support legislation at all government levels that prohibits the bulk removal of water from any ecosystem.
2. co-operate with other levels of government and reopen negotiations on the Canada-wide Accord of Environmental Harmonization . . .
3. seek amendments to NAFTA that include a more comprehen-

sive definition of "natural state" as it pertains to the description of water. The existing lack of clarity in NAFTA could provide a loophole through which parties could access Canadian freshwater resources. Should this occur, Canadians could find [themselves] obliged to honour long term contracts when detrimental to Canadian interests.

This issue is a serious concern for their members, and they urge all levels of government to protect the freshwater resources for all Canadians and future generations.

Calgary Courthouse

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, further to my questions earlier today to the Minister of Justice, I rise again to speak about the pressing need for a new consolidated courthouse in Calgary to bring Calgary in line with the integrated courthouses in other Canadian cities, including Edmonton, and many other towns and cities in the province of Alberta. In doing so, I hope to raise awareness about the inadequacy of the existing system of courts and why this government can't continue to delay taking action.

Mr. Speaker, proper court facilities are central to the successful administration of justice in any community and the preservation of order in any civil society. They are an important symbol to the public and inspire respect for our whole administration of justice, and they should not only be functional but should have the dignity that is appropriate to them.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, we are coming perilously close to losing the confidence of the public in our system of courts in Calgary. The facts are – and I highlighted some of these earlier. The courts are fragmented. They are overcrowded. There is duplication and inefficiency happening in the administration, and the users of the courts are not being served. It is very inconvenient, and it's very confusing. As long as I can remember – and I've been in Calgary for going on 16 years – these problems and the same situation have been existing, and it is only getting worse with the growing population being experienced in Calgary.

For a number of years there have been committees representing all three levels of court and government meeting year-in and year-out devising various concepts for improving the system. In June of 1996 a formal report was submitted for a new facility, and here we are and nothing has changed. I urge our government to give the people of Calgary a proper court facility.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

International Day of Mourning

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sixth International Day of Mourning will be observed Saturday, April 28. April 28 is recognized by the United Nations and by more than 70 countries around the world as a day to remember workers killed, disabled, or injured in the workplace and workers afflicted with industrial disease. In 1991 the Parliament of Canada designated this as a national day of mourning for all those workers.

Shocking statistics released yesterday by the Alberta Federation of Labour show that workplace accidents have nearly doubled in the past 10 years and that last year alone 118 workers were killed at work. These statistics would indicate that in Alberta workplaces are becoming more dangerous and more hazardous year after year. Injuries and illnesses that occur at our places of work are a serious matter, and making these places safe is a goal that is attainable.

Employers need to know that they cannot get away with infractions to health and safety laws and regulations. Political will has to be there to prosecute employers who break the law. It's crucial that

government employers and labour unions work together to eliminate death and accidents in workplaces in this province.

I will be attending a memorial service at Edmonton City Hall this weekend to show our respect to those workers who are no longer with us. I trust some other colleagues will also be there. These Albertans deserve to be remembered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the Government House Leader to share with us the projected government business for April 30 to May 3.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, April 30, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we would anticipate dealing with Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001; Bill 4, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001; and Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001. Time permitting, Committee of the Whole on bills 1 and 2 and address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, day 6 of 10. Monday evening at 8 under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply as per the schedule tabled earlier with the House, day 1 of the main estimates and the estimates for the departments of Sustainable Resource Development and Municipal Affairs.

Tuesday, May 1, 2001, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, second reading as per progress Monday and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders again in Committee of Supply as per the schedule tabled, the estimates for the departments of Infrastructure and Transportation, and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, May 2, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply, day 3 as designated pursuant to the House leaders' agreement, the main estimates for Health and Wellness; address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; and thereafter as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 3, under Government Bills and Orders Committee of Supply as designated, the main estimates for Learning; Committee of the Whole in supplementary and interim supply on bills 5 and 6; address in reply to the Speech from the Throne; and as per the Order Paper.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on this Sunday, April 29, our Clerk will celebrate his 56th birthday.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 24: Mr. Vandermeer]

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

2:50

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure, pride, and excitement that I rise today to respond to the throne speech by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and give my maiden speech in this House.

Before I begin, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your acclamation as Speaker, and also to the Deputy Speaker and Deputy Chairman of Committees my sincere congratulations. I would also like to congratulate the hon. the Premier on his leadership to a resounding victory for our party as well to all members in this House on their election.

I would like to say a few words about the election we've just passed. The hon. Minister of Justice made a very interesting comment in his address to the House a few days ago. He mentioned that residents looked at the progress of the province and the local economies as a benchmark from which to judge the history of this government. The hon. member mentioned that Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert benefited from this election, from this amazing economic activity, and indeed that is correct.

However, Mr. Speaker, the good people of the riding I represent also wanted to be a part of our team and the leadership which we had to offer. I would be remiss if I did not mention the fact that over a hundred volunteers from the riding worked very hard to see this day. They spent countless hours door-knocking with me, on signs, on mailings, and on the phone, listening and talking to the people of the riding of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. I wish to publicly in this House thank them for all of their fantastic support.

For the riding that I represent, Mr. Speaker, it was a time for change, from representation in opposition to representation in government. The citizens of the riding I represent made a clear choice, and I am humbled by the trust they have placed in me.

The walls of this room have seen and heard many things in the history of the province, and upon entering here for the first time as an MLA elect, I was struck by the enormous responsibility which each of us in this room bared to the people of this province and to our constituents and our children. This is where we will be making laws that may very well affect every citizen of this great province. We must bear this responsibility with integrity, wisdom, common sense, and a desire to do what is right for this province. What we do here may well affect our children's children, and that is a responsibility that I commit to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of this House, that I will never take lightly.

The residents in the riding of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert elected me to represent them here in this House and at the caucus table, and this I will do. I am aware that expectations are high and challenges exist. I would like to speak to you a little bit about what I heard before the campaign, during, and some afterwards.

Mr. Speaker, energy and energy costs are on the minds of Albertans, and my constituency is no different. Her Honour's throne speech said that the government will work to ensure long-term energy for all Albertans. I spoke during the campaign about that and asked the constituents who they thought could best handle this problem. I said that the Conservative Party and its leadership was the right choice to ensure long-term, stable energy for all Albertans. Based on the results of the election, I would have to say that they agreed with me. I know that they are also happy that this was in the throne speech. We have many family farms which depend on a reliable source of energy at a reasonable cost. Farmers know about the economies of supply and demand. They understand that supply must exceed demand in order for prices to drop. We still have

challenges in small businesses and in groups who are looking to us to help them through this period of a demand crunch.

It's no easy task and we know that, Mr. Speaker, but we are not shirking away from it. We will face it head-on, as is the history of this government and this leadership. This government is a government that recognizes the problems and puts forward solutions. It does what it says it's going to do, and that's what Albertans wanted.

The throne speech references Bill 1, which will formalize the rebate program on natural gas, something that Albertans said to me over and over that we should do. Albertans trust the government and this leader to do what is right for our energy problems, and you need not look further than the results of March 12, 2001.

Another major concern for my constituents is their health care. It is their health care, Mr. Speaker, not this government's, not the federal government's. It's about service to them and the ability to continue to do that in the future for generations to come. I was told on many occasions that health care must be reasonable, accessible, timely, and, very importantly, sustainable. There is general agreement that our frontline staff need help. They need to be a part of the team, and we need to address the issues of morale, staffing, and service.

It was on many occasions which I stated my commitment to our publicly funded health care system, and I have no problem in saying that, because I believe in this government's commitment to that system. The throne speech says:

The government's priorities for health care in the next year will focus on access to health services, illness prevention, and effective regional governance.

Mr. Speaker, we have some major challenges in health care as well. The world's advances in technology and treatment may be moving further ahead faster than we are able to debate the social and economic issues they create. We're living longer, and that's a wonderful thing, but like all wonderful things it brings about further issues.

One of those is long-term care and the expanding demand our healthier aging population has. In my riding, Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. Boundaries for long-term care are an issue, one which I and my colleagues want to find solutions to working with the RHAs. The people in my riding do not want me to complain about one level of government or authority. They expect us to work together as a team. We know what the problems are. We want to find the solutions.

Another key issue of concern for my constituents is education, and I could spend a great deal of time talking about this issue, because it took a great deal of time during the campaign. I know, Mr. Speaker, that all of my colleagues had the same experience. I also know that there is not one Albertan that I have ever met that said we wanted a poor education for our children and not one Albertan who ever said to me that we want to export our best and brightest out of the province.

Mr. Speaker, my constituents want the best possible education for their children, for my children. They want it to be measurable and applicable while also preparing young Albertans to face a global world. No one in this room would argue that grade level K through 3 students on average would do better in a smaller class size. However, other factors are also important at these levels.

We as citizens of this province have elected representatives to school boards who we have given the responsibility to make the decisions on how best to deliver this education to the students. Now in the recent budget we have ensured that funding levels allow flexibility for these boards to do just that. But is the measure of success we want to use that we spend the most or that our students are prepared to meet the world that is fast coming up to meet them?

I support smaller class sizes, but all five of the boards in my constituency do not want this government to legislate class size to them. My goal, Mr. Speaker, is to work with these boards as a partner and try to achieve the common objectives that we all have. We need to communicate with the parents that we are doing this, what is possible, what is achievable, and what the constraints are. As everyone agrees, the education of our children is critical to us all, to our history, to our future.

One other note on education, Mr. Speaker, and then I will leave it. I have heard many times that we need to bring more wellness education into our system. We need to teach our young people how to live a healthy lifestyle and to enjoy the benefits that go along with it. This will benefit all Albertans, and I would like to see an increased emphasis on the physical education and well-being of our students.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the best riding in the province. Why? Because it is as diverse as the province itself. Within the boundaries of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert constituency we have an entire city plus a third of another. There are two counties, Parkland and Sturgeon; five school boards; three health authorities, Capital, Aspen, and WestView; and the First Nations reserve of Alexander. The riding encompasses just about every economic activity in Alberta, from oil and gas to grain farming, hog operations, and high tech. In fact, we have world-renowned experts in the field of alternative panels for construction materials. All of this in communities such as Calahoo, Villeneuve, Riviere Qui Barre, and Alcomdale.

As my hon. colleague from St. Albert knows, the city of St. Albert began in 1861 and is the oldest successful farming community in Alberta. As the oldest nonfortified community in the province it has a strong cultural history with the influence of the Catholic mission of Father Lacombe in its early years, as well as the Metis influence, which started the settlement. Now a city of 55,000-plus and, as we found out during this week's week of the volunteer, it has a population involved in volunteering at the 50 percent rate: a caring, responsive, forward-looking community concerned about their quality of life and the proper development of their economy.

Spruce Grove, Mr. Speaker, is the gateway to the west, if you will, another strong, vibrant community that wants to grow but grow wisely. From its humble beginnings as a trade centre for the agricultural community to the west of Edmonton in 1907 it has grown into a beautiful city to raise a family. No longer simply a service centre to agriculture but now a centre for economic development. The residents of Spruce Grove want the government to act as a catalyst for development. The residents of Spruce Grove have serious concerns about infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, rapid growth and development in all of my constituency mean that transportation demands grow as rapidly. We need additional transportation investment, school investment, and tourism and economic development, and that is why they elected me to push for these things.

Growing up on a farm and, in addition, my pre-MLA life as a marketer of agriculture products internationally, agriculture holds a very strong place in my heart. Our agriculture community employs, directly or indirectly, one-third of this province, Mr. Speaker. It pumps close to \$14 billion into our economy, and most importantly it feeds us.

3:00

The riding of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert contains some of the best farmers and farmland in the province. As my rural colleagues will agree, farming is no easy task. It is very difficult to compete against subsidies which we could only dream of, but they are doing it, Mr. Speaker, and we need to step up to the plate when

we need to. We need to ensure that our small rural communities maintain their viability, their water safety, and their rural infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, on this my maiden speech in this hon. room with these hon. ladies and gentlemen around me, I want to say that I am committed to serving my constituents, representing them in this House and government, not the other way around, and working as a team member to do what is right for Albertans and Alberta.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, in March of 1968, 33 years ago, my father rose in this House to give his maiden speech, and he spoke passionately about good government and representing his constituents. I am not the only one in this House who is carrying on a family tradition of public service, and I know that they feel as I do right now. I am tremendously proud and blessed to be in this House today. It is very difficult for me to express the vast amount of emotions which I feel right now. I pledge to my constituents to do what I said I would, and to my colleagues in this House I pledge to give you one hundred percent commitment to my duties and to this Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I've been given the great honour of making my maiden speech. As we live in a time when growth is changing the face of Alberta, it's a privilege to play an exciting role as a member of this government. I would like to thank the electors of Calgary-*Buffalo*, who have shown great wisdom, independence, and a sense of adventure in their selection of an MLA. It's a great honour for me, the choice that thousands of Calgary-*Buffalo* citizens made when they chose me as their new MLA. Calgary-*Buffalo* had been a Liberal riding for 15 years, and the constituents knew that Alberta was going to continue to prosper. They chose a new representative with a fresh perspective in the Legislature for proven leadership and a positive future.

The makeup of Calgary-*Buffalo* constitutes a wide array of cultures, the most in any one constituency in the province. It's also home to young families, single moms, postsecondary students, young professionals, a large gay and lesbian community, seniors, and, last but not least, a number of homeless. The residential concerns span from homeless shelters, low-income units, rental apartments, and single-family homes to million-dollar condominiums. This constituency is home to Calgary's largest arts and theatre community, which adds a unique vibrancy and culture to the inner city. We are also home to the second highest number of corporate office headquarters, with a downtown skyline that is one of the most beautiful in Canada if not in North America.

During the throne speech on April 10, 2001, the Lieutenant Governor touched on many issues that Calgary-*Buffalo* constituents are concerned about, issues regarding health care and the provision of more efficient and effective service. I agree with this government in electing regional health boards as a top priority, ensuring the community's voice in the delivery of health care. As a board member myself for the past seven years, I know the task ahead for newly elected board members will be challenging and trying, combining the future model of health care with new medical technology.

This government's direction for education is equally important. All public education, from kindergarten through high school, will receive a great deal of support in the coming years. The Minister of Learning will not only focus on building new schools, modernizing existing ones, and classroom size, but also the role skilled educators play will be important in this delivery model which is valued highly by our government.

From door-knocking during the election I quickly learned that there are a great deal of postsecondary students living in Calgary-Buffalo, and this number is growing. They were happy to hear that the scholarships will be increasing and financing will be updated to offer student loan forgiveness and a user-focused student finance system. Postsecondary students will also be encouraged to hear more details about the Future Summit that will focus on improving the opportunities for young Albertans after their education.

Mr. Speaker, my skills as a police officer will serve me well as an MLA. These two positions share several characteristics. As we all know, being an MLA in the province of Alberta will be very challenging as we pay off the debt and watch as our taxes decline. The future goals that we have as legislators must be fine-tuned with a strategic plan in place. Basic issues can be incredibly complex as the different layers are torn away and more concerns and ideas must be considered. Issues have to be weighed against human desires, the willingness of the groups involved, and the resources of this government. Through the art of problem-solving and proven leadership we will reach the ultimate goal of a vision of a positive future for all Albertans. There are a myriad of complex challenges emerging for the community that will demand effective responses as well as lasting solutions now and over the next few years.

Part of the allure of being an Albertan is the fine tradition of pioneering and the regard for individualism by people of the province of Alberta. Albertans are the backbone of effective change. They will create opportunities, and the value of individualism as part of a tradition in Alberta is a very strong foundation for a healthy and vibrant society. Valuing individuals and emphasizing the importance of their contributions builds strong character and leadership and supports our coming together in groups to determine responses and solutions to the challenges of today. To me it is the individual dreams, aspirations, and actions which come together that are instrumental in building healthy communities like Calgary-Buffalo.

Strength, commitment, hard work, and an unwavering stance regarding my personal values are the qualities that support me in all my endeavours. As maturing people we go through many changes in our roles, our daily lives, our responsibilities, and our outward experiences. The only thing that ever remains the same day to day is our personal framework of values. This perhaps more than anything else forms the essence of who we are. Like you, I am not the same person I was 10 or 20 years ago, but still I hold on to my personal values, which will remain with me forever.

Over the years I've come to realize that the challenges I have faced in policing are not negative experiences but have been opportunities for growth and to become stronger and more experienced. Experience teaches us. Optimism is the key to turning problems into opportunities. The most significant value which helps us succeed in the challenges of a career and life is optimism.

As a police officer I often spoke from the heart on issues of social conscience and the harsh realities of policing: domestic violence, youth violence, child prostitution, and the release of dangerous offenders into our community. When I was knocking on doors during the election campaign and speaking to citizens' groups, I took every opportunity to get the views of constituents on a wide range of issues and community priorities. Listening is essential if I am to effectively represent the residents of Calgary-Buffalo.

I was honoured recently when the Solicitor General appointed me to the policing review committee. What are the challenges for policing emerging in the new millennium? One very significant challenge is the transformation of the way we deliver policing services. For many years police agencies were able to unilaterally decide the best approach to delivering police services, with no involvement from government or the community. For many years

police car patrols were effective. Youth fought with fists rather than guns. Racial tension existed in smaller groups, and domestic violence and child abuse were hidden in the home. Domestic violence and house break-ins would not have made the top two priority items, as they did in Calgary in the mid-1990s. This has changed.

Social awareness and working conditions for policing are very different today. The demands of today require a broader focus going beyond law enforcement. The public no longer wants the traditional crime control measures. They want and demand crime analysis, detection, and prevention. They want to live in their homes and walk through their neighbourhoods without the fear of violence. They don't want to risk the lives of their children on our roadways. Police services across the country and here in Alberta are now asked to provide direction not directly related to law enforcement and policing. It is not uncommon for police services to be asked to participate in evaluations of neighbourhood revitalization projects as well as complex social issues and problems, building partnerships with regional health authorities and corporate partners like the Alberta Motor Association. We must expand to build safer communities in the future.

3:10

Policing today faces tough questions which require answers to contribute to peace and wellness in our community. For example, what should society do with children who murder and with youth engaged in shoot-outs in public places? How do we ensure the sharing of opportunity? How do we work together to break the cycle of violence which begins in the home? How do we protect public safety when dangerous offenders are released into our communities? What are the resources that are required?

A good beginning to cope with the impact of changing demographics, technologies, and economies is to acknowledge that we are quite capable of managing the challenges of change. As community leaders and legislators we are responsible for creating a vision for policing. We know that we need communities' and stakeholders' consultation if we are to create that vision. It is a fact that if policing fails, people live in fear, economic success in our community is jeopardized, neighbourhoods regress, expenses from vandalism skyrocket, health care costs rise, and the Alberta way of life falters.

As a Progressive Conservative government we must do everything we can to not let this happen. The four key elements of community policing are consultation between police and communities about problems, policies, and priorities; adapting strategies that fit the needs of different neighbourhoods; mobilizing all the resources of a community, including police, citizens, government, and private sectors; and solving problems with our community partners by studying the conditions that lead to calls for service, then drawing plans to connect with these conditions and taking the lead in evaluating and taking remedial action.

The large seniors' community in Calgary-Buffalo shares the same public safety concerns as the general population: assaults, robberies, personal safety at home and in our neighbourhoods. Within these broad categories of crime concern are the special interests of our senior population. Some of these are unique to seniors, such as financial and emotional abuse and personal safety. Stereotyping based on age and gender can be harmful. We know that to be a senior does not mean to be physically weak. However, there are those who specifically target the elderly because they believe they are easy prey. Seniors in particular have a feeling of vulnerability at a time when they should be enjoying personal freedom and peace of mind. It is our commitment as legislators to create an environment free of crime where all law-abiding citizens can feel safe and secure.

Strengthening community relations and supplying community-based policing will ensure that seniors have a voice that is heard by their police service.

I would briefly like to touch on two concerns particularly relating to seniors; that is, financial scams and elder abuse. Financial abuse has many forms ranging from theft by caregivers to telemarketing scams and rip-offs by unlicensed trades. Crafty con artists are using old and new tricks to steal from trusting seniors, and it is important to raise awareness of this situation. Domestic abuse is another area where seniors fall victim to crime. The abuse of seniors refers to a range of behaviours where family members or caregivers attempt to control a family member. This can include verbal insults, refusal to provide the necessities of life, and limiting access to social contacts and medical help.

There is tremendous community support and involvement now on domestic violence and abuse issues, including public awareness and education initiatives in this area. The Kerby Centre, located in Calgary-Buffalo, is a facility for all Calgary seniors. It has taken a lead role in providing shelter for seniors. It is a one-of-a-kind facility in North America, and I was fortunate enough to have been a member of the steering committee in its development.

With the projection for an increasing number of seniors as part of our province, policing agencies must work collaboratively with other social service agencies and regional health authorities to re-examine the issue of senior abuse on a continual basis. I am confident that policing agencies serving Albertans are on the right path to significantly reduce domestic abuse of all forms, providing timely and meaningful assistance to all victims. I value the special relationship I have with seniors and seniors' organizations in my constituency and appreciate the assistance and partnerships I've had with them in the past, and I look forward to building on those strengths in the future. A continuous and open communication process is the best way to ensure Alberta's policing services continue to be among the nation's leading policing agencies, providing excellence in service delivery.

The core values I believe in as a former inspector of the Calgary Police Service are honesty, integrity, ethics, respect, commitment, fairness, compassion, and courage. Respecting these values, I will represent Calgary-Buffalo through hard work, with a passion for their issues.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I want to again express my thanks to constituents of Calgary-Buffalo in choosing me to represent them as their voice in this wonderful, historic 25th Legislature.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 5 **Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for second reading Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001.

The Committee of Supply dealt with the subject of the bill last evening in some detail, so I won't dwell on the bill at all other than to say that the people of Alberta were well served by the expenditures made pursuant to it, there now being actual approval with respect to the rebates on their natural gas and their energy costs over

the course of the winter and the particularly high costs of energy that we felt at that time.

As well, we are particularly well served, Mr. Speaker, by the reduction of education property tax, which necessitated the need to replenish the Learning budget from general revenue.

Mr. Speaker, I won't say anything more about the bill, and I commend the bill to the House for swift passage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to take a few minutes to make very brief comments on the second reading of Bill 5.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, this is the second supplementary bill for the past budget year before this Assembly. During last fall's sitting almost one billion dollars in additional spending was approved. Bill 5 adds almost another \$433 million in supplementary spending to what was already approved last fall.

In his last several annual reports Alberta's Auditor General has repeatedly drawn attention to the government's overreliance on onetime spending. The Auditor General's concern is that overreliance on onetime spending makes it hard to hold the government accountable for its spending decisions. Despite the fact that the government claims to operate under three-year business plans and on three-year budget projections, onetime spending strongly suggests that these documents aren't worth the paper they are written on and that in reality the government has no clear plan.

In making these remarks, I'm not in any way questioning the fact that the programs being funded through Bill 5 require additional resources. Sometimes the unexpected happens, and money has to be expended after the approval of the budget. However, when funding shortfalls happen year after year in core government programs like Children's Services, Infrastructure, and Learning, it shows serious flaws in how the government does its budgeting. Increasingly, the provincial budget that we approve in the spring sitting bears no resemblance to reality. Instead of fully meeting the fiscal needs of important programs in the spring budget, the government underestimates what's actually needed and then has to come back later in the year with supplementary estimates.

Based on a review of this week's budget, I feel that history is about to repeat itself. One example is social assistance rates. Instead of providing for an increase in the rates in the spring budget, the government tells us it wants to have a review done first, perhaps making it necessary to bring supplementary appropriations later in the year.

Going back to the question of accountability, Mr. Speaker, these supplementary estimates, especially when they come before this House after the money has been spent and the budget year has already gone – it reduces this exercise near to meaningless. The Legislature is the appropriate place to hold the government accountable for the moneys that it plans to spend, and the time for the opposition and for this House to scrutinize the government's budgetary commitments is before the approval of the budget, not to give approval after the money has already been spent and the House has no recourse but to simply accept the expenditures already made as a given. So what this means in terms of the role of this Legislature in the process of examining the budget, approving the budget, is that the Legislature increasingly is being marginalized. Its role is being reduced and made less and less effective, and that's what

should be a cause of concern to all members of the House, not just those of us who sit on opposition benches.

3:20

So I would like to conclude by saying that it is a practice that needs to be stopped. It's a practice that mustn't be allowed to become a standard practice. Otherwise, these debates on bills such as the one that we are debating now are more like closing the barn doors after the horse has left. In other words, that reduces us to a meaningless chatter in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to the supplementary supply appropriation bill, Bill 5, coming now on this date, April 26, some 26 days after the fiscal year-end and after the time that these dollars have been spent.

If we take a look at a supplementary supply bill, we need to question the purpose of the bill, Mr. Speaker. I think that what we should be remembering in appropriation bills that are supplementary in nature is that the purpose of the bill itself should be to deal with only the most unanticipated or extraordinary expenses that have come up in the year. So that's the test that we should use when we take a look at the dollars for which confirmation is asked. Did they meet the test of being both unanticipated or extraordinary? Later on, then, we can talk about how we measure whether or not the government made good choices in terms of whether they should have been unanticipated.

The first question we need to ask is: were these unanticipated or unexpected? So we go to them in terms of the separate areas that the dollars are asked for.

In Children's Services these are replacement dollars for a particular authority which had some funding issues. You would think, first off, that that isn't a problem, that that could happen, that it could be unexpected. Certainly caseloads in child welfare cases could vary. There could be issues to deal with there. But we're asking for quite a bit of money, given the context of what it is that we're talking about: \$3.8 million. You don't spend that in a month or a day in child welfare, in the particular authorities. That's an accumulation of dollars, so there is some expectation that this was an issue, a problem that the minister had some warning about, and in fact, Mr. Speaker, we know that to be true. This particular authority has had ongoing issues throughout the year.

Now, I'm not suggesting for a moment that those dollars weren't well spent. I think that all dollars spent on children have great value, and in fact the authorities by law cannot refuse to help these children if they come to them in need. The question here is: was it anticipated, and therefore should it have been in the supplementary supply bill? I would challenge that. I would say that these were dollars that were anticipated, that the minister saw the overruns coming, and there were other avenues that they could have used to adjust accordingly. Such a large amount of money, \$3.8 million in this case, indicates to me that there are some real problems in terms of how Children's Services is funded.

If we then lift our heads up and take a look to other indicators in the community, we see that to be true. In fact, to read through the Children's Advocate report recently is really quite a damning criticism of how this government has handled children. Caseworkers are overloaded, are not dealing always with the best interests of the child as their primary criteria. A lot of that is related to budgetary issues. It looks like they don't have enough money to do their job.

It looks like they don't have enough co-operation amongst departments and organizations and different authorities to do their job.

So those are big issues, Mr. Speaker, and issues I'm hoping the minister will address. I know she takes her work very seriously and is trying to do a good job, but what else is missing there in terms of getting the kind of support she needs? Why doesn't she have the support of the government on this? When we have multiple billion-dollar surpluses rolling into the province, this government should be able to plan for the kind of money that is needed to help children.

These are kids who are asking for help, young people who want to be able to succeed and excel in this province, and by what we've seen in that report, it doesn't look like that's happening. It also doesn't look like the minister has organized the resources properly in this particular authority. What were her options, Mr. Speaker? She could have come to us in the fall when the last supplementary supply request came in and told us that this was going to be happening, that they felt that it was worth while to put the additional dollars in to do whatever they did with them, whether it was minimize caseloads, assess kids, handle greater volumes, or whatever. I think that the Legislature should have had a heads-up on that. So I think in this particular instance these expenses could have been anticipated.

Are they extraordinary expenses? It doesn't look like it, Mr. Speaker, so that criteria also doesn't apply here. These are the day-to-day expenses of trying to get these kids through a variety of crises in their lives.

Let's take a look at the next department, being Infrastructure. That's the big one: the rebates. Does it fit the purpose of supplementary supply estimates? Were these rebate dollars unanticipated or extraordinary? I think in this case, Mr. Speaker, they meet both criteria by government standards. I think the high costs were somewhat unanticipated by the government, not a reflection on their ability to forecast. In fact, that's a condemnation of what happened here. They should have anticipated that the way they moved forward with deregulation, there were going to be horrendous costs passed on to consumers and they were going to be expected to respond in some format. That's in fact what we've seen with these dollars here. So both extraordinary and, only in the government's eyes, unanticipated. I think everyone else in this province clearly understood that there were going to be some significant financial consequences as a result of the way they proceeded with deregulation.

What about Learning, Mr. Speaker? Did they fit this particular criteria? Are the dollars requested there unanticipated? Not at all. Once again the government full well knew what their plans were in terms of reducing the education portion of property taxes. The only thing they didn't do was give school boards a mechanism to recover that money somewhere else. So poor planning is what we see in this particular instance. That could have been forecast and put into last year's budget, and we wouldn't have had to see these dollars come out at the end of the year. Had they done that, school boards would have had some sense of security in terms of what they were expecting for the rest of the year and wouldn't have to wait on tenterhooks until after the budget year for this to be approved.

Is this an extraordinary item? I guess in some ways it fits that criteria, Mr. Speaker. We're talking about what is now going to be an ongoing occurrence – the specific rates that they can collect on the taxes – but it was the first year that it happened. I guess it could qualify as extraordinary in that circumstance.

3:30

One thing we can do when we talk about supplementary supply is ask the question: has the government done their job in needing these funds and approval for these funds after the fact of the year-end?

That's, I'm sure, a matter of great debate on both sides of the House. We certainly would hope that we can see some participation from government members defending their position in terms of the government having done their job and asking for these dollars.

What we need to take a look at when we analyze them having done their job is: do the dollars reflect the government being able to meet their benchmarks in the business plans? If we take a look at the business plans in each of these areas, in fact we don't find the reasons why this additional money was requested to be benchmarked at all in the government business plans. So that raises a whole series of questions and issues in itself, Mr. Speaker. Why aren't they there? How can it be that the government is not measuring its performance on issues that it's actually spending dollars on? What are the benchmarks doing in the business plan, how effective are they, or why were they not?

When we've already established that for the most part none of these dollars requested hit the extraordinary category, then there should have been benchmarking done in the various business plans so that we could measure how effective the use of these extra dollars is in terms of meeting the government's actual goals and objectives. They can't do it, because they don't exist. The only thing that comes close are some references in Children's Services where they talk about the authorities. The Auditor General has made extensive comments on the problems surrounding how the authorities have established their goals, objectives, benchmarks, and performance indicators. Certainly when we get into that specific ministry under budget debate, I'll spend some time talking about that, because they are significant in nature, Mr. Speaker.

I see the lack of benchmarking for the supplementary dollars to be a major omission on the government side. I'm hoping that the Auditor General will take a look at that and will bring forward some comments at some point. Perhaps before his report is ready, it traditionally being ready in the fall, it would be interesting and I think helpful to the government to have his feedback on that.

Another question we need to ask ourselves when we take a look at supplementary estimates is: do they contribute to the long-term benefit of our province and the people in the province and the objectives that we have for ensuring that Alberta continues to be an excellent place to live? What measures do we use if we talk about contributing to the long-term welfare of the province? I think we can talk about equal opportunity, we can talk about stability, and we can talk about sustainability, Mr. Speaker. I think those are good frameworks to take a look at the dollars that are asked for and see if they contribute in some capacity to reaching those objectives.

When we talk about equal opportunity, I think that the dollars spent in Children's Services significantly contribute to that, Mr. Speaker, and I do congratulate the government on that. This is an authority that has had some issues, some problems, has needed extra support, and rather than shutting the door on the kids that came after the dollars ran out, the minister allowed that door to remain open, and those children continued to be helped. We could talk about the degree of help they got. Perhaps it wasn't enough, and maybe some people didn't get the access they needed, but in fact when we're talking about children in need and children at risk, then I think it is very important for the government to ensure that they provide the opportunity for those kids to get that help. Clearly, they at least made an attempt to do that by spending the extra dollars, so I think that's a good move on behalf of the government. Certainly I would like to applaud their efforts in that regard.

Overall review needs to be done of how those authorities are managed and whether or not children are being helped in an appropriate manner. Certainly we saw kids in crisis in this particular area, and the government tried to do something. That's a good first

step. We look forward to seeing many more progressive steps in that regard.

When we talk about equal opportunity, I'd like to talk about how government has not met that criteria when it asks for the additional funds in Learning. They denied the school boards the equal opportunity to participate in the decision-making on how revenue sharing should be done by just arbitrarily deciding what the percentage would be and how it would be changed. I would like to suggest that the government should re-evaluate how they operate that particular process and look to a more participative model, Mr. Speaker. What we see in the actions of the government is a dictatorial kind of style that does not give everybody at the table equal status. In fact, I would suggest that in this particular instance many people who should have been at the table weren't there, and those would particularly be school boards.

I would like to talk a little about municipalities and the direction they were given from the government in terms of being told that they could not use up that additional room in the property taxes that the government reduced the education tax by. While none of us like to pay more taxes, Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that municipalities have felt tremendous downloading by this government in programs and expectations for what they should be delivering to ratepayers. They haven't seen a corresponding increase in the dollars that they have received in transfer payments from this province. Once again, there is someone who is not at the table in decision-making. So what we have is a government who can behave like Santa Claus handing out candy bags whenever they dole out the money, yet at the same time they're starving municipalities of much-needed funds. This is a wealthy province, with the kind of surpluses we have. I would urge this government to take a look at treating municipalities not as a poor cousin but as an equal participant at the table of discussions and negotiations and decision-making in terms of where dollars should be spent.

Let's talk for a moment about stability and how that relates to these particular areas. Is what the government is doing in having spent this extra money contributing to the stability of the province or the people within the province? If we talk about that in terms of Children's Services, the answer there is likely yes. While we have a rocky kind of situation with how the authorities are operating themselves, did the additional dollars help the end user, which in this case is the youth who are using the services? The answer there is likely yes. I'm sure that my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods will also address that and let me know whether or not my assumption here in this case is well founded or whether there are some causes for concern in that area. But it seems to me at first glance that this is an area where the government has contributed to stability.

Has it contributed to stability for people in the province with the energy rebates? In the very short term the answer there again is yes, Mr. Speaker, because they've helped them to level out the energy costs that they're experiencing. In a climate of great instability they have helped flatten out the peaks and valleys a bit for individuals. The problem with what they've done is that it isn't sustained, which is an issue, I think. It's very short term in nature. The time has already passed for which we have received those subsidies, and what about the future? It doesn't matter too much to anybody in this room, but to many people in this province who are low income or working poor, it matters a great deal. It doesn't just matter when those huge bills come in wintertime. It matters to them in the spring, when we see fluctuations in the weather in the fall, and of course they're going to get significantly hit this winter. There's no stability in not knowing whether those rebates are going to be forthcoming again.

3:40

What we need from the government is some information as soon as possible about how it is they're going to implement the process. We would have thought we would have seen that in the upcoming debate on Bill 1, Mr. Speaker, but in fact it's not there. Why? Because that is a shell of a bill. It is a licence for the government to write a blank cheque on anything they want to do, because all the decisions are going to be made by regulations. The problem with making all those decisions by regulations is that nobody knows what the regulations are going to be until after the government has decided. There's no opportunity for input. There's no opportunity for people to get a heads-up in terms of what they can expect so that they can plan their lives.

I would suggest that many people choose not to live day by day, that they like to do a little planning in their lives and in their forecasting for the kinds of expenses that they're going to see to operate their homes and how they're going to manage their budgets in the next year. When you don't know if you're going to see additional costs of \$200 or \$300 per month in electricity costs, it's very hard to do any long-term planning. How can you plan to put money away for the kids' further education, for the education that they're in right now, for their sports programs? How can you pay down the mortgage or even renegotiate your mortgage when you don't know what your monthly expenses are going to be? How can you plan holidays, clothing expenses, any of those kinds of things? Serious issues, Mr. Speaker, that the government needs to look at.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity, as we examine the supplementary requisition this afternoon, to look at the requisition in the total context of budgeting and the kind of framework that jurisdictions and, in particular, school boards have to work within and how changes like those detailed in the requisition might be seen and might fit into that funding framework.

The government had a review that was reported in May 1999 of the framework for funding school boards. I'd like to dwell on that framework for just a few minutes because the items that were raised in that by the boards that took part and by that study group I think are important when we consider something like the requisitions before us this afternoon.

The concern of school boards of course – and it has been a concern right from the beginning of the changes made by this government in '93 and '94 – is the amount of flexibility that they have to deal with the problems they face and the lack of flexibility, that there has been a narrowing of their ability to respond to the needs of their particular citizens. They've even gone so far, Mr. Speaker, in terms of being unhappy with the flexibility that they have as to suggest that there should be a separate funding block for them set aside just to meet local needs. As a former school trustee who worked with a board that was able to levy local taxes at one time, this plea seems to be a far cry from those days of looking for a little piece of money in their budget that they can use to respond to local needs.

They look at programs that are introduced by the government and are concerned that often those programs come with no funds, no support for start-up costs. We know that when new programs are introduced, like the literacy program or the school improvement programs, those programs just don't come fully operational from the provincial government. School jurisdictions across the province have to spend a great deal of time and money trying to get those

programs started up and staff in place to conduct them. There is no accommodation in the present funding framework for those costs to be accommodated.

The notion of flexibility is also part of the basic instruction grant and based on a per student basis. I think that the plea there is that all of the instruction grants should be consolidated into a single rate because many of those grants don't reflect the actual costs. So it doesn't make much difference if they come in a separate package. They don't cover the costs of the package, and all they do at this point is add additional administration costs for school boards. The notion of having the grants consolidated into an instruction grant is one that I think was recommended by and considered by the funding framework committee and one that still has to be, I think, seriously considered.

Related to that, of course, is the problem of earmarked grants. As welcome as the programs that those grants often cover are, again the amount of flexibility of boards is curtailed when the funds that come to them are earmarked. It also is a way of the government taking what might be boards' priorities and changing them into priorities that the government has set. Again, it takes away flexibility. It takes away local autonomy in terms of boards trying to respond to the needs of their citizens and their ratepayers.

There have been some things that the government has done that I think are healthy: taking the cap off the number of students that could be identified as students with severe behaviour problems. That cap was artificial, and the government in its wisdom removed it. I think that boards applauded them for that.

The restrictions in terms of transferring money between blocks is a restriction that the boards find, again, restraining. I think the point is made and was made in the funding framework that if the grants were adequate in the first place, then transfers wouldn't be required between blocks. Actually, the plea at that time – and I think it is still there – was that restrictions be removed and that they be replaced with guidelines for school boards, and that would allow them some flexibility in terms of moving funds from one area to another. Really, I think again they made the argument that the local boards are in the best position to know where the funds should be spent, and if anything, the government should not be restricting it at the front end but holding them accountable for the results. So don't restrict us going in, but at least measure us by the kinds of results that we receive.

I think that if you look at the number of boards that actually ended up transferring funds between blocks, the majority of boards don't actually end up transferring funds. It's impossible politically. There's great pressure because all of the blocks are underfunded. At least, in the funding review report they indicated that they felt under great political pressure to not transfer funds. Usually if they did it, they ended up in political hot water. They, again, were very clear in their complaint that there were insufficient funds in the first place, so transferring funds from one block to another was really problematic.

3:50

The flexibility in terms of the payments to boards. I think, again, that the government made some changes to give school boards some greater flexibility by making sure the payments were made to boards in a more timely fashion than they have previously been made. Again, I think that has allowed boards more flexibility, something that is, as I've said, a very major concern.

One of the complaints that the funding review brought forward was the whole business of local decision-making and how boards feel unable to respond to their local communities, that in many cases the board members feel they are but flow-through conduits for

provincial government money. The more earmarked the funds, the more those restrictions are applied, I guess, the greater that's going to be felt by boards.

I think it's really unfortunate with the kind of public negotiating that's been going on through the budget and through comments of government members about teachers' salaries. I'm sure school board members are sitting out there wondering exactly what's happening and how they're going to behave at the bargaining table given the context that's been created by the provincial government, by the Premier and his 10 percent comments, and by the budget with its 6 percent provisions.

Again, it goes back to the kinds of things that boards were highlighting in the funding framework review, and that is that they're being left out, that their flexibility is being curtailed, and that in fact they are exercising less and less control in local communities over school affairs. They feel – and I think rightfully so – that this is not in keeping with the history of this province, where school boards were the very first form of municipal government. Certainly in this city and in most parts of the province school boards were formed before there was any thought of a municipal government. I think that that close association of citizens with their schools through those boards is something that's being lost. Boards are becoming more and more remote from citizens, given the kind of control that those boards have over school affairs.

I'd like to spend a few minutes, if I may, Mr. Speaker, talking about the complexity of budgeting. Instead of being a simple, straightforward operation, the government budgeting process has made it more complex and therefore more costly and more difficult for boards to render the services to local schools that they're expected to. In the funding framework review boards overwhelmingly thought that there had to be some streamlining, that the kind of framework that's in place right now is much too cumbersome and needs to be changed. I've mentioned a couple of them before, and that is the notion of taking away restrictions. Instead of a long list of laws that must be obeyed or regulations that must be obeyed, take those restrictions away, replace them with guidelines, and then hold boards accountable for the results. I think that there is wide support among boards for that approach.

There are some specifics, like moving the ECS funding to the basic instructional grant and at the high school level eliminating the credit enrollment unit funding because of its administrative complexity. We've seen some of the problems with that over the last number of years and some questions about the use of that system and how effective it really is in getting money to the boards for services rendered. Again, a plea to reduce the complexity by reducing the number of conditional grants. A number of the boards were more than frank about the amount of time that's being spent and the amount of paperwork that's being created in trying to access grants and earmarked funds that just seem to be wasted money as far as they were concerned.

The other one that came in for consideration and criticism was the amount of paperwork for funding for special-needs students, the kind of paperwork and the kind of work that has to go into getting their funding, how time consuming it was and how it had to be done time and time again and was really very wasteful of resources that could be better used to serve in programs for those students.

There were complaints about the transportation formulas being too complex, and again reporting the requirements for mild and moderate special-needs students was seen to be unnecessary and cumbersome. So the whole notion of complexity.

Again, they were concerned with the number of grants and earmarked funds, and I go back to the earmarked funds for just a minute. We heard earlier in question period this afternoon a

question on whether the earmarked funds or funds for the school improvement program were going to be continued. I think it bothers most boards that there aren't sunset clauses in place to automatically have those programs come to an end, because they are mechanisms of control exercised by boards, and when they are perpetuated, that control is perpetuated. So a number of boards are concerned with having a sunset clause – that seems to be, I would think, a wise recommendation – on earmarked funds to make sure that periodically those programs are reviewed so that the kinds of problems they present to boards, when they are programs, really, in perpetuity and not rolled into the basic instructional grant, could be eliminated.

The concern about funds that are initiated and then withdrawn. I think the technology funds are an example. The boards scrambled to get those funds and relied upon them, and then they were withdrawn. Well, I guess that whole notion of earmarked funds is something that adds to the kind of complexity that boards face, and I've mentioned that a couple of times.

The budget. I think there are some additional concerns that are indirectly related to the budgeting process. We get an opportunity when we look at the estimates in more detail to talk about some of those.

The funds in terms of adequacy. I think it's generally agreed across the province that the basic per pupil instructional grant is inadequate, and it's an issue that in my preliminary look at the budget I don't think has been addressed but one that I think is going to have to be. It's going to become more acute. It's chronic underfunding, and I think it's starting to raise some problems in the system that could be eliminated were the funds different.

4:00

I think parent fund-raising, school fund-raising is a huge issue that government, I know, has been trying to get a handle on, I don't think very successfully. It's a difficult problem. Some parents refuse to report the amount of money that they raise for schools, indicating that it's none of the government's business or none of the local school board's business how much money they raise. There are issues about the morality of using gambling funds to finance schools. We heard the bishop in Calgary issue a fairly clear directive to residents there in terms of not using gambling funds for school purposes.

I think the framework was designed to make more equitable the amount of resources available to each child in this province, yet the fund-raising has worked to introduce a whole new set of inequities as some school districts and some schools are able to raise thousands and thousands of dollars through casinos and bingos, and other communities where parents have other concerns don't have access to those same mechanisms, so huge variations across the province in terms of the additional moneys per pupil that are being raised by school boards.

User fees are now being incorporated and expected in terms of budget planning, in the budget process, and I go back to our notion, the idea we have in the province of a fully funded public education system accessible to all and how that ideal is being . . . [Dr. Massey's speaking time expired]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to another opportunity to speak on the budget.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comments will be relatively brief, unless you'd like me to go the full 20 minutes. In regards to Bill 5, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act,

2001, I'm sure in fact that my concerns are probably shared by many of us here. It is worrisome adding over \$400 million of approved expenditures to last year's fiscal year. We are, I think, setting a one-year, all-time record, if I'm correct, for supplementary expenditures, shattering all records of the late '80s and early '90s, which for years concerned us all, with Alberta's fiscal performance. It's a worrisome trend. The previous record I think was held by the fiscal year preceding the one we're discussing. So the last two years have been suggesting a dangerous trend for Alberta's fiscal management, that is, I'm sure, a concern for us all here. It suggests a drift into short termism, that is dangerous for any organization and particularly a large provincial government with a great deal of money in its pockets.

It also worries me that we are consistently now perhaps degrading or debasing the budget process. At one time I recall that budgets by the provincial government were taken extremely – extremely – seriously. I'm concerned about the way spending announcements are handled now, the scale of special warrants and such, that the budgeting process in fact no longer has the credibility it once had, and that budgets are not taken with the seriousness they once were taken.

In looking at the specific items in the bill, my eye is drawn of course to far and away the largest item: Infrastructure spending \$406 million, which is, I believe, for energy rebates. It's not clear at all from the bill whether the rebates are for gas or for electricity. The detail simply is lost in this, and gas and electricity rebates are combined in a price tag of \$400 million, a huge amount of money. I'm uneasy. I very much feel like this bill really must separate the expenditures on these two areas.

The energy rebates on natural gas may well be justifiable. We are enjoying record prices, record revenues from natural gas sales. It's our wealth, and one way or another it should be shared with all Albertans. On the other hand, if a sizable chunk or indeed any of this money is going to electrical energy rebates, I simply could not support that, or I'd be very concerned and very interested to see what the amount is. Our electricity crisis is of no benefit to any Albertan except the shareholders of a few companies. It's a self-induced crisis. It is not happening in other parts of Canada, and if we are voting here on a bill that is trying to lose the detail of that in the general line item, I am very uneasy.

I would remind all colleagues here that certainly Alberta's economy is strong, but demand for electricity actually grew at more than double the rate that it's been growing in the last few years in the 1970s. It grew in some years more than 10 percent a year, whereas currently it's been only growing at 4 or 5 percent, yet the old regulated system was able to manage that growth without any crisis at all, without any surge in costs or rolling blackouts and so on.

So I am very concerned that the \$406 million line may conceal a substantial amount of spending on electricity rebates and we will never know the full cost of our misadventure into electricity deregulation.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a second time]

Bill 6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Finance.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure as well to move for the consideration of the Legislature this afternoon Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001.

I won't say much about this bill because we'll be spending the

next month on the estimates in Committee of Supply, on the full budget that was tabled by the Minister of Finance just this last Tuesday. But in anticipation of the usual discussion on interim supply, might I just say that the numbers are as large as they are because many of the payments that are made by government are made in the first quarter of the year, so grants that are given out to various organizations and government structures, et cetera, aren't done on a per diem basis equally across the year but quite often are paid out in bulk at the beginning of the year, or a good chunk of them are paid out in bulk.

So when you do an interim supply, there should be no surprise that one sees large numbers in interim supply. It doesn't mean that we want to in any way reduce the discussion that's going to happen over the course of the next month in Committee of Supply, in discussion on the budget itself. The full details of the budget have been tabled. All the business plans have been tabled. This bill really begs no discussion whatsoever, because it's really just to allow the government to continue to operate as we conduct the ordinary business of the House over the next month and discuss the real budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, that was an interesting tale that we just heard from the Government House Leader, but I'm not buying it, and I don't think too many other people would either.

DR. TAYLOR: I did.

MS CARLSON: Well, I think we've got two on the front bench, Mr. Speaker, but the rest of you guys are a little smarter.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, no. Three.

4:10

MS CARLSON: Oh, well, I knew that one was coming.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to be able to speak to Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001. You know, traditionally on this side of the House – and that'll apply to you guys too – we support these bills because we don't want government to grind to a halt. But we're always concerned about the lack of accountability when the government rolls in with a big money bill at the very beginning of the budgeting process. I think the concerns for us are around whether or not the government can then say that they are good stewards of a province when they need to ask for interim supply dollars.

There are other options. We know what the provincial year-end is. The government can count, and they can count backwards too, Mr. Speaker. So when they know what the year-end is, they should be able to count backwards and figure out how many days we need to talk about the budget, bring it in at that time so that we can have this all over and done with before the year-end and we don't have to talk about interim supply at all.

MR. HANCOCK: I knew you'd rather not have an election, but we did have one.

MS CARLSON: Well, you had some flexibility when you called the election too, you know. I like door-knocking in January. That's a great time to be out there. We could've done that and been back in here.

I think that's always the concern for us, Mr. Speaker, that when you bring in a big budget like this, there's a concern that the government isn't acting as a proper steward and that we have a lack of accountability in the reporting of what's happening and that there isn't really an opportunity to debate. Yes, we've got the paper in front of us, but that's not the same as being able to sit down, send that stuff out to stakeholders, get their comments back, and talk to the ministers and department staff and find out just what it is that's going on and what the expectations are for the next year and actually debate. That is supposed to be the purpose of this Assembly, to debate issues and not to rubber-stamp them.

Certainly one of the reasons why we have an Official Opposition is so that all expenditures of the government can have a sober second glance and that decisions can be made based on comment and feedback from everyone in the province, not just those who agree with the government but those people who feel that they aren't represented by the government or who occasionally have differences of opinion with how things are brought forward. So I think that's why it's very important for us to understand that scrutinizing these budgets is important, on a line-by-line basis, on a basis to be able to take them out to the community and get the feedback and then discuss them. I think that's something that gets missed.

Certainly when we see the way the expenses are now being presented under appropriations – operating expense and capital investment, nonbudgetary disbursements, and lottery fund disbursements – they become meaningless in their representation when we see that the government is moving to have the ability to transfer money between programs and within ministries as well. It looks like it's a move to combine these operating expenses and capital expenses in single votes so that we can avoid coming back to the Legislature for approval of supplementary estimates, one more way of removing the scrutiny of the people of the province from the operations of the government, and that's a concern. I think that we need to be talking about these dollars. What happens when you do that is we see a reduction in transparency, and it certainly isn't fiscally accountable, and I think that it isn't what people expect of this government.

If I have been listening to the Premier over the last eight years or so, transparency is a theme that he likes to talk about, and that reduces, in fact, if not eliminates, a large degree of the transparency that should be here and I feel has been committed by the Premier. So I would like to see us move in that direction.

We've seen the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker, and the Financial Review Commission recommend the separation of these operating and capital expenses. You see that in all organizations outside of government agencies. It's an important tool that can be used in measuring performance, in measuring the strength of the government, in measuring their long-term capabilities and the potential for shortfalls or concerns in the near future, not just in terms of scrutiny by the opposition but in terms of strengthening the way the government itself reports and measures their performance, particularly in terms of being able to evaluate the effectiveness of programs. We see a lessening of that happening when we see operating expenses and capital expenses collapsed into a single vote. It's a dangerous direction to go in, Mr. Speaker, and I'm hoping it's the only time that we see this happen. I think that's a real problem.

We have to ensure that we do everything we can in this Legislature, regardless of which side of the House we sit on, to ensure that openness and accountability and transparency and strict fiscal discipline is imposed on the government, the Premier and the ministers, those who operate these large budgets, to ensure that the people get their money's worth, Mr. Speaker, and that the dollars spent are accounted for and that there's good value there, the basic

premise of good accounting principles, certainly a theme that the Auditor General likes to talk about and one that we should be supporting.

Another concern I have is the amount of dollars that are asked for in this budget. You know, we've seen the dollars being asked for in interim supply gradually creep up on this government. The first years I was in here it wasn't that much money. We were talking 10, 12 percent, something more appropriate to one month's operation of the Legislature. What we saw last year was 25 percent requested for the operating expenditures. [interjections] Well, I hear some chirping from the other side.

If we take a look at these budgets line by line, we can see that there are disproportionate amounts being asked for from different ministries. It would be nice to find out from those ministries why it is that some require a large amount of funds at this stage. [interjection] I think it is very relevant that we have that information and we know how the operations of the various departments are functioning and why and when they spend their dollars. I think that's a very appropriate request.

Last year in the interim supply budget we saw requests for 25 percent of the annual budget. This year it's up to 36 percent. What's the difference for, Mr. Speaker. We don't see an explanation coming from the Finance minister or her representative today on this particular issue. We're talking about an 11 percent increase in the number of dollars that are asked for in the first six weeks of this budget year, and that's a big change. Thirty-six percent. We're creeping up toward that 50 percent amount, and it's a serious concern.

This government likes to say that it operates very much like business does, but you sure don't see business operating like this. You know, we hear from the Premier all the time that expenditures are linked to outcomes. Well, how can that be when 36 percent of the money you're requesting is asked for in the first six weeks of the budget year? We don't see any outcomes for that. I don't see anything in this bill that tells me what the outcomes are going to be for that kind of an expenditure of money, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's a reasonable expectation that we should have that kind of information.

In fact, when we get into the detail of the budget, we'll see that the outcomes, as the Auditor General is quite fond of saying, don't often match up to the expenditures or the performance indicators as he sees them. So I think that's also a concern that needs to be talked about.

What we have when we see a government coming in and asking for this much money in an interim supply bill is, I think, an erosion of public confidence in the ability of the government to manage those dollars that they have been entrusted with. It isn't fiscally responsible. I ask anyone in here if they spend 36 percent of their annual paycheck in the first six weeks of the year. I don't think so. You can't manage like that. How does the government think they can?

What that premise is based on, then, is that we're going to see windfall revenues again. I say, nothing wrong with windfall revenues. We're a lucky province to have those, but when you start to incorporate those into the base operating costs of your budget process, you set yourself up for failure. We've seen time and again the kinds of peaks and valleys that the Alberta economy has had because we are so dependent on oil revenues. If we tie expenditures to those peaks, then they follow us into the valleys, and we end up with these huge deficit years, which are, I think, a real problem.

4:20

The inability to debate the amount of money that we're talking

about today is a concern. The amount of time we've had this afternoon is less than an hour of debate on big dollar amounts and areas that cross many ministries, Mr. Speaker. I think that that's a problem. When you're talking about 36 percent of the dollars put in, we should be talking about an ability to fully explore this information and get the feedback and information. [interjections] I hear more chirping from the other side. I hope those ministers get up and respond, Mr. Speaker. We'd certainly like to hear from them.

I think that when we see this much of a budgetary request in interim supply, we also have questions around the integrity of the process. If you're asked to spend the dollars before the detailed questions are asked and answered, then why go through the exercise of business plans at all? Are the business plans just window dressing, or do they have some purpose?

Business plans are tied to the expenditures. As the money goes out, the government should be meeting the goals as outlined in the business plans. It can't happen when more than 25 percent of your budget is expended in the first six weeks and the dollars are asked to be supported at that time. So I think those are issues that need to be talked about here.

We see that some of the expenses voted here in interim supply are really interesting. Agriculture: they're asking for 51.9 percent of their budget. Why is that, Mr. Speaker? That's a lot of money up front. There are a few of these particular ministries that are up in the 50-percent-plus category. Another one is Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Maybe that minister could respond and tell us why they need 58.1 percent of their dollars up front. One other one that I saw is really high. Environment, 42 percent. What are you guys going to be doing over there? It seems like you're underfunded. I don't disagree with that at all, but that you're going to spend most of your money in the first six weeks of the year is interesting. There can be reasons . . . [interjection] Well, I think that would be an interesting explanation to see you stand up here and give. Let's talk about that.

Finance: how can they be spending 48.5 percent of their budget in the first six weeks?

Infrastructure, 68.5. That one's a little more explainable. I think, Mr. Speaker, that we've heard the Premier talk about the dollars that they're going to be spending on expanding the Canamex highway, and that isn't all that bad an idea. So you can see that in that particular instance we've had some work-up to the reasons why the dollars are going to be spent and spent quickly and spent early.

What about an explanation for the rest of these categories? It's certainly justifiable to ask for that information and quite appalling that the government isn't prepared to do that. So, you know, that's a good question that needs to be answered.

Some of these are under budget, but Municipal Affairs also is asking for 43.6 percent. Sustainable Resource Development. This is pretty good, you know. Environment and Sustainable Resource Development are getting a whole whack of money before the first quarter of the year is up. I hope that means that they're going to be coming back for supplementary supply dollars later in the year. Those are two of my favourite areas, two that I think are completely underfunded, and we would like to see that there's a little bit more money spent there. So I'm looking forward to seeing what happens there.

There's one other issue that I'd like to talk about before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and that's the business plans themselves and the problem that this government has really with the effectiveness of program delivery. You know, what we're seeing is a government that's committed to measuring performance – or they say they are committed to measuring performance – but in fact has missed 264 of its performance measures in the past four fiscal years, enough for

the Auditor General to dedicate a serious portion of his report to and something that I think we as Albertans and legislators have to be very concerned about.

What are they doing with this information that they can't meet these performance measures? Is the premise that they're building the performance measurements on incorrect? Are they not measuring the things that they can actually deliver as a government? I think those are the kinds of questions that we have to talk about.

We've long said that input should be tied to outcome. That's a basic business premise, and it's the reason why they went to these business plans in the first place. Somehow it just doesn't happen and particularly doesn't happen in interim supply. We see no performance measures tied to the dollars that are spent here. So that's a question, because they're spending so much of the money in the up-front part of the year, and it's something that needs to be done.

We see that we don't have any programs specified in these ministry votes, no means for us to measure progress in the way that they are identifying their goals. That's a concern for us. When you just come out and ask for the money like this, we don't see objectives, we don't see strategies, we don't see benchmarks, and we don't see targets, all clear deficits of this particular process, Mr. Speaker, and something that I think needs to be addressed in the process of how interim supply requests come through.

The biggest concern for me certainly is the percentage of the budget that they're asking for, not the number of dollars, even though \$7 billion is a lot of money and is probably larger than the entire budget for a year for some of the territories that we have in this country. A lot of money, but that's not the question here. It's the percentage of the budget that they're allocating in the first six weeks of this particular budget year that is cause for concern. It means that they're not being accountable, and it is not supporting prudent financial management and fiscal responsibility.

Fiscal responsibility and prudent financial management require the establishment of mechanisms within the budgeting process that do a few things, Mr. Speaker. They protect the fiscal bottom line, something that this government is quite happy to talk about, but also sustain other investments. When we see the kind of drop funding that happens with this government, then what we don't see is a move towards a social or a fiscal balance that helps us support a very healthy community in the long term.

Those are the kinds of concerns we have. We think we bring up those concerns on behalf of many people throughout this province, and certainly I welcome the opportunity to have added my comments.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to have an opportunity to comment on Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001.

I'd like to restrict my comments, if I might, to the kinds of issues that were raised by the Auditor General in his most recent report, because we come to this request for money out of the context of the Auditor General's last review of budgets. He made a number of recommendations that I think were important recommendations, and by passing this particular bill this early in the legislative session, the opportunity to try to make some judgment about whether or not the Auditor General's recommendations have actually been followed is somewhat curtailed.

He did make a number of important points in his report, and one

of those was that the performance objectives in the business plans of this government are really a contract between the Legislature and the public. He went on to further state that when those performance measures were not clear and were open to interpretation, that contract was not being honoured. I think as you read through the report, the different departments and his comment on them, you can see that performance measures are still a problem for the government as far as it concerns their business plans.

4:30

Having adopted the performance measures paradigm or strategy for budgeting, I think it is incumbent upon the government to at least do the best with that model that can be done. It's a model that I think has been rejected in other places as being inadequate and supportive of values that don't always make people comfortable, but having adopted it, I think the obligation is to make sure that it works and works well.

The Auditor General did indicate that the Treasury had a responsibility to work with all of the government departments to make sure that those performance measures were ones that were useful and, again, honoured that contract between this Legislature and the people of the province. The Auditor General indicated that targets weren't being set by departments, that a lot of the measurements and a lot of the targets were not appropriate, and that they didn't in fact have targets for all of the measures that were in the business plans that had been prepared. There was often failure to indicate the year in which the particular target was supposed to be met by a department. I think the charge was that a lot of departments had targets and objectives that you couldn't measure, and they didn't have any kind of measure. They would have statements that included things like "increase over time" or there will be "continuous improvement."

The Auditor General was very critical of those kinds of measures in business plans. He again made the point that if the government is going to be held accountable for the budgeting, those targets had to be precise and they had to be quantifiable. They had to be measurable if they were going to be of any use. That's a refrain we've heard from the Auditor General for a number of years, that those performance measures are still, for a number of reasons, in some cases not well written and not very helpful in terms of examining the budget.

The Auditor General looked specifically at each of the departments, of course, and each of the departments is included in this bill for funding. Departments, for instance, like Children's Services: are we assured in this budget and in this request for money that the Ministry of Children's Services can really determine whether the funds they have spent have been spent economically? In the last report the Auditor General made the statement that the department really couldn't determine that and that \$32 million was being spent by that department where that was the case. They didn't know whether or not and couldn't tell whether or not they were spending that money economically.

It's a department that depends a great deal on support services, and services to children and families require a lot of association with suppliers and support services. It's a major worry as we pass this budget that that is in fact being looked at and has been rectified, and I'll be interested in hearing the minister when she presents her budget and makes comments. I'd be interested in her remarks as to the accountability in terms of support services.

Other comments about the accounting in Children's Services that were less than flattering. There are a number of difference practices in terms of financial reporting occurring among different children's authorities, and there are different understandings within those authorities of the kinds of procedures that should be followed.

Again, a large number of concerns raised by the Auditor General about the accounting practices in Children's Services and what was being done with money in Children's Services.

One of the specifics that he talked about was that the money being allocated and actually spent by authorities differed greatly. He saw that there were some real difficulties with the basic funding formula. I know the funding formula is under review and is being changed. There is a process in place for adjusting it. It still remains a problem that the department still doesn't have a handle on the funding formula. They are taking measures to enhance it, and I think we'll be interested in hearing what those measures are.

The Auditor General also talked about the financial statements. It doesn't concern us at this point as we look at these estimates, but it is something we'll be looking forward to as we look at the larger budget.

One of the major concerns in the Learning department and now Infrastructure was the lack of any long-term plan for capital planning for school facilities. This, again, has been a problem that's been with us for years; that is, there's no long-term planning for Infrastructure. We had the freeze on infrastructure followed by some doling out of some money, but the whole business of school buildings is still causing many communities a great deal of agony.

Those new communities that don't have schools: each school in those communities seems only to be gained by a great deal of citizen participation and lobbying of local boards and provincial government. We saw the agony of the residents surrounding the Alex Taylor school recently on television as those citizens lost their school. That hardly seems to be the way to run an infrastructure program, when one community gets a school at the expense of another community losing theirs.

Again, the Auditor General's recommendation that there be a long-term plan I think is one that would be echoed by school boards and by citizens across the province. They would at least know what the rules are going to be that they're playing by in terms of school facilities. I think it's because the government hasn't addressed some basic problems. Do they believe in neighbourhood schools? Is that something they value and will support with resources? It seems at this point that that whole notion of neighbourhood schools, at least in urban areas, is being rejected.

I think it is even more acute in rural communities. I have a file folder of letters and e-mails from citizens across the province who are alarmed at the state of their local school and the money needed to upgrade it. That's in the context of the fact that they might lose the school completely by closure. Some great worries in terms of what that does to their community. Many of them in that file predict that if the school is lost, the community itself will be lost. I think that's really very unfortunate because we can do much better as a province. Again, the Auditor General, in looking at the budget and reviewing the budget, made just those observations, that there has to be a strategic plan for infrastructure or for schools in the province.

4:40

A couple of other comments. The Auditor General devoted some parts of his report to graphing or charting the number of recommendations he or other Auditor Generals before him had made over the years that were just repeat recommendations, year after year. I think when we are looking at these appropriations, it's an opportunity to revisit them and to see what they are.

Some of the ones for Children's Services have been repeated at least twice in the Auditor General's reports. One in particular is that "we . . . recommend that each Authority develop an appropriate number of performance measures to monitor the effectiveness of services." There's been difficulty with performance measures being unrealistic. I think the comment was made that there were so many performance measures that there was no chance they were going to

all be measured, that some of them were vague, and that some of them were actually inapplicable. So that's a persistent theme through three of the Auditor General's reports about the Children's Services department and the state of the performance objectives they use as the base of their operations.

He's asked that the Department of Environment put in place some system for monitoring the delegated administrative organizations. That's been lacking, and again it's been the subject of a couple of Auditor General's reports. When we look at these estimates, we do it in a vacuum, not knowing whether that kind of attention has been given to this request for money and that that money has been spent within the context of the Auditor General's recommendations.

The health department has had a number of recommendations repeatedly from the Auditor General, according to his graph. One of them has been "that the Department of Health and Wellness and health authorities implement a . . . strategy for improving the implementation of . . . business plans." So we spend all this time in the authorities putting together business plans with a great deal of work and with a great number of resources brought to bear on it, and how well they work is in question. Some of them actually have to be changed quite dramatically if they're going to be really useful in delivering health services to the public.

The reporting of costs of key service outputs by health authorities has also been the subject of at least three Auditor General's reports. The need to make sure that those costs are actually determined with some accuracy and are helpful in terms of budget planning seems to fall on deaf ears.

Another related recommendation in terms of the department of health concerned the utilization and costs of health services. Without that information, the allocations of funds to help authorities were very chancy. If you don't know what it actually costs to render a service, then how do you actually prepare plans that have targets that involve those services? It seems it's an impossible task, or it ends up being a paper task that has no bearing to the reality or to the operation of health authorities.

The Department of Justice: a recommendation that they "report the results and costs of its fines collection activities." We'll be looking forward to looking at the budget to see where that's accommodated in the business plans and the measures that are there.

A couple more in terms of the Department of Learning. It's again going back to the recommendation about capital funding. I guess this recommendation now is directed toward the Infrastructure department, and the chart has been in at least the last three Auditor General's reports, that there be some long-term planning for school facilities and that that be in conjunction with the strategic plan for the delivery of education, and, again, that some of those decisions be made in terms of how we are going to deliver students' programs in this province both in urban and in rural areas.

There were a great number of recommendations that were related to the operations of the University of Alberta. The Auditor General had a wide range of questions about the university and its financial operations, and I believe that that's something we will be looking at very closely as we examine the larger budget estimates this year.

So the appropriation bill is before us, Mr. Speaker, and it's before us without a lot of justification or input by ministers in terms of amounts that have been spent, certainly very little airtime in this Legislature in terms of that money and how it fit into the goals and aims of the particular departments. I think that that's unfortunate.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude and look forward to the full budget debate when we get into the estimates. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]

Bill 7

Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 7. Bill 7 is the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 7 will change the Regional Health Authorities Act to allow us to set limits on candidate contributions and require an accounting of contributions in this fall's regional health authority board elections. It will also amend the Local Authorities Election Act by removing some unnecessary provisions relating to regional health authorities and outdated provisions relating to hospital and nursing home district boards. My colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs has responsibility for the Local Authorities Election Act, and I'm pleased to present these particular amendments to Bill 7 on his behalf. In all, Mr. Speaker, the limits, restrictions, and requirements we propose will be based on those that govern our own campaigns for membership in this Legislative Assembly. Those requirements ensure the perception as well as the fact of independent and nonpartisan campaigning.

The health authorities elections are fast approaching, and the nomination process has already begun. We need to ensure that all the rules are in place so the election process is uncompromised. We want to set the structure that will permit us to make those rules so that we can move forward and focus on the important matter of the election itself. Bill 7 is a necessary step towards creating this structure.

The first amendment allows us to require the disclosure of all records related to election finances. This process is similar to the provision applying to our own records as MLA candidates.

The next amendment is really the crux of what this bill is all about. It amends the Regional Health Authority Act to give government the authority to make regulations regarding the contributions themselves.

I would like to stress that the amendments I propose simply allow these rules to be established. With the approval of these amendments by this Assembly we will set out the rules that will govern who may make or accept a contribution, the timing and manner of making contributions, maximum amounts of these contributions, and penalties for violation. Also, we must address the holding and disposition of surplus contributions and how to act on contributions made in contravention of the regulations. We must define how contributions should be held and accounted for. Other regulations need to specify how election finance records should be kept and identify consequences of an elected regional health authority member failing to submit audited financial statements of election finances. I repeat: establishing the rules to effectively govern candidate contributions in these elections is essential to the integrity of the process. With the changes I've outlined in Bill 7, we will have the authority to make those rules.

Having said all this, I ask the support of members of this House for second reading of Bill 7.

4:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Happy to stand one more time this afternoon, this time to talk on Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act. There's no doubt that this is a bill that we have been waiting for for some time, and it's nice to see that we

finally have it before us and in a time frame where we can take this bill out and show it to Albertans, have some discussions with them, and look forward to their feedback before it actually will be passed in this House. So we're happy to see it printed and having been presented for first reading and now second reading. I'm sure that when we get to the committee stage on this bill, there will be a great deal to say about it, because it's been a discussion that Albertans have been having for some years in this province.

At least what we're seeing here are regulations with respect to the election finance rules, but I have to say that, even so, I do have a few concerns, just in the first cursory glance I've had at the bill, that I would like to talk about. Let's talk a little bit about the background of this bill before we get there.

We've seen this government promise RHA board elections since at least 1997, and there was lots of discussion about that before that time period in this Legislature. I can remember some of our good friends and good friends I think on both sides of this House – Nick Taylor, Bettie Hewes – talking about how important those kinds of elections would be in terms of increasing the efficiency and the ability of the hospital boards to be able to operate. So I think that's a good step.

We were told at that time that we were going to see these RHA elections in 1997, and of course as we all know, that didn't happen. There was some kerfuffle throughout the province at that time, lots of interesting feedback from people about the lack of actually putting those elections on the table at that time and some discussions about how the government would be prepared to move forward in the future.

It's nice to see that we're going to see those elections this fall. We're at the end of April. Those elections happen early this fall. It isn't very much time to get all the rules in place, all the candidates in place, and to ensure that we'll have accountability, transparency, and no conflict of interest in those elections and with the people who are running in those elections. So it's a little bit of a concern to me to see that once again we have what is in effect quite a flimsy bill for the kinds of issues and rules that'll have to be reviewed when it comes to putting these elections in place. That is one concern that I would like to put on the record.

There are many issues, we think, that are outstanding surrounding the impartiality of the election process, and that's going to be a key feature of the outreach we do to people throughout this province when we ask them to comment on this bill.

You know, one of the most important things that we can ensure in a democratic province and country is that there is impartiality in the election process. A concern that I have when I take a look at this bill, right off the bat, is when we get to section 4, where it talks about who can and who cannot run in this particular election. Mr. Speaker, we are talking about elections for the regional health authorities, where it looks like the government already has changed the rules about who can run. Now it looks to me that people who were specifically excluded before are now going to be allowed to run, so we're going to be for sure looking for clarification on that.

If we take a look at that section, it talked before about who was not eligible to be nominated as a candidate. Those were: if "in the case of a district board election," a person or their spouse

- (i) is a physician and a member of the medical staff,
 - (ii) is a dentist and a member of the medical staff or dental staff,
 - or
 - (iii) is an employee
- of a hospital or nursing home in respect of which the election is being held.

So good news. Previously those people were excluded from running to run the regional health authorities because, you would

think right off the bat, there was a huge potential for conflict of interest here, Mr. Speaker. Certainly that is a situation that nobody in this Legislature should even consider in their wildest expectations would be reasonable to support. So that's something that we're going to be getting lots of feedback on, I'm sure, and certainly some legal opinions on what kind of eligibility there should be or restrictions on those people if they happen to be elected.

You think about the regional health authorities and how they're operating now. If you put key people on the board, one or more who have a strong vested interest in the running of any kind of medical services within the community, we could see all kinds of problems perceived and real coming up that could be serious conflicts of interest. So I think that's something that's going to require a great deal of information on and discussion about before that particular part of this bill can be passed. Quite likely it's a situation where we will see an amendment coming forward from this side of the House.

Sometimes what's happened in the past, Mr. Speaker, a very good thing that's happened, is that we've talked to the government about parts of bills that we don't like or that we are finding that the community is finding problematic. Sometimes government members will go home to their constituencies and find out that the people they're talking to have the same kinds of concerns, and a discussion begins around how to eliminate that particular concern from the bill so that there can be otherwise general support for the bill. Sometimes we've seen that rather than us bringing forward an amendment which inevitably is defeated in this Legislature, the government will draft an amendment of their own that will delete or change the specific section in the bill, which will make it a lot more acceptable to us and to other people throughout the province.

So I would like to raise a red flag right now on section 4 and ask the minister to take a look at that and to get some feedback from people that he knows, not people who want to be sitting on these RHA boards but people who are concerned about the optics both true and perceived of having someone with a vested interest in the community participating at a board level in the RHAs. I think that's something that he can take a look at. There'll be some time to think about that before we get into the final stages of this bill. Certainly it's something that we're going to be running past any number of people to see how it sounds to them and whether or not they have concerns about it and whether or not we should be pursuing this in the form of an amendment of our own in the absence of an amendment from the government. So we'll see how that proceeds, but heads up on that because it's I think going to be a concern for us.

Also, this election only applies to two-thirds of the board members, Mr. Speaker, not what was originally discussed by the government or by us. So that's something that we'll be talking about, too, as this bill proceeds, that fully one-third of the members of this board are still appointed by the government.

Once again, the issues of conflict of interest, lack of impartiality, of concerns around transparency are all issues that we see when the government appoints these members. In addition to that, we've got the minister holding the exclusive right to appoint the all-important chair of each board, so many people would say that what you're putting in that chair is a puppet. So how could the minister eliminate that kind of a concern, Mr. Speaker? That's our question for him, and I'm hoping that he will address that.

Those are my opening concerns on Bill 7. I look forward to participating in the debate when it gets to the Committee of the Whole stage.

Thank you.

5:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to Bill 7, Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001. which is going through – well, we just started, I guess, in second reading. I'm pleased to join the debate and make some preliminary observations.

Since it's a bill that amends an existing piece of legislation, it's rather light on detail, but the general principles underlying it are the ones that I would like to address at the moment. The first main concern that I have about the bill is that although it now will enable regional health authorities to have some members elected, at least one-third of those who will constitute a regional health authority past next October will still be appointed and appointed by the minister. I wonder why this departure from the established practice in this province which applies to school boards, which applies to municipal councils, and which says that all members of local government bodies such as school boards and city councils will be elected. So when we elect all of those members, I wonder why the departure from this practice in this case.

Why does this government not trust elected members to do the business of RHAs, all elected members of the RHAs, and be able to do their work in the same way that our city councils and school boards, which have all members elected by the electorate, do their business? This causes me serious concern about the real intention of the government's insistence, expressed in this bill, to be able to handpick a substantial number of the board members of RHAs. One can only speculate about the real reasons why the government has chosen this route, a route that departs, as I said, dramatically from the established practice and experience of Albertans to rely on fully elected boards to get the services and hold these boards accountable if those services are not appropriately delivered. Why is the government trying to introduce this new practice whereby it will appoint one-third of these members?

I guess we know the record of this government on its position on the future of the public health care system in this province. We know that this government rushed through this Legislature, against widespread public opposition, a bill called Bill 11, presumably to protect the future of health care. Albertans did not trust this government on that. So one of the reasons why the government is perhaps proceeding the way it is, by way of this bill, to ensure that it can handpick one-third of the RHA board members is to ensure that it can secure an overall composition of these RHAs which allows it to continue to proceed with its agenda to gradually dismantle the public health care system in this province and implement its agenda of privatization.

I am trying to fathom the reasons. I had hoped that the minister would stand up and justify and comment on this concern. I'm sure he will. He's a good minister. He's a minister that I can expect to respond point by point and seriously to the issues, the concerns, and the questions which, as the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona and the leader of the Alberta New Democrats, I'm posing to him as he sits and listens. I know he's taking notes, which is very good.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections] The minister is obviously very popular with his backbenchers. It's a good thing to know. I'm sure he'll be able to convince them that some of the points I've been making need the serious attention of the Tory caucus. So it's a good sign that he has the support here of his colleagues in the caucus.

The government, Mr. Speaker, will continue to appoint the chairs of the RHAs. That's the second outstanding feature. I am again curious and Albertans are curious why the minister has taken such awesome responsibility when he has so much work to do as it is. He's running one of the biggest departments in this province, with more than, I'm told, a \$5 billion budget that he has to look after. Why is he adding to his responsibilities?

Another onerous one is to handpick the chairs of these RHAs, which in the first place are diminished by the fact that he's going to be appointing one-third of them with his own executive authority. That surprises me again. Why? Again the question is: does the minister or do his cabinet colleagues insist that he retain this government control over these RHAs and give them, however, the appearance of being elected, yet be able to set the terms, set the agenda, through his handpicked members and the chair, of what these RHAs should be doing? That is not the way, Mr. Speaker, to practise democracy in the province.

There's nothing wrong with following the practices that we have established in this province, long-established practices of allowing elected bodies. First of all, let these bodies be elected one hundred percent, have all members elected. Secondly, allow them and put in legislation that they will be responsible for electing their own chairs of the boards. Not to do so is to cause concern. Not to do so is to raise questions about the real intentions of the government. One of those apparent intentions that comes to mind would be to be able to manipulate behind the scenes what these RHAs do and make sure that the minister has the ultimate power to make them do what the minister and his cabinet want them to do.

5:10

Mixing elected members, who have legitimate authority backing them in terms of the votes they received from the electors, with appointed members who have no such authority, who enjoy no such legitimacy is to invite the possibility that there will be difficult relationships between the elected portion of the RHAs and the unelected ones, the ones who will be appointed by the minister. One should be able to anticipate, one should be able to foresee some of these potential difficulties and tensions across these two groups, the small 33 percent appointed by the minister and the two-thirds who will say: we are here because we are elected by the voters, and we're here to represent their voice. The voice of the citizens will be set against the intentions of the minister or the deputy minister, whoever is responsible for running RHAs. Not a good start, Mr. Speaker.

So this bill is terribly, terribly flawed. It is disrespectful of existing practices which have worked for us. It denies us the opportunity to try the tried-and-true practices that have been in place and replaces them with practices that will in my view cause difficulties and at the moment are causing a great deal of concern and suspicion about the real intentions of this government, given its record on the future of health care in this province.

There is much potential for conflict here that's built right into Bill 7. The appointments of the appointed portion of the RHAs will take place after the elections have taken place. This will give ample time for the government to assess the track record, the public commitments made by the elected members on each RHA. Thus the minister will have the opportunity, if he so chooses – and I'm not suggesting that this minister will definitely go that route, but the legislation before us gives him the powers to do so – to appoint the rest of the members in such a way as to balance the proclivities, the commitments of the elected members to neutralize any serious opposition that the department or the government or the minister may perceive may arise to the government's own plans to continue to privatize the health care system.

This feature again causes me to wonder, and I'm sure the minister will be replying to some of these concerns that I have. This ability to survey beforehand the composition, the makeup, of the elected portion of RHAs certainly suggests that the government is interested in ensuring that there's a progovernment net balance in these RHAs. That doesn't speak well for this government's own plans and certainly doesn't speak well for this bill. The government is afraid

of losing control of the boards because poll after poll of people in Alberta show they retain a major commitment to universal public health care, and they could very well lose control. The government could very well lose control if they had fully elected boards.

I will conclude my short comments here, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure I'll have an opportunity to say more in the later stages of the debate on this bill.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments on Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001, at second reading. Of course, at second reading we are supposed to confine our comments to the underlying principles of the bill, and I think that if you look at some of the principles that underline this bill, you can't argue with them.

The principle that seems to be embedded in this, at least partly, is that citizens should have local control over health affairs in their communities. Given the state of the health care system the last number of years, that's a principle that should be heartily endorsed. Citizens have been faced with hallway medicine, with long waiting lines, with services that are rendered to them in other communities rather than their home community, a whole host of problems that the central health authority hasn't seemed to have been able to deal with. I'm sure that citizens will feel much more comfortable knowing that there are local representatives who have some control over affairs and whom they can go to. These will not be remote figures in Edmonton for the most part. These will be local individuals known in the community and approachable by citizens with their concerns.

So I think that whole notion of more local control is one that has to be applauded. But – and it's a big but – the notion of limiting it to one-third and two-thirds is really very difficult to understand. It's like the government doesn't quite trust democracy to work as far as regional health boards are concerned, and they want to make sure that they have at least some control over the actions of those boards. It's a rather curious sort of ratio that they've come up with, and I look forward, I hope at some point, to hearing an explanation as to why that one-third/two-thirds ratio was the one that was chosen. You know, it really does sort of put a caveat on the whole notion of democracy and local control over health affairs.

There are some underlying principles concerning conflict of interest on boards that are rather interesting given the changes that have been made, and I think the changes are healthy in terms of some of the individuals. I found it hard to understand why an employee of a long-term health care authority would be excluded from sitting on a board. Having had some association with one of those facilities now for the last couple of years, I think the same rules should apply to employees of the health care system as apply under the Local Authorities Election Act to teachers who run for school boards. I know that that has been raised as an issue by some across the province, but in terms of faith in democracy and allowing citizens the widest opportunity to exercise themselves as citizens, I think that in the long run the few people that would be excluded from running under those kinds of rules have not been worth the kinds of problems that they've raised. So I'm pleased that it's been changed and that the eligibility has been opened up to the full range of citizens and that there aren't particular groups being excluded on the basis of their occupation and their association with the health system. In fact, in terms of the case of school boards, teachers who are on those boards I think have made some valuable contributions when you look back at various school boards across the province and

some of the innovations that they've been able to undertake. The insider knowledge is, I think, often very useful to boards.

It's going to be interesting in terms of how the appointments will be made, and there's an opportunity here, I think, for the government to soften some of the criticisms of the appointment pressure by taking and appointing an independent body and having people who would be appointees apply to that body and have that body responsible for health board appointees. It's one that we've suggested, for instance, for boards of governors for educational institutions, and I think that kind of mechanism could be put in place fairly quickly.

MS CARLSON: Tell us how it works. I don't know.

DR. MASSEY: Well, I think the notion is that if I were interested in being appointed to a health authority, there would be an independent board that I could apply to, much as if you want to be appointed to a board of city council. There's a group that overlooks those appointments. You make your application. That group then has an opportunity to compare applicants and their suitability for serving on such a board and to make the recommendations on merit rather than having those appointees serve under the cloud of having been appointed because they are a friend of a particular member of the government or have expressed political views that are consistent with the government's views which makes them a candidate for those reasons rather than because they have certain skills that they can bring to the board that are needed in terms of the kinds of decision-making.

MS CARLSON: Who would sit on that committee to decide if they could apply?

DR. MASSEY: I'm not quite sure.

I was trying to think of what it might be like to serve on a board where a third of the members were appointed, and I think it would be an interesting experience, reflecting back on my experiences as a trustee, having had a third of them appointed would have caused additional friction. Often boards serving local interests act in ways that are inconsistent with the way the government would have them act, and that kind of independence I think is going to be hampered by having members that are government appointees. The chances of one of those boards standing up and actually taking an independent stand is going to be compromised. It's going to be much less likely to happen with government appointees on it, and maybe that's the purpose of having the government appointees on the board in the first place. I think it's going to be an interesting experience to sit on a board that is set up in just that way.

5:20

I think those three principles, the notion that local citizens should have control over health affairs in their community, the principles underlying conflict of interest – the principles concerning democracy itself are embedded in this bill, and I think it would be interesting to put the kinds of experiences that other boards in the province have had against what's proposed for the health authorities and look at the experience they've had and then to try to make some predictions as to how well these boards are going to operate. It'll be also interesting to see what kinds of regulations the government makes in terms of the provisions for the elections that are out.

Some packages were delivered to our constituency offices outlining some of the details of health board elections. It's interesting that the information coming out is that in some of the regions, at least to this point, there hasn't been a full slate of people come forward saying they're willing to serve. That may be partly because

of the short time lines and the fact that there hasn't been a great deal of public discussion in terms of the responsibilities and the duties of people that are elected to these particular authorities. What are they going to do? I look back on my own experience on the school board, again having gone into that with little knowledge of what was expected. I suspect that that is what's holding up a number of people in terms of putting their names forward.

That poses an interesting question. What happens if there's not a full slate of candidates for the board? What actions will be taken? Will the list of appointees be expanded? What accommodation has been made should there not be a full slate? I think it's a concern that may have to be faced.

The new boards, of course, are going to face some pretty horrendous problems, given the state of health care in some parts of the province. I think we can look forward to the same kinds of difficulties that the children's authorities have had in terms of the different regions working with each other and the kinds of agreements that are going to have to be made when citizens move or are served in one health authority and are resident in another. I think that those will

be problems that we can anticipate, will be some of the very first problems that those authorities have to deal with, that whole notion of boundaries and the kinds of problems that those boundaries can present in terms of the delivery of services.

I think we can gain from the experience of the children's authorities. There are going to be some interesting questions in terms of the allocation of resources to the health boards and on what basis those allocations are going to be made. I think we can expect – because many of them will be new boards – there'll be some of the problems that children's authorities have had with reporting and the financial affairs of the authorities. Those will be growing pains that these new authorities will have to work through. We do have some experience now with the children's authorities that they can benefit from. I enumerated some of those earlier in the afternoon, Mr. Speaker, when I looked at the recommendations of the Auditor General. So I think that there's experience that these boards can learn from.

[At 5:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 30, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back. At the conclusion of the prayer would all hon. members please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please join in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice, and we'll call on Mr. Paul Lorieau.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you five esteemed members of the Junior Chamber JCs. I would ask that they please rise as I mention their names. Mr. Georges Bouverat from Switzerland is the world president of the Junior Chamber International. Mr. Bouverat is in Edmonton to consider this fine city, the capital of this province, as a possible location to host what is referred to as area C conference. This conference is scheduled for May 2003 and will include Junior Chamber representatives from 21 different countries including the U.S.A., Canada, and South America, to name but a few. It expects to attract up to 1,500 delegates. Mr. Bouverat is joined by Mr. Tracy DesLaurier, Canadian Junior Chamber national president, who coincidentally resides right here in Edmonton. Also joining them are Mr. Duane Vienneau, Canadian Junior Chamber national vice-president, who also resides here in Edmonton, and Mr. Andrew Woolley, past president of the Edmonton Junior Chamber and bid committee chair for the 2003 conference of the Americas. Mr. Justin Dahlen, president of the Edmonton Junior Chamber, rounds out our guests this afternoon. Missing from the delegation is the man who helped arrange all of this, and that's a good friend of mine and of the Assembly's, Mr. Mike Hodgins, who is senator of the JC movement and a past-president related thereto.

We wish the Edmonton bid committee every success in their efforts to attract this important international conference to our provincial capital in this great province. Would all of you please join me in extending an official warm welcome to these special JC guests.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order (93)(2):

- (1) the petition of the congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001;
- (2) the petition of the Royal Trust Corporation of Canada for the Burns Memorial Trust Act;
- (3) the petition of the Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company for the Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act; and
- (4) the petition of ING Western Union Insurance Company for the Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present to the Assembly today on behalf of the Member for Rocky Mountain House constituency a petition signed by in excess of 3,000 people from Rocky Mountain House and surrounding area who are concerned about bed shortages in the continuing care facility to be built by the David Thompson health region. The petition calls for the government of the province of Alberta to make a commitment to ensure that the number of beds, 70-plus, will become a priority issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition today which is urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to "ensure that maximum penalties are enforced for all crimes committed with weapons and that all youths involved in weapons related crimes be tried in adult court," signed by 92 people throughout Alberta.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition I presented last Thursday signed by 20 Albertans calling for the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on Thursday, April 26, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly copies of a letter I sent earlier today to Mr. Steve Penikett of Kenn Borek Air Ltd. The letter congratulates the pilot and crew of Kenn Borek for their successful mission to the Antarctica to rescue a physician. The letter expresses the pride that I know all Albertans feel that an Alberta-based company earned such international praise for its heroic work.

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to attach and table five copies of the requisite annual reports for the Municipal Affairs delegated administrative organizations. The organizations are the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta, the Alberta Propane Vehicle Administration Organization, and the authorized accredited agencies.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table my response to the questions raised in second reading of Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the last day of the grace period for employers to comply with Alberta's working-alone regulation. I would like to table five copies of Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees, which we mailed to 110,000 employers across the province, and five copies of the ad that we ran in daily and weekly newspapers to remind employers of the April 30, 2001, deadline to comply with the new regulation.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a brochure on the St. Matthew school open house and family wellness symposium, which was held last Thursday.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, all on the same theme. The first is a letter from Avenwood Corner pointing out that their electricity rate has quintupled and they are not receiving the 11-cent rate as they are considered a commercial user.

The second is a letter dated March 29 from the Condominium Advocate Association pointing out and asking the government for a review of power rate classification and rebate programs for high-rise condominiums.

The third is also a letter from the Condominium Advocate Association dated April 5 pointing out that after the rebates and the differential rates, high-rise condominium owners are paying substantially more for the same amount of power.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Mrs. Judy Bethel, president of Hostelling International, Northern Alberta. She's concerned about the negative effects of skyrocketing electricity prices on the financial stability of their organization.

The second is five copies of two letters from Dr. Tracey Henderson of the Bow Valley Citizens for Clean Air. Dr. Henderson and her group are very concerned about the negative impacts on air quality from Lafarge's Exshaw fuel flexibility project. They believe the original submission by Lafarge contained calculation errors and want the government to conduct a full environmental impact assessment on this project.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the entire Assembly the program from The King's University College graduation ceremony, which occurred Saturday, April 28, at the West End Christian Reformed Church here in Edmonton.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a report by a Calgary organization of parents known as SPEAK advocating effective quality public education. The report, titled Report to Calgary School Councils and the Calgary Community with Recommendations to the Calgary Board of Education and the Government of Alberta, recommends immediate reduction in class sizes and greater support of public education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 109 I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 12th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2000. This report presents the audited financial statements for the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 fiscal years and the fourth annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Hon. members who were here in the year 2000 may not be surprised to learn the following. In 2000 the average number of sitting hours per day rose to 6.16 hours, the highest in the history of this Assembly. The Assembly saw an unprecedented 22 requests for recorded votes between midnight and 2:15 a.m. and received a record number of petitions at 431. Nearly 133,000 people visited the Alberta Legislature and Interpretive Centre in 2000. A copy of the report is being distributed to all members.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the requisite number of copies, being five, of the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee 1999-2000 annual report.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm performing this introduction on behalf of the hon. Member for Highwood. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a young guest who is with us today and I believe is in the members' gallery. Well, maybe in the Speaker's gallery. There she

is. During a time when most people her age were enjoying the first warmer days of spring in High River, Melissa Mathieson spent her free time volunteering on the election team for the Member for Highwood. What makes Melissa's story stand out from that of so many other election volunteers is that she's not even old enough to vote. In fact, she won't be old enough to vote in the next election either. Eleven-year-old Melissa has a passion for politics and is a shining example of the strong values of community volunteerism and citizenship that Alberta's young people demonstrate across this province. The Member for Highwood is indeed fortunate to have this talented young woman in his constituency and on his team. Melissa is accompanied today by her father, Larry Mathieson, and I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 48 students from Our Lady of Perpetual Help school. They are here during Education Week celebrating the world of opportunity in the Legislature. They are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Fortin, Mr. Girouard, and Mrs. McCauley. Would they please stand and we could give them a round of applause. I believe they may be in the public gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Henry Kostyniuk and Miss Jaylene Kostyniuk, his daughter. These folks are here today to experience the Legislature, and they're part of a home schooling program. I'd ask them, if they are in the Assembly right now, to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we celebrate Education Week, whose theme is A World of Opportunity, I'm indeed delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 44 students from St. Elizabeth Seton school, which is located in the constituency that I'm honoured to represent, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The students are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Herbert and Mr. Boyechko as well as parents Mr. Marion, Mrs. Stotyn, and Ms Langstrom. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise at this time and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Todd Herron. Todd is a very longtime friend of mine, and he and his wife, Avril, and sons Aidan and Mason live in Winnipeg. He is coming to Alberta and visiting with increasing frequency and is often heard humming the tune *Alberta Bound*. I'd ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Education Funding

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Education Week, and our public education system is facing a number of critical issues. My questions are to the Premier. How can a school board follow your 4, 2 two-year teachers' salary guide when for most school boards 2 percent is taken up for grid increments each year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the budget provides flexibility for school boards to deal with all of these issues: the issues of class size, teachers' salaries, the myriad issues that face educators today.

Relative to the specifics of the question I will take the matter under advisement and discuss the question asked with the minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how can a school board settle nonteacher salary raises out of this budget when they normally follow teachers' salary increases on a percentage basis and make up about one-third of salaries in each district?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I previously explained, the budget, while it identifies a line item vis-a-vis teachers' salaries, also goes on to provide the flexibility for school boards to deal with all issues relative to the delivery of education, including class size and teachers' salaries.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the school boards deal with this issue when they're being given the money for teachers' salaries based on their '99 teacher employment rather than their 2000 or projected 2001? Why are they getting the money proportioned back two years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that refers to a detailed line item in the budget, and I'm not entirely familiar with the intricacies of the situation. I will take the question under advisement and discuss the matter with the minister.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. leader for the second main question, I would like to point out as well that on today's Order Paper the chair notices that on May 3, day 4 of the Committee of Supply discussions, the Department of Learning has been designated and is called as the department before the Assembly.

1:50

Education Funding (continued)

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, how can a school board make the appropriate decisions to reduce class sizes when the 3.5 percent budget increase is going to be mostly needed for salaries? How can the school boards properly deal with their functions?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Finance minister supplement my answer, but I do believe that there is flexibility in the budget, as I stated previously, to deal with all of these issues. I don't know if the percentage figure cited by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is indeed the correct figure or whether that figure was given in its absolute total context. I don't believe it was.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to supplement. In

the budget this year there are two things. One is a new line item that says salaries – it's clearly there – 6 percent over two years, but in addition to that, the base instructional grant was also increased 6 percent over the two.

It's not the province's role to intrude at the local level of the school district. We leave the bargaining process up to the local school board to deal with the local ATA. There is enough flexibility within the budget to deal with the pressure points, whether it be all on salary or on classroom sizes or the priorities within each school district. So there is flexibility, Mr. Speaker, within that budget to deal with all of the elements and the priorities that are laid out by the local school board, not by this Legislative Assembly.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: how much flexibility do the school boards have when they get a 3.5 percent base, 4 percent for their teachers next year, when 2 percent goes to increments? They have to deal with their staff. They also have to deal with the costs of increased utilities, which are not being met by the subsidies that are there. How do all of those get built into those two components: a 3.5 percent base and a 4 percent salary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the issue of the subsidies – and I'll address that issue specifically – I think that this government has been more than generous, particularly on the natural gas side, both through the program that ends as of today and the new program that will be in effect, I believe, July 1 of this year. Relative to electricity, we have gone some distance to ameliorate and alleviate the cost with respect to the high cost of electricity.

Relative to the line items in the budget, I do believe that those items and the amount that we have budgeted provide a reasonable degree of flexibility for the school boards to deal with the matters alluded to by the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the Premier looked into the possibility of how much class sizes may have to increase in order for the school boards to get the money to meet these other financial obligations that are coming when they don't have the option to truly alter those financial needs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have to budget based on reasonable assumptions, and the assumption in this particular case is that the amount that we have provided for basic education in the primary and the secondary systems is sufficient for the school boards to find flexibility within those dollar figures to provide the services that are deemed to be adequate to educate our kids.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Teachers' Salaries

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has decided to change the rules with respect to bargaining with teachers in this province: first, a specific line item in the budget for teachers' salaries, then provocative statements by the minister, and now a media campaign that does nothing more than provoke teachers. My questions are to the Premier. Has the government set out to deliberately provoke job action by teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take offence to that statement, to the preamble in particular, especially the statement relative to this

government going out and provoking confrontation with the teachers. It was the ATA at Mount Royal College sometime in the midmorning of a day last week that held the news conference that prompted the reaction from the minister of education. The first and opening salvo was fired by the Alberta Teachers' Association without a full examination of the ability of the school board to fully assess the impact of the budget and how they are going to find within those budget dollars the flexibility to deal with precisely the concerns that were brought forward by the ATA. It was the ATA and not this government that fired the opening shot.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: were the radio ads that have been playing placed before last Tuesday's budget?

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry; I don't know the radio ads to which the hon. member alludes, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we have made statements that we want our teachers to be fairly and reasonably compensated. The hon. minister has alluded to our teachers in many cases, depending on the school district in which they teach, already being the highest paid or amongst the highest paid in Canada. We want our teachers to be well paid, but we also want to provide the various school districts – and I believe there are about 62 or 63 – with the flexibility to deal not only with teachers' salaries but with all of the other issues that are so intricately associated with the delivery of education in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: having lost the confidence of teachers, what action does the Premier plan to rectify the situation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if we've lost the confidence of teachers. I believe that we do have the confidence of teachers. As a matter of fact, there are probably about 13 teachers in this caucus, and they feel very confident with this government or else they wouldn't be here and they wouldn't have run for our government. There may be a problem with the teachers' union and the leadership of the teachers' union. But amongst the teachers, the profession of teaching, I don't believe there is a problem, because they are committed to the education of our children, as we are committed to the education of our children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is playing cruel games with Alberta teachers, raising expectations of a well-deserved raise before the budget and then crushing their hopes with a measly 6 percent raise over two years. The double standard, backtracking, and hypocrisy on this issue are truly breathtaking. My questions are to the Premier. Why don't teachers deserve a raise that's comparable to the pay raises that nurses and doctors received prior to the election?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is not a comparison to be made here because the dynamics are different today, as they were different three or four or five years ago. I'll remind the hon. member that teachers have received on average a 17 percent increase over the past I believe it's four years plus another 6 percent over two or something

in that range, depending on how the school districts deal with the particular issue.

The hon. Minister of Learning, as I have already pointed out, has stated that in many school districts in this province teachers are already the highest paid in the country on average, and basically we have said that we want all of our teachers to be fairly and adequately compensated to ensure that our children are well educated. Mr. Speaker, this is not forsaking the wonderful profession of teaching in any way, shape, or form. This is fulfilling our commitment to excellence in education.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify a 6 percent increase in teachers' salaries over the next two years when private schools have been given 40 percent more funding over the same period? Why this double standard, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member is comparing apples and oranges and grapes and peaches and watermelons and mangoes and bananas. The situation vis-a-vis private schools is totally different. Private schools receive no capital funds. They receive no funds for equipment. They receive no funds for transportation. We subsidize up to 60 percent – it was 50 percent – of the basic instructional fee, and that's as far as it goes. As much as the hon. member hates and despises and loathes alternative education and the parent's right to seek alternative means of education, on the whole and generally across the board the grade average of children attending those schools is at least comparable to if not higher than it is in the public systems.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think supporters of public education should really start worrying about the future of education in the Premier's hands.

My final question to the Premier: why is the government cynically driving a wedge between school boards and teachers by forcing the boards to choose between teachers' salaries and other important priorities like class sizes?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, school boards have always been challenged within budget envelopes to deal with these issues, and year by year by year we have been increasing funding to allow them even more flexibility to deal with these issues. We have said as a government that we want to achieve excellence in education, but like health or like any other issue, you don't achieve excellence by simply throwing money at the situation. You provide reasonable resources.

I'll remind the hon. member that we are spending now on public education, because he alluded to public versus private education, in excess of \$4 billion a year. I know that he doesn't think that that's much – I mean, my God, it would be the philosophy of the socialist NDs to borrow and, you know, drive the province into bankruptcy at any cost, Mr. Speaker – but \$4 billion is a huge amount to spend on public education. This government is willing to put in the resources necessary to provide the school districts and the school boards with the flexibility to achieve quality and excellence in education in this province.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, would you please familiarize yourself with the preamble rule for tomorrow, please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Long-term Care

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently been informed of a situation that is somewhat due to a growing and aging population that highlights the need for an increased focus on long-term care. The situation is that of a senior couple where the husband requires 24-hour care. His wife, also a senior, can no longer provide the level of care her husband needs. Since there is a shortage of long-term care beds available in their home community of Strathmore, this couple is faced with the possibility they may have to live in different communities after 47 years of marriage. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the government doing to ensure that the people of Strathmore have the long-term care services and facilities they need?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that I understand it is very difficult in cases where families are separated from their loved ones, and I want to assure Albertans and the people in this Assembly that we are working hard at creating a culture and a system of supports that allow seniors to live as long as possible in their own homes. Last year the regional health authority in the area that was referred to by the hon. member received some \$6 million to build 50 new long-term care beds that will replace existing facilities within Didsbury. It's my expectation that there will be a study that is being prepared for a long-term care addition in the area of Strathmore, and I will be pleased to review that proposal in the context of other capital projects received from around the province.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to this, regional health authorities are preparing and submitting continuing care service plans to me later on this year. Those plans will identify long-term care, home care, and supportive housing needs for each region and their respective strategies within regional health authorities on how to meet those needs. When I receive the plan from regional health authority No. 5, I'll be reviewing it and working with them.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this specific case, I am encouraging the officials from health authority No. 5 to work with this particular family in Strathmore to ensure that all the possible options to allow this couple to remain together are explored.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to specifically address the needs of all Albertans as the population ages and more long-term care services and facilities are required?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government and this department are doing much to support Alberta seniors and their health needs. Regional health authorities have received nearly \$40 million over the last two years for long-term care but also for home care. Last year the regional health authorities received onetime funding of \$172 million to expand capacity and to upgrade existing long-term care facilities across the province; \$42 million of that was specifically earmarked to upgrade or replace rural long-term care facilities and to convert vacant hospital space for long-term care use. An additional \$28 million was approved to help rural health authorities implement the Healthy Aging partnership initiatives. All of these initiatives are designed to help seniors stay in their communities with the assistance that they need, and we remain committed to working with health authorities to address these placement issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

School Closures

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Education Week. My questions are to the Premier. How many public school closures can Albertans expect this year?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. I hope as few as possible, but understanding the challenges of the various local school boards, there likely will be some. How many? I don't know for sure.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: how many public school closures will there be in Alberta next year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know. This is a matter for the local school jurisdictions to deal with. But I can tell you that we have dedicated something in the neighbourhood of \$1.1 billion to build new schools and to renovate existing schools. You know, it's typical of the Liberals: the cup isn't half full; it's half empty. So it's not how many new schools and renovations to schools and improvements to schools we are going to make as a government. It's how many schools might be closed – might be closed – under the jurisdiction of the local school boards.

2:10

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, my final question: will Alberta be celebrating Education Week every year with school closures?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question during the first week of this legislative session. School closures have been going on for years and years and years. The whole question, when I was reporting on these issues – I was reporting back in the '70s and the '60s on school closures. When I was the mayor of Calgary, we had to deal with the issue of school closures. It was an issue during the '80s. It was an issue during the '90s. It's an issue now. It will always be an issue, especially in the major urban centres.

As I explained before, cities are creatures, towns are creatures, and they continue to grow. The demographics of those cities change, and the dynamics of those cities change. School boards are always challenged with the issue of where to open new schools, where to close schools, but they're also being challenged with the issue of how to think outside the box and, if a school is being closed, how they put it to another use. That use could be community use. It could be a use involving seniors. It could be a use involving a combination of community and education. Mr. Speaker, that's what democratically elected school boards are there for: to find ways to deal with these issues, understanding that a city and the demographics of a municipality or a municipal district or a county will never be the same. It's always changing, and they have to be up to meeting those changing needs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Protection for Independent Contractors

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Alberta government has put in place effective provisions to ensure consumer protection

against unethical businesses, a number of businesses in my constituency expressed to me their concern with the lack of attention to protect them from unethical customers. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. What has your department done to protect independent contractors from dealing with unethical customers?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we have the Fair Trading Act, which offers regulation and protection for consumers as well as sets a level playing field through standards for businesses. Outside the Fair Trading Act, of course, businesses have access to customer credit checks. As well, they can look at terms of payment as they sit down with their prospective customers.

Within legislation, Mr. Speaker, our department has a prepaid contract business licence regulation where an operator who is licensed and bonded can require an advance payment or a progressive payment in terms of the amount of work that has been done. Within the Department of Municipal Affairs there is also a provision that the hon. member's construction companies may wish to use, and it's called a builder's lien. In short, there are provisions there, and it's a good idea for businesses to get to know their customers and sit down and make the appropriate contracts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the same minister. Given that our economy is growing very competitive, Alberta businesses, especially the independent contractors that I talked about, cannot afford to waste their valuable time and resources in the government's bureaucratic and time-consuming requirements on them in dealing with the small number of unethical clients. My question is: what kind of help can the ethical contractors expect from the government?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are several ways that both the customer and the business can benefit. Under the Fair Trading Act we have a provision where an arbitration process can be in place if a customer files a claim against a business's bond. Now, there are also businesses that have set up within their contracts arbitration clauses, and one of the best examples of this is the Canadian motor vehicle arbitration plan for new car purchases, where the dealer and the customer can set down and through the arbitration clause come out to an arbitration result. As well, Mr. Speaker, in the province of Alberta we have the Arbitration and Mediation Society, that can offer their services too.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. I learned that in Denver, Colorado, there is a type of arbitration board that sends certified inspectors to the work site to review the work and make binding and final ruling between the contractor and the client. Could the minister tell us if there is a similar function in Alberta, and if there is none, what can we do to set it up?

MR. COUTTS: I can reassure the hon. member that there is arbitration and there are other areas where we can look at providing services to businesses as well as consumers. Contractors and renovators who enter into contracts with consumers and take a deposit, Mr. Speaker, are required to be licensed and bonded under

the Fair Trading Act. That establishes an automatic arbitration mechanism to which we will appoint an independent arbitrator. As well, as I said, the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society can provide services, and the Dispute Settlement Centre, which is operated by the Better Business Bureau of Alberta, is also in place for those circumstances.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, would you please, as well, review the preamble rule?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Classification of Video Games

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a September meeting Canada's justice ministers agreed that each province would come up with its own classification and regulatory scheme for violent video games aimed at young people. At the close of this justice ministers' meeting Alberta's Minister of Justice said, "Protecting our children is a top priority for our government." However, B.C. has now become the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce legislation to ensure that all video games are classified and that youth and children cannot rent or buy video games that are inappropriate for their age. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell this House if his department's research has shown any correlation between exposure to media and video game violence and aggressive and violent behaviour or even participation in gangs?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, with respect to the preamble, I don't think it's an appropriate or accurate portrayal of a decision made at the justice ministers' conference in Nunavut last September. What happened at that conference was that B.C. brought forward the proposal and outlined what they were planning to do with respect to the classification of video games. Justice ministers from across the country took that information for information and indicated that, quite appropriately, in most cases it was another department of their government that dealt with classification issues, that we had to consult and do those sorts of things. So, in fact, there wasn't an agreement at that ministers' meeting that all the provinces would get into the classification business.

In answer to the question, I don't believe we've done that research.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Well, can the minister tell the members of this House whether he is planning to follow B.C.'s lead and protect our children and young people from violent video games?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to say that protection of children is a very important concern for this government. We've taken a lot of steps, including the protection of children involved in prostitution, the domestic violence court project in Calgary that we've been involved in, many, many ways of trying to ensure that children are protected from violence in their community.

With respect to the question of classification of video games, I think it's fair to say – and I'd certainly welcome the Minister of Community Development if he wishes to comment – that we're going to monitor what they're doing to see what effect it might have. We're not into building bureaucracies and regulations for the sake

of having them. We want to know how effective they'll be, if they can show that there's a correlation. Sometimes it's useful to watch and see what's happening and see whether it's effective before you dive into it.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister detail to this House any other steps that he has taken since September to explore or to implement this classification and regulatory scheme for violent video games?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, no, Mr. Speaker. I should point out that really the best protection for a child with respect to renting or buying video games is parental supervision. Video games are not cheap; the last time I looked, about \$55 for a video game for one of the new play stations. This is not something that kids just get to go out and do most of the time. What play stations, what games the kids are using are really questions for parental supervision and control. But that doesn't mean that we won't look with interest at what's happening across the country and what's happening in B.C. to see whether they can demonstrate that by putting a classification system in yet another area it will have an effect. If it does have an effect, we'll be very interested in looking to see whether it can be used in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Working-alone Regulation

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The working-alone regulation was passed some months ago in response to the tragic murder of Tara Anne McDonald, a young woman who was working alone at a fast-food outlet in my constituency. I would like to ask the Minister of Human Resources and Employment what measures his department has taken to ensure the safety and the protection of Albertans who work alone.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, after that tragic death we decided to have a look at our regulation that was involved in this particular area. We had currently running at that particular time a task force involved in looking at all of our general safety regulations. But I also then put together a committee to look at best practices across North America and listened to their advice. So we made a change, as the hon. member has said, on I think it was October 4, and now today, of course, is the last day for compliance with that.

I did earlier today table the Working Alone best practices workbook, that we sent out to 110 employers. We're now indicating to all employers through the media and of course through questions like this that the time is now at hand for compliance with the regulation to protect any Albertan who is working alone.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to make sure that employers are meeting their obligations, and what is the penalty for noncompliance?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we have within Alberta a system of safety inspections. We do have the right under the act to inspect any Alberta workplace with or without notice. So what employers can be expecting from tomorrow on is that if they're involved in a

routine inspection and if it is determined by the safety inspector that there exists a working-alone situation here at this particular workplace, the employer can then expect to be asked to show the safety inspector how they have complied with the act.

Mr. Speaker, employers can do it very, very easily. They can use our workbook. We've provided templates. We're basically asking them to assess the hazard they have in their workplace, to then provide opportunities to either reduce or eliminate that hazard, to make sure the staff know how to reduce or eliminate that hazard but also to make sure that there's proper communication in place so that if the employee finds himself in some difficulty or in an emergency situation, they can communicate immediately a message of distress.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Electricity Costs

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine who's given me permission to ask this question owns a business that employs 14 people by importing raw material from Texas and Kentucky, manufacturing it in Edmonton, and selling the finished product back to the United States. She's seen her electricity bills soar to the point where, in her own words, she has lost the Alberta advantage and there's no reason for her business to stay here anymore. She's contacted every electricity company in the phone book but is unable to get competing bids to supply electricity. My question to the Premier: does he believe that meaningful competition now exists in Alberta's electricity industry?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the competition is increasing as we speak. New power is coming onstream, many forms of power that we've never seen before. We see the advent of small hydro micro-projects generating 30, 40 megawatts an hour. We see a lot of cogeneration now coming onstream. Hopefully, once all the environmental concerns have been satisfied relative to our clean-burning coal, we will see thousands of megawatts of new power come onstream. So the deregulation process has indeed provided the environment for competition, and believe me, as that power comes onstream, the prices will come down.

We recognize, as does the hon. member, that there are problems right now. Admittedly, some of those problems came about as the result of uncertainty over deregulation, but that was not – that was not – the sole problem related to the high price of electricity today. There are a number of other factors, including the extremely high price of gas, the booming Alberta economy, the Kyoto protocol as it relates to coal-fired generation, the fact that a number of generators were broken down. As a matter of fact, even as we speak today, there are, I understand, about one or two plants that are shut down, or at least generators that are shut down, causing a heavy load.

I would urge this businessperson, this entrepreneur, this free enterpriser, to hang in there, Mr. Speaker. There are all kinds of things that offset the high cost of power that go to the Alberta advantage: a highly educated workforce, a good quality of supply, lowest taxes in the country, perhaps in North America. There are all sorts of factors that contribute to the Albert advantage, and believe me, as that new power comes onstream, that will then become the Alberta advantage as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to keep my question brief. To the Premier: given that other western provinces have seen

no significant rises in power rates and that Alberta's power rates were stable during the boom of the 1970s, can the Premier tell the Assembly when small businesses in Alberta can expect their electricity prices to return to rates that compete with other provinces?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are not the highest in the country, albeit we are on the high side of things. We're slightly above Saskatchewan. We're higher than Manitoba, and we are higher than British Columbia. There are factors that contribute to low power prices in those provinces, and they will probably all always have low power prices, unless of course they do as the socialist Premiers are so strangely apt to do; that is, allow their power companies to export it all. You know, they're talking about it certainly in British Columbia. As a matter of fact, they're doing it and they're talking about it in Manitoba.

The simple fact is, Mr. Speaker, that it's a physical fact. It's a matter of physics. It is. The fact is that both of those provinces have an abundance of water – an abundance of water – and they have the ability to create dams. As a matter of fact, maybe even the Bennett dam – and I wonder if the hon. member likes the Bennett dam, that causes environmental havoc in the province of Alberta, but nonetheless it provides cheap power for the province of British Columbia at great environmental expense to Alberta.

2:30

DR. TAFT: To the Premier. What has been your government's response to the report of the Canadian manufacturers and exporters, which found that electricity deregulation could cost Alberta's manufacturing sector 31,000 jobs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how it has cost 31,000 jobs. I read the statistics and looked at the statistics just the other day, particularly for one of our primary industries, and that's the oil and gas industry, where they predict that something in the neighbourhood of 19,000 wells will be drilled this year, compared to – what was it? – 15,000 or 16,000 last year. I look at the phenomenal economic growth that's taking place in the tar sands, or as President Bush refers to them, the tar pits; about \$31 billion worth of new construction. I see the phenomenal activity and growth taking place in the information communication technology sector. I see the addition of almost that many new jobs, about 30,000 new jobs, each and every year in this province. I see people moving here in droves. I read about plants closing down in Saskatchewan and in power rich, by the way, Manitoba because of the taxation regime, saying: we've had enough; we're moving to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, relative to our deregulation success, out of the numerous jurisdictions throughout North America that are deregulating, we are ranked fourth in terms of our total success, and that is after being in the deregulated environment for only four months.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Children's Advocate

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last June the government has been sitting on an important review of the office of the Children's Advocate done by Chan Durrant. Ten days ago the government finally got around to tabling last year's Children's Advocate annual report. Both reports highlight the government's failure to address the serious shortcomings of Alberta's child welfare system. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Why is the government dragging its feet on implementing the important recommendations of the Chan Durrant report, which the minister has had for the past 10 months?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Chan Durrant report is one examination of the Children's Advocate position. Today under the terms of the Children's Advocate position the advocate is available for the children that are part of the system. This new report recommends a much broader horizon for Children's Advocate participation. In other words, we have 750,000-plus children in Alberta. It could, in fact, if you interpret this report, be suggested that we go beyond that child welfare group and advocate for all children. In fact, Schoolworks, a group, has recommended that the Children's Advocate get involved when students are suspended from school.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are numerous things that we have to examine, not only the scope of what that review could mean if in fact the Children's Advocate was always involved when children had concerns, whether they were child welfare clients or whether they were part of the general public. It also raises the question of the role of the school principal in the advocate's situation, of the parent in that situation. We are consulting extensively with the partners that we have through the Alberta children's initiative to make sure that what we bring forward in implementation is the right one and it balances.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, can the minister indicate to the House when the government will provide a response to the recommendations, when the government will indicate whether or not it's going to implement some of the excellent recommendations in this report?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are beginning already. The Children's Advocate has undertaken a review of the public relations or the publicity surrounding the advocate's office, and posters are going to be released very soon that tell children in key places where children gather how to get in touch with an advocate if they wish to. That is one example of several things we are doing to continually implement certain recommendations. The other will be forthcoming as we continue to consult with our partners in Justice, Solicitor General, and Learning principally.

Thank you.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the report calls for excellent recommendations like making the Children's Advocate an independent officer of this Legislature rather than a ministry employee and putting in place a credible independent system to review deaths and serious injuries of children in government care, will the minister indicate when we're going to get some concrete decisions on these matters?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are very close to being ready to come forward on the matter of the review of fatalities of children. We are very thoroughly looking into the process with the medical examiner and with the Minister of Justice. It should not be long before we'll be forthcoming with some recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, on the reporting to the Legislative Assembly, that may take a little longer, but I promise there will be a response.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

School Construction

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard – and I personally visited one – that there are several new private schools in

Calgary which apparently have been built new at a fraction of the cost being incurred by the public school boards to build their new schools. The private school that I visited appeared in a number of ways to be a superior building – more energy efficient, more flexible, and so on – and apparently was built for only a little more than half the price per square foot of comparable new publicly funded schools. My question, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure: has there been a comparative study done of the costs being experienced by private or charter schools in their new construction and operating costs per square foot as compared to the publicly funded school boards' new construction and operating costs per square foot?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to the question is yes, but since this is such an important question, I want to expand on it a bit. The fact is that when you look at the construction and the cost of new buildings, there are a whole number of factors that go into it. So I think it's extremely important, as we look at those costs, that we make sure we are comparing apples to apples, because the type of material that you use, the standards that you are building toward, the durability of the building – and as the Premier mentioned and very rightly so today, we have to start looking at what is the end use. Quite frankly, it could be that if we were only using or planned on only using a school, say, for 20 or 30 years, then we should be sure that there is an end use for it. If you're planning on using it for a longer period of time, maybe it's worth putting more money in up front to make sure that it lasts longer.

I think we have to make sure that we are looking, as well, outside the box, as the expression goes, and looking at how we can partner with the private sector. All of those things are being looked at. The operations are being looked at. I can assure the hon. member that it is extremely important to us because there are only so many dollars, and the more dollars we can save on this side of the equation, the more dollars that go into the classroom.

MR. LORD: My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Is the prohibitive cost of new construction of public schools being caused by outdated building standards, requirements, and specifications that could or should be reviewed?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it is true that the codes and the standards that we use do contribute to the cost, so when you are comparing, you have to compare what exactly another school is using. Certainly those standards have been established through a lot of consultation with people in the industry, with stakeholders. That is an ongoing process. They are looked at periodically, and we'll endeavour to make sure that they are the standards that are necessary to provide a safe and clean environment for the children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you. My second supplemental question is to the same minister, through you, Mr. Speaker. Is the prohibitive cost of new schools in the public system and the need therefore to raise additional funds the major contributing factor in inner-city school closure requirements?

2:40

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the utilization issue is a very important factor, but I think it's also very important that we consider in this

whole discussion the opportunity for the delivery of programs. As we have said on other occasions, if in fact your utilization is low or if you don't have some economies of scale within the school, you are going to have more difficulty delivering the various programs that are necessary for a full education. So there is a whole host of contributing factors that lead to the closure of certain schools, where school boards find it necessary to close those schools, but I can assure the hon. member that we are looking at all of these factors, and we will continue to make sure that they play a role in the decision-making.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of several hon. members to participate.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Motion Picture Industry Awards

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday night in Calgary I was fortunate to be able to attend along with the Deputy Premier and Loretta Fontana, my assistant, the 13th annual Alberta motion picture industry awards. It is a celebration of Alberta's film industry and a recognition of the incredible talent that we have. From script writing to cinematography to computer graphics to post production, there's very little that we can't do right here in Alberta. The evening recognized Leon Lubin's great contributions to Alberta and his retirement from AMPIA. Also recognized was Horst Schmid as a true friend of the Alberta film industry.

Canada's consul general to the United States was in attendance, a reminder that films transcend borders. It is in fact a global industry, and Alberta films are seen around the world. Dale Phillips' documentary, *Shadows of War*, shows Canada's forensic doctors looking for and finding proof of war crimes in Kosovo. It should be mandatory viewing for all of us. Films allow us to see the horrors that can occur if we don't guard against them. The film people of Alberta remind us of how fortunate we are to live here.

Congratulations to AMPIA and to the Alberta film industry.

Justice Michael O'Byrne

MR. RATHGEBER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of an Albertan who spent his life dedicated to the service of his country, his province, and his city, Mr. Justice Michael O'Byrne. Justice O'Byrne passed away last Monday, and Alberta is much poorer for the loss.

Justice O'Byrne was born in Seattle, Washington, on September 9, 1925, and grew up in an Irish Catholic family on Edmonton's Victoria Avenue. He attended St. Joseph's high school and was chosen valedictorian of the graduating class. He went on to serve in the navy in the Second World War and retired as a lieutenant. Justice O'Byrne married Eileen 55 years ago last week. Together they raised 11 children, all of whom were university educated. He graduated from the University of Alberta in 1951, the same year that he served as the president of the students' union, and was admitted to the Alberta Bar in 1952. He was a partner in Ogilvie and O'Byrne, renamed Ogilvie and Company after his appointment to the bench in 1967 at age 42.

Not only did Justice O'Byrne dedicate 33 years of his life to serving Albertans on the Court of Queen's Bench, but he also made tremendous contributions to his community. I would like to pass on my condolences to his family and to his colleagues. Mr. Speaker, he will be missed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

J. Percy Page High School

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Education Week I would like to recognize the fine work being done by the staff, students, and parents at J. Percy Page high school in Mill Woods. This school has a long history of attending to individual students and their needs in the pursuit of excellence.

A culturally diverse student body has meant that concern for students, their feelings and relationships with other students, is always a central concern. The house system, designed to help students and staff know each other; the Taste of Page, an annual public sharing of foods from ethnic groups; the outstanding Remembrance Day ceremonies; events like the moving commemoration of the UN declaration of human rights signing; along with a rich extracurricular program, which includes sports, music, and the fine arts, are designed to build a caring and stimulating school environment.

The Page global classroom program puts students in real-time touch with peers and experts around the world. The unique partnership with Industry Canada and Shaw Communications is but one example of the school's ongoing pursuit of the best in programming for students. J. Percy Page, the school's namesake, would be proud of the work that is being done and the strong tradition of excellence that has been established in the school that bears his name.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Community Volunteer Awards

MR. MASYK: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week was volunteer appreciation week, and one of the things that makes our province such a great place to live is the hard work of our community league volunteers. On April 21 I had the pleasure of attending the Edmonton North District Area Council Two Volunteer Appreciation and Awards Night at the Balwin community centre. The volunteers are revitalizing communities in north Edmonton, and I wanted to recognize the president of the area 2 council, Mr. Bill Maxim, and the following award recipients from Edmonton-Norwood: from Balwin Community League, Richard and Viola Kereliuk and Joyce Krachkowski; from Delwood Community League, Wendy Keiver and Dave Palosky. Congratulations to all of these people who have contributed to the efforts of revitalizing communities and strengthening them for our youth and for our seniors.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

St. Matthew Elementary School

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday St. Matthew elementary school held an open house and family wellness symposium in the afternoon and evening. A number of the families whose children attend St. Matthew's experience the same challenges as families whose children attend inner-city schools. This symposium was open to current and potential parents and students. They had the opportunity to explore the school, view student art displays, ask questions about the school, and learn about early childhood services. Display tables were set up in a gymnasium where parents could access free information on a wide variety of topics. Also scheduled throughout the afternoon and evening were guest speakers and presenters.

Mr. Speaker, the dedicated staff of St. Matthew's are to be congratulated for their outstanding efforts in organizing and hosting

this symposium. It is another example of the great work being done outside the classroom by our educators and further indicates increasing demands that we are placing on them and that system.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Josephine Nena Timperley

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to acknowledge the life and volunteer service of Josephine Nena Timperley, who died April 21 at the age of 90. Nena's tireless volunteer service to multicultural, humanitarian, and artistic causes earned her the gratitude of many. She was the driving force behind the creation of the Edmonton Heritage Festival, the Edmonton Canada Day celebrations, the Edmonton Folk Arts Council, and several other community endeavours. She also opened Edmonton's first blood bank and helped many refugees come to Edmonton. As an active member of the Catholic Women's League who led by example, she mortgaged her house in 1969 to enable 34 young Edmonton performers to travel to Africa for an international folk festival. For her enormous efforts Nena received numerous civic, provincial, and national awards, the medal of Canada, and was appointed to the Order of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, in the words of our Minister of Community Development, who worked with her for 30 years, she was called "Mum" and the Queen of Volunteers. The citizens of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, owe her our profound thanks. May she find the eternal rest she so deservedly has earned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to acknowledge the recipients of the leaders of tomorrow awards in my constituency. These awards are given to young volunteers in four age categories between six and 21 years of age who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and excellence in their community service and work.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending the awards presentation in Wetaskiwin, where 27 outstanding young people from Wetaskiwin and the surrounding area were nominated to receive leaders of tomorrow awards. Each nominee was given a certificate, and the recipients of the awards in their age categories were Kyle Widdifield, Jesse Houff, Dean Breitreuz, Laura Ruskowsky, and Dawn Werner. These winners were given an engraved plaque to recognize their efforts and a \$100 cheque that they contributed to a nonprofit organization of their choice.

I would like to congratulate and thank all the nominees and award recipients for the contributions they have made to our communities and for the important work they do as volunteers. Their service and generosity which is recognized now will make them leaders of tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The chair would also like to make mention of the fact that today is the anniversary of the arrival into this world of the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:50

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 26: Mr. Cenaiko]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly honoured to be able to speak to this House today responding to the Speech from the Throne. It is especially an honour this afternoon because it is my maiden speech. It is my first opportunity to voice concerns on behalf of the people of the constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and on behalf of all Albertans. Let me say right now that I hold this elected position to be a very special privilege, and in all my actions in the upcoming months and years I will do my best to listen, to learn, to develop, and to implement ideas that enhance the quality of life in this province.

Let me begin by congratulating all of my fellow MLAs on their successful elections and re-elections. I can tell already from the experience of working with a few of you over the past few months that a strong team has been sent to Edmonton for this 25th Legislature. I look forward to working with all of you and achieving effective results over the next few years.

I'd also like to make some very important thank yous. First, I would like to thank all the people of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for putting their faith in me. I am especially grateful because I know Innisfail-Sylvan Lake faces many unique challenges and needs a particularly strong voice in this Legislature to bring those concerns forward. I want it to be known that I regard your vote of confidence very seriously and will not fail you. I want all residents of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, including those who may not have supported me during the election, to know that I am approachable and open to ideas. As well, I would like to thank Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for her clear and eloquent presentation nearly two weeks ago and the hon. Premier for setting Alberta forth on such a positive agenda and for steering Alberta towards the agenda with tremendous vision and ability over the past few years.

Before I address some points from the throne speech directly, I feel it is important I bring some attention to the unique aspects of my constituency. My district is home to an increasingly diverse set of industries. It has significant light and heavy manufacturing with production of products as varied as insulation and piping used in oil exploration. It is also home to some of Alberta's best agricultural land and some of Alberta's most productive farmers, but the industry, I must admit, I most enjoy talking about is the tourism industry and the beaches and lakes on which this industry is founded.

I am proud to boast that my constituency is home to three of the prettiest lake resorts in the province. One is Sylvan Lake. It is amongst the fastest growing communities in the province. In the past five years its year-round population has doubled, and the population multiplies by several times every summer when tourists come out to enjoy the many amenities offered at the lake. The huge amount of interest people have in Sylvan Lake these days is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that Sylvan Lake has the highest lakefront property prices in the province. Sylvan Lake also has the best known, and successful, summer hockey program in the province. Demand has been so high for this camp over the years that it's been a major reason why Sylvan Lake is now getting a new recreation centre with a swimming pool, a hockey rink, and a curling rink.

Mr. Speaker, Gleniffer Lake, located 20 miles west of Innisfail, is

another beautiful lake in my district that I wish to talk about this afternoon. It is known for being amongst the cleanest lakes in the province. It has two very successful RV parks and one RV campground.

The third lake I wish to refer to this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all members are familiar with because of the unfortunate recent incidents that took place near it, Pine Lake. Before referring to the tragic natural disaster that occurred there last summer, let me say that Pine Lake has long had and continues to have much to offer. Pine Lake is very dear to my heart. It has a beauty that can only be seen hidden away covered in luscious growth, blessed with innumerable sandy beaches. It truly is a gem. Over recent years Pine Lake has seen a large amount of sustainable, positive growth. It now has several campgrounds, condominium developments, and an 18-hole golf course.

One of the achievements at Pine Lake that deserves special attention has been the efforts of the local community to clean up the lake. In the 1980s, because Pine Lake was such an attractive and busy destination, it began to develop a water deterioration problem, as did many lakes in Alberta. The people of Pine Lake, the homeowners and the small business owners, decided to take action on the issue. They bound together and formed a group called the Pine Lake Restoration Society committed to improving the area. My predecessor, Gary Severtson, deserves credit for getting that society going and for what that society has accomplished. Early on, about 12 years ago, this committee began consultations with a variety of stakeholders to determine the most suitable method to clean the lake. Farmers, homeowners, campground owners, and scientists were each brought in to determine their perspective. Ultimately, the decision was made to utilize a hypolimnetic withdrawal system. It was a relatively inexpensive idea involving installing an underwater pipe.

What happened next shows the strong community spirit that existed in Pine Lake even after the disaster. The idea was there, but resources were scarce, so the community stepped forward in a remarkable way. People volunteered thousands of hours, and companies donated pieces of equipment to get the project done. Clean Lake Days was initiated, that fund-raised and informed the public about the project. In 1998 the project was completed ahead of schedule and underbudget. It truly is a remarkable success story.

There's another remarkable success story from Pine Lake that I would like to speak about, a success story that happened amidst a catastrophe. We are all aware of the terrible disaster that occurred last summer at Pine Lake. The tornado that hit Pine Lake left a human tragedy. Lives were lost, many were injured, and millions of dollars of damage occurred, but even with the destruction of the tornado, Mr. Speaker, it was remarkable to see the resolve and strength of the human spirit. The community banded together to help one another, and people from all across the province and the nation provided aid and support. It was truly moving to see the way everyone worked together to deal with the terrible aftermath of the tornado. I would like to acknowledge all of those that showed such boundless compassion and caring to those that were affected by the Pine Lake tornado. Thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge the role this government played in lending invaluable assistance in the wake of the disaster. To all the emergency staff, medical staff, counselors, and to many others that were at Pine Lake to help, I thank you. All of you truly went beyond the call of duty to help the people in this community.

The throne speech, Mr. Speaker, emphasized the need to develop safe, strong communities. I believe the response of the local Pine Lake community and the support received from across Alberta has demonstrated that this province is living up to that goal.

3:00

Another goal put forward in the throne speech that particularly relates to the situation in my riding is the goal to develop stable agricultural communities. Mr. Speaker, from what I hear from my neighbours in my constituency I know that agriculture is facing some very serious short-term and long-term challenges. The most pertinent issue is the poor harvest from last year compounded by the bottoming out of certain commodity prices and what looks like is going to be a year with exceptionally little moisture. For many farmers this follows years of poor harvests and years of struggling to make ends meet. The economic and human cost of the situation has the potential to be massive.

I am encouraged by the concern this government has taken thus far in confronting the matter. The Canada/Alberta farm income assistance program, recently reaffirmed with the introduction of this year's budget, is a step in the right direction towards alleviating some of the burden. Now all struggling producers will be eligible for a per acre assistance program.

I am also encouraged by the actions taken to find long-term solutions towards keeping agriculture competitive in Alberta. I am referring especially, Mr. Speaker, to efforts to reduce the risk of letting foot-and-mouth disease enter this province. As many of you are aware, it is a highly infectious disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals. It has the potential to wreak havoc on our agriculture industry if not contained, as it is currently doing in Europe. Alberta's efforts to inform producers how to minimize the possibility of its transfer, along with the other high standards Alberta has developed to keep our industry disease free and competitive, showed this province's determination to keep agriculture as a long-term sustainable industry in this province.

The assistance program and the actions on foot-and-mouth disease, Mr. Speaker, showed that this province recognizes the importance of agriculture, but we cannot lose this focus. More can be done and should be done. Agriculture has been at the heart of Alberta since long before it became a province. Producers play a special role. Their role is not only to provide for themselves through hard work and dedication to their fields and pastures; their role is also to provide sustenance for all people. They are at the root of a healthy province in terms of its ecological health and its economic health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to the throne speech this afternoon. I hope my fellow Assembly members now have an idea of the immense beauty that exists in my district both in terms of the geographical beauty and the spiritual beauty. Innisfail-Sylvan Lake truly is a scenic district with an increasingly diversified economy, but its greatest strength is the immense community spirit that drives on and has only become stronger in recent years. I also hope my fellow members have come to see that agriculture is important in my district, as it is in most parts of the province, and that in order to strengthen this historical and vital industry, it will need special attention from this government in the years ahead.

I am truly honoured to be a member of this Assembly. The next few years will be a challenge, I am sure, but it will be an exciting challenge. I look forward to working with all of you and doing my best to help strengthen our homes and our communities and to help keep Alberta as the exceptional place it is.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly a privilege and an honour to rise on this occasion and speak to this distinguished Assembly.

First let me congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and the Deputy Speaker on your respective elections. I have been pleased with the manner in which you handle your responsibilities. I also wish to congratulate all my colleagues in this Assembly for their willingness and commitment to serve the people of Alberta and on their re-election or election.

May I also congratulate our Premier on his election and acknowledge his leadership in putting Alberta in the enviable financial position it is in today and the positive leadership he has provided. I realize that he had help from the cabinet and other MLAs, so I thank you all and also those who helped that may not still be sitting in this Assembly. We as Albertans need to be grateful and appreciative of your efforts and appreciate this great province.

I am the second MLA to represent the newly amalgamated constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. The first was Ron Hierath, who decided not to seek re-election. I would like to publicly thank him for the service he rendered. He worked hard and is well known for his frankness, honesty, and integrity. He represented us well, and again I thank him for his service and dedication and wish him well in his future endeavours.

I also, Mr. Speaker, wish to compliment Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the warm, gracious manner in which she presented the Speech from the Throne. I sensed her sincerity and commitment to Albertans and thank her for her service.

Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to represent a very interesting constituency. Many of my colleagues have said that theirs is the best, which of course is debatable, but what I can truthfully say is that Cardston-Taber-Warner is the most southwesterly and may well be one of the most scenic. It includes Waterton park on the west, the towns of Cardston and Milk River to the east, and Warner, Raymond, Stirling, and Magrath in between. It also includes all of Cardston county, the county of Warner, and part of the MD of Taber.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the area, but natural gas and oil production is also increasing. Agriculture consists of ranching in the foothills, grain and oilseed farming on the prairies, and irrigated crops of sugar beets, potatoes, vegetables, corn, hay, and specialty crops. The production from these farms and ranches is the backbone of the huge intensive livestock industry that has developed in the south and also provides the production necessary for the value-added industry that is developing in the area. These industries in turn provide employment for many people and provide much economic benefit not only to our local economy but to all of Alberta.

Although our farmers and ranchers are industrious and independent, they have been challenged the past year by severe drought conditions, low grain and commodity prices, and high energy costs. The family farm, which has done a remarkable job of providing food for Albertans at a very low percentage of their disposable income, is under severe stress. When one considers that consumers in this province work on average only 40 days a year to buy their food and that about 10 days of that work goes directly to the producer, one has to admit that farmers and ranchers, most of which are family farms, have been very efficient in providing good, quality food for all of us.

The tragedy of this situation is that many of these family farms may not survive because of the aforementioned factors of low commodity prices, high energy costs, and drought. I believe it would serve all consumers well to help maintain the viability of our agriculture industry and to ensure that the family farm remains economically viable. I was pleased, therefore, that the Speech from the Throne noted that it would be a priority of this government to maintain the viability of our farms and rural communities.

3:10

I would also like to acknowledge the great contribution of our

rural communities – our towns, villages, counties, MDs – to the economic well-being of Alberta. These communities are very dependent on a strong agriculture economy for their well-being. Many small businesses in these communities are struggling, and some have even closed. Not only are they suffering because of the problems in agriculture, but the sudden massive increase in energy costs is presenting them with a huge challenge. Although most are grateful for the government rebate programs to assist them, most have still experienced significant increases in their energy bills. Given these challenges, it was comforting to note the government's commitment to responsible spending, low taxes, and elimination of debt. I commend the Premier and the government for their efforts in reducing taxes and helping Alberta to become a tax-free province.

Mr. Speaker, as a father and grandfather I am concerned about children and about learning. I applaud the government's commitment in the throne speech to increase funding to school boards to improve learning. I am pleased that school boards will have the autonomy they need to deal with local issues such as class size. I believe it is important to leave as much decision-making as possible at the local level. Furthermore, I believe we need to ensure that the Department of Learning listens to local boards, administrators, teachers, and parents to get their ideas on what is best for the students and to whenever possible implement these ideas and policies to improve the educational process.

I would like to recognize, Mr. Speaker, the dedicated effort of the teachers, parents, and administrators who teach and work in the Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency. I have visited with and been involved with many of these people and know of their dedication, commitment, and excellence. As a parent and legislator I congratulate and thank them for their efforts.

Health care is a challenge in my constituency, as it is in many others. Regionalization has reduced beds available and care provided in all of the rural hospitals in Cardston-Taber-Warner. Waiting lists for some people seem to be too long. Doctors and nurses and our health care workers work long and hard to provide quality care. It is a challenge to keep doctors and nurses in small rural communities. I recognize that regionalization has many benefits and that available medical technology cannot be delivered to all small hospitals, yet we must recognize the concerns of many rural people about their proximity to acute care and emergency service. Many rural people in Cardston-Taber-Warner live long distances from rural hospitals and much farther from large regional hospitals. One of the current issues affecting many of my people is that there is not at present a kidney dialysis machine available on a local basis to the people of Cardston.

The Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency is also privileged to have many senior citizens living within its boundaries. These people have worked hard and contributed greatly to the status of this great province. They deserve to be able to live with dignity and respect and to stay in their homes as long as possible and, if they need long-term care, to be able to remain as close as possible to their families. I was pleased to see the throne speech commitment to publicly funded health care and for the focus on access to health services, illness prevention, and effective regional governance. I applaud the decision to elect two-thirds of health board members in the municipal elections this fall.

Families and traditional family values are very important to the people of Cardston-Taber-Warner. People work hard to support families and communities. People work hard to support and help one another and to improve schools, churches, and hospitals. These are a people known for their voluntary community service and charitable support of each other. I was pleased to see the throne speech reinforce those values, values of hard work and caring for

others, confidence and innovation “that have guided Albertans throughout the province’s history, and they are the values that will continue to guide this government.”

In conclusion, I say that it is truly a humbling experience and an honour to have been elected to this position by my constituents. I thank them for the trust they have vested in me and pledge to them my commitment to undertake that trust. I also appreciate the kindness and friendliness that has been shown to me by you, Mr. Speaker, and also by my colleagues in this Assembly.

I believe that government should be open and responsible. I believe that the rights to life and property are truly inalienable rights and that governments exist to benefit people and that there is truth in the adage that the best government is that which governs least. Many of my constituents are concerned about some issues such as gun control, the taking of property without fair compensation – for example, the protection of endangered species – and high federal taxation. I believe that these people want us as a provincial government to do all we can to protect their rights and freedoms and to stand up to the federal government on these kinds of issues.

I know my constituents are appreciative of the efforts and progress the government has made in debt and tax reduction. They want us to continue this effort until the debt is paid and taxes are as low as possible and to continue to be fiscally responsible. They want us to be sensitive and responsive to the challenges being faced by rural Albertans, also to respect families and traditional family values, and to be innovative in encouraging and protecting the family and the children.

Alberta is a blessed province. It has great resources and good, hardworking people. Those who have gone before us have left us a great legacy. Our challenge is to move forward, to preserve those qualities of thrift, hard work, and traditional family values that got us here, and to be innovative and forward-thinking to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

I look forward to working co-operatively with my colleagues and fulfilling our promise to successfully meet the challenges ahead. May God bless Alberta and its people. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I now move adjournment of the debate on the Speech from the Throne.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 3 **Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001**

[Adjourned debate April 24: Ms Blakeman]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments about Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001. The act itself is, of course, very specific and confines itself to one part of the fish management strategy that the government has undertaken.

When reading the bill, it reminded me of the comments that the Auditor General had made about the fish-stocking management in the province. I went back to review those comments, because it seems that that’s the context for this bill, that it is one part and a very small part of the fish-stocking management.

It was in 1993, I think, and 1994 that the Auditor General made a couple of recommendations in terms of fish-stocking management. The first was that the department set some measurable goals that

could be used to measure performance and to make sure that the kinds of activities that it was engaged in were ones that could be measured and that progress could be seen. The second was in terms of the information that the department has, and that was to acquire a better information base in terms of the fish stocks in the province.

3:20

I think one of the great concerns of the Auditor General is his attention to performance measures and making sure that those performance measures are specific and making sure that they are measurable. He addressed the last Auditor General’s report to that planning model, the one that’s been adopted by the department. It’s really made up of four components. First, a fish conservation strategy so that we’re actively trying to conserve the fish stocks that we have. The second part is a fish-stocking process for the province so that when stocks are replenished or added to, there’s a plan in place. The third part, an important part of the plan, was the recovery for individual species, that we go about trying to make sure there’s a plan in place to help those endangered species that we have in the province recover. The fourth part was that there be some specific action plans for various parts and areas of the province.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The department put together a strategic plan, and part of that was the fish management information system that’s being used. The Auditor’s complaint, of course, is that the fish conservation strategy defines high-level goals and objectives. I think that he was making the point that there’s a need for more specific, lower level measurable objectives that would address the habitats, the maintenance, fish conservation, and fish use allocations. So he was arguing for some performance measures at a lower level.

He acknowledged that plans have been adopted for six species of fish in the province: walleye, northern pike, bull trout, golden trout, Arctic grayling, and lake sturgeon. The objective for the department has been “to recover collapsed and vulnerable populations and to sustain stable . . . ones,” and I think that’s an objective that we certainly all agree with. Taking that overall objective and then operationalizing it for the various regions I think was a concern that the Auditor General had in mind when he made the comments that he did.

He noted that there are six regions and 17 areas in the province, that the province has been subdivided for management purposes. He pointed out that within those different areas there are often differences in the kinds of performance objectives that the staff, depending on the nature of the staff, will pursue. I think he also acknowledged that each of the 17 areas has particular concerns that the management strategies have to address, and of course they will be peculiar to an area or to a region. He looked at the work of the managers, and as I was reading Bill 3, I wondered how Bill 3 was going to be monitored to fit into those plans and whether that would be part of a performance objective that we would see in this year’s or a future year’s business plans.

He went on to comment about the department’s plans at the regional and area levels and that there was a need for them to have some consistency. Many of them, he indicated, did not include enough information on the kind of staff that was going to be required or when particular activities were to be timed. Again he went back to the problem of performance measures.

He did indicate that many of the actions and many of the action plans did not seem to be consistent with the provincewide fish conservation strategy, which would seem to me to be a real weakness. He gave an example that “in only two of the seventeen area

Action Plans was the principle of no net loss of productive fish habitats mentioned.” This is, of course, the key principle in the fish conservation strategy. So he’s concerned about the planning, and I think those concerns about the planning are appropriately raised as we look at Bill 3 and the kinds of proposals that are in that bill.

I think an important part of his comment refers again, as I mentioned before, to staffing. He went on to indicate that in two of the areas “there was no fishery staff to manage the species,” and as a result there was no mention of the species in the plans. That seems to be unfortunate. If there’s no staff in place to do the work, then those important goals are abandoned and not acted upon. So concern about the staffing level and the action plans.

A further comment that he made about the action plans is that they had to be much more clearly expressed. This is a theme that I think runs throughout his remarks on the department in the last report he made, and that is a plea for clarity and a plea for having the operations well grounded in reality.

He gives a couple of examples of performance measures that, I take it, he thinks are inappropriate. For instance, he gives as an example: “Fisheries Resource is sustainable and resource is adequately conserved.” I think we’d all agree those are admirable objectives and goals for the department, but in terms of operation just exactly what does that mean? How are you going to know at the end of the year, at the end of the day whether you’ve made any progress on those two particular objectives? He again makes the plea in the report for the language to be more precise and for very, very specific performance measures to be articulated.

The problem, I guess, is that in many of the areas there’s inadequate staff and the staff that’s assigned doesn’t have the kind of time that’s needed to devote to planning. Yet I think we would all agree that consistent planning across the province is most desirable and that those regional and area plans are really very important. Staff has to have the time to develop the kinds of performance measures that the Auditor General has indicated and then have time to see what progress is being made on the measures that are articulated. The bottom line I think the Auditor General indicates is that without that kind of specific articulation of the goals and performance measures, without the staff in place to do the planning, without the staff in place to carry out the work, the habitat protection and natural reproduction could be compromised.

3:30

So as we look at Bill 3 and set the provisions of Bill 3, besides the kinds of comments that the Auditor General has raised, I think it does raise a concern that we can pass the best legislation in this Legislature, the most well-intentioned legislation, but if in reality there is not the staff in place, if the resources that are needed to carry out that legislation are not in place, that is all for naught. I think it’s a warning that as this new legislation passes through the House and is enacted, that has to be taken seriously, and we’ll be looking closely at the business plans of the department when we look at budget estimates to ensure that the resources that make the provisions of Bill 3 possible are in place and that there is adequate staff for them to be able to do their job.

I think with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to conclude and look forward to the bill as it moves on through to committee stage. Thanks very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I look through the bill and consider its implications, I can’t help thinking of many years of

experiences on Lake Wabamun and the history of Lake Wabamun as a sort of miniature example of the entire fish ecosystem in Alberta, and I’m concerned that Bill 3, you know, while it’s okay in principle, really isn’t going to do very much to protect Alberta’s fish stock. If you go to a small museum at Seba Beach – and I’d recommend it to anybody on a day’s drive – you’ll see in there newspaper articles posted up from the 1950s which indicate how extensive the fish stocks in Lake Wabamun and in other Alberta lakes were. Through the winters in the 1950s the whitefish supply in Lake Wabamun was so extensive that it actually supported an export industry to New York, and Alberta fish were served in the finest restaurants in New York. Today you’re lucky to catch anything in Lake Wabamun, really, except maybe an infection. So I’m concerned that this bill nibbles around the edges and, you know, if we’re going to have a bill with a real bite, then we’re going to have to take some more steps to protect fish stocks.

I think some of the other issues that I’d like to see incorporated in an effort to protect fish stocks have to do, for example, with forestry and forestry cutting right down to stream edges and lakesides, which disrupts the banks of the streams and causes extensive damage and disruption to the stream flows and indeed to the lakesides.

I’m also concerned about agricultural runoff, like many of us here. I’m sure we’ve boated and canoed on Alberta rivers. I’ve canoed down the Red Deer River through agricultural land. Frankly, it’s very disconcerting to watch the runoff of silt and manure and chemicals from agricultural activity into rivers and streams. Again, I suspect that’s at least as major a contribution to declining fish stocks in Alberta as is sportfishing. At least I’d be interested to see some study on that.

I’m also very concerned about stream crossings for trucks, oil trucks, forestry trucks, and cattle. It’s not uncommon in Alberta for streams just to be driven across without regard for protecting the banks, without any effort at building bridges. Again the stream flows are disrupted. There’s silting that occurs. There’s weed growth that occurs, and that damages fish stocks.

Another concern, of course, is hydro development and the impact of hydro development on the flow of rivers and their ability to sustain spawning fish having to move upstream past large hydro projects.

Yet another concern – and this is very effective – at Lake Wabamun is the concern over power plant effluents going into lakes either directly or indirectly through cooling ponds. I’ve already had constituents approach me with very detailed analyses of the impact of the Wabamun power plant on that lake. I should note that the word “Wabamun” is actually, I’m told, the Cree word for looking glass. It was at one time such a beautiful lake. It reminded the Cree of a looking glass. Of course, now if you go out there, what you see in the looking glass are several major power plants and a whole host of major strip mines.

The power plant at Wabamun, I am told – and I would be interested in information on this from the government – and I’ve seen figures to support this, routinely exceeds the federal guidelines for heat effluents into a lake, and the weed growth in parts of Lake Wabamun is choking the lake and killing off the fish stocks. Likewise, the lake is surrounded by huge, utterly huge coal strip mines, which have completely disrupted the watershed of the lake.

So that kind of industrial activity, which can be illustrated at Lake Wabamun but occurs, for example, around the oil sands developments in northeastern Alberta and around other lakes, is certainly of great concern. If we’re really serious about protecting fish stocks, we should be looking at that.

Those are some of my concerns over where Bill 3 fails to go anywhere far enough if we’re serious about protecting fish stocks.

A different kind of concern I have is simply hinted at in the legislation. It will be interesting to see how the regulations proceed, but a concern over a trend to pay for what you fish. Fishing goes back to the beginnings of human habitation in Canada and in Alberta, and it has always been something that people do freely. My sons fish with their grandfather, who himself is a farmer and who loves fishing. They fish with their uncles, and it's something that's done as a public heritage of Alberta.

If I contrast that, for example, to Britain, it's a remarkable contrast. What's happened in Britain is that access to streams is, in fact, privately controlled. You can't just go fishing on a stream or a river in Britain unless you own the land that abuts the stream or the river. They've lost that whole heritage of public fishing in Britain, and I would hate for that to occur here through licensing and regulations and the encouragement of privatization of a public heritage in Alberta.

With those comments, I'll wrap up my reactions in principle to Bill 3, to simply encourage the government to take much further and more thoughtful steps towards protecting what is a great heritage in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to close debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the opposition for the comments they've made. We had an opportunity, of course, to file the answers to what they had asked previously. We filed those today for their information and the information of the public. Again, I will have my staff review the *Hansard* and then provide in writing the answers to those questions.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

3:40

Bill 4 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate April 24: Ms Blakeman]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 4, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001. If you look at the principles on which the bill has been structured, it seems that one of those principles, at least, is that fair compensation for damages as a result of the actions of oil, gas, and mineral companies should be available through the board. I think it's a good move. In essence, the act moves the amount that they are able to award from a limit of \$5,000 to a limit of \$25,000, and I think that that will be useful.

The Surface Rights Board has a useful role to play in trying to resolve disputes between occupants or landowners and oil, gas, and mineral companies, and they, I think, have a fairly good record of being able to work at solutions and avoid at least two things. One is more costly legal battles that might have to be undertaken by aggrieved occupants, and second, it's freed up room in Provincial Court. It hasn't burdened the courts with matters that can be resolved elsewhere.

It's an important bill, Mr. Speaker, for landowners. I refer to an experience in our own family with a well being placed on farm property south of the city and a concern that that raised in terms of farming the land. Well, there were a whole host of concerns that ranged from where the access roads were going to be located to the

relocation of fences. The problem of noise was raised and even the problem of aesthetics, where the tanks and equipment were going to be located on the property. Agreement was arrived at rather quickly with the company, but in other cases that wasn't the case. This gives those landowners with similar concerns an opportunity to be reimbursed without having to resort to the courts, and it gives the board, of course, much more flexibility with the raised limits to respond to specific items that are raised by landowners.

The work of the board is rather interesting. If you look at the kinds of requirements of board members, I think it's encouraging that one of the requirements is that they have a good grasp of the law covering expropriation and surface rights so that they know the kinds of problems that landowners and occupants will bring before them and that they have the ability to write concise definitions based on the law. So being able to take the law and interpret it when occupants come forward with cases is an important attribute of those board members and, of course, working knowledge of the related acts: the Surface Rights Act and the Expropriation Act and other acts that might impact decisions. So there's a real concern that board members who are making these decisions are knowledgeable, and that's rightfully so because for a small landowner who is facing trying to negotiate with a large company, it can be an overwhelming task. So I think it's good, when they appear before that board, that their case will be listened to by individuals who are knowledgeable and are able to make decisions that are well grounded in terms of the law of the province. Also, now with this bill those same board members will have an opportunity for a wider range of options in terms of responding to the concerns of occupants.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude. It's a small change to the act and one that I support. Thanks very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to close debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'd like to thank the opposition for their questions, and of course I'll have my department officials review *Hansard* and provide the answers in writing. I will again table those in the House for all the people that are interested.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 4.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Has the minister moved a motion to adjourn debate or close debate?

MR. CARDINAL: Close debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Close debate. Okay. For clarification it's for closing debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 7 Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

[Debate adjourned April 26: Dr. Massey speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a range of comments on this particular bill. I do think it's a step in the right direction, and I would like to make that clear. We've been waiting for some clarification on the election of regional health authorities for a long time, and this is a step in that direction. It would be nice

to have more detail on the regulations that will be guiding these elections. The minister has provided a media release which does indicate that there will be guidelines for these elections in some ways similar to what we as MLAs face. It would be nice to see more detail on that, but I'll take him at his word that these will be implemented, and I think that's a good step.

I would like here to note experience on these kinds of elections in the United States, a recent experience in Massachusetts which actually gives me some cause for concern. There were particular interests that wanted to influence the outcome of the health care elections in Massachusetts, and a number of individual businesses and corporations contributed each between \$100,000 and \$250,000 to campaigns to ensure that their particular point of view was victorious. I think we need to be very mindful of those kinds of developments occurring one way or another directly or indirectly in Alberta.

3:50

Though Bill 7 is a step in the right direction, it is only one step of what I think needs to be a much longer journey, and I think there will be some debate in the ensuing days and weeks over the nature of that journey as series of questions arise around the RHA elections. One is pretty obvious, I think, to everybody who looks at it. Why are we electing only two-thirds of the members of the boards? Do we only have two-thirds of a commitment to democracy? We don't apply that to municipal councils or county councils or school boards or other councils. Why are we choosing to limit democracy to only two-thirds of the members of a regional health authority? It makes me wonder how much democracy would be too much. If 66 percent is acceptable, is 68 percent too much or 70 percent too much or 75 percent too much? I'm not sure why we just don't elect regional health authority boards, period. There is nothing terribly wrong with democracy. It has its flaws, but as a number of noteworthy people have said, it's better than all the alternatives.

I'm also concerned that by only electing two-thirds of members, we are setting up situations in which there will be factions on boards. There'll be the elected faction, who will always be able to claim a legitimacy that the appointed faction will not have. There are risks of boards degenerating into divisiveness and friction and claims over whose rightful control should be exercised. I do think that in situations like this appointed members will lack a legitimization that is so fundamental in democracy, and indeed the minister will, I think, certainly find himself in a situation where candidates who have received thousands of votes through a duly followed electoral process will be pushed aside for a ministerial appointee. I do think that's a slap in the face for democracy and may be a problem for the minister when the situation arises. As only two-thirds of a democratic body I think there is a risk that these will be in many ways sort of paper authorities.

I also note that the minister reserves the right to appoint the chairman of each regional health authority, and as I understand it, that will be after the election. So as well as appointing a third of the members, the minister will be appointing the chairman, and I have to again ask: why is that? Is the government that frightened about what the general population believes they need to put those kinds of controls in? What legitimacy will the chairman have when he's appointed as a ministerial appointment, inevitably to be seen as a political position, when he or she will face a number of elected members who may challenge his legitimacy? Again I would point out that school boards choose their own chairman after the election, as I understand it, and of course in city councils mayors are elected at large through their own democratic process. So why the double standard for regional health authorities? We're tinkering around and

meddling in democracy in a dangerous way. I wish the minister would address these issues. On the tax issue the ability for school boards to control their tax revenues has been virtually eliminated, yet we allow them to be fully elected.

As I understand it, the payment to members on regional health authorities is \$10,000 per year, and it does seem to me to be a very small amount given the scale of responsibility that these people have. It's a smaller amount than major school boards pay to their trustees and certainly a smaller amount than municipal governments in cities pay to their trustees and this despite the fact that regional health authorities are actually typically larger. For example, the Calgary regional health authority, I understand, has a larger budget and more employees than the city of Calgary itself. It's an enormous organization. We are putting on the shoulders of these elected members huge responsibility. I think the least they deserve is a compensation that reflects that and is similar to people in parallel positions.

I'm also concerned about a particular section of Bill 7. I believe it's section 4(4), and I'm sure the minister will be able to explain this. The section allows, as I understand it, members of medical staff, employees, and their families to run for the regional health authorities. Again I think that the minister may be able to correct my perception, but as I understand it, this means that, say, a nurse or an employee of a regional health authority may well be able to serve actively on the board of that authority or that a medical officer, maybe the head of a medical department in a health authority, will also be able to serve and run for a position on that health authority. That does set off, I think, a dangerous situation, a potential, indeed probably a real conflict of interest. I'm sure that's not the minister's intention, so I would like some clarification on section 4(4) of Bill 7.

As I was saying in my opening comments, this is a step in the right direction. After years of waiting there is some advance towards RHA elections, and I commend the government for taking that step. I am and I think probably most Albertans also will be disappointed that the steps are not more decisive and more extensive, simply are too timid to really make a sufficient difference here.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will wait for the next round of debates and also, I think, wait for the minister's responses, which may be in a written form, which getting from the Minister of Environment on earlier bills were very helpful.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to finally get to speak this afternoon regarding the election of regional health authorities. This has been a campaign that certainly is overdue. With the billions and billions of tax dollars that are spent in providing public health care to the citizens of this province, the only way to ensure that that money is being wisely spent is to have an openness and also the concept of accountability. Public officials that are elected are of course accountable to those who walk into the closet where the ballot box is located. However, we need to look at this whole idea of electing regional health authority officials. This has been batted around since 1994, and at one point a former minister of health in the debate said that it just wasn't possible because of political sensitivities, I believe was the description, for another cancellation of the proposed regional health authorities.

Now, people in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar would say that we elect school board officials; what's the matter with regional health authorities? Of course, they have a very, very valid

point. In fact, allowing two-thirds of all board members to be elected is a step in the right direction, but one-third will remain appointed. This disappoints me, because in the spirit of openness and the spirit of accountability and in regards to the huge sums of money – the Capital health authority is the fourth largest employer, I believe, in the entire province, with thousands and thousands of employees. So one more level of governance is fine.

4:00

When you consider that the whole debate surrounding this election will be public, that there are going to be, I assume, forums, that there will be town hall meetings, that the positions of the various candidates will be recorded, that their comments will be noted and probably published in newspapers, that their views on the direction that the public health care system will take in the next three years will probably be discussed in various media outlets, then for the minister to take all of this into account with the appointment of the chair of each individual board – I don't know if that's the right thing to do, because I think the board themselves, not the hon. minister, should appoint the chair, for those specific reasons.

There may be one individual that has a specific view on, for instance, let's say Bill 11. Now, I encouraged all citizens of this province who were active in the Bill 11 debate to please consider running for the regional health authority positions. It is my view that this is the one last check and balance that will be available if the regional health authorities decide that they're going to use Bill 11 for the purpose that it was intended, and that was to contract out insured services, contract out our public health care system.

Now, there may be people on the board after the election who believe that the economics of this is unwise, that it's not a sound use of tax dollars. We see the increase, always in the health care budget, but that is not being currently reflected in an increase in patient services. We're putting a lot of money back in there, and we have to wait and see if it is going to be well spent. I certainly hope that the regional health authorities are not going to get frustrated, and they're going to say: well, the answer is certainly Bill 11. The board of directors for the health authorities will be under pressure, but the comforting thing with the election, Mr. Speaker, of the regional health authority boards is that they can stand up and speak out if they see quietly the contracting out, the privatization of core health care services to private providers whether they be corporations that are registered here in Alberta or what are called HMOs in America.

I heard a consumer activist, Mr. Speaker, describe the HMOs as, "Hand money over before you get health care." That was his definition of the HMOs. Certainly the whole debate around the free trade agreement and if we're going to allow a company from Calgary or a company from Edmonton to bid on these contracts, then we're going to have to allow a company from Nashville or from Charlotte or from New York City even to have that same opportunity – that's coming. But this is why at this time I support the elections, even if it's only two-thirds of the regional health authorities. They're long overdue.

Now, certainly I hope that the first purpose of an elected authority will be as a watch dog to make sure that the real intentions of Bill 11 do not come out. You go back seven years, when the public first saw a system of decentralization and the setting up of the 17 regional health authorities and the two separate health boards, and we saw all this unfold. We are still looking at the difficulties that there are between various regions and the transfer of service. It remains to me a mystery when a person, for instance, who lives in Hinton and receives health care in Edmonton just exactly what sort of agreements there are between regional health authorities, how one health authority bills another. How does this exactly work?

If we have an election of the majority of directors – well, hopefully it'll be the majority – how will this affect transfers between regions? Hopefully it is going to get a lot less complex, and hopefully they can work together, because that has been the problem in the past. It has been very difficult.

You've got to look at Edmonton and Calgary. You've got to look at the contributions at the universities and the fact that teaching hospitals are located there. There are a lot of specialists in both Calgary and Edmonton whereas in some smaller centres there are not. What sort of co-operation will go on between elected officials? If someone, for instance, Mr. Speaker, in Hinton has to have heart surgery, how is this going to work? If there is a senior living in Valleyview and that senior wants to be transferred by younger members of their family to the Capital region for long-term care, hopefully, it will be easier. Elected officials can converse and hopefully can solve a lot of problems that do go on with regionalization.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we think of the 17 regions, I don't see provisions in this bill – and the hon. minister can certainly shed light on this. If we are to change the boundaries, what exactly will happen? As I understand it, the minister decides on electoral divisions. Let's, for instance, say that perhaps we're going to go down to six regional health authorities, that we're going to change from 17 to six. This is certainly a number that has been bandied around. There was a number similar to that with The Rainbow Report. There certainly weren't 17 regions. It could be simply that 17 regions were the number that we came up with because of political considerations. I know that if you visit the Association of Registered Nurses, they have a map up in their office, and they have the province divided up into six regions – I'm quite sure it's six – so that their representatives can get around to meet members of their professional association.

4:10

So what would happen if suddenly we decided that we were going to have six regions? Now, what would drive this, or what would be the issue that would lead to, say, the formation of six regional health authorities and how would this affect the elections? What happens if, say, we're going to have two or possibly three, if private companies who would be quite willing if they got the chance under Bill 11 to contract out for insured services thought to themselves, "Well, we've got to qualify for all of the 17 different regions, but if there were only six or if there were only three regions, then we would have a much better chance of being able to provide this service."

Now, all the boards of directors are elected, and suddenly they're put out of work. What guarantee is there that there will continue to be the 17 different regions? We can go through all this process, elect them all at considerable expense, and then suddenly these jobs are redundant, because, well, we're going to reorganize this again. I have a concern about that, and hopefully in the course of this debate we will receive answers. Perhaps there is going to be no further reorganization.

In my remarks this afternoon I would like to speak briefly about the whole issue of conflict of interest. The perception exists that regional health authority CEOs and other high-ranking administrators are friends of the government. That's the perception. That was the perception that was around in Bill 11. I used to have town halls, open forums, and citizens would come up to me with this newspaper article and that newspaper article and say: "Look at this, Mr. MacDonald. What do you think of this?" I would read it, and I would try my best to get back to them. They were concerned about this intricate little web that had been created. The positions of friends of the government are more about patronage than sound fiscal policy or quality health care.

Now, let's compare for a minute, Mr. Speaker, the two regional

health authorities, the two largest ones, Calgary and Edmonton. The CEOs of both of them are very, very hard working. I can't for the life of me, unless I want to look at this – this is how it has been brought to my attention, as an issue of gender. They both have equally the same budgets, but the CEO in Calgary – and I know it cost a lot to park a car in downtown Calgary; I know that. But I don't think the CEO in Calgary should get I believe it is in excess of \$80,000 more than the CEO here at the Capital health authority. I'm just not going to put that down to the high cost of downtown parking in Calgary.

Someone said to me: oh, it's just gender discrimination. I do not believe that that is true, but why the difference? Maybe when we elect the boards, they're going to end this. I certainly know that the Capital health authority CEO works very, very hard, and I think the health care delivery system in this region is grateful for her work and her diligence. Certainly the leadership that has been provided there has gotten us through some rough times.

This is another issue, conflict of interest.

As I understand it, not everyone is going to be eligible to run in the election in their home area. We were looking at a description here: "is an employee of a hospital or nursing home in respect to which the election is being held." Well, I go back to the AUMA conference that I attended two years ago, when there was a resolution put forward I believe from an area north of the city here. This resolution talked about not allowing members of unions, particularly health care unions, to run in the regional health authority elections if and when they did happen. Well, now they're happening, and it looks to me that these individuals are no longer going to be allowed to run. Perhaps we can look at this perception that already exists with regional health authority CEOs and other high-ranking administrators and how exactly this is going to work and how long it is before there's a court challenge with this, because I'm sure there will be one. Someone is going to feel that because of their employment they're not allowed to participate fully in the democratic process. Has the hon. minister any concern about that? If there are any records in his department regarding this, I think it would be to the benefit of all members of the Assembly if they were shared with us, because it certainly is interesting that we're going to make a list of those who are not eligible.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that even if it is only two-thirds of regional health authorities that are going to be elected, it's a step in the right direction. I would again encourage all individuals across this province who are interested in further development of our public health care system to participate in the elections, and I am looking forward very much this fall to hearing the comments and the platforms of the various candidates as they come forward for these positions. I think it is vital, again, with so much public money being spent on the provision of health care, that all health authorities be elected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before I call upon the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests very special to me seated in the members' gallery. One is a lady I've known for over 30 years. She's been very supportive and very kind and tolerant of me. She happens to be my wife, Linda. The other one is my daughter Paula. They came today to hear my maiden speech. Fortunately, they missed it. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm greetings of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 7
Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the government's Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act. The act provides for a number of things. Particularly what it provides is amendments to what the government and the minister can do through regulation, and that is the problem that we have with this bill. It's a good idea that at least two-thirds of the members are going to be elected, finally fulfilling a campaign promise that had not been kept for a number of years. Now it's being partially kept by the government, and that, I think, is something that we could be grateful for, but there are a number of concerns that I have with the bill nevertheless.

4:20

It will permit the government to continue to appoint one-third of the members. Now, it's interesting how they can do that. They will be able to appoint the chairs of the regional health authorities, which will go a great distance towards allowing the government appointees to set the agenda for the other two-thirds of the elected people.

The government will appoint people to these boards after the elections are held. The government will then be in a position to survey the makeup of the elected members of these regional health authorities, and it will allow them, then, to determine which people are going to be appointed. They can ensure, I think, through those means a rather high degree of control over the activities of these boards, notwithstanding the fact that they have committed in principle to the elected principle of operation of these organizations.

Now, why would the government want to retain control? Why doesn't the government trust the people locally to make the right decision for their health authority? Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, the answer, at least from my perspective, is clear. The government does not want to lose control of the operations of the regional health authorities, and they are afraid that the unlimited exercise of democracy in this area will in fact put them at risk of losing control. Now, why would they be afraid of losing control?

Well, clearly the government has and continues to have a privatization agenda in the health care system. [interjections] Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The government wants to continue with its privatization agenda, and they are afraid of the people. They are afraid that the people will not elect people to these local health authorities that will further their agenda. [interjections] I'm glad that this Assembly is not as sleepy as it was a few moments ago. I'm glad that people are waking up all over the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that the government does not want to have transparency in the operation of these health authorities

either. We now have a situation that almost every aspect of the operation of the health authorities is being set not in the act by the Legislature but in fact by the government through its regulation power.

Now, I just happened to pull up, Mr. Speaker, the Local Authorities Election Act, and it specifies in legislation, not through regulation, a huge range of the operations of elections with respect to municipal government in our province, as it should. These are things that ought to be done by the Legislature because they govern who will and who will not be elected to a body that is supposed to be democratically elected. Just some examples: it sets the ballot boxes; it sets voting subdivisions; it sets rules of residency; it ensures that there's secrecy of vote. It goes through a whole range of things, and it specifies them very clearly in legislation so the whole process is completely transparent.

The regulations for democratic government, no matter how insignificant, Mr. Speaker, ought to be made by the Legislative Assembly or the Parliament of Canada through open and public debate and not behind closed doors at the cabinet table or in the minister's office. This entire act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, is a monument, a testament to the power of government operating behind closed doors without reference to the Legislative Assembly.

Particularly worrying is the authority for the cabinet to set regulations regarding contributions and election finances. There's no transparency here. We all know that the rules around contributions and election finances have a huge impact on who is and who is not able to get elected. A party or an individual with a huge cash war chest will regularly outperform parties or individuals who have meager resources, which is really the only reason there are so many over there and so few here, Mr. Speaker. Now, the government understands that very well. The government understands the role of finances in elections very well, and that's why they're going to reserve setting the rules around the health authorities for themselves. I'm very worried that we might have on the health authorities every right-wing nut in Alberta after this next election if the government is allowed to set all of the rules behind closed doors.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to express some concerns about the ward boundaries here. We haven't even seen what the ward boundaries are going to be. This is another thing that the government is going to do behind closed doors: set the wards. So where's the transparency, where's the democracy if this cabinet can by order in council determine precisely and in exactly which way they're going to set electoral boundaries, who the chair is going to be, who one-third of the members are going to be, how the election finances are going to be handled? It's not open, it's not transparent, and it's not democratic. Why are we rushing through this bill without an open disclosure and discussion of what the ward boundaries are going to be?

Another question that arises, Mr. Speaker, is the question of assistance for municipalities. Municipal governments have always had to carry out local elections. Whether their government wants to have a phony election for the Senate or whether they want to have elections for school boards, it doesn't matter. The municipalities are responsible for organizing, conducting, and paying for the election. It's high time that the government made a commitment financially to our municipalities to help offset the cost of these elections as they continue to load and load and load more and more elections on the municipalities and require them to carry them out.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to just indicate that I think this entire act, including the act which is amended by this act, is woefully inadequate, is a slap in the face to democratic principles. The government, if it was serious about fulfilling its campaign promise

made a long time ago to have these health authorities fully elected, would bring forward legislation that would in a transparent fashion allow for the election by all citizens of the entire health authority, and they would ensure that all of the regulations were replaced with legislation when it comes to questions of ward boundaries, election contributions, eligibility, and all of those things. Those are not the things in a democratic society that ought to be done behind closed doors around a cabinet table. It is an affront to the parliamentary democracy that we defend.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to close debate.

MR. MAR: I have nothing further to add, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

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

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

4:30

Bill 1 **Natural Gas Price Protection Act**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've been waiting to discuss this bill in a little bit more detail: Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, from the *Calgary Herald* of 1974. Again, for all members of the Assembly, I'm astonished that a flagship piece of legislation has been adopted from the first paragraph of a *Calgary Herald* editorial. I can't see any need for this Natural Gas Price Protection Act that already doesn't exist in legislation, specifically the Natural Gas Rebates Act. Also, upon further investigation there are specific provisions in the Gas Utilities Act and also in the Gas Resources Preservation Act.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I believe that this bill has been so hastily drafted after the election that definition (c) "marketable gas" as defined in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act is also the same definition that is in the Gas Resources Preservation Act. So obviously this bill was drafted in haste. That is one more indication that it was drafted in haste and pretending, whenever it was drafted, that it was concerned about consumer relations.

Now, the whole concept of price protection is discussed in section 2. How exactly is this going to be determined? The government already has the legislative authority to set gas prices in the Gas Utilities Act, part 1. It goes into a great deal of difficulty, Mr. Chairman. We can even list some of them. "The just and reasonable price or prices to be paid for gas" can be determined, et cetera,

- (ii) before it has been delivered into any gas pipeline;
- (iii) before it has been subjected to treating or processing by absorption or otherwise for the extraction from it of natural gasoline or other hydrocarbons;
- (iv) before it has been purified . . . [or]
- (v) at any point on a gas pipeline.

So I don't understand how this can be presented with much fanfare to Albertans as something new, something novel, or even necessary.

It's bad legislation. There's only one thing you can do, and that is try to improve it. Certainly you can try to improve it through

debate, through discourse. It's an important issue, with millions and millions of dollars being transferred to consumers, to distribution systems in the form of rebates, I should say. So what exactly are we doing here?

Now, the national residential gas reference price. We're going to tie our natural gas price to a national price, and this is how this reads, Mr. Chairman, in section 5:

The Minister of Energy may, with respect to delivered marketable gas, publish from time to time a national residential gas reference price, based on such factors as the Minister considers appropriate.

Well, we all know, Mr. Chairman, that there have been record natural gas prices in the year 2000 as growth and demand outpaced growth and supply. Prices increased steadily throughout the year and by year-end had quadrupled over 1999 year-end prices. Now, Canadian producers responded by substantially increasing investments in land purchase. There were many gas wells drilled; that was noted this afternoon in question period. The majority of these gas wells were located in the conventional areas of the western sedimentary basin. There were developments in the Northwest Territories. Members are going to say: what does that have to do with us? There were developments on the east coast that resulted in two new sources of supply. Well, here in section 5 we are getting tied to what goes on across the country. You look at what happened in Fort Liard; there were some excellent wells up there. There was gas discovered offshore in Nova Scotia. How this is going to be done: I think we have to have answers at this stage of the debate, Mr. Chairman.

When you look at the entire Canadian natural gas market, Canadian natural gas sales – and this is where we're going to have to be very careful – have been estimated to have increased by 4 and a half percent in the year 2000, following a 3.6 percent increase in the year 1999. Growth was broadly based across the residential, the commercial, and the industrial sectors, but consumption in electricity generation also increased. So, now, without any discussion, are we allowing in this bill as it stands now, Mr. Chairman, a subsidy for generators of electricity who fuel their plants with natural gas? We're told time after time after time that we're out of the business of being in business, but the potential for that exists in this legislation. The potential is real. It's a reality.

This sudden rise in natural gas commodity prices obviously placed a heavy financial burden or cost on these homeowners, these commercial establishments, or these industrial facilities. There's no doubt about that. Each member of this Assembly has heard or will hear about this at their constituency office and probably phone calls to here. But there needs to be an understanding, and I don't think the understanding has come forward in the debate so far, of just what exactly the Minister of Energy is going to do here in respect to national prices.

Now, where will this lead? We're contemplating spending millions and millions of dollars. There's \$125 million, I believe, allocated for further rebates. Considering that we've spent billions, I have to question how much more we're going to need.

4:40

We also have to question current production rates of natural gas not only, again, in this province but across the country. Also reserves: I note here that the initial reserves in billion cubic metres in Alberta – and these are figures that come from the AEUB – were around 3,919. This is a year ago, and of those reserves remaining, again in billions of cubic metres, it is 1,207. Now, that's in Alberta. So we have roughly a little bit more than 25 percent, or one-quarter, of those initial reserves left.

Prices are hardly going to go down. I'm not at this time, Mr. Chairman, going to go into the issue of natural gas and air condition-

ers and the consumption of electricity by the air conditioners in America and the fact that the rivers – or as it's described as the potential for hydraulic generation of electricity in northwestern America – are diminished because there's no water or the flow rates in the rivers has been substantially reduced by drought.

Canadian natural gas production in the last year recorded, in 2000, totaled 174 billion cubic metres. That was 2 percent more than the year before, but gas well completions in the year 2000 increased by 41 percent. I believe the Premier talked about this in question period today, the increase in drilling activity in our western sedimentary basin. The largest increase of all of this occurred in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan where the wells tend to be shallower. Of course, they're cheaper to drill and can be placed into production quickly. So it's much cheaper to drill a well there than, say, west of Hinton or out in Obed, somewhere like that, where you're going really deep. It can get very, very expensive in the foothills. Shallow wells account for about 70 percent of overall gas well completions in western Canada, so we're making the money. The producers are anxious to make money, and they're anxious to make money now.

It is up to the government – and this bill certainly doesn't do it – to ensure that there is some long-term planning. Again, this gas protection act, as it's called, doesn't do it, Mr. Chairman.

Now, earlier in my remarks I talked about subsidizing electricity generators. There are two outfits that come from across the border that are currently or contemplating building natural gas generating stations, and for the life of me I cannot understand, with this legislation as it exists, how their fuel source can be subsidized by the taxpayers of this province. At this point, I just cannot agree with that.

Whenever the minister is talking about having this reference price in section 5, we also have to look at exactly where we will be with natural gas exports and imports. In the year 2000 in this country exports of our natural gas reached a record 100 billion cubic metres, and that is again an increase from the previous year. If you look at it, in five years there has been an increase of 23 percent. Now, I think we could look at better ways of protecting consumers than this bill and this mystical price reference that the minister is considering. It's based on factors that not an hon. member in this Assembly knows anything about, that I'm aware of.

When you look at export sales, where did the gas go when it cleared the border at either Kingsgate or Emerson or even Monchy? Where did it go? The distribution, as I understand it, went somewhere like this: 37 percent to the midwest, 28 percent to the northeast, 19 percent to California, and 14 percent to the Pacific Northwest. So Mr. Chairman, 33 percent of Canada's export of natural gas went to places that are already experiencing electrical shortages. That was last year. That's how much gas we have exported to that part of America.

Now, the Pacific Northwest certainly has generating capacity, but California does not. How is our price here going to go way down with conditions that exist such as there are in California? I don't think it's going to happen, and this bill is simply a credit card with no spending limit on it for the Minister of Energy. What will happen? I don't think export volumes will decline. They may in the northeast part of America, but that's so far removed from us that I don't think it's going to matter. I think prices are going to remain very, very high in comparison to what they were, and if this bill is to make up the difference, it is going to be a real drain on the provincial treasury. It's just going to be a real drain. The hon. minister before talked about really sharp price increases. Well, this is going to be a real drain on the treasury.

Now, the substantial increases I mentioned in natural gas prices in North America are reflected domestically here in our price. The

average price of Canadian natural gas exports at the international border in 2000 rose by about 68 percent. That's a big price increase, 68 percent, Mr. Chairman. What will happen? These higher export volumes and higher prices for Canadian gas translate into increased revenue, and this is an argument that, I'm sure, will be made by the Minister of Energy: the increased revenue from natural gas exports. We can pay for anything with that revenue, anything at all. We can have an unlimited rebate.

Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just excuse me one second, please. The chair is experiencing a lot of difficulty hearing, so we would appreciate it if everyone would tone down the noise level. I would also appreciate that members take a seat and sit down. There should be only one person standing and speaking. That'll be much appreciated. Thank you.

You may proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I talked earlier about this concept of an electrical subsidy to electrical power producers, which I don't agree with. I've heard before this whole notion, this calm assurance that we're out of the business of being in business. When you look at the electricity production in this province, it is simply not true whenever people express the belief that 35 percent of the generating capacity in this province comes from natural gas. It's not that high. It's not nearly that high. The maximum that it could be is 22 percent. You know, people are forgetting that we've got dams, a couple of good dams, one at Brazeau, one out in the riding of Rocky Mountain House. There's certainly capacity there to generate electricity.

We need to look at what happened in Alberta last year and at the transfers of electricity. Now, Alberta imported electricity from three locations – from B.C., from Saskatchewan, and also from America, incredibly – according to the information that I have received. From America we received about 50 gigawatt-hours. Interestingly enough, we received the majority from B.C., 837 gigawatt-hours. From Saskatchewan we received 327 gigawatt-hours. Because of the high cost of electricity there has been a considerable amount of . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm going to have to continue with my remarks in a minute.

4:50

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments about Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. I didn't have the opportunity at second reading, so I have a number of comments that I'd like to make.

Of course, we're into the details of the bill, and Bill 1 is really a very interesting bill, not in terms of the substance of it, I suspect, because I think we're all aware of that, but in terms of what isn't in the bill or what's provided for through regulations. More than half of the bill, of course, is devoted to regulations, and I think it was timely that a former colleague, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, on the weekend took the opportunity to review for us through the media the history of regulations in this Assembly. It's a rather interesting history.

Each session this time of year – and this session may be different – we pass about 30 to 40 bills, and each of those bills comes to the

Assembly and is debated in public. We hear from stakeholders, and we often have people in the galleries who come to listen to debate on the bills. If you miss the debate, you can pick it up in *Hansard*. During that same period when those 30 or 40 bills are being debated, between 400 and 600 regulations will become law, and they're quite different.

The regulations are done in private. They aren't open to public scrutiny. They're the work of the departments. The departments often claim that they consult – and I'm sure they do in most cases – the stakeholders that would be interested in the regulations that they are putting together. Nevertheless, it's all done in private, and there's no record of the conversations that are held with stakeholders. There's no record of the kinds of arguments that were used to support the regulations or the rationale for particular regulations. It's really the department officials, unelected officials, who decide on who will be consulted and come at it from the perspective of an administration of the law rather than the kind of perspective that we have in this House, and that is one of looking at the law in terms of a policy perspective.

There have been instances in the past where those regulations that were put together by department officials were very costly to Alberta taxpayers. It was a result of the regulations that were put together concerning access to information and the application fees that we have the highest application fees in Canada. As I listened to the debate on that legislation, it certainly wasn't the intent of legislators that access to information would somehow or other be constrained through very high application fees. It makes it difficult for people to gain access to laws and rules surrounding private hospitals or to school records or to a whole host of things, and that is the direct result of regulation-making being done in private and not being open to public scrutiny before it was put in place.

Even the Auditor General has indicated that those regulations that were put in place concerning oil field waste resulted in taxpayers paying an extra \$100 million. So, again, an example of regulations being done in private, without public scrutiny, and the taxpayers are the ones that suffer. Regulations are very important in our province, and the fact that this bill would have more than half of it devoted to the making of regulations or delegated to regulation-makers I think has to be disturbing.

One of the things that the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo did on the weekend was to remind us of the history of regulation-making in our province. It was the Zander committee under the Lougheed government that examined regulations and regulation-making in the province. They had looked at various provincial governments across Canada and at how the power to make regulations was being used elsewhere and came back to the Assembly with a number of suggestions.

One of the key recommendations from the Zander committee was to create an all-party scrutiny committee of MLAs which would take and would review the regulations that the departments, the executive branch, put forward. The intent was that that committee would be the watchdog on regulations that were being made and would ensure that the departments weren't acting in an arbitrary manner and that the regulations that were formulated were consistent with the legislation that was in place. So the oversight by the legislation was seen at that time to be a very important aspect of regulation-making.

Each session, the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo points out, we appoint members of this Assembly – and we've just recently done it – to sit on the Law and Regulations Committee. I've been named to that committee myself, and the unfortunate thing is that the committee never meets. Since I've been in the House, the committee has not met. It has become a ritual, the appointment of that committee, a meaningless ritual and a ritual that I think none of us

should be proud to be part of. I think we should ask ourselves, when we're asked to sit on that committee, exactly what we're doing by being part of an exercise that pretends to appoint a watchdog committee, but the watchdog never goes to work.

5:00

The previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo went on to indicate that since 1985 there have been generated 15,000 – 15,000 – pages of regulations and that in fact since 1993 the government has passed more than 2,000 new regulations and added another 3,000 pages to the already abundant list of regulations there. I think the bright spot in all of this is that in 1995 there was a law passed to fix a sunset date for new regulations. You know, the notion of an expiry date for regulations, I think the member pointed out, is a good one, but it still doesn't take away the need for an all-party committee to overlook the regulations that are being generated.

I think if you look at the regulations that Bill 1 would have generated, those regulations are exactly the concerns of constituents. They are exactly the kinds of information that Albertans would like to have information on. They're the kinds of concerns that they would certainly be interested in seeing debated in this Legislature. If you look at the list starting in section 7(1),

the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations

- (a) defining for the purposes of this Act and the regulations any terms or expressions not already defined.

So really it can change the purpose of the act. It can broaden or narrow the act.

The regulations have a huge impact on the administration of the protection that is supposed to be afforded citizens under this act. They can make regulations "respecting the determination of the Alberta price and the amount to be prescribed by regulation," so they have control over the price, which is a huge, huge factor in this legislation. In 7(1)(c) they can make regulations "authorizing rebates." So the very kinds of things that most homeowners and rent payers would like to know – when are the rebates going to be paid, and what is the basis for the rebates? – that kind of information will be determined by administrators behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny. That, Mr. Chairman, I think is really unfortunate.

They can go on even further, and they can determine "the circumstances in which a person is considered not be to be an eligible consumer" and not eligible for rebates. People would like to know what those ground rules are. In the last round of rebates there was, as I'm sure you're aware, Mr. Chairman, great public discussion about the awarding of the \$150 to every Albertan over 16 years of age and great public questioning as to the wisdom of using that criterion to spend tax money on a rebate program. So the eligibility of consumers is of great concern. They can make regulations regarding the application procedures, how difficult or how easy it is to apply for and obtain the rebates. Again, there'll be nothing said publicly until the regulations are generated and in fact have become part of the law, no public discussion of the conditions under which the rebates may be made, so no one will know what will trigger rebates. What is the threshold when citizens can expect that there will be a rebate available to them? Again, I think that is unfortunate.

The ground rules, the playing rules, are not going to be public until some administrator, some department officials have sat down in the privacy of their offices and decided when those rebates shall start to operate and the manner in which and the frequency with which the rebates will be made, and that's of huge importance to citizens and consumers. Is it going to be a credit on your bill, or is it going to be a cheque that you receive in the mail? I think the kinds of phone calls that our constituency offices are receiving about when the second \$150 rebate will actually be made available give

you some indication of the interest that there is in the manner in which rebates and their frequency are made available. Again, it's unfortunate that the members of this Legislature, who have been elected to act on behalf of Albertans, will not be part of that discussion.

The maximum amount of rebate that may be paid to an eligible consumer for marketable gas consumed in the province for industrial purposes is again going to be subject to regulation. I have some suspicion that some large consumers have the ability to influence decisions in ways that many small consumers don't, but they will still be subjected to the same secrecy regarding what is going to happen to them in terms of rebates as smaller consumers are.

I guess the last one that I would indicate is the administration of the rebates paid to vendors for the benefit of eligible consumers. The vendors are going to find out what the rules are in terms of them offering rebates to consumers once the regulations are made.

So it's a long, long list, Mr. Chairman, of regulations that are going to be made that affect Albertans, and it's an important program. For government to embark on a rebate program is very, very important to taxpayers because that money that goes into that program is not available for other programs. All of the really important decisions, it seems, concerning those rebates will be made behind closed doors, as I've indicated a number of times, by department officials and by administrators whose interests may vary somewhat from the interests of the consumers in this province and the interests of legislators.

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, I would make a plea to the new members appointed to the Law and Regulations Committee, under the chairmanship of the Member for Peace River, for that committee to take up its work. To the new members – the Member for Calgary-Egmont, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the Member for Edmonton-Calder – and other members on that committee, I would plead with them to make the Law and Regulations Committee a committee which does the work that it was originally intended to do and that would be very, very useful at this particular point in time in overseeing some important regulations, the ones that are going to be generated from Bill 1 should Bill 1 pass in this Assembly.

So it's with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd conclude. Thank you very much.

5:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the next speaker, who is Edmonton-Highlands, I'd just like to remind members once again to please tone down the noise level. The chair is experiencing difficulty hearing the speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, traditionally after an election a government introduces as Bill 1 its most important piece of legislation, whether or not that's real or just symbolic. You know, when the Parti Quebecois government was first elected in Quebec, of course they introduced their Bill 1, which was their language law, which obviously was the most important thing to them at the time.

This also reflects the ideology of the government. It's of number one importance, and that is natural gas rebates. And why not, because it was in fact through natural gas rebates that the present government got where it is today. It was a number one issue in the provincial election and a number one election strategy for the Tory government in securing a renewal of its mandate. So I find it suitable that this particular bill would be the first order of business

of the government after the election. The act, of course, allows the government to make use of the financial resources of this province to provide rebates to citizens of Alberta with very, very little restriction, if any.

We've advocated all along – in fact, we advocated a year ago, back at the time of the by-election in Edmonton-Highlands – that something had to be done about natural gas prices. I think we were the first to raise that as an issue, and we certainly found that the public was very responsive to the thought that the government needs to do something about rising natural gas prices. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, natural gas prices in Alberta in the last few years have gone through the roof, and that is largely due to the fact that the governments, both the provincial government and the federal government, have encouraged the export of massive quantities of natural gas to the United States, creating essentially a North American market for this commodity. That leaves Alberta consumers at the vagaries of the Chicago price for their own natural gas.

We've always advocated, at least for home heating purposes, that the price of natural gas ought to be capped at \$3 a gigajoule, and we propose that it be done not through rebates but by actually fixing the real problem, which is the high price of natural gas. By a small increase in the royalties paid by producers, it would be very easy for the government to actually permanently reduce the price in Alberta to a level that was consistent with what it was a couple of years ago.

We continue to believe, Mr. Chairman, that that's the best course of action, but the government doesn't see it that way. The government is going to go in a different direction, and that is to provide rebates and let consumers recycle those rebates through their bank accounts and into the pockets of the gas company and of the natural gas producers. We believe our approach is superior, because for every \$1 in increased royalties due to natural gas prices that the government receives, energy producers receive on average about \$3. So they're very easily able to fund modest price protection for consumers out of the windfall profits that they're receiving as a result of the government creating this North American energy market.

Now, if we come to the specifics of Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, to support this as it's presently drafted would be in our view reckless. It would undermine the Legislative Assembly and the duties of each member. The specific provisions of Bill 1 as set out in sections 1 and 2 give way too much discretion to the provincial cabinet in making its regulations. These sections of Bill 1 are nothing more than an empty shell. They do nothing more than delegate from the Legislative Assembly to the provincial cabinet who is eligible to receive rebates, the amount of the rebates they receive, and when they receive these rebates. I sincerely hope that the government will introduce amendments at committee stage to rectify this unacceptable situation.

Unless this bill is fixed, I can't see how the New Democrat opposition will be able to support it. What the government is asking the Legislative Assembly to do is to give a blank cheque to the provincial cabinet. What Bill 1 does is give the power to the provincial cabinet to decide based on political considerations when, how much, and to whom natural gas rebates will be provided. Bill 1, therefore, fails the test of good governance. A feature of good governance, Mr. Chairman, is that the Legislative Assembly should not pass a law which transfers the power of making laws into other hands. The specific provisions of Bill 1 failed to limit the discretionary power of the provincial cabinet.

I'd like to review the specific provisions of Bill 1 and how they fail the test of good governance. Section 1(b)(ii) of Bill 1 allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council discretion to decide both who is and who is not an eligible consumer. If rebates are to be given from the

public chest, the Legislative Assembly should be the one who decides who is and who is not eligible. For example, is it the cabinet's intent to only make residential consumers eligible? Will rebates also be provided to farmers, to small business people, to school boards, and health authorities or even to larger industrial consumers? Or will the eligible consumers depend on how close we get to the next election or who exerts the most political pressure? Who knows, Mr. Chairman? You sure won't find any answers in Bill 1.

Section 2 deals with when a rebate might be provided. This section reads:

Where, in the opinion of the Minister of Energy, the Alberta price is or is likely to be greater than the amount prescribed in the regulations, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize a rebate.

Provisions like this are not delegation but abdication. Here again we read a provision that allows the provincial cabinet wide discretion on matters that should properly be put within Bill 1 itself. There is no formula set out whereby there is any indication of what the rebate levels will be or at what price level they will kick in.

Additionally, the bill is named the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, but a careful reading of section 1(d) and section 4(1) indicates that an elevated price of other substances might entitle one to a rebate. However, "other substances" is not clearly defined. Section 1(d) states: "Other substances" [include] propane, heating oil and any other substance used for heating purposes." Again, Mr. Chairman, "heating purposes" is not defined within the bill. Does this mean home heating, heating of schools and hospitals, heating of greenhouses, heating for the purposes of generating electricity, or some other industrial purpose? Again, who knows?

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Bill 1 is riddled with gaps and holes, and it would be irresponsible to leave solely to the provincial cabinet the discretion to fill these gaps and plug the holes. Instead of providing some certainty to Albertans about what kind of protection they can expect to receive from high natural gas prices, this is strictly a political bill which gives the provincial cabinet a blank cheque to decide to whom, how much, and when politically motivated rebate cheques can be sent out.

5:20

Mr. Chairman, as it stands, the New Democrat opposition cannot support the bill. This has the same deficiencies as I referred to in my comments on Bill 7. It is an abdication of the responsibility of this Legislative Assembly, the transfer of its powers on a wholesale basis to the government, where decisions, as I said earlier, are not made here in open, public debate but are made in private, behind closed doors around the cabinet table.

Something like rebates, which are such an incredibly powerful political tool for any government caring to use them, cannot be provided in a bill as flimsy as this one. It galls me that billions and billions of dollars that have been handed out in rebates as we led up to the last provincial election are now being enshrined in this legislation with far less legislative framework than things like the regulation of taxis or the regulation of co-operatives. We saw the massive bill on co-operatives by the hon. member opposite. It's this thick. It weighs half a pound, but here we've got a bill that will allow the government to hand out billions of dollars with no strings, with no scrutiny by the Legislature, yet this government has the arrogance to ask us to pass it.

Well, I don't think so, Mr. Chairman. I think this is a bad bill. There's something wrong here. This bill, the first priority of the government, is the first priority of the Legislature to defeat if we have any sense, if we have any commitment to the rules of parliamentary government that allows the elected people of this province

or of this country to have a say as to how their expenditures are made. That is the first principle of our parliamentary system, and the government's bill completely flies in the face of that principle, of a thousand years of struggle for democratic representation in the British system. We need to do something about this bill. I'm appalled that the government could bring forward a bill with absolutely no scrutiny on billions of dollars of politically motivated expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, those are my comments at this stage of the bill. Hopefully we'll have much more debate. I hope that the government will actually bring forward some amendments when we continue to deal with this bill in committee stage. It can't stand the way it is now. It's got loopholes here that you could drive a Brink's truck through. I hope that something is done.

Mr. Chairman, that will conclude my remarks, and I will now move that we adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 1.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:25 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 30, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: **01/04/30**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay; we'll call the committee to order.

Hon. members, before the Committee of Supply starts considering the main estimates for the 2001-2002 fiscal year, the chair would like to confirm the arrangements that have been made by House leaders. In the April 10, 2001, agreement House leaders agreed that the minister whose department's estimates were before the committee would have 10 minutes for opening comments, followed by one hour for questioning by the opposition parties. Under the agreement the minister has five minutes to conclude consideration of the estimates for his or her department.

The agreement is silent on questions by members of the government caucus. Should there be any questions or comments by those members, it would have to be after the opposition parties have had the hour but, the chair assumes, before the minister concludes.

Under the agreement two departments are to have their estimates considered on Monday, Tuesday, and certain Wednesday evenings. On two Wednesday evenings and three Thursday afternoons the opposition parties will have up to two hours of questions and comments. All consideration of the estimates is to be completed before the normal adjournment hour of midnight on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings and 5:30 on Thursday afternoons.

The only other matter that the chair would add is that under the agreement the first estimates to be considered by the Committee of Supply are that of the Legislative Assembly, which are to be voted upon without debate. The chair wanted to take this opportunity to make sure that members are aware of the arrangements that have been made before the committee starts its work on the main estimates.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

Offices of the Legislative Assembly

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the offices of the Legislative Assembly, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Support to the Legislative Assembly	
Operating Expense	\$29,838,000
Office of the Auditor General	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$16,986,000
Office of the Ombudsman	
Operating Expense	\$1,754,000
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer	
Operating Expense	\$7,035,000
Office of the Ethics Commissioner	
Operating Expense	\$212,000

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner

Operating Expense \$3,287,000

Amount of Operating Expense and Capital

Investment to be voted under section 1(1) of

the Appropriation Act, 2001

\$59,112,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Sustainable Resource Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I start, I'd like to introduce my staff sitting in the members' gallery: Bob Fessenden, deputy minister, and Bruce Perry, senior financial officer, both for our department and also Environment; also, Donna Ballard, my executive assistant.

I'm pleased to present this year's budget for Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. Today's presentation also gives me an opportunity to talk about our new ministry, which I'm very excited about and proud of. As a new ministry we're presenting a new budget that reflects a prudent transfer of resources. We have worked closely with the other ministries and have involved my other colleagues' departments of Environment, Community Development, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and Energy. We are working together to use our resources effectively. For example, the senior financial officer and the human resource director are a couple of the shared positions between our ministry and Alberta Environment. It also shows the co-operation that is occurring between the various departments as we continue to work towards a co-ordinated approach in this government.

Our overall ministry's budget for 2001-2002 represents our core business: \$70 million for industry development and \$146 million for resource stewardship. Of the \$197 million voted appropriation for the department, \$56 million is budgeted for regional operations and \$63 million for Alberta's forest protection. I will talk a bit about that later.

I have had questions from many of you about exactly how our new role fits the recent organizational changes. Our focus at Sustainable Resource Development is on Alberta's renewable resources. We have responsibility for Alberta's forests, forest sustainability with responsibility for conservation and management, as well as development and collection of revenues, public lands, and also fish and wildlife.

I'll talk a bit about the manpower. The department is also a large one, with close to 2,000 people with a strong presence in regions and a lot in your local constituencies. Our regional staff, for example, are involved in conservation enforcement, fire management, public lands, and local planning and education. About 45 percent of our operating budget is on manpower.

The other area we have is public lands. By bringing public lands and forestry together in one ministry, we are putting the responsibility for the province's public lands back under one roof with the exception of the parks and protected areas, which are now part of Community Development. This allows us to co-ordinate both areas. Most importantly, it gives Albertans and industry a one-window approach to our services and information. In addition, the Surface

Rights Board, the Land Compensation Board, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board fall under our ministry. If you'd like some information on land issues or have concerns, my doors are always open.

8:10

Forest protection. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development also is the steward of Alberta's forest resources. An important part of our mandate involves the protection and management of these resources. As I mentioned earlier, we have budgeted \$63 million for forest protection. There is also \$12 million allocated under the Alberta environmental protection and enhancement fund.

I want to assure everyone that we are taking steps now to prepare for this year's fire season, and of course we are already fighting fires. With the early indication of dry weather we began our fire preparation one month earlier this year. By gearing up early, we are in the best position to allocate our resources wisely and minimize the expenditures throughout the season. This puts us in the best position to protect Alberta's communities and people from the risk of wildfires. As well, just a week ago we issued a fire ban throughout a stretch of Alberta that was facing particularly dry conditions. We know that we can't control nature and that most fires are caused by lightning, but we can certainly reduce the risk of fires by humans.

With the management of forests it stands to reason that this ministry also is responsible for fish and wildlife and habitat issues throughout the province. We have approximately \$4 million to \$5 million allocated to fish and wildlife. There again we have key individuals in the field offices delivering our management and enforcement programs.

Alberta has shown the greatest provincial leadership within Canada in the development of our endangered species program. Together with stakeholders we will continue to develop this program. We'll have many challenges. We will work to ensure that Albertans continue to enjoy the benefits of well-managed fish and wildlife resources. Among other things I am interested in working to ensure the health and sustainability of our fishing resources in this province.

Industrial development. As I mentioned earlier, we are accountable for the sustainability of our forests. We must manage them in a way that offers economic, social, and environmental benefits for all Albertans. Our continued quality of life feeds on Alberta's forests. Forestry is the third largest industry in the province, contributing \$8.3 billion to our economy annually. Albertans enjoy our vast forests, as do Alberta's wildlife. We are committed to managing the resources in a sustainable way, which brings the maximum benefit back to Albertans.

There are essentially three ways that the industry can have access to our carefully allocated forest resources. One is by permits, which deal with very small amounts over short periods of time; timber quotas, which result in licences to cut timber in a designated area over a longer period of time; and forest management agreements, which require a company to consider all forest values and consult the public in preparing long-term forest plans in a designated area. In all cases the government approves any management decisions and has legislative authority over the activities on Crown lands.

One of the big priorities for me is increasing the value that Albertans get from our forest resources. We initiated benchmarks to study last year that are going to help identify opportunities to expand the secondary forest manufacturing industry in Alberta. We'll continue to develop our relationships with industry and work together to build an even stronger industry that employs Albertans and continues to improve the quality of life for all Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, that is essentially an overview of our new Ministry

of Sustainable Resource Development. We have a big job to do. It is a job that we take very seriously, and it is a job I look forward to doing in the future. I will be pleased to hear your questions and provide written answers, that I will table in the House in the future.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have a chance to stand and speak this evening to what is really the first debate we're having on estimates of the various ministries. We've done supplementaries prior to this and did Leg. Assembly, but this is really our first opportunity to get into the meat of this whopping budget that we're going to be approving here in less than a month with this government. I'm happy to have a chance to discuss one of my favourite topics, which is sustainable development. In this particular instance, it's sustainable resource development.

I'd like to take a moment to talk about the most recent changes in the ministry shuffles that we've had since I've been in this Legislature, which is early '93. There have been four significant changes in the way the government has tried to do business since that time period. They came in in '93 talking about a reduction in the number of ministers and government departments, subsequently reduced those ministers so there was a shuffling of areas that we talk about now as being with sustainable development.

Sometime later they figured that wasn't working all that well and that all the ministries were in stovepipes. They wanted to flatten that out a little bit and try and do more co-ordination between the departments, so they added a couple of junior ministers and tried to make some changes that didn't seem to be too successful. We saw another set of small changes after the '97 election, and now once again in 2001 we've seen some significant changes: many more ministers on board, many more junior ministers on board, and another big shuffling of ministries.

I was trying to describe it to a friend the other day and said: you know, it's like taking a deck of cards and just when the people in the province and their voice in this Legislature, the opposition parties, have the decks all sorted out according to suits and according to ace to king and have them nice and orderly and can talk about them and compare figures from year to year in a manner that's reasonable and objective and comparable, the government shuffles the deck, mixes them all up again, and throws a budget at us and expects us to talk about how that works for the people of the province and approve the budgets.

The problem with how that works is that you end up with some inconsistencies and a great many numbers that are not comparable, which is quite a problem for anybody that has an accounting background and wants to be able to take numbers in budgets and compare them and see where there have been increases, decreases, and compare those numbers to benchmarks and targets and find out whether or not the government really did its job. The way these budgets are organized this year again, it's very, very hard to do that, Mr. Chairman.

The first time it happened after '93, I thought: well, they're trying to streamline things that really aren't the government's fault. Now after this fourth time that this deck has been reshuffled, I'm beginning to believe that the government does this with some deliberate attempts to make it hard for people to hold them accountable, Mr. Chairman, and that is a concern.

8:20

It isn't just my concern, Mr. Chairman, or the people that I

represent in the constituency and the people that I hear from throughout the province, but it is certainly a concern of the Auditor General. Every year that I've been in this Legislature, he has made some remarks about this in terms of consistency and comparability and holding the ministries accountable, setting measurable goals, and actually being able to determine through the goals and the benchmarks and the objectives whether or not the government has done its job. Every year in virtually every department the Auditor General sets out some recommendations which would indicate that the government hasn't done all that great a job. They make it harder for everyone trying to study these figures by the kind of shuffling that happens. It's certainly no different this year than other times when they've done this.

Now we have this department, Sustainable Resource Development, which is primarily taking some parts of Environment, what used to be environmental protection, Mr. Chairman, taking a portion of that along with parts from Community Development and Agriculture and Energy and calling it Sustainable Resource Development. So we have a bit of a hodgepodge mix compared to the departments we had before and an interesting transition that I'd just like to spend a moment talking about.

Most of this department used to come under environmental protection. What's in a name, Mr. Chairman? I think quite a bit when we talk about government and how they decide what filters they're going to use for decision-making in this province. Environmental protection would suggest that a primary concern of the government was environment, protection being the protection of the environment, and that that was the filter through which they made the decisions, the business decisions, other spending decisions, protection decisions, on how the dollars were spent.

Then they dropped the protection part of it. The question I think we have to ask is: why is there no longer a department that deals with protection in this province? That's a problem for me and for many people who think that protecting the environment is a role of government and that they have a large role to do that, particularly when we see so many competing interests for the landscape in this province: business interests, pressures from people on land uses, agriculture interests, wildlife interests. All those issues are competing interests and need to be taken into account. Somebody out there has to stand up and say that at some point we have to decide what land loads are going to be for the environment and make our decisions based on that, which certainly incorporates protection and sustainable development from all perspectives, not just resource development, which is what we have here.

I understand the pressures on the department to do some of the separations that we've seen here, and I don't disagree with some of them, Mr. Chairman. I think that definitely how the departments were organized previously wasn't all that effective in terms of service delivery and in meeting the mandates that the business community wanted. But I think that they were somewhat effective in starting to take a look at a protection perspective, and I would certainly hope that as this Legislature unfolds over the next three or four years, we don't see any erosion in protection of the landscape.

Certainly what I feel we need and what many people feel we need is for protection to have more significance in decision-making, particularly in business decision-making in this province. We are seeing businesses take a lead in that in many instances, Mr. Chairman. What we're seeing is that businesses are seeing that protection is a big deal. It's a big deal in the global marketplace and in being able to sell their commodities abroad and to be globally recognized as world-class leaders in the industry that they're involved in.

I'm thinking particularly of forestry when I talk about this. We've seen many businesses really take a leadership role in this province

in what they're trying to do in terms of sustainability and protection of the landscape and perpetuating forests forever as a good business decision. So I applaud those organizations. I hope the government will catch up with them, because in many regards they are not up to speed with what some of the organizations are doing out there and the issues that they're facing and the proactiveness that they're taking.

I certainly don't mean to offend anyone in the department when I make those comments, Mr. Chairman, because I think that certainly the people in the department work very hard. They're well qualified for their work. They're committed to the jobs they do, and I have always had a very good relationship in terms of feedback and questions being answered and seeing the commitment they have to the work that they do, but it doesn't mean that they're the leaders in this particular area. I think that business is out there a step ahead of them, and that concerns me a little bit sometimes when we talk about the choices that need to be made about competing interests in this province and particularly when I don't see incorporated into the business plans or the budgetary processes or the goals and so on a significant amount of attention being paid to cumulative impact.

I think that when we talk about sustainable development, be it resource or wildlife or landscape, we need to start talking about how important cumulative impact is on where we go in decision-making, and I don't know that that's incorporated into the decision-making process. I hear people in the department saying that it is. I've been asking this particular set of questions on cumulative impact for three or four years now in this Assembly, and I get answers, but they don't seem to be comprehensive in nature. I'm not sure that the department has a full handle on what it means to take not just a business decision in an area as their criteria for establishing cumulative impact but a sustained long-term perspective.

If we take a 20-, a 50-, and a 100-year look at a piece of land in this province, what are the impacts? What are all the cumulative impacts on that piece of land now, in the past, and in the very long-term future? We take a look at all the forests. We take a look at what the companies want to do with them. We take a look at the weather, what impact droughts, fires, floods have on the landscape. We take a look at the people impact, whether that be encroachment of urban sprawl or whether that be a tourism impact. We take a look at the impact on that land from a wildlife perspective: what's happening to the habitat for wildlife and how it is being impacted by all of these other factors. Then we take a look at the business development impact on that area and not just the landscape at that point in time. We need to talk about the air and the water at the same time. It doesn't happen, I don't think, in that kind of comprehensive fashion, and we need to take some leadership on this.

There's certainly enough expertise in this province, and there is certainly enough expertise in the department to be able to do this. I would like to see this minister take this as an undertaking for the next few years as something that he can show some strong leadership in in co-operation with the Minister of Environment. It's a little bit of an issue now with the way the departments are divided up, because as I understand it, essentially air and water decisions are in Environment and lots of the landscape issues are in Sustainable Resource Development. So they're going to have to have good lines of communication if they're going to talk about cumulative impact in those areas, Mr. Chairman. I know that can easily happen, but it's a big undertaking, not a small undertaking.

What do we need to do? We need to inventory the landscape in the province right now. What do we have in each region of the province in terms of these different kinds of impacts: the people, agriculture, wildlife, and industry? If we take those four basic areas and determine what the current inventory of impact is on the

province, then we take a look at where the impact is causing pressure points at this particular time. We know that there are some areas like that in the province. Certainly we're seeing urban sprawl and industrial development in the area around Edmonton as a big issue. We are probably overimpacted on agricultural land and from an industrial development and clean air and water perspective in this industrial corridor now. So we need to determine where those pressure points are. The eastern slopes is another good example of where we are overimpacted at this particular stage with all the competing interests for the landscape. We need to do an inventory right now of what's in the province. We need to determine where the pressure points are because we have too much significant impact on them. We need to decide how to mediate and turn around some of those problems. That's a role for government I think, Mr. Chairman, and that's a leadership role. We need to then determine the areas that don't have maximum allowable impact right now. Where are they? What could we sustain in those regions, and how do we get there? Long-term kinds of things to talk about; certainly important to do.

8:30

We're seeing that some of the forestry companies are doing that now. They're understanding, I think, that if they're not overallocated on the forests – which I think we are, but they would disagree with me – then they at least don't have enough sustainable inventory to meet their business needs. So what are they going to do, Mr. Chairman? They're going to land farm. They're going to tree farm some parts of the province so that they can sustain the kind of inventory they want. They've done cumulative impact studies within their own organizations to determine that they don't have enough sustainable inventory. They're going to have to do something else, so they look elsewhere.

At some point government needs to talk about that as an issue. Where are they going to tree farm? Not on marginal farmland, that's for sure, because it'll take too long to grow the trees. They're going to be looking for prime farmland. So that's a competing interest for agricultural use, and it's something that I think needs to be talked about in terms of the direction this province goes. Do we grow sugar beets, do we grow wheat and barley, or do we grow trees? Those are choices that need to be made. We're going to be seeing, I think, industry butting heads with the agricultural community at some point in time or at least taking over some of the agricultural land, and there is a role there, Mr. Chairman, for government to be involved in the process.

It's nice to see the minister in his comments talk about the shared resources and co-operation that is there between the departments he's working with now and that they're working to achieve co-ordination. Certainly that's something that's been talked about by the Auditor General in the Environment audit coverage and recommendations, and certainly the next stage, the next part of that, is that they go to a consistent planning basis, which is in fact recommendation 13 in the AG's report. They talk about

the Department of Environment's regional and area Action Plans used in the planning process be completed on a consistent basis.

There are 17 areas covering the Province for which Action Plans are prepared by the Department's Natural Resources Service.

There have been some areas where there are some issues, particularly when we talk about fish stocking management, Mr. Chairman.

That's a big issue in this province. We have a serious problem with fish stocks. When I first started talking about that in budget debates, they thought that was funny, that it was a very minor issue, and why would I spend so much time on it? But fish in this province are an indicator of things going wrong. If you can't sustain your fish

inventory in the province, why is that, Mr. Chairman? Because we have too many people fishing? Perhaps, and that's one of the things the government has done, in terms of setting limits. In most lakes and streams now we're catch and release. It's a long way from where we were 20 years ago or even 10 years ago.

That's not the only issue. What else is impacting the fish stocks? Development certainly impacts them, development around and on fish streams and on lakeshores. Both commercial and industrial development is a big issue. You just need to read any of the hundreds of letters that I have received over the years from the residents around Wabamun to start to understand what that kind of impact is. Water quality impacts the fish stocks too. So what are we doing about this?

Those are just some of the issues that impact fish management. The government hasn't been able to get a handle on those source problems, and we see it outlined in the Auditor General's report. We see some significant time spent on the goals and key strategies and performance management indicators in this year's budget on that issue, and that's good. I hope they're not too late. I hope we're in a stage where we can be recoverable on these issues.

I'm just about out of time on this set of 20 minutes. Certainly I need to come back because I haven't gotten to really any of the details of the budget yet. But one question I would like to put on the record right away is the \$7 million that the minister talked about in business development. He said business development. What I see under Core Business is Industry Development, and I'm wondering if he's talking about the same thing there. Are we talking about business development from the perspective of what the department is doing, or are we talking about some actual financial support to the industry? I see some of that outlined here in the key strategies in goal 1.1, and I'm hoping we can get some elaboration on that. I think it's not a bad idea that they're doing some development for industry.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'll be back.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to join in the scrutiny of the budget proposals for the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development. Now, this department, Sustainable Resource Development, includes the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the Surface Rights Board, and the Land Compensation Board. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has already pointed out how confusing it is to try and keep a through line in watching performance measurement, monitoring and evaluation of this department, because over the years it has changed its outfit so often that it's beginning to look like a refugee from the Goodwill. I've been trying to track it through the Auditor General's report, and I'm kind of struggling to find all the pieces under what it used to be called, or was called very briefly for a year or 18 months, and then part of that. Once upon a time I think this was called forestry and a couple of other things all grouped together.

Looking at Industry Development and Resource Stewardship – those are the two core business areas in this department – I find that a really interesting combination. Number one, that it is – and I'm sure the words are very carefully chosen – industry development first and then resource stewardship second, which is always a concern for me. I know in Alberta over the long term, for the last 30 or 40 years, we've been trying to expand the base from which our revenue comes. Certainly with sustainable development we should be able to do that, but I think it's a very careful balance. I'm trying to understand if that balance is being achieved, if we are achieving

sustainability in what's being proposed in this 2001-2002 budget. I'm looking for stability in the department because it has been changed so many times. As I said, it's wearing a coat of many colours now, having been patched together from a variety of other ministries.

I'm looking for whether there is good management in this department. I'm looking to see whether the choices that are being made in the direction the department is going in are equitable to all parties involved, particularly to Albertans because it is their legacy for the future. Frankly, it's a little hard to determine.

Now, when I started by looking at the Meeting Priorities, Sharing Benefits business plans for Budget 2001, one of the first things I noticed is the performance measurement for the first goal; that is, to "sustain growth opportunities in the forest resource sector through maximization of opportunity, secondary processing and exports of products." And when I look at the performance measurement, it's under review. This is something I've noticed with the government in the past. They seem to do a set of performance measurements in a department, and then the next year they change it, so it's very difficult to track year to year to year how things are progressing. Again in this department it's under review. Now, perhaps that's appropriate, and that's a question I have for the minister, about why it's under review.

8:40

One of the things I noticed in the performance measurement that is in fact listed here, that being the target to "reduce the gap between the harvest and annual allowable cut," is that the gap in '95 was 7.0, and that dropped to a low in 1998 of 4.3, then skyrocketed in 1999 to 8.7. The estimate in 2000 is not available. That is disappointing. It's also difficult for anyone that's trying to measure whether the department is performing, and for two reasons. Is it a good performance measurement? Is it what we should be measuring? Is the outcome what is going to give us the information about good management and, in this case, sustainable resource development? So is the performance measurement accurate and valuable, and what is the information that we're getting from it, if it is a good performance measurement? Here we don't get anything. It's not available.

One of the other things that came out of that section that I'm reading – and I'm referring to page 328 in the business plan – is a section that says:

The sustainable harvest is calculated using only that portion of forest land base (e.g., excludes recreation areas, wildlife reserves, stream buffers, etc.) which the government makes available for timber harvest; and reflects the forest management strategies applied to that land base.

Now, at one point I thought I had read that every tree in Alberta that it was possible to allocate has been allocated. So if they've already allocated every possible tree, how is it even possible to measure this? I'd like to hear back from the department about what's happening there.

When I look at the second core business plan, Resource Stewardship, in the business plan there is no performance measurement listed at all. When I went through the secondary goals under Resource Stewardship, the first goal, 2.1, being to "protect Alberta's forests by preventing and suppressing wildfires," there's no performance measurement. When I look at goal 2.2, "improve environmental stewardship of public land," there is no performance measurement at all, nothing listed. When I look at goal 2.3, "promote fish and wildlife conservation," there is a performance measurement which is under review and seems to be saying that it's not a problem, because they're looking at the species of fish and wildlife that are in Alberta and which ones are considered at serious risk. They're stating that "only two percent are considered at serious risk" here and that the target was the "percentage of species at

serious risk below five percent." So that seems to be a reasonable performance measurement. It seems to have given us the information. It, too, is under review.

When I look at the third goal, under Support Services, to "manage the department in an effective, affordable manner and provide an attractive work environment for employees," again no performance measurement. So how is the department being a good manager and even able to check how its own performance is moving along when it either has no performance measurement for key areas and key goals or they're all under review? I ran into the same problem under the Estimates book.

Now, here it states quite clearly that "given the newness of the Department" – well, yes, this particular combination of sectors is new, but, you know, resource development isn't new, the protection isn't new, and the sustainability isn't new. Come on here, folks. Yes, all these things have been joined together for perhaps the first time, but none of the activities that they're doing is new. It states quite clearly that because of the "newness of the Department, the performance indicators and targets are under review and should be treated as preliminary." What are we going to see in this thing next year, and how are we in next year's budget supposed to be looking back at the performance of this year when all these things were under review or don't exist?

You know, this government loves to get up and talk about how it's open and accountable and then seems incapable of producing the performance measurements by which it can measure itself and use as a management tool and allow the scrutiny of other legislators, the opposition, and the public to look at this. So there's a disconnect here.

As I say, I did try and locate the various pieces out of the Auditor General's report for '99-2000 and haven't been quite successful, so let me go back and look at the numbers. When I look at program 1, which in fact is listed as ministry support services, I'm looking at the full-time equivalents. The minister himself noted that there was a sizable staff, and I'm wondering how many FTEs are employed under the ministry support services in this budget before us, in 2001-02.

I'm also looking for the breakdown of FTEs for each of the subprograms in the ministry support services. This is another area where the government gets less open and less accountable as the years go on. When I go back and look at budgets from the late '80s or even the early '90s, we got a breakdown of where the FTEs were in each of the subprograms, and you were able to track that. Now you're getting a sort of lump sum at the end of the budget, one figure for the entire department. Particularly in a ministry like this one, which is really a collection of other components, I think it really is necessary that the FTEs be shown broken out by the programs. In particular here I'm just going to ask at this point for the breakout of the FTEs for the subprograms in ministry support services.

Now, the next question I have. The minister's office budget is increasing by it looks like \$167,000. Yes, indeed. Yowsa, it's a leap, 95 percent. Let's get into this one. What is the breakdown of the \$342,000 minister's office budget for 2001-02 by salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses? I'd like that breakdown for each of those areas, please.

Now, when we look at the human resources budget, that as well is increasing by \$984,000, by 46 percent, but if you look back, the preliminary actual for the previous year is \$355,000 underbudget. We're underbudget, we think, for last year by \$355,000, yet they're asking for almost a million dollar increase at this point. What is going on here? Can we get an explanation for what is happening in

the human resources budget that we're getting that kind of spread? I think we need to know what's happening there, whether there's a lot of retirements, pension contributions. What on earth would account for that?

8:50

As well, the budget for legal services is decreasing by \$43,000, from \$110,000 to \$67,000, so that's a 40 percent decrease. Why? What are the choices being made there? Or has there been an ongoing legal cost that is no longer being called for? What's the reason for the discrepancy in that? Does the budget for legal services cover internal costs only, or it is used to cover legal expenses for intervenors' legal fees when a development is being challenged? If the intervenor fees are not covered from this budget, where does the government make allowances to pay the legal fees so Albertans' views can be heard on development projects? Is that covered under another area in these program expenses, and if so, where is it? We'd be interested in hearing that.

What was included in the \$725,000 budget for achievement award in 2000-2001, and why has it been eliminated in this year, 2001-02?

Still under program 1, ministry support services, what is the breakdown of the \$367,000 deputy minister's office budget for 2001-02? Again, salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent, and salaries contract positions, and in addition travel, advertising and hosting expenses, and telephone and communications: so what's the breakdown in the deputy minister's office under that?

Now, program 2, policy, program, and standards. Same question that I started with before: what are the FTEs that are employed under program 2, policy, program, and standards, and could we have a breakout of these FTEs by the subprograms? It looks like there are about nine subprograms under that. Specifically what services are provided under 2.0.5, forest industry development, that are worth \$2.682 million? Yes, there's not a lot of information on that. So what services are under that? What are the measurements that are being used to determine its successes? What sort of outcome are they looking for from that? Can the minister provide a written list of where the money was spent for forest industry development in 2000-2001 and where he anticipates spending it in 2001-2002?

What capital investments does the minister plan to make under program 2.0.6, public lands management, for \$300,000? So what are those capital investments under that section?

Why is the capital investment in program 2.0.7, which is grazing reserves – now, this is interesting. In the comparable year of 2000-2001 preliminary actual, that was \$131,000, and it's dropping to \$25,000. What is in there, and why has it reduced by that much? Is there something that's being covered under another area or another program? Have they completely dropped a program? That's a significant reduction. I mean, we're not talking about a lot of money overall, but still to go from \$131,000 to \$25,000 is a fairly significant drop. So I'd be interested in what's in there and why that happened.

Can the minister provide a list of the capital investment projects that were funded under program 2.0.7, grazing reserves, in 2000-2001 and a list of the anticipated capital projects for 2001-02?

I'm aware that my time will be running out shortly. I know that my colleagues also wish to pursue scrutiny of this budget, but I'll go until the bell rings on me.

In program 2.0.2, enforcement field services, why is it being reduced from \$2.869 million to \$2.633 million? We think that's a real problem, because what effect does this decrease have on catching poachers and those who overfish? We know we have a real problem with the fish stock in Alberta lakes for all kinds of reasons, but certainly decreasing the enforcement field services isn't going to

help us very much there if there is abuse of the system. So we're interested in that.

I'm sorry. I've run out of time, but I will try and proceed later.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to continue my questions about this particular ministry. I'd like to talk for a moment about the department's core businesses and some good things about those that I think exist and also what I feel are perhaps some inconsistencies that I would like some explanations for and I think maybe even some justification. So if we talk about the department's core businesses as being industry development and resource stewardship, which include such items as "foster development, investment, trade and research in Alberta's forest resources," I think that's good. Definitely that needs to happen.

Then next we talk about "development and research in Alberta's fish and wildlife and public land resources." Also good on the face of it, Mr. Chairman. An issue I have with that, though, is when we go over to the goals, key strategies, performance management indicators, and measures by core businesses and we take a look down at goal 2.3, promote fish and wildlife conservation, you look at that and think that's really good, and it is really good, but it's only half the job. What I think goal 2.3 should say is: promote fish and wildlife conservation and rehabilitation, because we know there are some huge issues in this particular province with fish. So it's more than developing and research in fish in this case, and I would suggest that carries through to wildlife and public land resources. In this case we have to see some rehabilitation.

Going back to my earlier comments about the cumulative impact and managing the land base in a fair and reasonable and sustainable manner, I would suggest that we need rehabilitation in several areas in this province, that we need to take a look at how demand is managed. If we go back to the core businesses, they talk about "establish and optimize Albertans' share of revenue from forest, fish and wildlife and public land development." Perhaps good from this government's perspective and perhaps from industry's perspective but not particularly good from the perspective of a protection mandate, ensuring that part of a sustainable future for this province is sustaining some areas that are if not pristine then certainly benchmark areas for what the landscape could look like to use as indicators, as a measuring tool for what happens in other areas in the province.

Also, if we're talking about things like wildlife corridors, which are very important, optimizing the share of revenue in those areas isn't going to help wildlife be sustainable. When you disrupt the wildlife, you disrupt the fauna, and so then we sort of have multiple problems in these areas. I would suggest that that particular goal is in direct conflict with their other goal that says, "Ensure Forest Protection." I think those are in direct conflict as they are stated in the business plans, and I would like some explanation on that in terms of how the government expects that it can do both, that it can give at least equal value to both of those. If they are not prepared to give equal value, then what kind of value, what kind of weighting are they putting on those two competing goals? What happens when there are instances when forest protection for whatever reason becomes a greater need than optimizing the share of the revenue in order to keep the forests sustainable? If those questions could be asked, I would like some answers to them.

9:00

Some overall concerns about how the dollars are being spent. We see a \$3.4 million decrease from the 2000-2001 budget. It concerns me when we see decreases in ministry budgets in areas that involve any kind of protection, Mr. Chairman, because it seems to me that what this government does is what it does with the name of the department: it just cuts the protection off. So I need some assurances, some documentation from the department that getting less money is going to be able to still allow them to at least meet the minimum standards that we've seen in the past if not exceed them in some cases.

I think there are many documented times in this Assembly when we have registered concerns about the underfunding in particular areas, and that needs to be addressed, particularly in light of the fact that we see a department that overspent its budget by 14 percent in total and is overall facing about a 5 percent budget cut. So that's a bit of a concern for me, particularly when you then compare it to program 1 in ministry support services, where we are seeing significant increases in the budget dollars. So if we see the minister's office increasing by 95 percent and human resources – well, we'll talk about that separately. I don't think that's all that bad.

Some increases in some areas that are not direct program delivery, Mr. Chairman. That concerns me somewhat. What we need in this province from this particular department is more people in the field. There is no one who can disagree with that. Parks need more frontline people. Forestry needs more frontline people. We need more frontline people to manage the huge issues that are starting to evolve as people compete for land base use. We've seen all kinds of those issues emerge, from poaching of fish and wildlife to random camping issues to overuse of trails that interfere with wildlife: all kinds of issues like that. They're numerous and need to be addressed. I'm wondering how, when we see an overall 5 percent reduction with increases on the administrative side, this government expects this department to meet its mandate. So if they could talk about that, if we could get some written information about that, I would certainly appreciate it.

When we see the human resource budget increasing by 46 percent, I'm hoping that means more people in the field, yet when I take a look at the number of full-time equivalents, it looks like it's just increasing by 13 people. Are all those people going into the field? I'd like to think so, but I would like some detail on that, because definitely we need to have more people there.

My colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked about how necessary it is for us to have intervenor fees, and we are concerned, when we see the legal services budget being decreased, that that may disrupt that process. Certainly we need more dollars here. Intervenors are a necessary part of the process in this province. I think we have all kinds of instances where by having people who are directly or close to being directly affected intervene in particular areas, we have seen good decisions being made, decisions that encompass the many competing interests and not just a few interests. So that's something we would like to see more dollars spent on.

Definitely we've got some more questions on this budget in terms of fisheries and wildlife management. We see a little bit of money increased in program 2.0.3, and that's good. Just some details on where that's going. We're hoping that it's going to be to address the problems identified by the Auditor General in the management of the fisheries. As much detail as they can give us on what's happening there would be helpful, I think.

When we see a bill before us in the Assembly that addresses a few very, very minor issues, it almost looks like tinkering at the edges, Mr. Chairman. We need some substantive stuff done there. What we need is consistent reporting so that costing of fish stocks can be

effectively managed. A big issue, one we've talked about for years, but seriously a problem in this province at this time, so what are they going to be doing for that?

Is there going to be money, Mr. Chairman, to track the problems coming from the resource data in program 2.0.9? It's increasing the budget for that particular department, and we'd like some detail on that if we can.

You know, we've been recently receiving quite a bit of information from the Western Wildlife Council. I'm sure many people in this Assembly also have been obtaining that information from the council. They've got quite a few concerns about the government talking about the stopping of stocking of walleye in two years. So could we get that confirmed? Is that what's going to be happening? If so, what are the justifications for doing that? If it's being phased out, why? What we're hearing from them is that they think this problem is going to cause stress in lakes that are currently stocked and that will also then be depleted. Are those issues they bring forward based on sound science, or are they just concerns that don't have any factual base? Could we do that?

You know, the way the landscape is going here, I think it's going to be important for us to talk about a little more serious promotion of aquaculture and private fishing plans. We're a landlocked province, but that doesn't mean that we can't see fish farming as a viable economic enterprise. There are some successful ventures now in the province and we would like to congratulate them, but clearly we're not meeting recreational fish needs, never mind those from a business perspective. So something's got to be done there. What's the government doing to support that particular industry?

We consistently have questions raised about the caribou from people who live in the northern part of the province. Particularly, caribou are a species that doesn't like intervention by people or by equipment, so seismic crews and forestry all impact their habitat significantly, significantly more than for some other species. You know, we see some species who seem to thrive when people and industry are around. I think particularly of the sheep that we see in the mountains around the coal mines. They really thrive in that environment, but caribou don't, Mr. Chairman, so we need to ensure that we're able to sustain their habitat. Particularly when we go in and cut seismic lines or move in and do any kind of forestry operations, what happens is that we open up the landscape, which makes it harder for the caribou to get away from their prey. So what we do is upset the balance of nature sometimes.

I know that the government has been doing some work on this issue. If we could get a little bit of factual data on that, that would be helpful, particularly in the area of habitat fragmentation. What studies is the government currently involved in, and what plans do they have to participate, either fully or in part, in studies being done by other organizations? If they could talk about that.

You know, we talk a lot in this Legislature about wildlife and maintaining their habitat and ensuring that they're sustainable, but something that's recently come to the attention certainly of me and I think of many people in this province is how wild animals are managed in captivity. I think this would come under here when we're talking about management of things like wildlife and fish. Previously it was the Department of Environment, though, and they were undertaking a review of zoo regulations in Alberta. We want to know who's responsible for that. It seems to me that the logical fit is here. If not, I'm hoping that you'll pass my questions on to the Department of Environment. How's it going with the drafting of those regulations, Mr. Chairman? We saw increasingly over this past year some concerns, and legitimate concerns, from the general public about how some zoos are operated, and certainly we need to

know that those wild animals are safe too. So if we could get an update on that.

9:10

With the changes in the ministries, the delegated authorities are – we don't know who belongs to whom, Mr. Chairman. Could we just get a list so that we know who's reporting to the Department of Sustainable Resource Development so we know where to direct our questions? In the past the DAOs have been a huge item of concern for us. I'm not sure that that's still the case.

I think we are seeing some excellent progress with some of the DAOs in terms of how they are managing their operations. It's something that we keep a fairly close eye on. Certainly last year the Auditor General raised concerns about the Alberta Conservation Association and had some preliminary discussions with the association. I have been quite satisfied by the feedback that I've got on an informal basis from the department. We would like something a little more formal. Could we hear specifically how the concerns raised by the AG have been addressed with the ACA? What are the outstanding concerns, if there are some, and what steps are being taken to rectify those?

Now, I think this is a department where we have seen some good-news stories on the DAOs, and certainly I've seen some involvement in some of those, particularly with the Professional Outfitters Association of Alberta. I think that is a stellar example of how a DAO can effectively operate and manage, and that's kind of an interesting story, Mr. Chairman. We see that what most of us would think of as a pretty freewheeling group of people have spent some serious time and energy in making their delegated authority work efficiently and effectively for them, and it has turned out to be I think a good-news story for their organization and for the government. So I would like to offer my congratulations on that one, and we hope that they continue with the kind of strong mandate they've had and that they can be used as a good example for other DAOs in terms of reporting and operations.

Lots left to talk about here. For sure I want to talk about fire. It's a big issue in this province over the last couple of years, and managing fires and protecting the forest is a big deal from an economic development perspective, not just for the sustainability of the landscape and for the enjoyment of the tourism population.

It's interesting to see that we're seeing a decrease in those dollars here too, Mr. Chairman. I know that when it comes to fires, the government will spend the money that's necessary to fight them, and that's good. I know that they will come back in supplementary estimates and ask for more dollars if they overspend their budget, and I don't have a problem with that. But it is nice to know what the basis is that they're making their projections on for the upcoming year. I know that we've had a couple of heavy fire years, but we've had drought conditions again this year, so it would seem to me that we're likely facing the potential of a bad fire year again. We've been lucky so far, but that could change in a heartbeat, as we all know.

In addition, if we could find out the capital investments that have been made under program 3.1.1, provincial fire-fighting centre, I think that would be interesting to know. You know, with the reductions that we had in this department, we saw a significant decrease in some of the senior fire-fighting staff, and that was a real shame. I'm wondering if we could get a comment on what has happened since then.

I think two years ago we saw significant increases as a result of the lack of continuity in the history and knowledge of fire fighting. I'm hoping that they're on the road to recovering that. So if we could find out some information about that. In 3.2, the fire centres, could we find out why that's also being reduced? That's pretty

significant, 31 percent. Maybe it's justified if they're well on their way to being where they need to be. But could we just have that information?

I don't have very much time left and lots of information. We need some copies of the reports on the effects of logging on watersheds and water quality and quantity. If we could get some information on that.

What's the government planning to do in protecting the Bighorn area? Will the minister continue to promote and support development in the Castle-Crown area, or can we look to some more good news in terms of protection? The Alberta Outfitters Association is looking for a 10-year access. We've heard that that's happening. Can you give us the update on that? We also heard that there are three pilot projects related to the 10-year system on the eastern slopes this summer. Could we get the status of those projects and some more information on them?

Quite a few things left to talk about. I never got to the petroleum tank management or regional operations or the reporting agencies or specific questions on the goals and business strategies, but I think, Mr. Chairman, what I will do, with the minister's permission, is submit the balance of my questions to the department, and hopefully we can get some answers to those. [interjection] He's saying that's fine. I'd like to applaud the minister so far for the co-operation that we've had from his department and from him, and I look forward to that continuing over the next few years. I think that I am pretty much out of time and am happy to conclude at this point.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: As per the House leaders' agreement the time allocated for opposition party members is over. Before I call upon the minister to conclude, is there anybody else who wishes to speak?

The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to take a moment to thank the opposition for their keen interest in the department and also some of the good recommendations they made tonight. We'll definitely look at those recommendations.

Also, I'd like to take a moment to thank the staff for sitting up there and taking notes. I'm sure we'll have a lot of good answers for you. Sometimes we forget, but governments would not run without the staff. We have over 2,000 staff in the department, and we have very well-qualified staff. In fact, I believe we have some of the best staff in North America to manage such valuable sustainable resources. Our staff are to be commended because I believe, when you look around in Canada, we probably have some of the best-managed forest and wildlife resources in North America.

That doesn't mean that we can't continue listening very carefully and continue to improve the operations we have and continue to listen also to the opposition. They do have some good ideas, and I'm sure willing to work closely with their members to ensure that we continue providing the best we can to Albertans in relation to this department's responsibility.

Like I indicated before, we will be providing written answers to your questions and to the questions you submitted. We will provide written answers for those also. Again I'd just like to say thank you very much for tonight.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Sustainable Resource Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$197,134,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

9:20

Municipal Affairs

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For every hand that I heard clap, that was a million dollars, so I think I just counted about 400 more than I was budgeting for tonight. So that's good news for my colleagues and for my colleagues across the way.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to present the estimates for Alberta Municipal Affairs. Before I begin, as my colleague from Sustainable Resource Development mentioned, we also have staff from the department here. Deputy Minister Doug Radke. I'd ask him to wave. Doug has been with our government now for almost 32 years, and I thank him for coming tonight. [interjection] In fact, no, I wasn't even born when Doug was working for the provincial government.

As well, the assistant deputy minister of local government services, Brad Pickering, is here tonight. From our public safety division, Assistant Deputy Minister Dennis Gartner is here. From business planning and corporate support we have Joyce Ingram here as well, and my assistant, who keeps me out of trouble, Laurent Auger, is here as well tonight. Thank you.

Our Ministry of Municipal Affairs is committed to working with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that Albertans live in safe, sustainable communities and are served by open, effective, and accountable governments at the local level. I might add tonight that many of my colleagues in this room and across the way have had a considerable amount of experience in local government: aldermen, school trustees, councillors, mayors, reeves. I look for the insight and comments tonight that they bring in terms of our budget estimates.

Essentially, since our last review by the Committee of Supply we've continued to develop and articulate a more focused and co-ordinated approach to working with municipalities, and in the coming years we will pursue five specific goals. We will, first, work towards a financially sustainable and accountable municipalities perspective. As well, we will work towards an effective, responsive, and well-managed local government sector and also a uniform and equitable property assessment system in which stakeholders have continued confidence but which is also easily understood by all Albertans. Finally, the last two goals that we have are a comprehensive safety system that provides an appropriate level of public safety and a disaster services program that enhances and supports the capability of local authorities and also their partners to prepare for, respond to effectively, and recover from major emergencies and disasters.

First, let's talk about the ministry's expenditures for the year 2001-2002. The operating expense and capital investment total \$204 million. This funding will support the operation of the ministry in four main areas: the local government services as well as the public safety division, the ministry support services, and the Municipal Government Board, which is, of course, a quasi-judicial tribunal that adjudicates matters specified under the Municipal Government Act.

Now, what about our revenue side? In the year 2002 the ministry statement of operations by program indicates that our revenue will be approximately \$14.4 million. We will receive about \$12 million from lottery revenues to support financial assistance provided under a municipal sponsorship program, and the remaining \$2.4 million will come from services rendered to municipalities for assessment of linear transmission systems like pipelines as well as the sale of licences and fees associated with safety certificates and cost-sharing arrangements with the federal government for some of our disaster preparedness programs.

I want to talk about the local government services division, one of our four main areas, which is responsible for a significant part of the ministry's budget, \$112.5 million. This includes about \$94.6 million for grants to municipalities. That's almost close to 90 percent of our local government services. In terms of grants to local municipalities \$94.6 million goes directly to municipalities. I think we all know, from the feedback that I'm getting from municipalities, that this is important and welcome news in terms of the large percentage of dollars that go to local municipalities.

From key initiatives within the local government services there are a number of initiatives that will be carried out under the nongrant portion of the local government services budget. That's going to total almost \$18 million. One of our four major initiatives will be to encourage and help develop regional partnerships. You know, we've heard much about regional partnerships. Really a partnership is about: what can I do for you that you can't do, and what can we do for you that you can't do? Really, that partnership is something that I think we never want to take for granted, nor does this ministry, in working with municipal governments throughout Alberta.

In addition, we're going to continue to offer a highly successful intermunicipal dispute resolution initiative. Not always do we agree, and our ministry has played a very key role in terms of dispute mechanisms, in terms of dealing with disputes and working on resolving them. I think what's really important on this initiative is that it is not a top-down approach. We're using a bottom-up approach where we work with municipalities, because no matter if you're a federal, municipal, or provincial government, we view these as the McDonald's restaurants approach in terms of the fact that we are all horizontal in terms of serving the same taxpayer, because there is only one boss.

As well, though, we want to focus in on best practices, and this program of course encourages self-evaluation of excellence by municipalities. We want to continue to improve the processes for assessment and equalization in education requisitioning and continue to work with MLA committees to develop a uniform, equitable, and efficient property assessment system. I must say that the hon. member from Two Hills is of course chairing that committee. He's here tonight and, I see, listening very keenly and interested because he's also working with another key member of that committee, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

From a grants to municipalities perspective the local government services is administering the department's major grants to municipal governments, accounting for the \$94.6 million. As I mentioned, that makes up almost 90 percent of that sector in terms of our main goals. I want to say that the major grant programs are made up of the municipal sponsorship program, which is \$13.5 million, as well as the unconditional municipal grant program, which is almost \$38 million, the municipal debenture interest rebates program, which is almost \$11 million, and the grants in place of taxes program of almost \$32 million.

As well, we have financial support in dealing with local authorities such as the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, that we work closely in partnership with, and the AAMDC, the Alberta

Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. These are important partners that of course we will continue to work very closely with.

From the municipal sponsorship program the innovative projects that improve municipal government are something we're very keen on but specifically are working toward things such as regional partnerships. The unconditional municipal grants program promotes grants to municipalities that of course allow general use and help offset some of the cost of restructuring municipalities, because the restructuring portion has been reduced and we have reallocated some funds to other priority programs, including the municipal sponsorship program.

It's important to note that the Future Summit, that's going to be coming up, is going to play a key role in terms of: what do we want municipalities to look like in the next 10 years? Big cities, small cities, medium-sized cities? If we were creating Alberta again, would we create the jurisdictions that we have today? How would we work towards more regional partnerships? Certainly that is one of the priorities of our ministry over the next couple of years in working in partnership with municipal governments.

From the public safety division I also want to say, now on to specifics, that this accounts for about \$80 million in our ministry budget. This is a significant increase over last year because of the fact that \$70 million is budgeted for the second year of the underground petroleum storage tank remediation program. Of course this is an important environmental initiative that's been around for some time, and I do know that all members in the Assembly agree that this is money well spent towards this environmental initiative. This program of course is conducting environmental assessments and remediating contaminated underground sites, that will go a long way towards presenting a clean environment for all Albertans alike.

From a divisional support perspective we'd also like to talk about and notice an increase under the public safety division of almost \$203,000, not a lot of money, but that's for additional staff and support within that area. Of course, this area is going to provide critical support.

We have many other key initiatives, but I'm very interested in hearing the comments from across the way pertaining to our budget. In the meantime, I do want to say that safety services and the fire commissioner's office will continue to improve our assistance to municipalities in helping to ensure that safety codes are met. We also want, from a disaster services perspective, to continue to work with our municipal partners to ensure that emergency plans are tested and in place. Last year's tornado initiative in Pine Lake of course was an important initiative, that we want to continue to provide.

With that, I eagerly wait for questions, that we will be responding to, Mr. Chairman.

9:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It was a pleasure to listen to the minister's opening remarks this evening. I would also like to welcome the members from his department that have taken time out of their schedules to be here and to be involved in this process. I would also like to congratulate the minister on his appointment as Minister of Municipal Affairs. I'm sure that his experience in local government will serve our local leaders well now that he is directing this very important ministry.

I call Municipal Affairs an important ministry because of the influence this department has on the daily lives of Albertans. The Minister of Municipal Affairs is faced with probably the most number of cross-ministry initiatives since so much of the work done

in the municipalities crosses over to other ministries. There are some key issues on which I would like to provide some opening comments. Then my colleagues and I will move into questions on the specific programs in the ministry's budget. I hope that if we are unable to get all of our questions on the table today, the minister will accept a letter with the remaining questions.

Alberta's local leaders are very appreciative of the government's recent announcement about the cut to the education property tax. The tax cut opens up room for municipalities to meet their local priorities and be more self-sufficient. That's a good thing, but I also see in the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association news release that was put out on April 24 that they still feel that

provincial property taxes continue to force municipal governments to rely on grants and hand-outs instead of being able to raise and use their own funds locally.

If the Province is truly interested in creating self reliant and accountable local governments then a significant cut in the amount the Province takes out of a community through property taxes is needed.

On the other hand, Mr. Chairman, I'm concerned about the lack of connection between taxation and representation in the way the education property tax is collected. The province sets the tax rate, and the actual money is then collected by the municipalities and submitted to the Alberta school foundation fund. My understanding is that municipalities are still not being compensated for this required tax collection duty. The Alberta school foundation fund then takes the money and gives it to the school boards, who in turn give it to the schools to meet their budgets.

Municipal administrators in Alberta will tell all kinds of stories about the challenges of explaining to irate ratepayers that the town office is just collecting the tax and that if they don't like the rate, they should talk to their MLA. If a taxpayer doesn't like the way education is being funded, do they vote out the MLA who is not getting enough provincial funding or the school board for not spending the money the way the parents want it spent? Or maybe the parents are mad about the level of fund-raising that the school boards are now doing. Is that the fault of the provincial funding levels or local priorities?

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

I could go on about the problems with this tax, but I think the important thing to note here is that the education property tax is not just about the mill rate on property. There is a broad range of issues here, and hopefully we will see some action in the near future on them. After all, there's only one taxpayer to serve all levels of government.

I think the other key area for municipalities is the relationship with the provincial government. Alberta municipalities are looking for real action in terms of a new partnership. There has been plenty of time to talk and ponder and be philosophical. It is time to sit down at the table and start working on an agreement. The pen has to hit the paper, and the province and our local leaders need to clarify and accept their roles and responsibilities.

A third area, which I know is close to the minister's heart, is amalgamation. Each community and each municipality is proud of its identity and wishes to preserve that identity. Some continue to see amalgamation as a threat to that identity, but it sounds like it has worked well in what is now the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo. I notice that throughout the ministry's business plans are commitments to working with the municipal leaders on regionalization. The ministry has for some time been pursuing regionalization through economics. By this I refer to programs like the 25 percent bonus in the lottery dollars for municipal projects. I'm not ruling out

the benefits that come from regionalization, but I wonder if financial incentives from the province blur the lines between whose priority this is and who really benefits. If this were such a great idea, wouldn't the municipalities do it without direction and financial incentives?

Now, I'd like to begin to ask questions about specific programs in the ministry's budget. I would like to start by referring to the Auditor General's report which was filed March 31, 2000. It did contain his reservation of opinion. It goes on to say: "In my opinion, generally accepted accounting principles require the financial statements of the Safety Codes Council and the four DAOs." These four delegated administrative organizations are the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Association, the Alberta Propane Vehicle Administration Organization Ltd., the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta. In his opinion he wants these to be consolidated in ministry financial statements.

Now, then, in my review of these statements I could not see where this recommendation by the Auditor General had been followed. I would think that if he has indicated that this is a very serious neglect in past reporting, this particular issue would have been addressed in these. So if the minister could please tell me if I have not seen these in here or if they were not included. If they haven't been, what are the plans to do this this year?

Now, Mr. Chairman, as well the 2001-2002 gross operating estimate for the department of \$203.184 million reflects a \$62.36 million increase over the 2000-2001 budget. Sixty million dollars of this increase is for the underground petroleum tank site remediation program.

The department's operating expenses from 2000-2001 are forecasted at 14.6 percent, \$20,675,000, over budget, and their capital investment expenses are forecasted at 72 percent, or \$693,000, over budget. The total forecasted budget is 15 percent, or \$21,368,000, over budget. Most of this should relate to the Pine Lake disaster.

Now, then, I also notice in here that the number of full-time equivalent employees is increasing by 14, from 303 to 317.

MS BLAKEMAN: We need a breakdown.

MR. BONNER: Yes. I think it's quite in order that we do require a breakdown.

So I would ask the minister if he would provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses of \$203.184 million for 2001-2002 by object for the following components: If we could please have a breakdown of the salaries for permanent positions, the salaries for nonpermanent positions, the salaries for contract positions. If we could also have a breakdown of travel, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses.

Now, moving along, under the fee changes in the Budget 2001 fiscal plan. I'm referring to page 54 under Municipal Affairs. Municipal Affairs will be charging a fee for relocatable structure labels, from \$140 per label to \$30 per label. Again, if he could please provide for us what relocatable structure labels are, where they are used, who produces them, how many are produced in a year, and why the fee is dropping this year from \$140 per label to \$30 per label. If the fee has been too high in past years, where has the excess money gone? How many full-time equivalent positions are involved in producing and distributing these labels, and where are these positions located?

9:40

In the Municipal Affairs business plan for 2001-2002 – and again

I refer to page 296 – I see that the estimate of revenues for 2001-2002 is \$376,000, and the actual is \$591,000 from 2000-2001. So if the minister could please provide a breakdown of the revenues for the various types of premiums, fees, and licences. Also, a question is: why is this revenue source anticipated to drop from \$591,000 to \$376,000?

MS BLAKEMAN: Is it the year of decision?

MR. BONNER: Yes. Is this the year of decision?

Now, then, as well I see under revenue that the bottom line refers to "other revenue." I see that in 1999-2000 the actual amount of this particular line was \$6,188,000. In the 2000-2001 budget this was \$1,307,000 for a budgeted amount when the actual amount was \$1,476,000, and the estimate for 2001-2002 is \$1,531,000. So what I would like to know from the ministry is: what is included in other revenue, and how is this estimated?

Moving right along, I'd like to now go into program 1, the ministry support services, and I see that the estimate in 2001-2002 is \$10.192 million. As well, the actual in 2000-2001 was \$10.16 million, and the budget amount for 2000-2001 was \$8.097 million. So the actual is \$2.063 million, or 25.4 percent, over budget. The estimate is \$2.085 million, or a 25.8 percent increase over the previous budget. Now, then, my questions in regard to program 1, ministry support services, are: how many full-time equivalents are employed under the ministry support services in the year 2001-2002? As well, what is the breakdown of the full-time equivalents by the three subprograms: the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and support services?

I'd like to now refer to line 1.0.1, the minister's office. I see that in the year 2001-2002 we had an estimate of \$270,000. The actual for the year 2000-2001 is \$270,000, and the budgeted amount for the year 2000-2001 was \$270,000. The \$270,000 operating expenses represents no change from the previous year's budget or actual. So if the minister could please provide a breakdown of the \$270,000 from the minister's office budget for 2001-2002. If you would please include in that the salaries for permanent positions, the salaries for nonpermanent positions, the salaries for contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and posting expenses.

Moving on to line 1.0.2, the deputy minister's office, I see that for the year 2001-2002 we have an estimated amount of \$374,000. I see that the actual amount for the year 2000-2001 was \$332,000 and that the budgeted amount for 2000-2001 was \$302,000. So the actual is \$30,000, or 9 percent, over budget, and the estimate is an increase of \$72,000, 23 percent above or over the previous budget. What is the breakdown of the \$374,000 the deputy minister's office budgeted for 2001-2002? If this could please be provided by outlining the salaries for permanent positions, the salaries for nonpermanent positions, the salaries for contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and posting expenses. If the minister could also indicate why the deputy minister's budget is increasing by \$72,000 for this year.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The next line I'd like to refer to is 1.0.3, support services. I notice here that in the year 2001-2002 the operating estimate is \$9,423,000. The operating actual for last year, 2000-2001, was \$9,433,000, and for the same period the operating budget was \$7,400,000. Now, as well in 2001-2002 we have a capital estimate of \$125,000. For the year 2000-2001 we had a capital actual of \$125,000, and for the same period we had a capital budget of \$125,000. So the actual

operating is \$2.033 million, or 27 percent over budget, and the estimate is an increase of \$2.023 million, or 27 percent over the previous budget. Then why are operating expenses of \$2.033 million over budget? What is the breakdown of the \$9.423 million operating estimate for support services in 2001-2002 by business planning and corporate support, communications, financial services, human resources services, information technology, and legal services?

I see that my time is running down, Mr. Chairman, so I will start with program 2, local government services, and hopefully I will have a chance later on this evening to continue with the questions. In local government services our operating estimate for this year is \$111,827,000. For the last fiscal year the operating actual was \$118,557,000, and the operating budget was \$112,703,000. In 2001-2002 the capital estimate was \$705,000. For last year the capital actual was \$1,523,000, and for the year 2000-2001 the capital budget was \$830,000. My questions are: how many full-time equivalents are employed under program 2, local government services? Also, what is the breakdown of full-time equivalents by the four sub-programs: division support, municipal services, assessment services, and financial assistance programs?

I see here, Mr. Chairman, that my time now has roughly expired for this particular portion, so I will take my seat and listen to comments by others. Thank you.

9:50

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. This is an area that I have a great deal of interest in. Being as I'm the MLA for Edmonton-Centre, I end up doing a lot of work in partnership with the city of Edmonton. I certainly attend a lot of events there, and I try to work as closely as possible with my colleagues on city council. I think that over the years we've seen some adjustments, some struggle in this department between the government's intentions and how the municipalities are receiving that and what kind of support they're looking for. It has been quite difficult.

The federal Constitution puts the authority for municipalities under the provincial governments, and certainly this provincial government is on record as saying that they regard municipalities as the children of the province, which is an astoundingly patriarchal attitude, especially in the year 2001, when we have cities that are close to a million people. I find that an astounding attitude, and certainly the Official Opposition, the Liberals, have argued for some time that there should be a more respectful and balanced relationship between the province and the municipalities.

Now, when I started to review what was being proposed through this budget, of course I went back to see where issues had arisen in the past, and my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry has already raised the issues of the delegated administrative organizations that are to report to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. In fact, their financial statements do not appear, and they are not consolidated with the department, and that continues to be a concern. There is taxpayer money going out. Ultimately, the Safety Codes Council and the DAOs are accountable to and are controlled by the ministry and certainly get taxpayer dollars, and therefore they should form part of the ministry's reporting entity. So I, too, am asking the question of the minister as to whether that indeed is happening in this year's budget.

The second thing that I noticed from the Auditor General's report was a recommendation that the ministry establish a business continuity plan to enable the timely resumption of business in the

event of a disaster. Now, specifically, what's being suggested here is that

a business continuity plan should develop formal business continuity procedures, to be implemented in the event of a disaster. Alternative locations to conduct business should be identified, as well as the actions that need to be taken, and who is to undertake those actions. Without such a plan, critical time will be lost as Ministry staff will need to work out the details of how to resume business after the disaster has struck.

A regulation under the Disaster Services Act requires each department to have a business continuity plan.

That was not so, as brought forward in the annual report of the Auditor General '99-2000. I'm wondering if that indeed has been addressed in this budget. Where could I find that? When will the report be released? How do we know that the minister has indeed taken the recommendations of the Auditor General seriously and has got that under control? Given what we've seen by way of natural disasters in Canada that really have affected municipalities in the last five or six years, I think this is darn good advice, and I would sure like to know that it has been followed and that a plan is in place and is readily available and accessible to municipalities.

Now, the next thing I looked at, of course, was performance measurements, my favourite. To my dismay, there are indeed performance measurements, which is a good thing, but there's no measurement, which is a bad thing. When I look at pages in Meeting Priorities, Sharing Benefits, the business plans from Budget 2001, pages 294 to 295, I can see in fact that there is a lovely grid here. We've got goals in one column, performance indicators in a second column, the source of the information, a historical/current baseline, and a target. Delightful. Very nice. Well done. An easy-to-read grid. Just one column missing: what the outcome is.

So I read across here. Goal 1: "An effective, responsive, cooperative and well-managed local government sector." Good goal. Okay. Then I look at the performance indicator. There's quite a lengthy paragraph in here. "Level of satisfaction with the Local Government Services Division's activities, services, programs, and legislative framework in enabling," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Okay. Great. "The individual performance targets . . . used in the calculation of the overall performance ranges from 65% to 90%." Yowsa. That's quite a range for a performance measurement. Just what is the outcome of that? Do I just pick a number that I like somewhere in between 65 and 90 percent? Do I just guess? I mean, what is it? What target has actually been hit here?

The next column: source. Well, it's an annual satisfaction survey. Boy, that'd give you a lot of information. So where is the information? Nope.

Then we skip right over to historical/current baseline. Well, the target for last year was 75 percent. Okay. Did we meet that target? Did we exceed it? Did we fall short? There's no information. That whole column is missing. Was there a printing error here? Was an entire column missed when this was printed up? Perhaps the minister could enlighten me, because the final column that fits on the page is the target, which tells me that in this budget year, 2001-02, 77 percent is what we would like to get, 77 percent of "an effective, responsive, cooperative and well-managed local government sector." In 2002-03, 78 percent, and in 2003-04, 80 percent. Well, where are we now, and where have we come from? What was it two years ago? Is this improving? We have no idea based on what's in here.

I search diligently. I go through all the pages. I read it all. I seek the knowledge, and it is not here, not one thing that tells us what the Ministry of Municipal Affairs actually did, what the outcome actually was, what the performance measurement actually was so that we could know how this department was doing. You know, close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades, and we're a long

way off on this one, Mr. Minister. I'd like an explanation on why there is absolutely no information in here, no column at all about what the performance measurement achievement actually was and where it's been in the past.

I mean, we get an hour to debate each ministry in this government, and despite the claim of being open and accountable, I just don't see the information in here. We have to go through and ask for breakdowns of every single department. Again, when I looked at budgets from five, 10, 15 years ago, all that information was provided.

Now, to be fair, they were not working on a system of performance measurements at that time, but we know better now, and we are trying to move ahead. But what is the point of saying that you're working with performance measurements when you don't actually do them? What kind of a management tool is that for the people in this department or for every single one of the municipalities that falls under this department? I'm almost at a loss for words, but I know you'll all be happy to know that I'm not at a loss for words. I could go on at some length about performance measurements. They are a useful management tool, and as government, as legislators here we are supposed to be ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively. That is the point of performance measurements. It's a good system that we've adopted here in Alberta. Some might even say and I might even agree on a good day that we were one of the leaders in this method of evaluation in the country, but not when I see this kind of thing. I mean, this is the second budget we've debated now out of the 24 of them. I sure hope I'm not going to see this kind of thing in the rest of the other 22 ministries.

10:00

Okay. So that's enough – well, it isn't enough on performance measurements. I really do look forward to what the minister is going to explain about why they're not here, how he's going to get them in there, and how he's going to get that information out to the other municipalities.

I'm going to pick up a bit from where the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry left off. We're looking at the FTEs in . . .

MR. BONNER: You were actually at a very good spot, because we're looking at goal 1.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, that's right, goal 1, which I had actually started talking about before, the "effective, responsive, cooperative and well-managed local government sector," which doesn't have a performance measurement. Anyway, questions I'm interested in. Will the minister continue using financial incentives, such as the 25 percent bonus funding in the Municipal 2000 sponsorship grant, to increase regional co-operation? All right. What type of support is the minister willing to give municipalities to effectively use technology? Is this financial or expert advice, and will this be in the form of further grants?

Now, one of the things that's happening here is that Supernet idea, where it's being run to every municipality in Alberta by such and such a time I think the promise is. I'll be real interested in the performance measurement on that one. Further to that, what's been brought to my attention is that the technology is only run to the outside of the buildings. I had anticipated that we would have this Supernet available in every library, in every municipality in Alberta, and I thought: that's wonderful. But then I talked to the libraries and some of the other agencies in these municipalities, and they go: "Well, you know, especially with library funding we don't have the money to, like, get it through the wall and upstairs and buy all the computers to hook up to this. We've got sort of a 486 in the back there that's kind of lumbering along, but we're going to have to do

more chocolate bar sales, calendar sales, Christmas card sales, raffles, bingos, and casinos to raise the money to actually implement this idea, because the government's only paying to run it to the outside of the building."

Once again I just think: nice idea, great stuff. Why did you stop at the outside of the building? So what is the technical support that is being given to these municipalities to effectively use this technology? Is there nothing in addition that's going to be given? Are municipalities going to be able to apply for additional funds to get this Supernet actually workable rather than sort of a set of wires dangling on the outside of the building?

Where does the minister see opportunities for municipalities to make significant contributions to the reduction of greenhouse gases? Is there a plan that is being put forward or co-ordinated by this ministry to assist municipalities in a campaign on this? It's certainly something we all need to be working on. We certainly need a co-ordinated effort. What is happening around the municipalities?

Here's a big one: intensive livestock operations. What role does the minister see for his department in relation to regulations for intensive livestock operations? I have just felt so badly for municipalities that are out there looking for leadership from this government, looking for something concrete, and nothing. They've just been literally swinging in the wind there, and not too pleasant an odour in the wind.

MR. BONNER: One of the major questions from the AAMDC conference.

MS BLAKEMAN: And certainly a major issue at the AAMDC conference. Again, they're looking to this government for leadership, for stewardship. And a big nothing, a big zero.

I think this is one of the biggest issues to face our future, particularly for this department. I'm looking for what the minister will develop as a mechanism to address major municipal/provincial issues. What issues does he anticipate addressing? There's been a lot of talk about an initiative about, as I started out saying, what that relationship is. Where is a different kind of more equal partnership relationship between municipalities, particularly the larger municipalities in metropolitan areas, and this Department of Municipal Affairs and the government as a whole?

I note that we've had the MGA, the Municipal Government Act, in front of us for – what? – three out of the last four years or something like that. So I just thought that while I was at it, I would ask what changes the minister anticipates to the MGA in this business plan, this three-year business plan, between 2001 and 2004.

I'm aware there are others that are very anxious to speak to this, so I will cut my time short, and if possible maybe I'll sneak a bit more in at the end. I appreciate the opportunity to raise these questions. I look forward to the written responses from the minister. I appreciate the hard work of the staff in this department and I'm sure their continuing hard work to come as they answer these questions that I have put before them.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make these brief remarks on the budget estimates for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and I also appreciate the minister's comments about the people who have served in the municipal order of government. I would remind him, when he's doing work and talking about

the role of members on committees, that there are also members on this side of the House who have some experience and would be only too happy to make a contribution.

Mr. Chairman, I served for a number of years on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' board of directors, and every once in a while a member of that board would leave municipal politics to go on to one of the other orders of government, whether it be federal or provincial. At their last board meeting there was traditionally a speech by the president reminding them of the value of the municipal level of government and reminding them not to forget the things that we fought for while we were there, as so many people have done when they've gone on to another order of government. Some have not forgotten the value of municipal government and the many issues we have fought for, and I hope this minister is one that has not forgotten.

I realize he's new to this ministry. I congratulate him on that, and I know it will take some time to be able to put his own stamp on the department. He may or may not have had a great deal to do with the development of the budget here, given the recent election and his appointment, so I won't hold the shortcomings in this budget to his account right now, Mr. Chairman. I think he deserves an opportunity to show that he has, in fact, kept his municipal roots and understands the importance of that order of government which is the closest to the people.

There is a growing disconnection, Mr. Chairman, between the rosy financial position of the government of Alberta and the financial straitjacket faced by many Alberta municipalities, and also I include in that, of course, the cities of Edmonton and Calgary. Just a day after the provincial budget was delivered last week, Edmonton mayor Bill Smith was quoted in the *Edmonton Journal* as saying that the city of Edmonton faced a financial shortfall of about \$90 million over the next two years.

Now, the major factor that is preventing the city of Edmonton from having to either significantly raise taxes or cut services this year is of course the profitability of EPCOR, something which I and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview campaigned very hard on, to convince the city council to reject proposals that it should be sold. We predicted, in fact, that it would become extremely profitable under deregulation, which indeed it has become. EPCOR was able to increase its dividend to the city just last year and to further increase it this year. In fact, there's some talk that if they continue to make the profits they are under the government's misguided deregulation scheme, they will allow the municipality to dispense with property taxes altogether. But I think, Mr. Chairman, that's a fantasy. That's not what it's going to end up as. Clearly the decision by Edmonton city council a couple of years ago was a very prudent one. However, relying on financial windfalls from the government's electricity deregulation scheme is no substitute for fair revenue sharing between the province and Alberta's municipalities.

10:10

When the province cut its budget back in 1993, municipal grants were cut perhaps the most deeply of all. Municipal grants were cut by more than 60 percent. Unconditional municipal grants were cut deeply and have never been restored. Policing grants were eliminated. Transit operating assistance was eliminated. Grants to support municipal public libraries were cut. Support for social housing was deeply cut. The effect of all these cuts was to download the province's budget deficit onto the backs of Alberta municipalities. The province's budget deficits are long gone. However, none of these municipal partnership programs have been restored.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think we need to take a look at that, because in this budget, if you look at the bottom line – this is on page 351 of

the estimates book – the province is actually giving less support this year to municipalities than it gave to municipalities last year. The province is providing a total of \$112.7 million in this year, down from \$118.6 million last year. Now, can the government honestly say, can the minister honestly say that the pressures on Alberta municipalities have been reduced in the last year? Has the wind gone out of the economy? Are the number of cars on the roads fewer? Are there less people in the municipal jurisdictions? I don't think so. In fact, the pressures on municipalities have increased and with the growth in the province will continue to increase. This budget should be reflecting that, and it's not.

I'd ask the minister to consider and to respond to why the government has rejected the Alberta Urban Municipalities' position on property taxes, which says that the provincial government should vacate the property tax field altogether and give just half of that to municipalities. That would provide property tax payers with a 25 percent reduction in their property tax. It would provide an increase in property tax revenues to municipalities of one-third and should be sufficient for most municipalities to meet the needs of their citizens and to accommodate the growth that's occurring in this province. I ask the minister why the government has simply capped the portion of property tax taken by the provincial government and left it at that. It's not good enough, Mr. Chairman, in my view.

I have some specific questions to the minister. How can the government justify further reducing municipal grants when many municipalities are faced with the unpleasant situation of either having to cut service levels, raise taxes, or both? What plans, if any, does the government have to increase municipal grants in the future? Specifically in terms of line 2.4.3, grants in place of taxes, which municipalities would prefer to be called payments in lieu of taxes because they shouldn't be considered grants. They should be considered the cost of the government doing business. There should be no question of those just being considered a grant. They are the cost to the provincial government and its share of operating in municipalities in which they find themselves and their property.

In terms of that, why has the government failed to act on one of the recommendations of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, which wants the grants in place of taxes program expanded to include not only provincial buildings and property but also property owned by school boards and regional health authorities? Municipalities are required to make provision for community facilities like schools and hospitals in their land use plans and incur financial costs for roads, water, and sewer to service them, yet they have no ability to generate revenue for their property tax base. It's not fair, Mr. Chairman, and when is the government going to take action to address this?

I also have concerns about the ministry's unwillingness to provide additional funding for other municipal services such as public transit, libraries, and policing, but given that these programs are the responsibility of other government ministries, I will save my questions until those estimates are before the Assembly.

However, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs is responsible for public safety and disaster services. I note in vote 3 on page 354 of the estimates that \$70 million dollars has been budgeted to do remediation for underground petroleum storage tanks. This is an important program, and I do have a couple of questions on it. Can the minister provide some additional detail on how this money will be expended? How many underground storage tanks will be remediated? Where are the storage tanks located? What efforts are being taken to recover costs from those companies who own or once owned those underground storage tanks?

Mr. Chairman, just in conclusion, it's my sincere hope that in this budget and particularly in the next budget we're going to start

addressing the fundamental issue of municipalities in this province. Municipalities play an important role, a hugely important role, in the governance of this entire province, and they do so efficiently and with balanced books. It's always been a requirement that municipal governments may not run deficits, and as a result they have provided debt-free government and very efficient and very responsive government that looks after the basic needs of citizens right across the province. I think we ought to be rewarding that success. I think that municipal government has shown its efficiency, has shown its responsiveness, and has shown its democratic functioning.

Unlike the government here, Mr. Chairman, almost all decisions are made by municipal governments out in public view, with full public debate in front of the citizens. It's completely transparent, and everybody knows what's going on. We have very, very effective government at the local level in this province, something we can all be proud of. I wish the government would begin to take municipal government in this province more seriously and to provide it with the access to financial resources that it needs to meet the needs its citizens put upon it and also to meet the needs of those programs that have been downloaded from this level of government or from the federal order of government onto municipal government. It's time to take municipal government seriously, provide it with the resources and the financial capacities it needs, and it will get the job done for the citizens we all represent here.

With those remarks, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and listen to others. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to continue along with my questions for the minister, particularly looking at page 353, program 2, local government services. I'd like to start with financial assistance programs and line 2.4.1, the unconditional municipal grants. I notice here that in the year 2001-2002 the operating estimate was \$37,947,000. The operating actual for 2000-2001 was \$35,434,000, and the operating budget for that same year was \$39,619,000. My questions to the minister are these. Why is the estimate \$1.627 million less than last year's budget? Does the minister plan on continuing cuts to this budget? What type of application process is there for unconditional grants? What monitoring is in place to evaluate how these funds are used? Will the minister provide a list of all the applications that were received under this program in 2000-2001 and all the applications that were approved?

10:20

Under goal 2 in the business plan it says: "Develop and administer new grant initiatives targeted at municipalities." What new grants does the minister anticipate developing? Would the minister also consider further reductions to the education property tax to give the municipalities more tax room to meet their local priorities?

Again, as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has indicated, our local governments do a very good job, a very efficient job, a very responsible job in providing for their citizens and certainly are doing it on a shoestring budget, so this would be one way that we could give the flexibility where they could have a little more control under their own government. In exchange for this tax room, the municipalities may be willing to give up some of the smaller grant programs. Again, I know that is a major issue with our municipalities.

Now, then, looking at grants in place of taxes, line 2.4.3, I notice that in 2001-2002 the operating estimate is \$31,690,000. For the last fiscal year, 2000-2001, the operating actual was \$29,304,000, and

the operating budget for that same year was \$32 million. These grants are in place of property taxes on provincial buildings. Will the minister provide a list of where the \$29,304,000 for grants in place of taxes was distributed?

Moving along to line 2.4.4, financial support to local authorities, again a very contentious issue when we do look at the whole idea of what occurs between municipal and provincial governments. I notice that in the current budget year of 2001-2002 our operating estimate is \$730,000. Last year the operating actual was \$14,485,000, and the operating budget for the same year was \$519,000. Why is the operating actual \$13.966 million overbudget? I would certainly hope the minister will provide an explanation for this. If these are with the Pine Lake tornado, could he provide us with more information in respect to that? Now, then, if it is in relation to the Pine Lake tornado, what contingency plans has the department put in place if a disaster of this scale happens again?

MS BLAKEMAN: As the AG pointed out.

MR. BONNER: Yes, as the AG pointed out in his review.

Is there any type of disaster reserve fund that the province has as a cushion in case of a major disaster like Pine Lake? Again, with our ever changing weather patterns in the province and, as a matter of fact, around the world, it seems to me we are getting more and more disasters in areas that didn't have these types of weather phenomena occurring at other times. So if there's no type of reserve fund, would the minister consider setting up some type of reserve or contingency fund for disaster support?

The next issue I would like to consider here is line 2.4.5, municipal sponsorship. I see that our operating estimate for this year is \$1.5 million. In the year 2000-2001 the operating actual was \$1,217,000, and the operating budget this year was a new budget item. When I look at what happened and that our dollars came from the lotteries, I see that the operating estimate for 2001-2002 is \$12 million and that the operating actual and the operating budget for the previous fiscal year were also \$12 million. Why has the minister not released the list of grants that were given in 2000 under this program? Will the minister release a list of all the grants that were applied for under this program since its inception? Will there be any changes to the type of funding that can be applied for under this program, or will flower pots, street paving and signs, computers, and employee wages all be covered under this grant? Also, how does the ministry monitor to make sure that the funds are spent as applied for? Again, a key question and certainly some accountability for these taxpayer dollars.

Finally, under municipal sponsorships, Mr. Chairman, I would ask the minister: has the ministry ever requested funds be returned because they were not spent as intended?

Now, then, as we move along here, I would like to move to program 3, public safety, and I see that our operating estimate for this year is \$712,000. The operating actual for the last fiscal year was \$845,000, and the operating budget for that same period was \$509,000. My question for the minister: would he please explain why the estimate is \$203,000 higher than the 2000-2001 budget when the actual expenses are \$336,000 higher than the budget?

Also, as we look at public safety, I would like to look at line item 3.2, safety services and fire protection. Now, under line 3.2.1, program management, I see that our operating estimate for 2001-2002 was \$367,000. The operating actual for the last fiscal year, 2000-2001, was \$1,128,000, and the operating budget for that same fiscal year was \$151,000. Why is the actual \$977,000, or a whopping 747 percent, overbudget? Why is the estimate \$216,000, which is also incredibly high, or 243 percent, higher than the 2000-2001

budget? Also, I would like to know what services are provided under program management in this particular category.

Now, I also notice the business plan for the years 2001-2004. In looking at goal 4, we are looking at "a comprehensive safety system that provides an appropriate level of public safety." Again, this is an issue certainly because of recent events in our province such as the Pine Lake tornado. As well, we had some very, very severe hail storms throughout the province last year. So the question to the minister: how does the ministry evaluate the appropriateness of the provincial codes and standards? Also, what is the status of the development of a provincial electronic permit system? What is the role of the municipalities in this partnership? How much will it cost? Will the system be developed in-house, or will it be in partnership with the private sector? Again, if it is in partnership with the private sector, how are these people in the private sector going to be selected by the government? Will the government or the private sector manage this particular service?

10:30

Moving along, I would like to direct my next set of questions to line 3.2.2, technical services. What services are provided by the department under technical services?

Mr. Chairman, I see my time is up. I want to thank you for this opportunity to address this set of estimates, and I also want to wish the minister and his department every success in dealing with this very difficult ministry. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Seeing no other speaker, the chair recognizes the hon. Minister for Municipal Affairs to make concluding remarks.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the members from Edmonton-Glengarry, Edmonton-Centre, and Edmonton-Highlands for their comments, and I also want to say that their feedback is very important. As I look around this room, I see mayors and aldermen and councillors and reeves. I see a former mayor and a former president of the AUMA over there from Grande Prairie-Wapiti. As I look around this room, one thing is very important to the comments tonight: this government is and will continue to work closely with local municipalities.

To the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who I know is listening very intently of course: I will explain to him what horizontal management means in terms of the three levels of government. Of course, his medical training somewhat skewed his understanding, but I will certainly get him to that.

Now, I also want to say to the special member from down in Calgary that I look forward to his input. I want to assure the members of the Assembly that the ministry will respond in an expeditious manner to the questions they posed tonight in terms of putting together and providing a full and complete disclosure of the Minister of Municipal Affairs' budget for this upcoming budget year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business and proposed estimates for the Department of Municipal Affairs, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$204,014,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments: support to the Legislative Assembly, operating expense, \$29,838,000; office of the Auditor General, operating expense and capital investment, \$16,986,000; office of the Ombudsman, operating expense, \$1,754,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, operating expense, \$7,035,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, operating expense, \$212,000; and office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, operating expense, \$3,287,000.

Sustainable Resource Development, operating expense and capital investment, \$197,134,000.

Municipal Affairs, operating expense and capital investment, \$204,014,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 3 **Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to be the concluding speaker in committee on Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001. While we haven't had a great deal of time to be able to go to different groups, different stakeholders and get some feedback on this bill, we have had an opportunity to talk to a few groups and have some debate in the Legislature on this issue, and in general we support where this bill is taking us. Certainly the amendments that we see here to this proposed act strengthen the manner in which we deal with individuals whose licences are suspended from fishing. It adjusts how fish in captivity are dealt with, some regulations that were needed as we see Albertans moving into this marketplace, and extends regulation-making authorities.

Now, I know this is a government who has not supported, certainly since '93, additional regulations, Mr. Chairman, but there are times when it is necessary, particularly when new issues arise or conditions change, causing different interpretations in acts, and this is one of those times. Our fishing industry is under great stress. We certainly need to look at options, alternatives, and new ways of doing things, and for that some regulations are necessary.

So we see these amendments as contributing to the province's capability in protecting wild fish, and that's helping to sustain the resource. We've heard some discussion tonight in the budget debates on sustainable resource development about how necessary it is to try and sustain that industry. While this bill isn't very substantive in nature, Mr. Chairman, it's at least a step in the right direction, and we look forward to seeing more action being taken in this area.

We see in this province that some of the most viable fish species are under significant pressure. They're under threat because of overfishing both commercially and through sportfishing. Part of the problem is not just the management of the resource, Mr. Chairman, but it's the way we've done the enforcement in this particular area.

I remember last spring, when I was up in the Slave Lake area talking to the people who work for the Department of Environment there about the challenges they faced in fulfilling their roles in that region. They were talking about the immense area that they needed to patrol. Slave Lake itself is a huge lake. It's a great resource and an asset for this province, but in terms of patrolling it, monitoring it to ensure that people using the lake for fishing, either commercial or sportfishing, were complying with the rules and regulations, it was an onerous task and something that they really just weren't capable of fulfilling to any sort of extent.

They have one fish and wildlife officer in that area to monitor all the lakes in the region, and it takes that officer a full day to traverse the area of the lake. So, in fact, it's absolutely impossible to properly police the area, Mr. Chairman, and that's an indicator of the kinds of issues that we're facing in this province on regulations and enforcement. While it's good to see some of these regulations being put in place, we know that they don't do us any good if we can't enforce them.

We haven't heard yet whether or not we can expect any more officers to help in that regard as a result of the budget debates, but we will. I'm looking forward to that answer and hope that in fact we see that progress in a manner that we need.

10:40

My colleague from Edmonton-Centre was going to discuss some of the feedback she'd had from parties that she had talked to, Mr. Chairman, but I will pass on her comments this evening. They were primarily around the part of the bill that deals with the derbies and the sportfishing. There is no doubt that when we see lakes and rivers under such great pressure in terms of fish stocks, we have to wonder what some of those causes are.

There are a great many people committed to sustaining fish stocks in this province who are recreational users of the lakes and rivers and who are very concerned about derbies and massive kinds of sportfishing like that. Their concern is around the kind of problems that occur in lakes and rivers during derbies. When we see a large influx of people using the lakes during these derbies, we see the resource being damaged in many cases. The lakeshore, which is habitat for egg laying, the fish themselves, even the number of fish that are killed throughout the derby, that die as a result of improper handling in a catch-and-release kind of scenario, all have a huge impact on fish stock. So there is a group of people who would like to see the end of derbies completely, not just regulations, but I think for the most part people see this as a step in the right direction. Let's try this first, let's see how it works, let's try and monitor this form of the sport to the best of our ability . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Use it to control it.

MS CARLSON: Use it to control it. That's right. Let's see where

it takes us. Let's review it regularly and ensure that it's working, and then perhaps the regulations will be as far as we need to go here.

We did consult a number of stakeholder groups with regard to this particular bill. We talked to the Alberta Fish and Game Association. We thanked them for their participation. They were involved in the three-year consultation process with the government and other stakeholders. They expect that the regulations will take in most of these recommendations, so we look forward to seeing those recommendations when they come forward, Mr. Chairman, and seeing if they actually meet this group's expectations.

In general, they're fine with the bill except for the definition of sportfishing. They have a problem with that. Traditionally this has been limited to angling, and we see something new here in this particular bill. We see bow and spear fishing, which are new to me. I can't imagine being on a lake and encountering either a bow fisherperson or a spear fisherperson. Obviously they're out there, and clearly if they're out there, we need some regulations around them. Let's see where these regulations take us.

There's no doubt that when you're using a bow or a spear, catch and release doesn't work, so we need to talk about how that's managed.

Yes, definitely it's something that First Nations participate in – excellent for them – but certainly they need to participate in sustaining the fish stock, as does every Albertan. They do; they are really good when we talk about bringing forward information and practices about sustaining the environment, and certainly regulations need to be reviewed and brought forward with regard to them as well as everyone else in this province.

Trout Unlimited was also consulted on this bill, and they see it as dealing primarily with sportfishing and specifically walleye and didn't have any specific concerns. Once again, their key area of interest is habitat protection. We know that we are seeing a lot of the habitat for fish spawning particularly being degraded over time as a result of the competing pressures on the habitat, and it's a big deal for them. They do an excellent job, but they need the assistance of government and all Albertans in terms of this. The biggest concern for them is industrial development having significant impact on fish habitat. That's an area that isn't dealt with in this bill, so we'd like to see the government taking some responsibility in that regard.

The Western Walleye Council was also consulted, Mr. Chairman, and they've got some concerns. There are a number of questions they'd like to see answered, and I'd like to put those on the record and have the minister answer them for us.

They'd like the department's plans for stocking walleye in Alberta's lakes to be made public. If we could have that information. Are there any other fish stocking programs that the minister is considering cutting in the near future or any ones that he's considering adding? Are the government's plans to reduce fish stocking in public lakes tied to the promotion of private fishing opportunities in stocked ponds? If we could have some information on that, it would be helpful. Will the minister make a commitment to the Western Walleye Council and sport anglers in Alberta that they will continue stocking walleye in Alberta's lakes? They're particularly concerned about overfishing happening in those lakes that do currently have adequate walleye stocks, so what happens then is that we just perpetuate the cycle.

Mr. Chairman, those are my comments. I would like to thank the minister for his speedy responses to my colleagues' questions the other day in the House. The questions were well answered, I think. The one he didn't talk about in his response was the Auditor General's request and concerns with regard to fish stocks. We're expecting those answers to come as a result of our budget questions. So we're pretty happy with the responses and the speed with which the responses came forward.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude my thoughts on Bill 3.

[The clauses of Bill 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 4 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm getting lots of direction from my colleagues here in the Legislature in terms of how long we should be speaking to this particular bill. It's not my fault that it's brought up at this time of night, and certainly we would be happy to hear any comments people have.

This is my first opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to speak to Bill 4, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001. We're seeing legislation passed through this House at an alarmingly speedy rate this particular session. I understand everybody's keen interest in getting back to their home constituencies and their gardens or their farms or their families, but there is a rule for the Legislative Assembly and legislative scrutiny in this process. Certainly as part of the Official Opposition we will fulfill that role to the best of our abilities given our numbers.

All of these bills, when they come in, Mr. Chairman, we send out to a variety of stakeholder groups, and we hope that we will get the responses back from people prior to their flowing through all of the various stages available in this House. In fact, on this particular bill we haven't had feedback from the stakeholders yet. However, the surface rights group is a group that I have been in contact with regularly for a number of years now, and certainly I understand their concerns in this area. No doubt this bill is one good step in the right direction in terms of the kinds of outstanding issues we have on surface rights.

10:50

What we'll see with Bill 4 is that the compensation limit will be increased from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for damages that can be claimed by people who have problems with companies moving in on their land. That starts to come close to the costs of damages that can be incurred. With this larger ceiling being put on the claims, we're

going to see less time and money being spent within the court system, and that's good, Mr. Chairman, because definitely our courts are backlogged. It's a speedy process, and most people would like to see their issues resolved outside of the court system.

The process now is that landowners negotiate compensation with oil and gas and mineral companies for giving them the access rights to move onto their land and access whatever it is they're going after. Sometimes the compensation for this is something that can't be agreed upon, and they have the option to go before the quasi-judicial provincial Surface Rights Board for a decision. So with these limits being raised, we're going to see that this board is going to be a lot busier than it was before. It's a step in the right direction, I think something that we support.

Definitely there are other issues on surface rights that need to be addressed, and certainly we look forward to their being addressed. Most of those are issues with adjacent landowners who are eligible with this particular bill for compensation. So a lot more outstanding issues to be talked about, but certainly this is a step in the right direction and something that we will support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 3 and 4.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:54 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 1, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/01

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a number of international visitors who are here with us today and seated in your gallery: the Hon. John Aquilina, Member for Riverstone, Australia, and Minister for Education and Training, whom I will be meeting with later today to discuss a number of issues relevant to education. Mr. Aquilina is joined by his wife, Anne, and his chief of staff, Michael Waterhouse. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, our next international guest in your gallery is Maria Jose Viana, Secretary of Education, from Alagoas, Brazil. Ms Viana was sponsored through the Rainbow of Hope for Children in Wainwright to speak at the ATA learning network global environment and outdoor education conference in Canmore, April 26 to 29. Accompanying Ms Viana is George Bunz, president of the Rainbow of Hope for Children, and her interpreter, Anna Driedgr. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly today Mr. Colin Robertson, who's the Canadian consul general stationed in Los Angeles. This is Mr. Robertson's first official visit to Alberta since his appointment, and we're pleased to welcome him. California is Alberta's second largest trading partner, with exports totaling \$5.1 billion last year. It's a strong, dynamic, and growing relationship, but there are certain ways to expand and improve it, especially in the context of the recent discussions about continental energy supplies.

There are also numerous opportunities for further partnership between Alberta and California in natural gas, high technology, education, agriculture, and particularly with respect to our Supernet initiative, where there are excellent opportunities. The consul general's visit is an excellent opportunity to discuss these areas and ensure Alberta has a strong voice in California. We look forward to building a strong and productive relationship with Mr. Robertson in the coming months and years. I would ask that our honoured guest please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a

petition signed by 15 residents of Slave Lake, 132 residents of Lethbridge, Fort Macleod, and Coaldale, and 940 residents of the city of Edmonton. The petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta

to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or belief that human life is sacred.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government to ensure that maximum penalties are enforced for all crimes committed with weapons and that all youth involved in weapons related crimes be tried in adult courts.

head: **Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund I would like to table the report of the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund for the 2000-2001 fiscal year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow, Wednesday, May 2, I will be moving that written questions and motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 8, being the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill implements reductions to corporate income tax rates and the elimination of the capital tax on financial institutions as announced last fall in response to recommendations made by the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee. The bill also incorporates the amendments contained in Bill 22, which was introduced into the Legislature last year but not passed, and some technical amendments resulting from changes made to the federal Income Tax Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 8 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

Bill 205
Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection)
Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Bill 206
Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will bring about the same kind of conflict of interest legislation and guidelines as we have for a lot of the other government positions. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you. It is my pleasure to table with the Assembly today the required number of copies of Alberta Transportation's three-year highway construction and rehabilitation program, including the north/south trade corridor projects, covering the years 2001-02 to 2003-04. Also included are copies of the construction of public roads and bridges for the years 2001-02 to 2003-04.

Further, Mr. Speaker, each MLA will be receiving information relating to the project listing that applies to their individual constituency. With respect to the listing of highway projects, those MLAs whose constituencies are within a city will receive information relating to the entire city. Of course, if any further information is necessary, they can always get in contact with our office.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, today I'm very pleased to table with the Legislative Assembly the annual report of the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal for the year 2000. Additional copies of the report are available through my office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly this afternoon five copies of the 1999 vital statistics annual review. The review summarizes all births, marriages, deaths, and stillbirths that occurred in 1999 in Alberta and meets our legislative requirement under the Vital Statistics Act. My office will be providing copies to all members.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

1:40

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I would like to table five

copies of the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Edmonton-Highlands by-election, held June 12, 2000, and the Red Deer-North by-election, held September 12, 2000. Copies were distributed to members on January 15, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three brief tablings, if I might. First, I'd like to table five copies of the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association, AMPIA, award winners for 2001, which were announced last Saturday evening in Calgary, an event that was attended by a guest in your gallery, our consul general to California, along with our Deputy Premier and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and our Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. This list reflects many of the excellent production projects that occurred during the year 2000 and reflects many projects that received financial and other support from our Alberta Foundation for the Arts. Congratulations to all of those winners.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter of congratulations to Dr. Horst Schmid, a former member of this Assembly and a close personal friend of many people here including myself, who received a great honour from AMPIA this last weekend. He was presented with the 2001 friend of the industry award arising out of his many years of dedicated support to this industry, which included helping to create the Alberta film festival, the Banff International Film Festival, and the Alberta Motion Picture Development Corporation.

My final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter to Mr. Leon Lubin, the former executive director of AMPIA, regarding his recent retirement and thanking him for his tireless efforts to "keep it rolling" in Alberta. We all wish him very much success in his endeavours.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Ms Merla Gibson of the Canadian Federation of University Women, Alberta Council. In this letter she's urging, on behalf of this council, the government to eliminate public library fees.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a report just released today by the Canadian Orthopaedic Association and the Arthritis Society of Canada. The title of the report is Canada in Motion, and the main point that the report makes is the long waiting list for orthopedic surgery in the country.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies of the agreed statement of facts filed in the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta between Her Majesty the Queen and Ziad Jaber.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today a letter that I received recently from the Minister of Government Services regarding the elimination of the propane fuel tax in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the home page for the ConCerv.com web site, and this one is specifically entitled An Alternate Vision for Rossdale – Adaptive Re-use of Historic Powerhouses.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had the pleasure this afternoon of meeting with four young ladies, university students who belong to the Youth Coalition Against Poverty. They brought a petition to me which will be tabled in the near future. They also offered to help myself and the government address the whole issue of homelessness. I would like the Assembly to extend a warm welcome to Meera Pandompatam, Shreyasi Gollapudi, Aliya Jamal, and Roseanne Yeung. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very special honour for me during Education Week to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the very first school from my constituency that I've ever had the pleasure of introducing in my history as the MLA for Calgary-Egmont, and it's great. We have with us today 32 very bright grade 6 students from St. William school in Willow Park with their energetic teacher Mrs. Donna Brashko. Helping Mrs. Brashko is another teacher, Mrs. Pat Jarabek, and three accompanying parents: Ms Diane Wirringer, Mrs. Claudette Westerbeek, and Mr. Bruce Foxall. They all got here safely thanks to bus driver Mr. Roy Taylor. I had the pleasure of visiting with this class last Friday, and I can assure you that these students mirror the enthusiasm of their teacher, Mrs. Brashko, who really is opening up a world of opportunity for these bright young minds. I would ask that my guests, seated in the members' gallery, please stand and receive the warmest welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce a very special group of 24 bright young minds who are here visiting the Legislature from a wonderful school in my constituency, that being W.P. Wagner school. In their midst is another very special young gentleman, whom I believe you had the pleasure of meeting here not long ago at our Youth Parliament session. His name is Ken. They are all accompanied by a very dedicated and energetic teacher, who consistently helps these people achieve very high marks in all subjects. Her name is Arlene Cairns. I would ask this very special group to please now rise and receive the very warm and friendly welcome of our Assembly.

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the K to 12 school from Mallaig, who will be arriving at 2 p.m. Mallaig community school, with 275 students, is a place where students honour and respect each other's differences and beliefs. Mallaig school is a strong community school offering dual-track

education in French and English. The school also recognizes and teaches both Catholicism and Lutheranism. Mallaig is very famous for their school sports, especially for volleyball and their team, the Stingers. Visiting us today is a grade 10 class accompanied by their teacher Todd Tanasichuk.

Thank you, very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today, in particular it being Education Week, to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature students from the Mountain View school in Calgary-West. They are accompanied by teacher Mrs. Jane Lizotte and the school president, Mr. Doug Wright. Would they please stand and receive a very warm welcome from this Assembly.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I've just been advised that perhaps the youngest person in the members' gallery is with us today. Gordon Olsen, who runs our office in Calgary, has his young daughter with him, Catherine. I would like her – that's right – to be held and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members in the Assembly Jim Ragsdale from the Edmonton-Glengarry constituency. Jimmy was a tireless worker during the last election, and I would like him to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Teachers' Salaries

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Why insert a 6 percent salary budget line in the budget if it is not a solid commitment that you expect the school boards to keep?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I said, that line item was put in the budget – I indicated this to the media yesterday, and the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition was present at that news conference – I think to remove all expectations on the part of the teachers' union, the ATA, that a 30 percent increase is in the books when in fact it is not.

1:50

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, when the Premier says that they can actually take money out of the increase in the instructional grants to supplement this, how does he expect it to be any kind of a guideline?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we think that a 6 percent raise is enough for those school jurisdictions that haven't completed their negotiations with teachers to make their teachers amongst the highest paid if not the highest paid in Canada. The boards can negotiate higher salaries if they wish, using funds from their general instructional grants. That flexibility is available to the various school boards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the minister of human resources. Can the minister of human resources, who is responsible for the Labour Relations Code, tell us if the Minister of Learning has conferred with him to determine the possible impact of the salary line item on the collective bargaining process?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, it's inappropriate to raise questions with respect to inner-cabinet consultations. However, if the minister wants to venture forth, he may choose to do so.

MR. DUNFORD: No.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier, please. How can the Premier say that there is flexibility in the system when the government has effectively given local school boards a floor or a guideline for teachers' salaries, which is basically 6 percent?

MR. KLEIN: A guideline is precisely that, Mr. Speaker, a guideline. As I indicated to the hon. member, the school boards do and will have the flexibility to increase wages, if they so wish, using the general instructional grants.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Learning further respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, as you know, included in this year's budget for the first time was a 6 percent line item that would ensure that our teachers would be the highest paid among provinces in Canada. During the election campaign we heard one very important issue, and that was the classroom issue. We heard about class size. We heard about functioning of classrooms. What Budget 2001 does is allow the school boards the flexibility of close to \$135 million in the first year, followed by \$240 million the second year, to be able to put those towards teachers' salaries, if they so wish, to be able to put them towards the classroom. The question that I always get since that time has been: well, you took away our flexibility. For the last 50 years the school boards have been negotiating teachers' salaries versus classroom issues out of their general grant. In actual fact what we have done is made it easier for them in that we have said that we want the teachers to have at least 4 percent and 2 percent. That's the issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When they say that they're going to make it at least 6 percent, does that not bind the school boards and create expectations on the public's behalf that the school boards are now expected to live up to? Does that not interfere with the collective bargaining process?

MR. KLEIN: No, it doesn't interfere with the collective bargaining process, Mr. Speaker. This is a budget item. I'm sure that the Leader of the Official Opposition would like the assurance that he's going to get a 6 percent raise. If he were back being a university professor and the board of governors said that he will be guaranteed at least 6 percent, I don't think he'd be whining.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I left the university when they told me how I could get my budget set.

Will the Premier confirm that the strategy of inserting 6 percent in the budget was a mistake now that he's indicated that it's only an opening offer?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, it's not a mistake. It's a clear signal that school boards have at least 6 percent to give their teachers plus the flexibility to provide more, if absolutely necessary, from the basic instructional grants. I think it's a good deal. It's a good deal from a budget point of view, and it's a good deal for the ATA, because they know that they have that in their pocket. What do they say? A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush?

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Learning indicated that the budget included a final position of 6 percent for teachers' salary increases over two years. In the past number of days a number of figures have been attributed to the Premier. Yesterday, and I quote: a low position of something in the neighbourhood of 6 percent. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Was the 6 percent the opening offer or the final offer for teachers?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, for roughly the fourth time in this Assembly I will stand up and answer the same question. As I made it abundantly clear the day of the budget, as I made it abundantly clear one day, two days, and three days after the budget, the teachers are guaranteed a 4 percent raise this September 1 and a 2 percent raise next September 1. But there is nothing stopping the teachers and the school boards from sitting down and negotiating what is the most important factor in their school. If the teachers and the school boards feel the most important factor is class size, then the money will go to class size. If it's teachers' salaries, then it will go to them.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done here is put the flexibility in the hands of the school boards and the teachers, the people who know what's going on in the schools by far the best, and the decision is up to them as to how they spend that \$135 million. We have guaranteed by using 4 and 2 percent that our teachers will be the highest paid in the land, and I think that's great, but if the school boards want to make them higher, they can. They have a flexibility in this budget actually to increase by an extra 10 percent, up to close to 16 percent, if they so wish. It is up to the school boards and it is up to the teachers to determine what the most important need is in their particular school district.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will negotiations be reopened with those teacher groups who have already settled for less than 6 percent?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are roughly seven boards who have already signed for the upcoming year, and these boards will have the ability as of September 2001 — again, in the contracts what has to occur is that both the teachers and the school boards have to agree to open the contract. They have the ability to take the 4 percent at that time if they so wish. If they don't wish, the school board can keep it. That 4 percent has to be for teachers' salaries because we on this side feel teachers are important.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier has indicated that there is no money hidden in the school board operations budget, just where is the money for settlements above 6 percent to come from?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I already indicated that there is a line item relative to salaries. There's also a line item relative to instructional grants. As the hon. minister pointed out, the school boards have the flexibility to use that instructional grant to assess and meet their own priorities.

DR. OBERG: If I may on this issue, Mr. Speaker. Included in the budget this year is \$115 million, that they have the ability to use. Included next year is another 3 percent, which is close to \$100 million or a little over \$100 million. So in the two years they have \$215 million that they can use for exactly what the hon. member has just asked.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Orthopedic Surgery Waiting Lists

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Canadian Orthopaedic Association and the Canadian Arthritis Society have released two studies, both indicating that the national indirect economic impact of excessive waiting lists is close to \$18 billion per year due to lost productivity. In a survey of September 2000 the Capital Region Medical Staff Association showed that Edmonton patients were forced to wait up to nine months for orthopedic surgery. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the estimated economic cost of long waiting lists to the economy of Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can say with some confidence that those individuals who actually use the health care system indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the service that they receive. Having said that, there are some legitimate issues as they relate to waiting lists for a number of different areas, and I can say with confidence also that we are addressing them. We have made a number of announcements over the last year that have dealt with waiting lists in a number of critical areas, and we've made announcements and made good on our promises to invest in the areas of people, plant, and equipment. As a consequence and including some moneys targeted specifically at waiting lists, there are improvements being demonstrated.

2:00

I cannot answer the hon. member's question as it relates to an economic cost that I'm aware of – that kind of analysis has not been done – but I can say with confidence that our waiting lists are going down, Mr. Speaker. The number of physicians has gone up, the number of nurses has gone up, and the number of people waiting in lines and the times that they are waiting have gone down.

DR. PANNU: My supplementary to the minister: are waiting lists for orthopedic surgeries in Calgary and the rest of the province as bad as they currently are in the city of Edmonton?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of orthopedics in particular is a very interesting one. One of the areas that we have invested in is a centre of excellence in bone and joint in the city of Calgary. When it comes to strictly competing on the basis of remuneration for physicians and health care professionals, it will be very difficult for the province of Alberta to compete with many other jurisdictions

that are able to provide more financial remunerations to such professionals. However, by providing investment and environments in research and gathering critical mass, we are being very successful in recruiting people. Again, it's not just people. It's a balance of people, plant, and equipment that we've invested in. We think the centre of excellence in bone and joint in Calgary is an excellent initiative and is already paying dividends for us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the minister: is the private, for-profit provision of orthopedic services still one of the major options that the government is considering using to reduce the waiting lists?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that I am aware of, nobody has put that proposal before us to have, for example, hip replacements done in a private surgical facility. I can say that for those services that have been approved under private surgical facilities, the total value of contracts, some 34 contracts, amounts to just under \$10 million out of an overall global budget of roughly \$6 billion. So it is a relatively small part of our health care system. I'm not suggesting it is unimportant, however. Should the College of Physicians and Surgeons determine that it is medically safe – medically safe – to provide any kind of service under a private surgical facility, then certainly we'll give it consideration.

Teachers' Salaries

(continued)

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, since the release of the budget there has been a lot of discussion in my constituency and elsewhere about teachers' salaries. It's been suggested that teachers are not keeping pace with inflation. Can the Minister of Learning tell me how the salary of a teacher who started teaching in my constituency of Red Deer-North in '92-93 would compare to a teacher starting today?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I may, I will use figures from Red Deer public as opposed to Red Deer Catholic. A teacher who started off in 1992-93 in their first year of teaching would have received \$30,864. Today that same teacher would be earning \$54,330. With a potential 6 percent increase in the budget, that we've talked about several times here, they would earn \$57,633 by 2002-2003. That's an 86 percent increase.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would again ask the Minister of Learning. Based on this salary grid, how would a teacher at the maximum end of the scale compare from '92-93 levels to current levels of pay today?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It does vary with jurisdictions, but in general the teachers with 11 years' experience in 1992-93 versus 11 years' experience today would have received a net increase of about 12 and a half percent. What that means is that they have received increases of 17 percent, and as you know, they did receive a decrease of 5 percent in the '94-95 budget year.

So in general a teacher with four years' experience would have been making about \$52,000 in '92-93 and would be making roughly a little over \$59,000 today.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, with these different rates of salary increase, can the Minister of Learning explain how this grid system works and how it benefits all Alberta teachers?

DR. OBERG: I'll keep it very short, Mr. Speaker. Very quickly, what happens is that for the first 11 years of a teacher's career the teacher receives an automatic increase on the grid, so over those 11 years, regardless of any increases, the teacher would be increased. What you have is a second component, which adds to the compounded effect of the increase which led to the 86 percent increase, and that increase is due to the actual amount per year. So that's what brings it up to the 86 percent increase that I talked about earlier.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

School Closures

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Education Week continues, so, unfortunately, do the school closures across the province. Yesterday the Premier said that he had no idea how many school closures we will see, if any. One estimate has put that as high as 20 percent of all public schools in the province. My first question is to the Premier. Will the Premier acknowledge that school closures are caused by his government's school utilization formula?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, school closures are caused by people or the lack of people. You know, if there are no students, there is no need for schools. I mean, that makes perfect, logical sense. Would this hon. member keep a school open to accommodate no students? Yes. Well, he's a Liberal, and he would.

Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday, the dynamics and the demographics of municipal districts and counties and municipalities are constantly changing, and to accommodate those changes, school boards have to make decisions. Where schools are being closed, new schools are being built in other areas where they are needed. It's happened in the past, it's happening now, and it will happen as long as we live and for many, many, many years thereafter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier acknowledge that the families hurt by school closures are those in inner-city neighbourhoods and those in rural communities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, school boards are not there to hurt people. They're there to administer good education and good education opportunities for our young people. They put themselves up for election, and they undertake a commitment to provide quality education, as this government makes a commitment to provide the funding for quality education to the best of our ability. The simple fact is that changing dynamics, changing demographics cause some schools to be closed and other schools to be opened. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier:

will the Premier commit to celebrating Education Week by scrapping his flawed utilization formula?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: The utilization formula is not flawed, Mr. Speaker. It comes down to very simple mathematics and economics that perhaps even the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar can understand. If there are no students, then there's not a need for a school. If there are many students, then there's a need for a school.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:10

Agriculture Safety Net Programs

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year this government recognized and responded to the economic crisis in the oil and grain sector of the agriculture industry by providing two payments of \$4.29 and \$6 for a total of \$10.29 per acre. Just last Friday the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development announced a further payment for the year 2000 of \$10.29 an acre, even though commodity prices have not significantly increased and the input costs have risen significantly, especially with nitrogen fertilizer going up by \$20 to \$30 an acre because of natural gas prices. So it's argued that natural gas prices have actually increased the provincial coffers while increasing farm input costs. Could the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development assure the farmers of this province that if the commodity markets do not improve over the summer months, this government will continue to listen to their concerns and provide a further acreage payment this fall?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the one thing I can assure the hon. member and all hon. members is that this government will continue to listen very carefully to agricultural producers' concerns.

Will we provide a further acreage payment? I think that would be purely hypothetical, although we do know that markets have not improved significantly, that commodity prices are rising slightly but not nearly as the rise of input costs. What I believe would be more responsive to the producers of this province is to continue the work on the review of the safety net program so that producers can operate from year to year with an assurance that they can manage some of the risks that are associated with producing a crop.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister outline for this House how much of the recent payment that was announced on Friday comes from the Provincial Treasurer and how much comes from the federal government?

MRS. McCLELLAN: The federal government provided \$500 million for all of Canada for oil and grain producers. Alberta's share of that was \$126.8 million. I think that the agreement committed us to cost sharing that at 60 percent federal and 40 percent provincial, which would have meant that we would have contributed about \$85 million. I think the hon. member will know, as producers do, that we contributed significantly higher than that, and from the calls I've had in my office, Mr. Speaker, the agricultural community is quite appreciative of that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, based on what the

minister tells me, could she tell me why we are providing less per acre this year than we did last year, even though the input costs are higher this year?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Actually, Mr. Speaker, the farmer is receiving exactly the same amount this year as they did last year. We would have liked to have been able to provide more. However, as we go through the budget debate department by department, we'll understand that we were trying to meet all of Albertans' priorities.

We've made some commitments to producers in other areas. We have a number of programs in place, so our commitment is much higher than the \$10.29 an acre, and we'll continue with that commitment. It's maybe not enough, but it's what we could do. I think that if you look at the summer rebate program for irrigation farmers, if you look at the 30 percent reduction in crop insurance premiums, and if you look at the continued support they'll get through Bill 1, the producers in this province will recognize that this government supports what they're doing, appreciates what they're doing, and will continue to listen to them and work with them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Health Information Act

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although the Health Information Act was proclaimed last week, the minister of health has announced a six-month implementation grace period. My questions are to the minister. What steps will the minister be taking to prevent people from disregarding the act during this grace period?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think that this is a good question. I think the best answer rests with the fact that we worked greatly with stakeholder groups who will be working with the Health Information Act, and we'll continue to work with them. We provided such stakeholders with information sessions, indicated to them how the act is intended to work and how it is not intended to work. I should give a good deal of credit to the Information Commissioner, who has done a great deal of service in this particular regard.

Mr. Speaker, we know that there are some concerns as they relate to how the act should work and shouldn't work, which is why Mr. Clark, the Information Commissioner, indicated that he would have this six-month grace period to allow for transition before we got into a situation like the hon. member has identified. Also, we've made the commitment that if there are difficulties with particular parts of the regulations, we can take that six-month period and make amendments to them as may seem fit.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The act exempts medical records generated by private health care providers. Will the minister explain this exemption?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member has said is correct. Our first priority has to be with the publicly administered system. It has been raised as an issue that perhaps private providers should fall within the scope of this act. That issue is being considered; however, the final decision on whether that will in fact be implemented has not yet been made.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under section 38 of the act the Premier's personal medical records could be filed in the provincial archives without the Premier's consent if a future minister of health feels they have enduring historic value. Has the minister explained this to the Premier?

MR. MAR: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Library Funding

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Libraries: the past, the present, the future; exciting new technologies, new innovative ways of delivering service. Postbudget, post library conference held last weekend in Jasper, my questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Mr. Minister, will the \$700,000 identified for libraries within your budget be used to increase the per capita funding, cut in 1994, or will it be used to bring the 1997 census figures now used to current 2000-2001 population numbers?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the \$700,000 increase in this year's budget, which takes Alberta library funding from about \$14.2 million up to \$14.9 million, is quite specifically to reflect the population growth that we've experienced in various parts of this province. It is not part of the per capita increase that we heard so much about in the Jasper convention this weekend. That issue was raised on a number of occasions, and I did promise them that I would have a look at that and see what the impact is or isn't as we look at this very important aspect of the Alberta intellectual advantage.

MRS. GORDON: Again to the same minister. As new technologies evolve, are there any plans within your department – and I stress within your department – to further assist the Alberta Library, TAL, to expand the patron-popular, patron-satisfied Alberta Library card, that allows many Albertans walk-in access to borrowed books through any one of over 300 participating libraries in Alberta? A wonderful card, a wonderful system.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the project is a wonderful project, and I'm very supportive of it. TAL, as we may know, is the Alberta Library. It's a consortium that reflects the concerns of about 245 libraries in this province. One of their important projects is this universal access card for library services for those individuals or those libraries who are part of that particular membership system. While we do provide \$50,000 a year annually to this consortium, there are no plans at this stage to expand that money to further the Alberta Library card project, not at this time.

I would say that we did increase the Alberta public library electronic network funding by another \$1.75 million, which is a partnership project between us and the TAL group. Also, Mr. Speaker, on the weekend I presented a cheque for \$25,000 to a project that involves the CNIB and the TAL group, and that's called VisuNet, to help users who find it impossible in fact to use conventional print materials. So there are two very good projects there that they've benefited from.

2:20

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, what role postbudget do you see libraries playing at the community level in year 2001 and beyond,

whether that library be in downtown Edmonton or in Mirror, Alberta, population 487?

THE SPEAKER: Well, that sure leads us to an opinion statement and request.

So let's move on to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Drug Treatment Courts

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. Would the minister please inform this House about the status of his discussions with the federal Justice department concerning the establishment of drug treatment courts in Alberta?

MR. HANCOCK: I haven't had those discussions yet, Mr. Speaker, but I'm looking forward to them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Has the minister done any research at all in his department as to the estimated cost to the province of establishing and operating such a court?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a number of priorities in the department with respect to dealing with issues of significance, and certainly dealing with drugs is an issue of significance, but at the present time I don't believe we have any studies going on with respect to establishing a drug court. There was an announcement or a discussion from the federal minister some months ago about a keenness to get on with that type of a project, and I believe that we have at the senior officials level some discussions happening.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. As part of those discussions that are happening, then, can the minister enlighten the House as to whether the department is considering drug treatment courts in both Edmonton and Calgary or just one of those cities?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, because as I've indicated, the discussions are at a preliminary level among senior officials. I've indicated that I have an interest in proceeding in that direction if we can do it within the context of our budgetary allotment. We've got a number of priorities on the table. I certainly think drugs are a priority, and if we can proceed in that direction, I'm very interested in doing so.

So I've indicated to our senior officials an interest in the area. As soon as we heard that the federal minister was interested in drug courts, I asked them to engage in the discussion, and when it gets to a level where we have some information as to what the federal government is prepared to do in the area, how much in the way of resources they're prepared to put into it, and how we can fit into their proposal, it'll come to my table for a policy decision.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Automatic Bank Debit Authorization

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans now pay their bills, mortgages, car payments, and make charitable and political contributions through automatic debits on

their bank accounts. One of the most disturbing aspects of the *National Post* negative option billing case I asked about last week is the fact that they were given access to an automatic debit arrangement set up with a different supplier, being the *Edmonton Journal*. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. What protection, if any, exists to prevent a supplier from tapping into a consumer's automatic debit account to charge them for a service that they neither ordered nor agreed to pay for?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue that the hon. member brought up last week: I just want to let this House know that the matter is still under review. Evidence to this date appears to indicate that this particular campaign began about two or three months ago, and it's not really known whether or not anyone's account has actually been debited at this point in time. However, we're continuing to investigate. The newspapers that are involved have stated that they are prepared to provide a refund to anyone who has been billed, and that is still under review as well. The national newspaper that is involved has in the meantime suspended the entire campaign.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that, but it was not the question.

Will the minister commit to action to ensure that third parties cannot direct financial institutions to alter debit billings without the expressed permission of the account holder?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, under the financial act that we have in place today, we are not required to protect privacy, as banks and other federally regulated financial institutions are regulated by the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, which came into effect January 1, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question really is: can we prevent financial institutions from altering debit arrangements at the request of a third party without the permission of the account holder?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, section 22 of our own FTA states that a customer is not liable to pay for goods or services and would have a claim against any supplier or any financial institution if funds were withdrawn without authorization.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Protection against Family Violence Act

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Protection against family violence is an important issue to all of us here in this Legislature. It's an issue on which we all would like to see positive steps taken. There are many victims in these cases, and protection is extremely important. Removing the antagonist is certainly a major step in the protection of these victims. It's also critical to maintain some form of stable home life. My question is to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. The new Protection against Family Violence Act has been said to be a success story to improve the lives of abused persons in Alberta. Can the minister tell us how many victims have been able to stay in their homes because of this act?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure, indeed, to profile the new act and what it has resulted in. From June '99 when it was evaluated, from that period forward to February of this year we've had 224 victims that have been able to stay in their homes. It is not only a success because the abuser is prevented from contacting the victim either in the home, the workplace, or in the school but because in co-operation with the Minister of Justice and the authorities in Justice we've been able to get the abuser in to receive help more quickly. They are up in a courtroom setting. Agencies are there to start the healing process with all members of the family, focusing on the abuser but also being conscious of the needs of the victim and the victim's family as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary, then, is to the same minister. Can the minister clarify to us how the Protection against Family Violence Act has helped reduce family violence in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, while we have had this opportunity to review the legislation, we have had a third-party consulting firm, Howard Research, conduct an evaluation of the success of the legislation. One of the most dominant characteristics is the increased awareness not only by those people that are involved, such as the police, social workers and so on, but the increased awareness of the kinds of support we can give to victims of violence.

Mr. Speaker, this report I will table today in the appropriate number of copies so that other members who may not have been privileged to hear of the release of it last year will have an opportunity to review the context in which we find ourselves today; that is, more people receiving help at an earlier stage. Families that have been previously subjected to violence are aware of another opportunity to create protection within the family as well. We have reduced the incidence of family violence behaviour. I urge people to read this report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Children's Services tell us whether funding has increased this year for shelters in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it has increased from \$11 million to \$13.6 million. This is significant not only because of the help that we are being able to give people, not only in the 19 shelters inclusive of which are two second-stage housing opportunities, but because we are also going to assist the shelters throughout Alberta to track their statistics, to know where those people that are not in fact admitted to shelters are provided accommodation. Last year we provided alternate accommodation for some 8,600 people. We have to look at opportunities that allow us to be more knowledgeable and serve better the needs of the family that is a victim of violence.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

School Transportation

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Children's

Forum report of 1999 recommended that legislation be implemented to reduce the time that students spend on buses. My first question is to the Minister of Learning. Given that busing students is an issue across this province, will the minister support legislation to reduce busing time for children?

2:30

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, what we have now is varying degrees of busing around the province. Obviously this is a large province. In some rural areas in my own constituency I have people that are probably 40 to 45 minutes from their closest school. That's purely an element of distance. In the urban surroundings what we do is for anything over 2.4 kilometres we pay for the busing. I don't feel that putting in legislation limiting the time in busing would be advantageous at all in this province, because we have so many people that are so spread out and, quite frankly, are a long ways from existing schools. We are not going to be building schools for one student.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is this government reluctant to reduce busing time for students when we know that these hours could be better spent on learning rather than riding?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has an excellent point. Obviously, if these kids were in school for the extra hour, it would be much better for the student. But there are some physical realities in Alberta, and those physical realities are that the people are a long way from schools and we have to get them there. We are not going to go back to the 4 by 4 system, that was instituted in this province in the 1900s, where they said that there would be a school every four miles because that's how far a person could walk. We're not going to go back to that system. He has a good point about expanding learning opportunities. I would love to be able to do that, but the distances are there in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the Minister of Transportation. Does this minister support legislation to reduce the time students spend on buses and thereby increase the safety of our roads for all Albertans?

THE SPEAKER: We're on the subject of safety here, not the minister's personal opinion.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I would say that this province of Alberta enjoys some of the best roads in Canada, some of the best maintained roads and best side roads. I think that leads greatly to the safety of our most treasured possessions, and that's our children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Hotel Tax

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Presently the Alberta government collects about \$45 million in hotel taxes. It's a lot of dollars. My hotel/motel association in Whitecourt-St. Anne and their operators would like to see this tax eliminated. How was this addressed in this budget?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. NORRIS: You'd like me to stand up or speed it up?

THE SPEAKER: No. You can go with that, but we're going to have your estimates before us here, too, before too long.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The rationale for not addressing the tax in the recent budget was that the tax was indeed reviewed in the fall of 2000 by the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee. At that point the tax committee found that this hotel tax does not constitute an unfair tax.

My understanding of this issue that the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne raises is that the money that's being raised in the form of a tax should be more directed towards tourism spending. This government doesn't as a rule tie tax revenues to specific programs. However, we are listening and in the last redefinition of our budget found \$2 million more to put towards tourism spending. That brings the total tourism spending to \$18 million. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my department and I are very anxious to continue finding ways to promote the beautiful province that God's given us through tourism.

Thank you.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, leading to my last question: if the government is looking to review this, when will this review actually happen, and when will it be complete?

MR. NORRIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, part of the Alberta advantage of course is the fact that this government listens very closely to businesses and their input on taxes and how we deal with those taxes raised and spent. As such – and hon. members all know this – we have the lowest tax burden in Canada on businesses, and that's why they keep setting up here.

With regard to reducing business taxes, this government is committed to reducing business taxes over \$1 billion in the next four years, Mr. Speaker. It continues to be the best and the envy of Canada. With regards to this specific tax, my department and I are continually reviewing it and finding ways to make it more effective for the hotel industry and the people involved. I would very much like to work closely with the hon. member and others involved in the tourist industry to find the best way to deal with this tax and how to spend it, but I should let you know it's always in the scope for change, and we will look at it in due course in the next year.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Lottery Fund

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Speaker, this year gaming revenue is forecast to be approximately \$1 billion. As I understand it, gaming revenue is no longer allocated to the general revenue fund but, rather, is diverted to the Alberta lottery fund. Members of my constituency have asked me on numerous occasions how these funds are distributed to Alberta communities. My first question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister outline the types of projects and initiatives that are funded by the Alberta lottery fund?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, we could go on with this one for about an hour and a half. I would just like to point out that May 7 is day 5 and the hon. minister's estimates will be before the House. Please proceed.

MR. STEVENS: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, and I think I only need about three minutes in total.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is quite correct that the revenue from this source is approximately \$1 billion this year and that it in fact is not part of general revenue. As a result of recommendations coming out of the 1998 gaming summit, those funds go into the Alberta lottery fund, which does incredibly good work throughout this province.

There are essentially two ways in which the funds are distributed. One is through various foundations and programs; the other is through special projects and initiatives. Foundations and programs deal with such things as helping communities build hockey rinks and playgrounds and community facilities, and the special projects and initiatives do such things as infrastructure projects and construction of health and learning facilities. I think, for the hon. member and all Albertans, indeed, who would be interested in more detail on this, they should look at the Internet at www.gaming.gov.ab.ca.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. minister was so eloquent in his answer, I'll proceed to my final question. Can the minister please advise me and my constituents how these funds are allocated through the various boards?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Essentially, the funds are in large measure allocated through grant programs and foundations. I've indicated that there are a number of those within the Ministry of Gaming. There are two specific ones: the community facility enhancement program and some 88 community lottery boards. In Community Development there are a number of foundations: the Alberta Foundation for the Arts; the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; the Wild Rose Foundation. All of these programs do incredibly good work within our communities. I can tell the hon. member that in this upcoming year some \$128 million will be allocated to those foundations. Those foundations each have a mandate, and they're responsible for fulfilling the mandate and getting those funds out into the community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Regional Health Authority Boundaries

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Boundary changes to the health regions will result in the operations of the Mannville health care complex transferring to a different region. My question is: what assurances can the minister give the residents of Mannville and district that the level and delivery of service will not be compromised?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member and members of this Assembly and Albertans that the boundary changes that are being contemplated are minor. They will not affect where Albertans go for health services, nor will it affect the level of service that they receive. Of the 17 regional health authority regions, there will be small boundary changes to 10 areas. These changes will allow us to better align the regional health authority boundaries with those of municipal districts.

Now the specific area that the hon. member is referring to is part

of Minburn county. Minburn county was located in both the East Central and the Lakeland regional health authority regions, and under the new boundary all of Minburn, including Mannville, will be part of the Lakeland health region, Mr. Speaker.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My only supplemental question is also to the same minister. Would the minister confirm that the delivery of home care and ambulance services will remain comparable?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that home care and ambulance services to clients will not be changed as a result of the these minor boundary changes. The Department of Health and Wellness and the regional health authorities of East Central and Lakeland are working together to ensure that there is a smooth transition of the services, the finances, and the capital resources between the two regions.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, very shortly we'll call on the first of a number of members today to participate in Members' Statements.

May I say to all of you: congratulations; well done. My target today was to get all the members into the question period. We had 16 members participate. We had a total of 45 questions and answers in a time frame of 51 minutes, which is really very, very good. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

In 30 seconds from now we will go to Members' Statements, but in the interim can we revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the indulgence of the Assembly to allow me to introduce a young woman from my constituency, who I believe is here today on some business but also thought that she should come and check to see if the person she worked hard to elect was actually in the Assembly doing her job. I'd like to introduce Wendy Gladdish of Hanna, and I'd ask Wendy to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now I'll call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to participate.

Education

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to lend my voice to the celebratory chorus honouring the remarkable learning and teaching that is taking place across this province during Education Week and, indeed, every week in Alberta. I am proud to say, as I did many times during the education forums during the election, that education is both my profession and my passion. Education provides the environment in which we shape and nurture our societal values, study our past and explore our future potential, and learn to think, evaluate, and open our minds to the worlds of literature and creative writing, the visual and performing arts, and the joys of science, research, and mathematics.

I am proud to say that in the year 2001 in the province of Alberta education is alive and well. Indeed, it is solid and sound. Our schools present a world of opportunity for learning, provided by caring, competent, professional teachers to students of varying needs and capabilities in the intended environment of safe and caring schools.

This week I would like especially to acknowledge the provision of free education in two equally publicly funded school systems in this province. I am proud to be a member of the Alberta Legislature, in a government that identifies education as a priority. In partnership with our school boards I'm also proud to participate co-operatively in creating educational policies and opportunities for the students of our province.

Education is always worth celebrating, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Columbia's Inclusion in the Summit of the Americas

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today, May 1, to speak out against the warm reception that was shown to the President of Columbia at the recent Summit of the Americas in Quebec City. The Quebec Declaration, which was signed by all the heads of government of the 34 nations in attendance at the summit, celebrated the so-called democracy clause in which the leaders pledged not to do business with countries that fall away from the ideals of genuine democracy.

I believe democracy is the system that allows for the peaceful exchange of differing views. However, over 1,200 union leaders and union workers have been assassinated in Columbia over the past 10 years by right-wing paramilitary groups operating in the country. The issue is not one of determining which group, the paramilitary groups or the union members, has correct political ideology. Rather, the issue is one of fundamental importance to Canada and Canadians, the issue of human rights.

If the government of Columbia has only halfheartedly tried to protect union executives from harm, why then did Canada show such a warm reception to President Arango at the Summit of the Americas? On the assumption that the countries that comprise the Americas are truly dedicated to the democracy clause, it is clear that Columbia should be excluded until such time as it shows true respect for democracy by halting the violence perpetrated by the paramilitary groups against union executives and union members.

Now is the time for Canada to review its relationship with Columbia as well as any other country that shows a flagrant disregard for democracy and human rights.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Immigrants of Distinction Awards

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to update my hon. colleagues about an annual event that I attended last Friday evening. It's the gala night of the Immigrants of Distinction Awards 2001, organized by the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society and volunteers. The immigrants of distinction awards honour newcomers to Canada who have made outstanding contributions and achievements to Alberta and to Canada. There are a number of categories.

The organization diversity awards are given to the organizations that made outstanding achievements in implementing their human resource diversity initiatives. The individual awards are given to newcomer individuals who have made exceptional contributions to Alberta society in the areas of arts and culture, business, community

service, and professions. The youth scholarships are given to newcomer youths who have achieved excellence in academics, arts, sports, and the community.

Just to mention a few here. Dominika Boczula came from Poland, currently an outstanding high school student with academic honours, track and field records, and piano competition first prizes.

Shirley Ho came from Hong Kong, currently an excellent high school student overcoming an English language barrier to become the chairperson of the Calgary Stampede youth speech and debate tournament.

Jung-Mee Hwang came from Korea, currently a high school student with top honours in mathematics, the lead clarinet player in the youth orchestra, an award winner in badminton, skating, and martial arts.

Danijel Margetic came from Croatia, arrived in Canada in his late teens, overcame an English language barrier in high school and graduated in drama and psychology at the University of Calgary on the dean's list and planning for a career in movie production.

Sheila Ung came from wartorn Cambodia, currently a biochemistry researcher on the dean's list and with the goal to become a pediatric doctor. She was instrumental in the Minds in Motion, a summer science camp for children locally and nationally.

I thank the organizers for the opportunity of recognizing these outstanding immigrants.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Shawna Wallace

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring attention to an announcement that was made on Monday naming Shawna Wallace, an 18-year-old high school student from Hanna and member of the Byemoor Beef 4-H club, as the 2001 winner of the Premier's award. This is the highest honour for the Alberta 4-H program, and Shawna is the 38th Premier's award recipient. She was selected out of 131 candidates during the annual 4-H selections program in Olds on April 27 to 30, 2001, where delegates took part in activities designed to improve leadership and life skills.

In addition to receiving the Premier's award, as well as meeting the Premier, Shawna Wallace becomes a 4-H ambassador. Shawna's role will be to promote the 4-H along with 13 other 4-H ambassadors who were chosen at selections for their leadership, communication, and personal development skills for which Alberta's 4-H program is recognized.

2:50

I had the pleasure of meeting Shawna Wallace and the other ambassadors and all the other outstanding young 4-H leaders at the 4-H selections program in Olds over the weekend, and I have to say that I was very impressed with their enthusiasm and their commitment not only to the Alberta 4-H program but also to the agricultural and rural communities of this province. They will be tomorrow's agricultural and agrifood industry leaders, and I'm pleased that this government supports 4-H in this province.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 204 Medicare Protection Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act.

This bill represents a real health care protection legislation in sharp contrast to the government's Bill 11, which first and foremost is a blueprint for further privatization of our publicly funded and publicly administered health care system.

About a year ago I made a decision to leave civic politics and enter provincial politics. The number one reason I made this decision was because of my deep concern about the Conservative government's plan to further privatize Alberta's health care system.

When I was running during the Edmonton-Highlands by-election last June, I promised my constituents that at the first available opportunity I would introduce a bill in this Assembly to repeal Bill 11 and replace it with legislation that truly protects medicare and safeguards our public health care system. Today I am keeping that promise to my constituents. Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act, does far more than just repeal Bill 11. It replaces Bill 11 with a set of provisions designed to strengthen rather than erode the public health care system so cherished by Albertans.

Second reading involves a debate about the intent of a bill as well as debate on its major provisions. The intent of Bill 204 is clearly expressed in its preamble. It states that

the primary objective of health care policy . . . is to promote, protect and restore the physical and mental well-being of Alberta . . . through a public health care system.

The preamble enshrines the five principles of the Canada Health Act in provincial legislation. The Canada Health Act sets out accessibility, universality, portability, comprehensiveness, and public administration as the principles that guarantee access to medically necessary health care services without financial or other barriers.

Now, government members may say: well, the principles of the Canada Health Act are also enshrined in the preamble to Bill 11. While that is true, in addition to being in the preamble of Bill 204, the principles of the Canada Health Act are also contained in section 2 of the text of the bill. Because these principles are contained in the bill proper, not only in the preamble, they carry much more weight than they do in the government's bill.

Bill 204 is based on the premise that when patients are denied access to necessary health services on a timely basis, the credibility of the public health care system is undermined. There is no question that there is strong support among Canadians and among Albertans for a single-tier public health care system that serves everyone, rich and poor alike. It is only when waiting times for surgery or for diagnostic procedures like MRIs become unacceptably long that support grows for the development of a parallel two-tier system, where people with money can jump the queue and pay privately for medically necessary health services. If the guarantee of access to health care services without financial barriers is to have any meaning, we also have to be able to guarantee timely access to those services. That is exactly what Bill 204 does.

The major provision of the bill contained in section 2 sets out the rights of Albertans "to receive publicly funded and high quality health care services" in a timely manner and without financial barriers. It sets out the rights of Albertans to receive these services in a public health care system that "is accessible, universal, comprehensive, portable, and publicly administered." Moreover, it "recognises that a provider of health care services is a valued member of a multidisciplinary team." Finally, it requires that a patient bill of rights be posted in conspicuous locations in hospitals, other health care facilities, and the offices of health professionals.

Setting out in legislation a patient bill of rights to ensure access to medically necessary services is not in itself enough. Mechanisms need to be established that will ensure that the public health care

system can actually deliver on the commitments made in the patient bill of rights.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The first step would be to establish an officer of this Legislature called the health care services commissioner. The duties of the health care services commissioner would include making recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on standards required to ensure timely access to medically necessary diagnostic procedures like MRIs and CT scans, timely access to medically necessary surgery and to cancer treatment, timely access to referrals, to medical specialists, timely access to emergency services and for admission into hospital. Finally, standards would be developed to ensure timely access to long-term care and to home care.

Bill 204 also makes provision for the health care services commissioner to review on an ongoing basis whether standards for timely access need to be developed for other medically necessary health services. The commissioner would also be mandated to consult with a wide range of stakeholders on the development of these standards, including health professionals, health care unions, patients, seniors, consumer groups, regional health authorities, government departments, and other levels of government. The commissioner as an officer of this Legislature would also be empowered to investigate and resolve complaints from patients who believe that they have been denied timely access to the medically necessary health care services set out in this bill.

Bill 204 also provides for the establishment of an all-party standing committee of this Legislature called the select special committee on health and wellness. This all-party committee would work with the health care commissioner to make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly on establishing waiting time targets for health care services. At that point, it would be up to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and to the parties represented therein to pass these standards for timely access to health care services into law. I anticipate that some government members may say: well, developing standards for timely access to health care services is all well and good, but how much is it going to cost?

It is for this very reason that Bill 204 provides for consultation with health stakeholders to develop these standards. The Canadian health care system provides priority access to those patients who are most critically ill or injured. In other words, someone facing a life-threatening illness or injury is given priority in diagnosis or treatment over someone who can reasonably wait without damage to their life and well-being.

It is not the intent of this legislation to base the waiting time standards solely on the demand of the patient. However, I think we're all too familiar with situations where patients have had unacceptably long waiting times. A frail, elderly senior having to wait a year or more for a hip replacement is simply too long. An injured worker having to wait six or more months for an appointment with a specialist and then going another six months for surgery is simply too long. These are real-life examples, Mr. Speaker.

To its credit the government has, especially over the past year, reinvested moneys in the health care system to address these unacceptably long waiting times. The government and regional health authorities are beginning to measure how long patients are being kept waiting for important medical procedures. What Bill 204 does is introduce more accountability into the system by making sure that the buck stops with us as elected legislators.

Will introducing a patient bill of rights cost some additional money beyond what the government has already committed in this year's budget? It may, but we also have to ask ourselves: what is the

cost to the government of failing to reduce waiting times to a reasonable level? What is the cost to society and to government when an injured Albertan is forced to draw WCB benefits or rely on social assistance or unemployment benefits simply because he or she has had to wait an unacceptably long time for medical treatment?

The Canadian Arthritis Society released a study today reporting that the economic cost to Canadian society for the delays in orthopedic surgery alone was \$17.9 billion. Ensuring timely access to diagnosis and treatment may cost a few more dollars at the front end, but it could save all of us money in the long run.

3:00

Bill 204 also strengthens the public health care system in a number of other ways. Bill 204 would ban queue-jumping once and for all. It would base priority in medical diagnosis and treatment on the health needs of the patient, not on the size of their pocketbook. Unlike the government's Bill 11, which sets out a complicated process whereby patients can be required to pay out of pocket for so-called enhanced goods and services, Bill 204 would simply not allow these direct patient charges.

Bill 204 would require all medically necessary health care services that require an overnight stay to be performed in a hospital operated on a nonprofit basis. Unlike the government's Bill 11, which is a blueprint for the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals in this province, our Bill 204 shuts that door completely.

As a result of this Conservative government's pro privatization bias, there are over 50 private, for-profit surgical clinics operating in Alberta. These facilities are accredited by the province's College of Physicians and Surgeons under the Medical Profession Act. Many of them have contracts that give them access to public funds through regional health authorities. Bill 204 would not allow any new contracts between regional health authorities and these private, for-profit clinics. Bill 204 would give existing private clinics two years to reincorporate as legal nonprofits if they wished to continue receiving public funds. Existing private clinics that do not receive public funds and provide only nonmedicare services would not be affected by any of these changes.

Bill 204 contains similar provisions for nursing homes that contract with regional health authorities. It would give the existing nursing homes operated for profit two years to reincorporate as legal nonprofits if they wished to continue receiving public funds.

The distinction between public health facilities operating on a for-profit basis and those operating on a nonprofit basis is an important one. For many years in this province we've had hospitals operated by Catholic organizations. We've had nursing homes operated by Lutherans and other voluntary groups. These voluntary nonprofits operate for much the same reason as public health care facilities. They operate to serve a need, not to make a profit for a shareholder.

There are many sound reasons why we need to put a brake on the commercialization of our public health care system. The evidence is overwhelming that using for-profit corporations to deliver public health care services costs more and delivers less. Conflicts of interest between duties to patients and duties to the bottom line inevitably arise. International trade agreements like NAFTA and the WTO mean we will have to provide the same access to foreign health care corporations as we do to Canadian ones. We can and must put a stop to the creeping privatization of our health care system and focus on strengthening the capacity of the public system to ensure timely access to medically necessary health care. It can be done, Mr. Speaker.

I note that the government of Manitoba recently announced that it was buying the Pan Am clinic and making it part of the public system. The Pan Am clinic does a wide range of day surgeries and

was used by this Conservative government as an example of privatization elsewhere in Canada during the Bill 11 debate. If other governments recognize the folly of going further down the road of health care privatization, why can't this government?

Finally, Bill 204 would also require any contracts between the public system and nonprofit health care facilities to be made public on the same basis as they are in Bill 11.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 provides real and meaningful protection to the public health care system, unlike Bill 11, which is a blueprint for gradual privatization. I look forward to the debate on this important bill and urge members on all sides of the House to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak against Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act. The government has a long-term vision for health care in the province of Alberta. We call it the six-point plan. On March 12 of this year this government went to the people of Alberta and asked them if they shared the vision. The answer from Albertans was a resounding yes.

Mr. Speaker, I must speak against Bill 204, as it would undermine this vision for health care and the direction this government is pursuing. Under our six-point plan for health we have established firm guidelines and rules designed to protect Alberta's publicly funded health care system. This six-point plan for health care clearly states the government's desire to improve access to and enhance the quality of publicly funded health services in the province of Alberta.

The Health Care Protection Act is an integral part of the government's plan for health care. It put into place firm rules and regulations that will provide a public health care system that is efficient and responsive to the needs of all Albertans, and this includes reducing waiting times. Its regulations were developed after considerable consultation with organizations representing doctors, nurses, health authorities, and other concerned parties.

Private facilities have long been a fixture of health care in this province, and the Health Care Protection Act clearly lays out rules and regulations for them. Before the introduction of the act there were 51 private health care facilities that we had no control over in this province, and now, Mr. Speaker, they are regulated.

The act has also made the contract procedure for all private health care facilities open and transparent. Further facilities wanting to provide insured health services can do so only under contract with a regional health authority, and the health authorities have assured this government they have no plans to seek a contract for overnight stays. Also, all major surgery must continue to be done in a hospital, and the Health Care Protection Act expressly prohibits private hospitals. Therefore, only nonmajor surgery needing more than 12 hours of postoperative care can be done in a private facility offering overnight stays.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta recently approved the standards for facilities wishing to offer surgical procedures that require an overnight stay. The college had the authority to set these standards at any time but deferred until the Health Care Protection Act was in place to restrict and control private facilities in Alberta. The most important restriction requires that a surgical facility achieve both college accreditation and ministerial approval before it can operate. Mr. Speaker, neither the college nor the department has received an application for accreditation.

Bill 204 seeks to put in place a health care services commissioner to recommend the establishment of waiting-time targets for health

care service. Mr. Speaker, this government has taken firm action on waiting times. Just one example is that in 2000 the number of heart surgeries performed in Alberta actually exceeded the number of people waiting for heart surgery. In fact, the demand for open-heart surgery in Alberta increased by 25 percent while the waiting list decreased by 14 percent. This government has accomplished this feat by providing increased funding to enhance service levels in heart surgery. This has resulted in more open beds and in the recruitment and training of additional cardiac staff.

Another example of this government's decisive action on waiting times is the availability of MRI scans in the province. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that waiting lists for MRI scans in Alberta are steadily declining. The number of MRI scans being performed is now surpassing the number of people waiting to have MRIs. Just this month the government set a clear target rate for MRI scans of 24 scans per thousand population. This will be the highest rate in the country and is more than double Alberta's '99-2000 scan rate of 10.4 per thousand. Seven previously announced MRIs will be installed this year, and this will bring the number of MRI machines in Alberta to 15, more than double the number of machines in operation last year. That means that Alberta will have the highest MRI capacity in Canada.

This government has recognized the value of incorporating cutting-edge medical technologies in our public health system and is committed to making them accessible for the benefit of all Albertans. The government of Alberta is also taking action to decrease waiting times for hip and joint replacements. As our population ages and as surgical procedures and quality of artificial joints improve, there has been a major growth in the demand for these surgeries. This government has responded and made additional funding available to increase the number of replacement surgeries available to Albertans.

3:10

We need to optimize the value Albertans receive from our health care system. This government is committed to making every dollar spent on health care work towards an effective and efficient public health care system. Instead of spending our health care money on matters this government is already addressing, we should be spending it on new and innovative programs to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Bill 204 also calls for the creation of an all-party committee on health. This is unnecessary. The government of Alberta already has a number of committees made up of health care experts to examine the various elements of our provincial health care system. The standing policy committee on health and community living allows Albertans to provide specific input into health policies, programs, and legislation. This committee meets with health care professionals and organizations to hear their ideas on the health system. The Premier's Advisory Council on Health is comprised of leading health policy experts representing physicians, the nursing profession, and other key sectors. This council provides strategic advice on the preservation and future enhancement of quality health care services for Alberta and on the continuing sustainability of the publicly funded and administered health system.

Mr. Speaker, there is also the Health Information Standards Committee for Alberta, that oversees and co-ordinates the development and dissemination of approved health information data and technology standards within Alberta. The committee ensures that these standards align with approved provincial reporting standards as well as national and international standards.

The newest health committee that assists our government is the Alberta MRI Review Committee. It was established to build on the

regional health authorities' current role in delivering MRI services. The committee will appoint physician specialists to review cases of privately purchased MRIs and, based on medical information and urgency, will determine if reimbursement is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, these various committees were established to provide the government with a wide range of Albertans' concerns, interests, and opinions. Listening to these concerns helps chart the course for our public health care system.

I feel it's important to mention that the federal government has recently announced the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. Former Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow will head up the commission of inquiry. Mr. Romanow's commission will make recommendations on the sustainability of a publicly funded health care system that will balance investments in prevention and health maintenance with those directed to care and treatment.

Mr. Speaker, every government in this country is concerned with health care, especially this one. Alberta already has the committees necessary to provide our government with expert advice and insight. Another committee as recommended in Bill 204 is unnecessary.

As announced last week in the budget speech, Mr. Speaker, the government is substantially increasing the amount of money allotted to our health care system. Funding will be increased by 13.5 percent this year, and over the next three years it will be up a total of 28 percent. Within three years this government will be committing 35 percent of total spending to our public health care system. This means more funding for all elements of the system and will certainly reduce waiting times.

But, Mr. Speaker, improving our health care system is not dependent only on the money that is put into the system but on the people who provide the services. That is why funding has also been increased to our postsecondary institutions, and that means more qualified men and women to fill the ranks of our health care system.

Mr. Speaker, we have one of the best health care systems in Canada. This government has made a commitment to Alberta's health care system that will not waver. Bill 204 would undermine that commitment, and I urge the members of this Assembly to vote against it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: May we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to take this opportunity to introduce to you a group of very special young people from the city of Medicine Hat. You know, it's not very often that I get to introduce students who venture all the way up to Edmonton from Medicine Hat, but to have an opportunity to introduce such a special group as the Crescent Heights high school band is a real pleasure for me. This band has a reputation throughout the community and, in fact, throughout the province as being an award-winning band. I understand that they're up here in Edmonton to compete in some Education Week festivities, and I wish them all the best. I'll be meeting with them shortly to have pictures taken and talk with them all, but I'm just so pleased that they're able to join us here in the Legislature this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to indicate that 81 students have joined

us today along with teachers Mr. Bill Wahl, who is the head band instructor at Crescent Heights high school, Mrs. Joanne Jensen, Mrs. Shirley Woodward, and Mr. Andrew Strange. I can see a number of them seated in the public gallery. I'm not sure if they are all there or if some are in the members' gallery. I would ask that they all rise and receive warm recognition from all members of the Assembly.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 204
Medicare Protection Act
(*continued*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to speak to Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act. I am certainly a supporter of this bill and I think a supporter based on a tremendous amount of thought, reading, and consideration. I am confident that there will be widespread support for a bill of this nature across Alberta. I've certainly traveled from corner to corner to corner of this province speaking on these kinds of issues, and I know that Albertans hold a public medicare system close to their hearts and want to see it truly protected, not hollowed out. I think this bill would go a long way to achieving that.

There is extensive literature, truly thousands of academic papers written on health economics from around the world. I have at various times in my career spent many hours studying dozens and dozens of these. I've published in the area. One of the things I can say with complete confidence is that there is simply no evidence to support for-profit delivery of health care. Study after study from the United States, Canada, Singapore, Great Britain, and many other countries in the world suggests that we must go as far as we can to protect a public medicare system in Canada.

As a person with a business degree I am quite comfortable with markets. I support markets. I am comfortable with free enterprise. The evidence is clear that in many cases markets and free enterprise work very well. They can be efficient; they can be creative; they can be productive. There are countless examples of that in our lives every day.

At the same time, the evidence is also very clear that markets have their limits. There are a number of areas in which the evidence is simply overwhelming that markets don't work; for example, in health care. Trying to run the health care system through the markets is a profound mistake. We should be able to learn from the lessons of other countries and not make these mistakes. Again, I think Bill 204 would go a long distance to pre-empting or preventing those mistakes.

If we do as I believe will be done over the next four years under this government and supply more and more of our health services through private, for-profit clinics, we will see higher costs, we will see longer waiting lists, we will see reduced efficiencies, and we will see soaring corporate profits, profits that will be taken out of resources that otherwise could go to patient care.

3:20

Higher costs: why would we see higher costs? Well, we would see higher costs because a typical for-profit health corporation is looking for growth in returns annually of 15 percent to 20 percent a year. If they aren't achieving that kind of growth, their management will be replaced. [interjection] That routinely happens, and

anybody who follows the market with care and intelligence will understand that. [interjections] If we incorporate that kind of approach into our public health care budgets, we're going to simply lose control of our expenditures.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, entering into debate is part of what this Chamber is all about, and I'll put your name down so that when the next opportunity arises, you may address the thing. Right now we have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the recent column in the newspaper on a series of FOIP requests for information behind Bill 11 revealed how little evidence there was to support the provincial government's campaign. It was virtually nonexistent. On the other hand, there are truly bookshelves and libraries full of material that would oppose increasing the for-profit role in health care. I can also tell you that virtually any credible health economist would support this same position, and I expect that the great majority of them would support this bill.

Under the Canada Health Act we have developed in Canada an enviable medicare system. The kind of public panic that is being generated about out-of-control costs is largely unjustified. Despite claims by this government that health care spending was soaring out of control in the later 1980s and the early 1990s, the evidence, good evidence, showed quite the opposite. Once adjustments were made for inflation and population growth, health care spending in Alberta was actually flat from 1987 through 1993. There was no out-of-control health care spending crisis in Alberta through that period.

I will also address a couple of concerns raised by the hon. member's response to the bill. The fact that the number of procedures conducted in the health care system exceeds the number of people waiting for that procedure on the waiting lists strikes me as virtually irrelevant. I am certainly hoping that there are fewer people on the waiting list for appendectomies than there have been appendectomies performed this year, for example. There's, I believe, a breakdown in logic there.

I would also point out that the credibility of the government's health protection act is extremely low, and public suspicion is, I think, justifiably high. Again, repealing that act, I think, is a very important step in the right direction. It's something that, in fact, the Liberals have been committed to for a number of years, as I'm sure the hon. member will agree.

I would also point out that the contracting process for for-profit health care delivery is seriously compromised, indeed I would say profoundly compromised in a number of the regional health authorities because of conflicts of interest that simply would not be accepted in other areas of the public sector. So, for example, we have senior officials on the payroll of the Calgary regional health authority who are also major shareholders in for-profit companies that contract to that regional health authority.

We don't allow our senior public servants in other departments to be in those kinds of conflicts of interest. We don't allow senior members of the staff of the Department of Transportation to oversee contracts that go to their family members. We should not allow that to occur in our regional health authorities. As long as it does occur, there are serious, serious questions about the contracting process under which for-profit contracts are let in the regional health authorities.

With all of that said, I think there are a number of angles to Bill 204 that should be spoken for. The patient bill of rights is certainly worth very serious attention. The creation of the particular commissioner for public health is an excellent idea. The incorporating of the principles of the Canada Health Act into the active clauses of the

act is an excellent idea, and as I've indicated a number of times, repealing the Health Care Protection Act that's currently enacted is urgent and important.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take leave. Thanks.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to participate in debate at second reading on private member's Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act, at this time. I'm looking forward because I'm sure this is going to pass and go into committee and I can have dialogue with the author of this bill, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, regarding some friendly amendments.

It's a good piece of legislation. If imitation is a fine form of flattery, then the hon. member certainly has been reading some of the Liberal proposals from the past, in particular our 1998 health care bill of rights. We certainly had the idea of having an independent health ombudsman.

I commend the hon. member, after the debate that occurred on Bill 11 last year, for bringing this forward. I can see a role for this health care services commissioner already. After this bill becomes law, the first job of the health care services commissioner would be to appear before Mr. Romanow, the distinguished former Premier of Saskatchewan, who is going to go across the country and have a close look at the public health care delivery system in this country.

Now, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North talked about there being no need to worry. I believe the description was: there are going to be no private hospitals in Bill 11. But I would like at this time to take the opportunity to remind the hon. member, Mr. Speaker, that private hospitals can exist by another name. We look at the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre. Certainly we know that that's a hospital. The Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, also is a hospital. So just because the name hospital is not on a building does not mean there aren't going to be overnight stays and it's not going to be a private, for-profit hospital. Or, as I said yesterday, many individuals I had the pleasure of getting to know during the Bill 11 debate said about the HMOs: hand money over before you get health care. That's what they affectionately called the HMOs: hand money over.

We also had the Cambie centre in B.C. The Cambie centre in B.C. is certainly not a hospital. There's no name on it, but it's a hospital and has overnight stays. It was started by the New Democratic Party in the last 10 years. So the New Democrats are not as innocent in all this as they would like to maintain. They had been advocating private hospitals in B.C. This is the reality.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but the time allocated for this item of business on this day has expired.

3:30

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Second Language Education

501. Mr. Johnson moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to make the learning of a second language a compulsory component of a high school diploma by the year 2006 and to increase the opportunities for Alberta students to participate in national and international student exchange programs with a second language component.

[Adjourned debate April 24: Dr. Massey]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in support of Motion 501 sponsored by my colleague from Wetaskiwin-Camrose, because this motion has the potential to lead to significant change and improve the outcomes for our already good education system and all for the benefit of future generations.

Mr. Speaker, I've often said in this House that the difference between politicians and statesmen is that politicians do things for the next election, but statesmen do things for the next generation. I believe this motion is one of those that, if accepted, has the benefits for the next generation in mind.

Mr. Speaker, we're all familiar with the concept of globalization and what it's doing to the global economy. Every time we open a newspaper or turn on the television news, we see that word "globalization," and we become more aware that a growing number of nations are now preparing to become a part of the global system of commerce. The growing sophistication of technology, communications via the Net, and transportation systems make it easier and accelerate globalization trends.

Since our schools and universities must prepare the next generation of Albertans to succeed in this new environment, Mr. Speaker, it is our responsibility, then, as government to create the conditions that will provide our learning institutions with the mandate and tools to prepare our students as well as they can be prepared. The new globalization environment requires our students to be as prepared as possible not only for the challenges of the economy but, more importantly, for the new human relationships that must now effectively deal with many more different cultures and languages.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 501 speaks directly to the issue of ensuring our students are prepared for the challenges of today and tomorrow. Motion 501 urges the government to make "a second language a compulsory component of a high school diploma" within five years and seeks to also "increase the opportunities for Alberta students to participate in national and international" language exchange programs. Both of these objectives could produce measurable advantages for future generations for both our students and the province.

Mr. Speaker, having the opportunity to travel abroad and across Canada can have a profound impact on the shaping of a young mind and soul by involving our students in learning what is essential in human relationship building. A student fortunate enough to learn in a foreign learning system receives not only the benefits of an alternate form of education, but they experience firsthand and absorb the historical richness of diverse cultures, and that can't help but change you as a young adult. The benefits of such an experience would not only be invaluable to the student but also to the people of Alberta.

I have met countless foreign businesspeople being introduced to our environment and culture by exchange students who had begun to forge that relationship while learning abroad. Now, in the fullness of time those relationships are introducing potential foreign investors to the logic and good sense of investing in Alberta and its people. New agreements on tariffs and trades also help to foster these new relationships. So by providing our students this exceptional opportunity, Alberta also has a golden opportunity. Our province sends out young, bright emissaries ready to show that Albertans do excel in any environment anywhere in the world because of their ability to make lasting and meaningful human relationships with any culture.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Our province already enjoys international exchange agreements with well-established economies such as Germany, Japan, and Spain, and we are currently finalizing an agreement with Mexico. Well, that's a fine start, Mr. Speaker, but Alberta needs to expand its range of nations as their economies expand to global proportions. Our exchange programs should be taking us to new economic regions in Asia such as South Korea and Hong Kong and many others. We should also be expanding our contacts with emerging South American economies like Brazil and Argentina and other developing economies like India. It is these economies that will further develop and expand the fastest in the years to come.

However, the advantage goes both ways. As our students introduce us around the world, Alberta gains the advantage of learning from visiting students as well. We can gain valuable insight into how to deal with people with different nationalities, ethnicity, language, and culture, by helping them to succeed and learn in our province. What a tremendous advantage to a young Albertan, to a young mind a second language would be, and what a valuable future asset to Albertans.

But those are only a few of the reasons why I urge this Assembly to seriously consider approving this motion. Life is about relationships. Business is about relationships too, and these relationships are often very different in other countries. Success is largely dependent on being able to appreciate the difference in culture and, of course, understanding the language but, more importantly, bridging the gaps with lasting human relationships.

Mr. Speaker, for our province to keep up with the ever expanding global economy, we must develop Albertans who are fluent in several languages. We only have to look at the European community to realize that they currently foster and therefore enjoy a tremendous advantage because it's not unusual for them to function in four or five languages or more.

Sending our students abroad is important for Alberta, but we must also promote the benefits of learning a second language in our own backyard and through our education facilities. In the mid-90s 32.5 percent of our high school graduates had completed a 30-level second language course. Sadly, by the end of the '90s only 23 percent of our high school graduates could boast a 30-level second language. Now, this isn't moving in the right direction. It's not for the lack of opportunity or variety that there is this decline. Many of our high schools offer second language courses in several languages other than our two official languages. In fact, Alberta can offer second language instruction in 15 other tongues, ranging from Arabic to Polish, but let's provide our schools with the tools and the mandate to expand this. Let's make a globally relevant second language program compulsory for our high school graduates. We should approve Motion 501 and help make our already good education system even more of a success story.

Mr. Speaker, last October the city of Edmonton hosted an international symposium called Languages: Passport for the Millenium. Delegates from education, business, and the political arena all met to discuss the impact of second-language instruction on both students and society. To paraphrase the outcome, one report showed that students fluent in two languages displayed better measures of both verbal and nonverbal intelligence and that these children also had more diversified cognitive abilities. Others demonstrated that bilingual children had more effective problem-solving abilities than unilingual children. As well, these bilingual children had higher standardized test scores in mathematics, reading, and language arts.

So you sort of have to ask the question: why do they seem to do so much better? The reason, in my view, is that they understand the nuances of words and their meanings; in other words, comprehen-

sion, pure and simple. Words in any language have a history. They have a culture and in many ways are the souls of a nation. When you understand the emotion of the word, you have been changed forever in terms of how you view that world, because you now understand why that word is what it is because of the contribution of culture and history.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, I took Latin in high school, and I absolutely hated it. But why is Latin still the most precise language in the world? In my view, it's because of the myriad of conjugations and declinations that add precision to the picture the word transmits. Latin is still considered the legal language because of its precision. So when you understand the emotion the word conveys, you get the picture.

Through words you express your creative power. It is through words that humans manifest everything and clarify their intent. So, Mr. Speaker, the benefits of second-language instruction are not just economic or even academic, but more importantly they give the student the ability to develop cross-cultural awareness, the understanding required to build meaningful, lifelong human relationship skills. These students are generally able to adapt more effectively to different cultural settings and show greater cross-cultural sensitivity than their one-language counterparts. If everything in life revolves around relationships, then why not give the leaders of tomorrow, the principal citizens of the new global economy, the requisite skills to build these human relationships in the global village?

Mr. Speaker, to paraphrase and use perhaps a personal experience that I had to make a point, I recall so vividly the amazement I felt when visiting St. Peter's in Rome. I was absorbing and marveling at the richness and beauty of the paintings above many of the side altars, but as I came closer, I realized that they weren't paintings at all. They were mosaics with tens of thousands of painstakingly selected and shaped minute pieces of marble, each nuance in colour and texture playing their own small part to achieve the overall glory of the masterpiece. While I believe that in human beings each additional experience in culture and language contributes its own small part to the mosaic of life, enriching, understanding, and respect for the historical context of other cultures, languages, arts, and the soul of nations, the bottom line results in human relationships that make life more meaningful, more productive, more fun, more forgiving, and more peaceful.

So let's support this motion for the sake of our future masterpieces, our children. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of Motion 501, which encourages the learning certainly of a second language and indeed perhaps even a third and a fourth for our high school students and then suggests that they put that learning into practice by engaging in some national or international exchange programs.

It is my belief that because we live in an officially bilingual country and it is my experience that because we live in a multilingual, multicultural community, it is very important for us to put into the curriculum structure of our high school programs one that encourages the learning of a second language. There are many people in this Assembly who have talents that I admire and certainly, I'd almost say, that I envy. Many of the Members of the Legislative Assembly here gathered can speak not only one but two and perhaps three or four or as many as five languages. This is something that they learned perhaps at home, but no doubt they also learned them in the schools which they attended.

I believe that of course language is certainly the way that we communicate and communicate extremely well. If we have the ability to communicate and reach out to another person in their language if it is other than ours, we breach and we reach over a chasm or an area that might perhaps precipitate some enhanced understanding. Learning a second language, I also know, enhances the growth of the brain muscle. It also teaches us to use our tongue in different ways for the benefit of communication and exchanges in friendship. Communication creates not only friendship, but it also creates commerce.

So those students in our schools and particularly in our high schools I do believe should experience the learning of a second language. I would hope that they have learned one of those languages initially in elementary school, at least been introduced to them. But when it comes to high school learning and curriculum, for them to be compelled, as the motion says, to a compulsory course or courses in a second language – it doesn't have to be the other official language; it can be any language – I think is only providing for them an enrichment and a valuable lesson that they will use for the rest of their lives.

My colleague who spoke previously indicated, too, that learning a second language, learning a language other than our mother tongue, helps us to increase our brain power, our brain activity. Studies have indeed shown that problem-solving comes more easily and becomes greater and more successful for those students who exercise their minds in other disciplines, one of them being, of course, learning another language.

A second language is a tool for learning, a tool for learning much more, not only for learning the beauty and the joy of the poetry of another culture in another language, but it also provides a tool for our students and for anyone who can speak another language to be able to communicate with others in their business dealings, in their cultural exchanges, and certainly in their own circumstances, which is what the second part of this motion encourages, and that is an exchange program.

To learn a second language and I daresay to be compelled to learn that second language in our high schools will increase students' appreciation of other languages, of other nations, and of other peoples. For they say – and I know it's true, because our daughter in particular, who learned one language taught by the father of one of our representatives sitting at the Clerk's table here, has learned a second language, but in so doing in that school also was introduced to a third language. She has gone on to use that language in her business experience and certainly found that learning a third language is easy compared to learning the second language and certainly compared to learning the first.

So I would say that if we are to support this Motion 501 and urge the government to make it compulsory for high school students to learn a second language in a course provided to them in the curriculum of high school, we are doing them and their futures a favour. We are planning and providing for their opportunity to grow, to grow personally, to grow in their business, and certainly to grow in the international and global milieu in which we live and do our commerce. It provides an opportunity, too, for our students to be interconnected to each other, because when we can speak to someone else in their language, which perhaps isn't our mother tongue, we can understand them better, and I hope and truly believe that we can appreciate them better as well.

So I do want to urge, Mr. Speaker, everyone in this Assembly to support this motion. Not only is it an opportunity for our students to be provided with this additional skill of knowing a second language, but it's an opportunity for them to move forward in all that they wish to explore. I would like to add, too, that being a former Latin

teacher – and I understand that your Latin teacher, my member to the right, was obviously not impressive on you. It is a dead language. In fact, my students used to always change the cover of the book, which was called *Living Latin*, to Dead Latin. And it is a dead language – it's not something that is used – but it is the basis of understanding the construction and the grammar of many of our Romance languages.

There has been the provision, the compulsory provision, in the past in our high school curriculum that students should study a second language, but unfortunately we have lost that. But because we had it before and I feel that it was to the advantage of high school students, I would like to encourage everyone in this Assembly to agree to and to vote for this Motion 501. It will do nothing but encourage the learning and enhance the learning capabilities of students in high school.

I appreciate the efforts of the sponsor of this bill, and I do again encourage everyone to support this bill. Thank you.

3:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It certainly is an honour to be here today to be able to speak to this motion. At the outset I'd like to say that the Department of Learning and myself in particular as Minister of Learning are both in favour of this motion, and I think it's something we should move strongly towards.

What this motion is asking us to do is take a look at making a second language compulsory. Mr. Speaker, what I believe we need to do is sit back and ask the question: well, why would the hon. member bring this motion forward? I think you saw the answer today sitting in the Speaker's gallery, in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, where we saw the minister of education from Brazil, we saw the minister of education from Australia. What this shows us is that education, that learning, that people in general are a very globalized society today. We are no longer bound by the constraints of the boundaries of Alberta, the boundaries of North America. What we're seeing is a huge amount of traffic that flows back and forth between different countries around the world.

I'm a true believer that if a child, if an adult learns a second language, the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth languages will come that much easier. I truly believe that with this motion making a second language mandatory, it will do nothing but help our students in the long run.

A Japanese gentleman told me, if I can beg time to say this, in response to questions that were going around – they were probably very similar to questions that were in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker – that the language of the computer is English. The language of commerce, a lot of people will say, is English. The Japanese gentleman told me that the language of commerce is not English; the language of commerce is the language of the customer. I believe that to be extremely true in that when you're communicating with the customer, when you're communicating for an economic advantage, it helps significantly if you don't go through interpreters, if you are able to communicate directly one on one.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you know yourself, having been able to speak more than one language, the ability, the one-upmanship it gives an economy if you're able to communicate with your customer in the language of that customer. I truly believe that this will be a huge advantage to us.

Mr. Speaker, we have an excellent school system in Alberta in all but one area, and the area that I'm not happy with, the area that I'm not pleased with when it comes to education in the K to 12 system is the number of foreign languages and the number of students that

are taking foreign languages. We're actually seeing the number drop off. I believe that that's truly a mistake, and I believe that this motion by the hon. member would do a lot to rectify that situation.

What he states in here is that he's making a second language compulsory for a high school diploma. I would even go one step further, Mr. Speaker. I would say that at some time in the future second languages should be compulsory throughout the school system, and at some point in the future I will guarantee that that will occur. It may not be within the next five years as in this motion, but I will guarantee that will occur.

Mr. Speaker, the second part of the motion was what I just came from, which is to encourage Alberta students, to encourage Alberta teachers to have more international exchanges. The hon. member would be pleased to know that I just arranged with the minister from Australia for more exchanges to take place between Australia and Canada. Presently we only have four teacher exchanges between New South Wales and Alberta. We hope to expand that, and it was his wish as well that we do expand that, that we do push the globalization.

Mr. Speaker, the average postsecondary institution in Alberta today is in 22 different countries. I will be going over to Beijing in August or September of this year, where the Medicine Hat College in the southeast corner of this province, a very small college of 2,000 people, is opening a school in Beijing. This speaks to the globalization that is occurring within our economy, and it speaks to the absolute need that our students have to have a second language and potentially a third or fourth. Are we talking about French? That's another question that comes up because people say: well, gee, you know, I took French in school, and I never use it anymore. No, we're not talking French. We're talking a second language, period. It could be French. It could be Spanish. It could be Greek. It could be Chinese. But I feel that the aptitude for learning languages comes from learning one language, in effect having one more language than what you're essentially speaking now.

Mr. Speaker, for that reason I completely support this motion, and I would ask that the whole Assembly do as well because I believe that it will sincerely help our economy, that it will help our students, and will help make this a much more global place.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Minister of Learning, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

Agricultural Investment Shares

502. Mr. Fischer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the possibility of increasing investment dollars in agriculture and the agricultural industry through the use of a tax vehicle in the form of flow-through shares.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to begin debate on Motion 502, which urges the government to explore the use of flow-through shares as an investment tool to attract capital investment in the value-added processing and marketing sector of agriculture. These issues surrounding the viability of farming today have created a great deal of discussion in my constituency and are vital for the well-being of every community in rural Alberta. I believe that Motion 502 could provide the missing link to the

agriculture production chain. It has the potential to attract the necessary capital to be more competitive on the world market. Flow-through shares will encourage the growth of Alberta's value-added processing sector for agriculture products, which is necessary if our farmers are to remain profitable in today's increasingly competitive world marketplace.

The agriculture industry has been the number one economic engine for Alberta over the past hundred years, since the beginning of Alberta being a province. Grain, livestock, and agriculture food products have all been in demand around the world for the majority of those hundred years. There was not enough food for people in many countries, especially in the years of World War I and World War II and the many years that it took to rebuild and put European farmland back into production. Canada was in the fortunate position of obtaining preferred markets that would take all of the raw product that we could produce and at good prices. There have always been some transportation problems and marketing difficulties. However, in general things were quite good, and there was a reasonable balance between production expenses and the prices that producers received for their product.

[The Speaker in the chair]

During the past 30 years major changes began to take place. More productive varieties, new technologies, and unfair subsidies all encouraged increased production. Markets dried up, and importing countries became exporters and our competitors. Inflation drove up input costs, and product prices did not keep up.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, machinery costs have increased possibly 50 times from back in the early part of the last century. I had a copy of an old newspaper that in 1926 was selling number 1 wheat for \$2.67 a bushel. Today that same grain may sell for around \$4 a bushel. It's almost doubled since 1926. I would like to clarify something for the Member for West Yellowhead. Even though I may be among the senior members of this Assembly, I was not reading that newspaper in 1926.

The unfair competition based on multibillion dollar farm subsidies from the European countries has become ridiculous. Instead of a fair and even competition based on the capacity of the land and the ability of the farmers, the competition has only developed between trading blocs. It is clear that the European Union is not interested in importing our commodities except at the lowest prices and has established tariff barriers which make selling our commodities economically unviable. Also, there are subsidies that have caused the supply of food to expand so unnaturally, and the entire world market is saturated with cheap commodities.

Something must be done to help our farmers obtain fair value for their crops. Motion 502 will create markets for food commodities right here in Alberta, and Alberta goods will have the advantage of very low transportation costs to markets. This advantage will help offset the unfair world trade practices in agriculture that are now being used even by the U.S.

Flow-through shares that encourage value-added processing to the many products we produce would provide a valid option for farmers and producers and give a much-needed and long overdue boost to the agriculture sector. Currently flow-through shares are common shares subscribed from the treasury of a company engaged exclusively in Canada's oil and gas industry. The common shares are purchased according to a flow-through agreement at a premium to the market price of the company's shares, and this is compensation to the company for the benefit of tax deductions. Then it is

passed on or flowed through by the company to the investor.

There are a number of investment tools that could also assist in this growth and investment. However, the flow-through plan is one that becomes very attractive to an investor who may be in a high tax bracket. His benefits are threefold: first, a substantial saving by lowering the tax rate by moving into a lower tax bracket; secondly, they are offered a share at a discount to the market price; and third, they enjoy the opportunity to participate in the success of the company. The flow-through plan is the right plan. It will make it much easier for entrepreneurs to raise venture capital.

Mr. Speaker, let's take a look for a moment at how flow-through shares have impacted the oil and gas industry. First, we must visualize that this incentive may not be available for all the multi-billion dollar international companies. There are many very small start-up companies that have flourished and grown through the use of this investment tool. It encourages higher than normal risk dollars for the exploration and development of new oil and gas wells. These dollars may not have otherwise come into the industry. It allows the investor to share part of the risk with governments, as the program can allow investors to write off up to 100 percent of the expense claimed.

The benefits to the oil and gas industry are enormous. Firstly, it allows small business to participate and opens up many opportunities for our young and talented Alberta entrepreneurs. Rig workers, drillers, and management all benefit from the high wages within that industry. Secondly, it provides the much-needed local competition, which results in a healthier industry.

Mr. Speaker, the concept of flow-through shares would work the same way in Alberta's agriculture industry as it does in the resource development industry. The capital raised would help finance the construction of value-added production plants around Alberta. Over the past two decades entrepreneurs in this province have moved ahead with secondary processing and value added, and there is growth in the industry. However, is it fast enough to keep up with the changing world markets? The answer to that is no. Just to demonstrate that, Stats Canada stated on Alberta's food and beverage industry that \$9 billion is in that industry and only 9 percent of it is processed oilseed and grain products. Only 9 percent out of the \$9 billion.

There are many good thoughts and ideas proven through research that fall by the wayside because investors will not risk the dollars. There are many more ways to add value to our traditional products. For example, turning grain into ethanol, which is an industry surprisingly slow to develop here in Alberta, is a major business in the U.S., using up to 20 percent of their total grain production. Motor oil from canola has not thrived here even though Alberta is a major canola producer, but it is going ahead in other areas.

By bringing the means of value-added production closer to Alberta, more jobs are created and the potential value of the raw commodity is gained by Albertans. This strategy of field to retail vertical market integration keeps profits inside Alberta and reduces the transportation costs. Our goods would compete well, and locally grown commodities would be worth more. Thus the farmer could bring in greater profits and be less reliant on government subsidies in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this government is interested in diversifying our economy. Oil and gas have been the bread and butter of the province for the past couple of decades, and we are making strides to reduce our dependence on this industry. Motion 502 proposes that we at least give fair treatment to agriculture and allow investment dollars to enter on a tax deductible basis in the same way as in the oil and gas sector. The reason that the tax deduction is allowed is because the money raised through the shares goes to new capital,

and these costs are deductible to business. Allowing this type of investment tool in the agriculture sector would promote investment and innovation. Increasingly the markets for primary agriculture goods are declining and are not expected to increase in the near future, according to the World Trade Organization.

There needs to be a solution to help Albertans obtain fair value for their product. Presently Canadian agriculture goods are being priced out of international markets. Many European countries have given large subsidies to their farmers and agriculture producers which undercut the price of many competitors who trade their products internationally. Canadian farmers are not capable of keeping up with these subsidized prices and are forced to lose value on their goods.

Mr. Speaker, in order for the Canadian farmer to regain the preferred standing that they once had on the international market, we must find a way to maintain a competitive edge. Huge farm subsidies like the ones received in European countries are not an option. They are a quick fix to a problem and in the long run will prove to be a greater expense, with no long-term solution.

In order to maintain a competitive edge in the international market and even within our own country, we must look at changing the status quo. Why? Because, Mr. Speaker, agriculture is an industry unlike any other industry. It operates similar to others with input costs, costs for labour, land, and capital, but there's just one thing different about agriculture: if agriculture fails, people starve. It is a simple, brutal fact that's been proven time and time again throughout the history of the world.

4:10

Countries and provinces that are not self-sufficient in food production will not be able to receive food in trade if it's scarce globally. You cannot eat bonds, stocks, or equities, nor can you drink a nice tall glass of oil. Furthermore, no amount of money or other commodities will suffice in trade when food becomes scarce throughout the globe. It has happened in the living memory of many Albertans, when many were forced to revert to the hunter/gatherer lifestyle in the 1930s. Many people went to bed hungry in those years, and I hope that we are not so arrogant to think that it could not happen again.

My point is that it is wise to have a little bit more food than we need and to be able to produce that food within our own borders. Our economic prosperity may one day depend on it. This is why our attention should be focused on ways to increase the value of our agriculture products. By increasing the profit potential in the industry, we foster and maintain a diverse and healthy food industry, which is of great benefit for each of us as well as our future generations.

The investment need not necessarily come directly from government, which is an important aspect of Motion 502. Flow-through shares are an instrument that will provide capital for growth without government subsidies. Well-developed markets including processing, shipping, and retailing for Alberta agriculture goods all over the world are the ultimate goal. To be able to produce the highest quality food in the world and to process, package, and send it off to the retail market creates real jobs for Albertans.

Adding value to our resources is not a new idea. Other industries have provided many jobs to Albertans by processing our raw materials. A healthy economy must be diverse and add as much value as possible to the raw materials. I'm not against selling a boatload of Alberta grain to whoever wants to pay for it, but I think it would do us a lot better selling bread and pasta that sells for much more than \$145 per tonne, which is the current price of wheat.

Tax incentives to promote diversity and prosperity in our ag industry are necessary for growth. Competitiveness in the raw

commodities market is a futile game of keeping up with the multi-billion dollar subsidy programs of the Europeans. We need a real incentive for businesses to tear down the processing plants in other countries and to build them here. It is not enough just to keep up with the world economy. Alberta should be leading it, especially in the sector upon which our province was founded.

It is intended that the flow-through shares will attract much-needed investment dollars and offer investors tax incentive opportunities, assist with the construction of agriculture value-added processing plants, and increase the number of jobs within agriculture. Motion 502 will explore ways that we as government may accomplish just that. The purpose of this motion is to improve access to venture capital. I believe that it is time for us to take the lead and provide support to this very important sector of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, a flow-through share incentive is a sound, proven idea. It is a viable option, and I ask all members of this Assembly to support Motion 502 to explore that option.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much for this opportunity to speak to Motion 502, which is:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the possibility of increasing investment dollars in agriculture and the agricultural industry through the use of a tax vehicle in the form of flow-through shares.

This is a really interesting idea and is following through on some of the government incentives and plans that I have seen in some of the other sectors. There's a real encouragement for the sector to find dollars from other places aside from government dollars. Certainly I saw that happen in the nonprofit sector, which is the one I come from. There was great encouragement to raise more dollars through fund-raising and other activities: open gift shops, have tea parlours, and all those kinds of things to raise additional dollars, usually through commercial ventures, which is essentially what's happening here.

Part of what intrigues me the most about this is the potential for additional support into the value-added sector, which is a sector I've been really impressed with. I'm not fooling anybody here. I'm not a kid from the farm. I'm from the city.

AN HON. MEMBER: But you snowmobile.

MS BLAKEMAN: I snowmobile, yeah. Well, that doesn't qualify me as a farm kid.

I remember being struck on a couple of occasions by the amount of work that's been done in Alberta on value added, and there's certainly been support coming through Innovation and Science and through the Ministry of Agriculture on that. In one of the airports – I think it might be Calgary – there was an incredible display of the number of value-added products that were coming out of Alberta. It was quite extensive. I think this thing went on for a good long hallway, and there were all kinds of things in there, not just food but products beyond that. It really impressed me, particularly as a city kid, of what the potential was in the agricultural sector in Alberta to move beyond what we've always accepted as agricultural produce. I think that if we are going to be competitive and move forward with this, exploration into these new kinds of ideas is the way to go, and certainly any financing or ways of promoting additional research and development in this area is, I think, probably quite worth while to follow up on.

The other time I can remember – I think this was in either a budget debate or in Public Accounts – when the minister outlined the number of things that were being done with canola and canola oil, the list was quite astounding as to what all was being done with it now, even being used as machinery lubricating oil or something overseas. I thought: well, good on us for finding other ways to truly be value added, to make our resources go a bit further and be more attractive to others and find themselves another market. Truly, if we can find 500 different markets for canola, we're going to be well on our way here in Alberta to diversifying our economy, which is a goal that all of us share.

Now, I had not been familiar with the concept of flow-through shares when I first read this motion, so I had to do some reading on it, and I think I've got most of it. Part of the need for this is that venture capital is difficult to get, and certainly the member proposing this motion, the Member for Wainwright, had outlined in some detail how difficult it was to get that additional venture capital into this area. So, in that, this idea of flow-through shares is worth consideration. It is giving small companies an opportunity to raise capital that they may well not be able to qualify for or be able to raise from other sources.

It is pointed out to be a high-risk venture for investors. The investors do take all of the risk, and nothing is guaranteed. They also have to hang in there with it, because they may not get an immediate return on their investment. So I'm wondering what sort of research has been done by the member to establish what the investor pool is out there that would be interested in this kind of high-risk, very long-term investment. To my knowledge that isn't what you usually find in an investor. They're looking for a lower risk with more of a guaranteed return, and they want it quickly.

4:20

So what is the investor pool? Who's out there that's interested in this? Are they individuals? Are they corporations? Are they Albertans even? Where is the member expecting these investors to come from? Are they international investors? Are they Canadian investors? Where is he looking for this to come from? Eventually, if I understand this, the investor does end up with some equity in the venture, and I'm always a little concerned about having large amounts of foreign ownership of our farmland. Maybe the member himself or someone else can answer that question for me if we have time.

One of the other issues that came up as I did my reading on this is the point, well made I think, that farmers are pretty independent-minded folk. They'd have to be to get into the kind of venture that they get into, working so many hours often alone and taking on that risk basically by themselves or with their family to support them. This kind of venture does give someone else control over what they are trying to do. How well are farmers going to take to this? I'm wondering who the member was consulting with or who were the driving forces behind him bringing forward this motion. I was listening to the member, but I didn't hear things like UFA or other farmers' groups who were somehow behind this venture, pushing for this. I'm wondering if the farmers would even be willing to accept this kind of venture.

So that's the two sides of this. One, are the farmers going to go for it, and two, who are these investors? Who are they expected to be? Are they out there? Do we know that they're out there and they would even take it? I think the possibility for not necessarily abuse of this system but an unexpected outcome of this system is certainly there if we don't know already that that investor pool is there and it's who we want them to be and that there is acceptance of the scheme by the very people that are seeking the funds; that is, the farmers and

the family-farm business. Truly, without those two groups working together on this one, we may well have put a mechanism in place, a process in place that's not wanted to be used by either of those groups, therefore open to abuse by others yet to be named. So I'm just looking to get the confirmation on what kind of research has been done behind this.

I understand that the government would likely be much in favour of this because it is a way of increasing venture capital for the farm industry without the government having to put any money up. I think there's a much longer conversation that we can all have about government subsidy and support of farmers and where that's going in the context of free trade agreements, NAFTA and now this larger free trade agreement, plus things ever looming on the horizon like the MAI.

I read an article recently about the whole idea of farm subsidies and government supported farms, a very interesting one saying, "Keep that kind of subsidy program we've now got in place," and the other side saying, "Dump it," and looking at different countries where those two systems are in place and seemingly working well in both cases. So there's a larger discussion underneath this idea of assistance to farmers that we have not ever really had in Alberta.

As we move increasingly from a rural-based population and economy to an urban-based population and economy, we continue to uphold all of those institutions that were put in place in support of a rural status. We haven't really revisited that and carried on that discussion, so I do find points still where there's an inequity between what kind of support and possibilities and opportunities are there for farmers and the rural way of life versus what's happening in the cities. But that's another discussion for another time.

The government does have to be involved with this or it does have to involve the feds, I think, in order to put the tax credit or the tax receipt in place to allow the first part of this scheme to work. My understanding of it is that an investor receives a tax write-off for a certain percentage based on whatever percentage has been established. Now, is that to be done through the federal government, and is the member aware of any negotiations or any movement on behalf of Revenue Canada being open to that or the federal government making a move to open up that legislation to include this kind of thing? Are we just kind of running this idea up the flagpole to see if it flies? Has that kind of investigation and research taken place?

If it's also to be coming from this provincial government, what sort of discussions have taken place with the Minister of Revenue and I suppose the minister of expenses? Essentially a tax receipt is forgone revenue, so what kinds of negotiations and discussions have taken place there? What kind of effect does this have on our Alberta bottom line if we are forgoing revenue as a result of this tax scheme being put in place?

One of the other things I looked at is: how is this process, this scheme looked at in the investing world? There was kind of a split decision there. Some people that were writing and talking about this scheme – I'm not saying "scheme" in any negative sense here; I just don't know how else to describe it – or this setup that's being proposed often seemed to be people who were in fact seeking this kind of a scheme to be set up – and it's already up and running in the oil sector, and it does mention the film sector as well. That's not in fact happening here in Alberta. I have checked with some of my contacts in the film industry, and while they have discussed this, they have not made any moves beyond that discussion stage that I'm aware of.

The investment community seems to be of two minds on whether this works or not. They tend to keep pointing out that it's a poor investment, and they don't tend to recommend it to their investors because it is risky, as they say, and often has a low return. So I

guess that's a subsection of my concerns and comments around who that pool of investors is. These are the people who are advising those investors, and they don't seem to be entirely confident or promoting this particular way of doing things.

This investment sector – and I'm looking at those newsletters that all the banks and everybody puts out – keeps saying that the risk is totally on the shoulders of the investor, that historically flow-through shares have been bad and have not paid well for the investor, especially in the small resource-based companies. It's noted that governments like to encourage these flow-through shares, but the investment community seems to come out quite strongly saying, "Yeah, but the risk is totally on the investor," and they're not that keen to get people involved in this.

So I'm sure we'd be looking for . . .

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but the time allocation for this part of the Routine today has now expired.

4:30

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 30: Mr. Jacobs]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. GRAYDON: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today and deliver my maiden speech in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Now, some may think that after 17 years of elected service to the city of Grande Prairie this occasion today might not be that significant. Let me assure you and other members of the Assembly here today that it is a significant day for me, for my family, and for the constituents of Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

While I have served these many years as an elected official, my constituency has changed considerably. Where previously I represented 36,000 residents of the city, I now represent about the same number, but they are split roughly in half, with half coming from the city, the other half coming from hamlets, towns, villages, the county of Grande Prairie, and the MD of Greenview.

I want to thank all those who supported and worked for me but especially those workers and voters from outside the city who took a leap of faith to support and trust a city mayor to bring their rural and small urban concerns to this provincial House. I appreciate their support and pledge to them that I will bring balanced representation to this Assembly and this government.

In my first few weeks I'm already seeing the new range of issues that I'm expected to help with, issues ranging from grizzly bears near a rural school to the construction of indoor soccer pitches at the Community Knowledge Campus in south Grande Prairie, a project that will feature two high schools, twin ice arenas, twin soccer pitches, and more, a co-operative effort of a public school board, a Catholic school board, and the city of Grande Prairie, a project that by working together will save the partners over \$1 million per year in operating costs.

Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, a guy could go on and on about the

qualities of the constituency that I've been elected to represent, but I think it's already a well-known fact that we have a robust, broad-based economy that contributes a great deal to Alberta's wealth and the Alberta advantage as well as a constituency that maintains a quality of life envied by many.

While thanking people, it would be remiss of me not to thank my wife, Anne, and our family of four children and five grandchildren for their support and understanding in the past and the present as I head off to Edmonton every week and they're left to keep the home fires burning. As well, Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the encouragement and guidance of my father, the late John Graydon, a veteran of the Second World War and a farmer from Lacombe, Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I bring to this Assembly a reputation of one who makes short speeches, and I don't want to blow that reputation on my first opportunity to speak in the House today, but I do reserve the right to go on and on at some other occasion.

Let me wrap up by saying how much I've appreciated the warm welcome and help that I've received from all members, both returning and new, on both sides of the House as well as you, Mr. Speaker, and the staff here at the Legislature. You've made these first few weeks comfortable, a great learning experience, with so much more to look forward to. There's a quote that goes something like this: it's the set of the sails and not the gales that determine where we go. Well, obviously there are many gales here in this Assembly and in our province, but the throne speech laid out the set of the sails, and I have tremendous confidence and pride in the direction we are headed under the guidance of our Premier and my colleagues. Our province has a proud history and a very exciting future. I look forward with personal pride and anticipation to my role in this exciting future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Did the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti desire to adjourn the debate?

MR. GRAYDON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would move to adjourn the debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Third Reading**

Bill 3

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill 3.

MS BLAKEMAN: This has been an interesting bill, and in third reading I just want to speak briefly to the effect of the bill. We here in the Liberal opposition have supported this bill at all stages, I think mostly because, certainly from my point of view, it gives us processes to be protecting water habitat and particularly water inhabitants, which would be fish, in Alberta. We seem to have in some cases lost control to limit the amount of fishing or the kind of fishing in a number of our lakes and streams.

This is essentially a housekeeping bill, a catch-up bill. Since I have stood in this House previously and complained that we're not doing enough in Alberta to update our statutes and bring them into the modern age, which would be 2001 now, I was pleased to see

what this bill is attempting to do. Having spoken to this in second reading, I did say that I hadn't been able to consult with some of the people that I'm familiar with who are very concerned about what's happening in our waterways here in Alberta and especially around the fish stock. I have since been able to do that and got very positive feedback on what this bill is proposing to do.

It kind of surprised me actually. I was expecting more people to be up in arms about it, but no, it's pretty clear, even from the fishing groups that are out there. There's this walleye group that has written in to us about that, and I was also in touch with some folks I think from the trout fishing club – I'm sorry; I just can't remember the names off the top of my head – who all felt very strongly.

Actually, one group in particular felt pretty strongly that there should be no fishing derbies allowed whatsoever. They felt that what was happening with the fishing derbies in Alberta at this point was really causing problems in some of the lakes, because these fishing derbies are like golf tournaments. There are prizes for absolutely everything, so people are dragging fish out that they should not have in fact taken out of the water – they should have done a catch and release on them – to get one of these fabulous prizes. I think some of them are even doing, you know, the smallest fish, which is a particularly dumb thing to do in Alberta. Anyway, this group that I was talking to really had wanted no fishing derbies allowed at all because of what it does when hundreds of people descend on a lake and tromp around and run their boats around in the water and pull out all kinds of fish and then pack up, pull up stakes, and are gone.

So, as I say, I did my consultation. I did follow through, as I said I would, and I have to say that I'm supportive of the bill. I would like to see it go further, and I'm hoping that the minister is looking at further processes to put in place to control how people are fishing and to control our fish stock in Alberta more.

4:40

There is some talk of certain species of fish no longer being stocked by the government, which I think is a great concern to the fishing community. We've got to be able to manage better what we already have. Anything that's in place that allows us to manage what we already have – and that's what I'm assuming is going to be happening with this, particularly under the fishing derby part, where there has to be licences. I'm presuming that the minister foresees being able to not issue a licence for a derby if it was being held on a lake that would be deemed to be dangerous to the fish stock. If I can get him on record saying that, I'll be a happy woman.

That's really the only issue that I wanted to raise during third reading, and I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to be able to speak. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be brief in my remarks about Bill 3, but I first would like to express my gratitude to the minister for providing answers to the questions I had at second reading debate. I really appreciate his diligence and the diligence of his department in providing these answers. I am pleased to see that he's not scaling back in his efforts in regards to the Fisheries (Alberta) Act. I'm glad to see that there are penalties or jail or that there can be a combination of both if there are to be violations.

I would like to note for the record that I do have some concerns about the consultations with the sportfishing guides here, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, there has been no decision as to whether or not the Alberta Professional Outfitters Society will be

involved in the administration of the sportfishing guide industry. I understand there's going to be a consultation process with the guides about the administration of their industry before any regulations are put in place. I know there have been complaints. There certainly have been complaints to the constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar from professional outfitters that they have felt that the government has moved and has not consulted them. So with that, I would caution the minister about that.

Again, I would like to express my gratitude. It certainly made my job much easier through his co-operation and the speed with which he and his department officials answered my questions at second reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The effect of this bill, I expect, will be favourable if it's implemented, although I expressed concern earlier that it is not strong enough or doesn't take on enough of the issues that are putting our fish population at risk.

The quality of water is certainly a concern. In looking through some information on Alberta's wildlife, 50 percent of amphibians are threatened or endangered in Alberta and a quarter of the fish species are at risk. This suggests, of course, ongoing concern with the quality of our aquatic environment in Alberta, and I'm concerned that Bill 3 does not go nearly far enough. A number of organizations certainly do identify overfishing as a concern and one of the causes for Alberta's declining fish stocks, but with a quarter of the fish species at risk, I think we need to be looking at a number of causes.

Bull trout, walleye, pike, and perch are all subject to being depleted by overfishing, but they are also subject to other reasons for their decline, whether that decline is deterioration of water quality, pollution, overdevelopment, disruption of water flows and aquifers, and so on. This is affecting not only sport fishermen but the commercial fishery in Alberta. Alberta Environment's own figures suggest that in 1987 there were 3,000 tonnes of fish taken commercially out of Alberta waters. By 1993 that had declined to below 2,000 tonnes, and now we're seeing in the last couple of years, after a brief recovery through the mid-90s, a rather precipitous drop in the take from the commercial fishery in Alberta. It gets me to thinking that we may be facing the same kind of environmental collapse in the fishery in Alberta that we have watched unfold so tragically in Newfoundland with the cod fisheries.

The cod fisheries were thought to be virtually inexhaustible in Newfoundland, supported hundreds of thousands of Newfoundlanders over many centuries, and then with the advent of new fishing techniques in the last 20 years and with deterioration of environmental conditions, the cod fishery has collapsed. Even with the suspension of commercial fisheries, the virtually complete suspension of commercial fishing in Newfoundland, the cod population has not recovered.

Well, if we look at that example and wonder what's going to happen in Alberta, I'm worried that the same trend is occurring, that in fact we've seen a dramatic decline in the commercial fish stocks in Alberta and sportfishery success in Alberta. There have been steps taken to restock lakes, to increase the catch-and-release programs, to limit takes on fish, yet we're not seeing the fish populations recover at all, and that's very worrisome to me.

I think we need to reduce human impacts and protect the habitat for fish and indeed for all the vulnerable species. This is not just a matter of sentimentality, if you can be sentimental about fish. It's also a matter of economic prosperity for the province, and the annual losses in the commercial fishery incurred since 1987 in Alberta

measure in the many millions of dollars. In fact, they decline virtually every year, and again going from Alberta Environment figures, I believe the value of the commercial fishery in Alberta has almost collapsed. It's gone from an index level of 100 in 1990 down to about 40. It's at about 40 percent of its value, and a large portion of that drop has occurred just in the last two or three years, where we've seen the value of the commercial fishery in Alberta decline by half in about three years, which tells me the fish population is just disappearing. The same kind of trend is clear in sportfishing, where we can see the value of sportfishery also following virtually an identical trend to the commercial fishery.

It's very interesting to note that going in the opposite direction, if you plot economic growth, the faster and the further the economy climbs in Alberta, the more rapidly the fishery collapses. It makes one wonder if there is a correlation here. As we open up our wilderness and our northern waters, our northern rivers and lakes, to industrial development, as we see cities expanding, as we see oil and gas wells being drilled in areas that have never been touched before, we are at the same time seeing the collapse of the natural environment and with that the fish stocks of the province.

With Bill 3 it's a step. It's heading in the right direction, but I think we will find that is woefully inadequate and that Alberta's fish stocks will be as low five years from now as they are today and that we will be looking at much more drastic actions or simply not only at abandoning the commercial fishery in Alberta but virtually abandoning the whole tradition of sport and recreational fishing, which would be a great tragedy for this province.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I'll take my seat. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to close the debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I only have a few comments to make. First of all, I'd like to thank the opposition for the comments and recommendations they've made and the support they've given throughout the debate on the particular bill.

4:50

I agree; this bill is a good bill. It's a step in the right direction. It's targeted certain areas, but in order to address some of the concern the opposition here and the public out there mentioned in relation to the whole commercial and sportfishing industry in Alberta, I intend to as soon as possible come forward with a plan to look at further rationalization of the whole fishing industry in Alberta. I think it's time that it's done. I will of course have to take that process through our own approval structure. I also will commit that I will be consulting with the opposition members to seek their support and help and guidance as we move forward with that industry, because the benefit is for all Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Bill 4 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move third reading of Bill 4.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time on third reading of Bill 4, Surface Rights Amendment Act, I would like to say for the record that I think certainly this is an improvement in

compensation claims, from \$5,000 to \$25,000. This may even be too low. I'm not convinced that it isn't, but it certainly is a step in the right direction.

However, when you see the increase – this maximum level of appeals for surface rights compensation claims to be considered by the Surface Rights Board can be in that range of \$5,000 to \$25,000 – it is unfortunate that due to the nature of the board's mandate, there's no impact on the environment by the operations of the board. All environmental issues before the board are dealt with by other agencies.

When you look at surface rights, there are many ways that landowners could be affected. There is generally no difference, in my view, between surface rights and environmental rights. For instance, let's take the case of a battery. Let's use for example, Mr. Speaker, a battery that is located on a quarter section of land where a rancher or a farmer has a herd of cattle grazing.

That battery produces many things. We can only naturally assume that battery is going to have a flare. It will have a flare, and regardless of whether that flare is burning, there's going to be gas at the flare tip. That gas will be emitted into the atmosphere, and some of the particulates in that unflared gas will land on that surrounding land, and where does the owner of that land go? There are many, many cases where the farmers' cattle have been affected by industrial activities like batteries.

Now, this surface rights amendment I don't believe goes far enough. There is an increased suspicion, particularly since deregulation has become fashionable with this government, that there has been an unacceptable decline in the relationship between landowners and petroleum companies.

Now, the activities around that battery can certainly affect the livestock, but the rancher or the farmer does not have the ability in this legislation to have his or her concerns addressed. This is something that I think we need to take a look at in this Assembly. The effect of this, of course, is not only on the cattle, but it's on the land. I believe it's residual. By that I mean it remains behind for long periods of time. Benzene is one chemical that's not suitable for man nor beast as it comes off the flare tip.

The whole idea of surface rights I think has to be discussed. We can look at landowners in Sherwood Park and how they feel, in Fort Saskatchewan, any area. Certainly north of Calgary there are some producing wells, some sour gas wells. How do the citizens feel about that in close proximity? Would \$25,000 be enough to meet their needs? I don't think so. That's why I would caution the Assembly that perhaps \$25,000 is not suitable.

Now, I'm sure the hon. minister has consulted extensively with the stakeholders regarding this issue, and whether the target of \$25,000 was a mutually agreed-upon figure, I don't know, but the stakeholders that have been consulted by this side of the House, by the researchers, the ones that they talked to had no idea that this bill was even coming forward.

So when you look at the changes that this could have on the cattle industry, the changes that it could have on soil conditions in the immediate proximity to a battery or a pumping station, a gas plant even, a petrochemical plant but also the changes that this has as the urban areas grow bigger and bigger and get closer and closer to existing developments in the oil and gas industry, I'm sure that in the future – it won't be 20 years or 17 years – hon. members of this Assembly will be debating this very issue and the whole idea of what is adequate about that range between \$5,000 and \$25,000.

With those comments at third reading, Mr. Speaker, I shall cede the floor to another hon. colleague of this Assembly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to close the debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the opposition for their comments and for some of their recommendations and some of their concerns they have brought forward in relation to this bill. I believe that again this bill is targeted on a certain area, but I believe it is in the right direction.

You can be assured this ministry will continue monitoring the situation. I believe there was some mention in relation to the increase in the dollars that that may not be enough. We will monitor it further, and if further adjustments are required in the future, then we'll come back and go through the process with the adjustments that are required.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the opposition and thank the House for listening to this process. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the good progress we've made this afternoon, I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene this evening, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: Would all hon. members in favour of the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Please say no. Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 1, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/01

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd like to start Committee of Supply. For the benefit of those in the gallery as well as in the seats, this is the less formal part of the Legislature. People may move from one place to another and sit down and talk to a friend or a colleague if they do so quietly. Only one member is allowed to stand and talk at a time. People may remove their jackets. We may have coffee or juice or pop in here. So it's less formal. It is designed to promote ready exchange back and forth. You must speak, though, from your own place.

Again, just so everyone is clear on the new rules that have been agreed to by our House leaders and by ourselves, before the Committee of Supply starts, then, this evening, the chair would like to confirm the arrangements that have been made. In the April 10, 2001, agreement House leaders agreed that the minister whose department estimates were before the committee would have 10 minutes for opening comments, followed by one hour of questioning by the opposition parties. Under the agreement the minister would have five minutes to conclude consideration of the estimates for his or her department.

The hon. Minister for Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you. I wondered if it would be your pleasure to introduce those that are in the gallery this evening, if you had intended to do that.

THE CHAIRMAN: We do intend to do it as soon as we get the rules out. Sure, and I'll call upon you then; is that right?

The agreement is silent on questions by members of the government caucus. Should there be any questions or comments by members in that caucus, it would be after the opposition parties have had their hour but, the chair assumes, before the minister makes the concluding remarks.

Under agreement two departments are to have their estimates considered tonight and on Wednesday as well as on Monday. All consideration of the estimates is to be completed before the normal adjournment hour of midnight on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings and 5:30 on Thursday afternoon. The only matter that the chair would add is that under the agreement the first estimate to be considered by the Committee of Supply this evening is Infrastructure, and when we're finished with that, then we would go to Transportation. Anyway, that's just to refresh your memory – this was all given to you last evening by the chair – and just in case there are some people here tonight who weren't here yesterday.

Now, we have Introduction of Guests. The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

head: Introduction of Guests

MS EVANS: Thank you. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly this evening – perhaps that's a touch too formal – some wonderful young Albertans who are seated both in the members' gallery and in the public gallery who represent the Forum for Young Albertans, whom many of us have had the pleasure of meeting, talking with, and learning their ideas from today. They are great Albertans, over 50 of them, who I think will be proud inheritors of our legislative

responsibilities some day in the future. Could I just ask the youth assembled from the forum to please rise and receive the acclaim of our Legislature?

MR. NORRIS: Mr. Speaker, if it pleases you, it is an absolute delight to introduce to you and through you a very good friend of mine. He's either a very good friend or he's very silly, because he ended up getting out on the freeway with me every morning at 7 o'clock to wave at traffic. [interjection] Both, yeah. That's the definition of friendship. I'd like to ask him to rise, be recognized, and please accept the warm welcome of the Assembly. It's my friend Quincy.

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, those pleasantries are concluded.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

Infrastructure

THE CHAIRMAN: We can now commence this evening's considerations and call upon the hon. minister to begin his remarks.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Before I start, I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce some of the staff that are here with me tonight. To start off, I'd like to introduce the new Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Maria David-Evans. With her we have Ray Reshke, who is the ADM of corporate services, and we share him with Transportation; Malcolm Johnson, the ADM of Property Development; Debra Strutt and Larry James, executive directors, property supply and management; David Bray, director of communications; Tom Hong, executive director, business management; and Winnie Yiu-Yeung, executive director of finance.

Infrastructure's three-year business plan and 2001-2002 estimates indicate how we plan to contribute to Alberta's economic prosperity by managing the development of health care facilities, schools, postsecondary facilities, and seniors' lodges; planning, operating, maintaining, and developing government facilities; and managing services to government departments, including procurement of supplies, disposal of surplus materials, air transportation, and government vehicle fleet operations. We support the provincial government's ongoing strong financial management, which allows us to continue to maintain and enhance Alberta's physical and technical infrastructure.

Infrastructure continues to work with a number of ministries to address priority issues and ongoing initiatives and to increase our effectiveness and efficiency in addressing government needs. These include the Ministry of Health and Wellness, to ensure that long-term regional capital plans are developed in partnership with the regional health authorities; the Ministry of Learning, to plan and develop capital plans, programs, policies, and legislation for K to grade 12 schools and postsecondary institutions; the Ministry of Seniors, on the provincewide upgrading of seniors' lodges; the Ministry of Community Development, to develop and upgrade museums and other cultural facilities; the Ministry of Children's Services, to provide approximately 100 Alberta children's initiative offices across the province; the Ministry of Transportation, to lead the capital planning initiative for the government of Alberta; and the Ministry of Energy, to continue with the energy rebate program.

Overall, Alberta Infrastructure's 2001-2002 budget has increased by some \$2.1 billion from last year. This budget increase includes \$303 million in program funding restored for the capital health facilities and school facilities programs, as this was deferred from last year in order to provide partial funding for the energy rebates;

\$598 million to address costs of the energy rebates program, and this amount includes \$473 million to continue with last year's program and \$125 million for the natural gas shielding program, which is to commence on July 1; \$600 million for health care facilities; \$400 million for school facilities; \$210 million for postsecondary institutions; \$19.3 million to commence the centennial projects program, and this is part of the \$85.4 million transferred from Community Development for the planning, design, and construction of the approved centennial projects; and \$20 million for the operating costs of the Swan Hills treatment centre. This is onetime funding, as our objective is to sell the facility during the year 2001-2002.

I'd like to highlight some aspects of the 2001-02 estimates, including funding for Infrastructure's health care facilities. Additional onetime funding approvals, beginning with the 2001-2002 health care facility project budget, to over \$870 million: these funds will be used to proceed with new capital projects to address waiting lists, priorities, upgrade or replace older, long-term care and acute care facilities, and develop new capacity to meet the need for Alberta's growing and aging population.

In addition, two new centres of excellence are being constructed, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary. These facilities are being constructed at a cost estimated at approximately \$125 million each. Two million dollars will be spent in 2001-02 to develop plans for these facilities. Future year approvals for these two facilities, which are targeted to open in the year 2005, our centennial year, include \$34 million in 2002-03 and \$40 million in 2003-04.

8:10

The cardiac centre of excellence, to be built in Edmonton, will provide surgery including open-heart and transplants, coronary care units, ambulatory care clinics, as well as research in transplants and heart, stroke, and vascular biology. The primary site for this will be at the University of Alberta hospital. The bone and joint centre of excellence, to be built in Calgary, will provide orthopedic surgery including joint replacement and fracture reduction, chronic pain management, rehabilitation, expertise in prosthesis and orthotics, as well as research in bone and joint disease. The primary site for this will be at the Foothills medical centre in Calgary. The result will be shorter waiting lists for these critical services for all Albertans.

Alberta will continue to attract and retain the best people in these fields and produce a centre of expertise with a worldwide reputation. The new centres will build on Edmonton's leadership in cardiac services and on Calgary's excellent reputation in bone and joint research and education.

Alberta schools infrastructure is being improved under the new century schools plan. The multiyear plan commits \$1.075 billion to Alberta schools. This funding is targeted to upgrade viable schools through modernization and to build new schools where they are most urgently needed. School facilities funding allocations in 2001-02 include over \$700 million to address growth pressures and the renovation/modernization backlog identified through the school facilities evaluation program.

The 2001-02 estimate for postsecondary facilities is over \$255 million. The level of funding will help the institutions address various program delivery requirements. I'm pleased to say that we are now in the process of doing comprehensive facility evaluation for the postsecondary facilities. We will be in a better position to determine actual facility requirements once the study is complete.

In 2002-03 \$80 million is targeted for two new health research innovation centres for the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. Ten million dollars was already provided to these universities last year to allow them to proceed with feasibility

studies. These facilities will be primarily for research and development but will also support the training of highly qualified personnel in the health sciences.

The total cost of these research facilities is estimated at \$220 million, with \$90 million contributed from Infrastructure. The provincial contribution is expected to leverage funding from the federal government through the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and from private and community partners.

The seniors' lodges program will be provided with \$17.1 million to be used for the upgrading of lodges.

In 2001-02 we will provide about \$40 million for accommodation and program delivery facilities such as Alberta's children's initiative offices and agriculture's food processing plant at Leduc.

We also will have a commitment of \$96.7 million for the operation and maintenance of government-owned facilities. In 2001-02 \$20 million is required from Infrastructure to provide for the operating costs of the Swan Hills treatment plant. We are currently operating the plant as a going concern using a private operator. The government expects to release a request for proposal in late spring of this year, seeking a qualified firm to purchase and operate the facility for the long term. Approximately \$82 million has been allocated to the leasing and operation of private-sector facilities for government program use.

I would also like to mention one other major initiative that is involving the 100th anniversary of our province.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude my remarks. I am anxious to hear the praise and the glory that the opposition are bound to put on us for the fine management over the last nine years. Now, you have to remember, though, that you have to put your brain in gear before your mouth.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's certainly very valuable advice by the minister, and I certainly hope he follows his own good advice.

Good evening to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and his colleagues who are able to join us here this evening. The hon. minister has a very big task ahead of him and one that we appreciate takes up a considerable amount of our budget each year. While the responsibility for roads in the province, Mr. Chairman, has gone to his colleague from Vegreville-Viking, the Member for Rocky Mountain House has a lot of bricks and mortar to manage as well. With this year's plans for one more round of onetime spending he looks to be a very, very busy person.

There are some very big-ticket items in the budget this year, and I look forward to receiving a reply from the minister on the details of those programs. I hope that if we're not able to get through all of our questions tonight, the minister will accept a letter with the remaining questions in it, and I know he will agree to that. Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Before getting into the specific program questions, I'd like to make a comment on the challenges of making year-to-year comparisons in this ever changing ministry. Not long ago there was transportation and utilities and the department of public works, supply and services. Then we had the superministry of infrastructure. Now we have Infrastructure and Transportation. It is difficult to hold the government accountable when these changes keep happening, but change is what makes politics fun.

With those comments I would like to move on to concerns that I had when I read through the Auditor General's report. I'm referring to page 180 of the report, where the Auditor General talks about

effective capital asset management systems. He goes on to say:

We found that the Ministry has many of the elements of capital asset management systems in place or is in the process of developing these systems through the implementation of the strategies of the Capital Planning Initiative. We also noted that improvements to the Ministry's systems could be made. Specifically, we noted that the Ministry should obtain additional information on strategic program delivery needs to develop long-term capital asset plans for owned and supported facilities, develop processes for monitoring the implementation of the CPI within the Ministry and review existing plans for the development and implementation of infrastructure management systems.

Now, again, Mr. Chairman, when we look at the incredible number of dollars that are in this budget and the enormous job that the minister is faced with in monitoring and tracking all of these assets and these dollars, then I think that this advice, this sound advice, from the Auditor General is something that the minister certainly has taken into consideration. I would like to know what his department is doing in order to implement this very worthwhile suggestion.

As well, I read further into the Auditor General's report on the ministry financial statements, and I'm referring to page 181 of the report.

In accordance with corporate government accounting policies, the Ministry reports the costs of site restoration in the period in which the restoration work is performed rather than in the periods in which the liabilities arose. In my view, the Ministry should estimate the cost and record the liability for sites that do not meet the required contractual or environmental standards. The estimate of the liability should be refined each year, as the extent of required restoration work becomes clearer. I believe that the effect of this departure from generally accepted accounting principles is significant; therefore, a reservation of opinion is noted in my auditor's report.

Once again I would ask the minister: what is the department doing in order to meet this recommendation of the Auditor General to get back to what is a generally accepted accounting principle at this particular time?

8:20

Now, then, moving along in the estimates, Mr. Chairman. As I mentioned, particularly with the changes in the department, it has been very difficult tracking the dollars, and this is one of those ministries that expands and contracts and has had a number of very significant changes over the last few years. Certainly, as I went through here, I could not find any notes which would assist any person trying to make a wise decision as to how those dollars are to be tracked between the various ministries, and when I looked through the business plans here as well, I also noted that again there were no notes at all to assist anyone when they went through these particular business plans. I also note that this probably would be the proper time to do that, particularly when we looked at the operating budget for the ministry this year increasing by roughly \$2 billion, I think I heard the minister say.

When we look at program 1, ministry support services, for the year 2001-2002 the operating estimate is \$15,364,000. For the year 2000-2001 the operating actual was \$14,357,000, when the operating budget for the same period was \$14,357,000. For capital estimates for the year 2001-2002 the amount was \$410,000, and the capital actual for the year 2000-2001 was \$410,000, and the budgeted amount was also \$410,000 for ministry support services.

My questions relating to these figures. How many full-time equivalents are employed under ministry support services in the year 2001-2002? What is the breakdown of the full-time equivalents by the three subprograms: the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and support services? My next question: what capital

projects were funded by the \$410,000 in capital investment in 2000-2001, and what will be funded in 2001-2002? Why is there an additional \$1 million needed for operating expenses for ministry support services this year? Also, would the minister please provide us with a breakdown of the \$390,000 in the minister's office budget for the year 2001-2002, and could you please provide that breakdown in salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses?

AN HON. MEMBER: Hosting expenses?

MR. BONNER: Yes, we have to host in this department.

Also I would like to know what is the breakdown of the \$385,000 deputy minister's office budget for 2001-02, again for salaries in permanent positions, salaries in nonpermanent positions, salaries in contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses. Again, could the minister please provide the breakdown of the \$14.589 million operating estimate for support services in 2001-02 and if he could please give us a category breakdown for business planning and corporate support, communications, financial services, human resource services, information technology, legal services?

Now, then, last year, Mr. Chairman, there was one Ministry of Infrastructure. This year there is a Ministry of Infrastructure and a Ministry of Transportation. Both of these ministries show budgets for ministry support services for 2000-2001, but these numbers do not seem to match the approved estimates for the Ministry of Infrastructure for the year 2000-2001. The capital investment appears to reconcile a portion of the approved amounts that have been allotted to each of the new ministries, but the budgets for the minister's office or the deputy minister's office do not seem to split out. It is very difficult for Albertans to see how much the supersized cabinet is costing.

Accurate reporting on this account is very important, because back under the old ministry of transportation and utilities the minister's office had a budget of \$220,000, and public works had a ministerial budget of \$270,000. Under the superministry of Infrastructure the amount was \$388,000. Now that we have two new and improved ministries, Infrastructure and Transportation, the combined cost for ministerial offices is \$775,000. That's \$390,000 for Infrastructure and \$385,000 for Transportation. Would it be possible for the minister to check with the accountants and provide an explanation as to how they arrived at the 2000-2001 budgets and actual numbers for these ministries?

Mr. Chairman, when I was going through and looking over the various goals and the business plans that occurred, I was quite amazed that we did have some key results, we had strategies, we had a number of different items that were looked at, but in all of this I could not see a column which stated the outcome. In other words, what was the target for the particular year for many of these strategies? Was that target reached, was it exceeded, or did it fall short? When we see numbers like 90 percent or 75 percent or whatever, this really doesn't mean too much. So I certainly would like to see in future years that there is a column for outcomes where we can track in a very definite manner what has happened as far as performance, as I mentioned earlier, in the three categories: whether we fell short, whether we achieved it, or whether we surpassed it.

Now, looking at program 2, construction, upgrading, and operation of infrastructure, I note here that for the fiscal year 2001-2002 the operating estimate is \$11,827,000. Last fiscal year the operating actual was \$118,557,000 and the operating budget for the same year was \$112,703,000. I also notice that for the year 2001-2002 the

capital estimate was \$705,000, the capital actual for the year 2000-2001 was \$1,523,000, and the capital budget for that same year was \$830,000. Now, my questions in regards to construction, upgrading, and operation of infrastructure. How many full-time equivalents are employed under program 2, construction, upgrading, and operation of infrastructure? What is the breakdown of the full-time equivalents by the subprograms in program 2?

8:30

When I look at the budget line 2.1.1, health care facilities, under facilities infrastructure, I notice that the operating estimate for 2001-2002 is \$750,100,000. I also note that the operating, lotteries, for this same fiscal year is \$120 million, that for the year 2000-2001 the operating actual was \$70 million, and that the operating budget for that particular year was \$48 million. So looking at these particular figures, Mr. Chairman, my questions to the ministry. In the ministry's business plan, funding for health care facilities is targeted at \$870 million this year, then dropping to \$81 million in 2002-2003, and then back up to \$132 million in 2003-2004. Can the minister provide some explanation for this spending pattern? Also, in health care facilities, will the minister provide a list of all projects being considered for 2001-2002.

The next line I would like to look at is line 2.1.2, school facilities, and I see that in the fiscal year 2001-2002 the operating estimate is \$555,030,000. For the same period the operating, lotteries, is \$150 million. In the year 2000-2001 the operating actual was \$130,030,000, and for 2000-2001 the operating budget was \$60,030,000. My questions to the minister in regards to school facilities are: will replacement of and repairs to schools be funded based on the recent and very detailed report on the status of our schools' infrastructure, or will school infrastructure be funded and repaired based on political expediency?

As well, on page 222 of the minister's business plans the strategy is to use \$705 million in 2001-2002 "to address high-priority requests." I would like to know what makes a request a high priority. Is this a priority as set up by school boards, or is there some other measure which is being used to determine priority?

As well, I'd also like to look at line 2.1.3, postsecondary facilities. I note here that we have an operating expense for the year 2001-2002 of \$195,700,000, and we have an operating, lotteries, for the same period of \$60 million. For the year 2000-2001 we had an operating actual of \$33,400,000 and an operating budget of \$17,400,000. In looking at postsecondary facilities, I would like to ask the minister about funding from Infrastructure, which has an effect on postsecondary operating budgets and therefore an effect on tuition levels. We see a great difference between the budget and the actual for postsecondary funding in 2000-2001. So if the minister could please fill us in as to why there is such a difference in this particular situation.

The last item I'd like to discuss at this particular time, as I see my time is running out, Mr. Chairman, is seniors' lodges. I see that our operating estimate for 2001-2002 is \$7,100,000. The operating funded by lotteries for the same period is \$10 million. For the previous fiscal year, 2000-2001, the operating actual was \$5,800,000, and for the same period the operating budget was \$7,100,000. What I would like to ask the minister is why there is no increase in the budget for seniors' lodges despite the aging population.

I will end my questions at this particular time. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will carry on with the questions that were being pursued by my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry, particularly regarding seniors' lodges. The minister in his opening remarks addressed the fact that we have an aging population in this province, and I am concerned certainly about not only the quality of the existing seniors' lodges, but also I have concerns about the speed at which we are constructing new facilities. In this budget, is the budget for seniors' lodges going to create new spaces or just renovate existing ones? What are the government's plans this way? What inventory of seniors' housing is the government expecting it will need in the next 10-, 15-, and 20-year period, because I would love to see some long-term planning from this current government. I think it's very, very important, and we need to study other jurisdictions just to see exactly how they are providing quality, affordable housing for seniors.

Now, in the ministry's business plans for the year 2001 through to 2004 I understand they show funding for seniors' lodges decreasing to \$12 million in 2002-2003 and then down to \$8 million the following fiscal year. Our population is getting older, not younger. To the hon. minister: why is this funding level this way? It seems to me to be going in the wrong way, because we always hear from ministers and from hon. members in the government that we have an aging population. We have a crisis in this province. Just look at health care. But when I look at this, that concern is not reflected.

8:40

Now, the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. Another \$20 million. I don't know when this is going to end. I don't know if it will ever end. It just astonishes me. It's all innocent funding, a little bit more and a little bit more. Certainly we're over the \$470 million, and I think this is going to bring us up to \$490 million and counting. We had very little money for the poor, for seniors, yet for the Swan Hills waste treatment plant there's no tomorrow.

I would like to bring attention to the Financial Administration Act, section 49.1, outlining when the government must bring business dealings before the Legislative Assembly. The Premier, Mr. Chairman, in question period has offered to table some documents relating to the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, because there are many, many unanswered questions there.

Now, I would ask the minister to please look at section 49.1(3) of the Financial Administration Act. Un program 2.1.10 for the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, the "waste" part has been removed from the title in the budget documents. This should have been brought before the Assembly. The act, as I understand it – now, I could be corrected here – does allow for some exemptions to this clause. So I'd call on the minister to either table the documents so these estimates can be voted on and so we all know what's going on here or indicate the exemption being used to prevent Albertans, the taxpayers – they're the ones that have lost millions of dollars here – from seeing how their money is being invested.

I don't believe I even should use the word "invested." I should use the term "lost," because it's been going up that incinerator stack, and it's just amazing. We're out of the business of being in business, we're told, but not whenever I see a \$20 million line item here. We are not out of the business of being in business. We are still funding that, and I would like to know what this \$20 million figure is based on. We are paying some very significant management fees, as I understand, for this plant. Also, on page 222 of the ministry's business plans there is an identified strategy to manage the Swan Hills waste treatment centre "during transition and develop and implement a long-term strategy for the facility." Any background the minister can provide on this initiative would be appreciated. [interjection]

Now, that's a very interesting question, about the environmental damage, because we know, Mr. Chairman, that there was some faulty welding in the waste treatment plant that led to a substantial release of PCBs, furans, and dioxins, and the taxpayers are going to have to pick up that bill. I'm wondering if the minister has had any studies done on what exactly that bill is going to total.

While I'm at it, I would also be curious just to see how far we've come along, if at all, with the construction of the proposed chain-link fence that was to be constructed around the waste treatment plant as part of the creative sentencing in the famous court case that occurred where the treatment facility was fined over \$600,000, I believe, for two charges from the Environmental Enhancement and Protection Act. There was a fence to be built to keep the large mammals at the top of the food chain from grazing in the immediate vicinity.

The minister is smiling. This is the proposal that was put forward. Now, I don't know whether it's gone forward or not. The hon. minister is in a much better position to know than I. I'd have to drive up there and have a look and I just don't have the time, but I would be very curious just to see if that fence has been constructed. It was an area of 1.5 kilometres in a circular pattern from the centre of the plant. This was one of the solutions. I believe it was to cost half the total sum of the fine, close to \$300,000. If the minister could look into that, I would be very, very grateful.

Now, will the minister provide some background information, please, and details on what is covered under the program services relating to energy rebates on line 2.2.1, and on line 2.3, program services, please, and also for financial transactions, line item 2.4. There is an operating estimate here of \$2 million. If the minister could please explain what the \$2 million budget for the program on line 2.4.3, consumption of inventories, covers.

We're getting to the next program, and that's program 3. My colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods has some questions regarding cross-government services and the air transportation services, and I know he's quite anxious to ask those.

I have a few more questions from the business plan. Now, I see that goal 1 is that we're going to "enhance infrastructure planning and management." On page 221 we are discussing participation in the "development of a policy framework and guidelines for public/private partnerships." Oh, we're going to have more private/public partnerships. What guidelines are currently in place for these partnerships? What is the process for developing this framework and guidelines? Can the minister please provide some examples of the public/private partnerships? Please don't say Bill 11.

Now, we see here on page 221 as well that there is going to be some assistance. We're going to "assist consumers by reducing the cost of natural gas, propane and fuel oil through monthly rebates." This is a business plan until the year 2004. Does the minister see this as a viable program until 2004? Other members of cabinet are confident in their assurances not only to myself but to other Albertans that this is just a spike in natural gas prices. In fact, the hon. minister himself the other evening in the Assembly said that it was a real sharp spike. Does the hon. minister expect this real sharp spike to last until the year 2004?

Now, also on page 221 there is a discussion regarding working with "all government departments, industry and external stakeholders to achieve a reduction in power consumption." Well, this side of the House wanted to lead by example and have all government departments and offices reduce their electricity consumption by 10 percent. Mr. Chairman, sometimes I look up at the ceiling of this distinguished Assembly and think that perhaps the minister should take some light bulbs strategically out of there in a grid formation, and that way we could spell "no more deregulation." We

could serve two purposes with that. We certainly could be sticking to his business plan here, and we could be saving electricity at the same time. Every time one of the members of Executive Council leaned back in their chair, they would be reminded of the folly of what they attempted with their plan to deregulate our electricity generation system. It would be a good idea, yes.

Now, by keeping energy prices artificially low – this is also in relation to page 221 – what are the minister's specific plans to reduce power consumption?

8:50

On the next page, 222, there is a discussion on developing "a facility to accommodate the provincial archives." Where does the minister anticipate the archives being moved to? What options are being considered at this time? We certainly need a permanent home for the archives, and I think it should be within a short walking distance of the Legislative Assembly. I saw the hon. minister himself, I believe with a couple of his assistants, the other day at noontime at Jasper and 107th Street, busy chatting, waiting for the light to cross, Mr. Chairman, and that would be about the maximum distance away from the provincial parliament that I would like to see the archives built.

Now, there are some people who expressed an interest in putting it down at the power plant, but all their important papers on the floodplain – I don't know how often that floods, but the minister will study this. If there's a hundred-year flood on the flats, then I don't think that's an appropriate place for the Provincial Archives but certainly somewhere within a distance of the Assembly. I would be delighted if that were to be one of the works that is to be concluded by our centennial year. I think it would be a very worthwhile project, and it's a project that will benefit generations and generations of Albertans, including scholars who will be coming to study the hon. minister's political career. I don't know how many different ministries he's been in charge of, but surely there are going to be people going through the papers, and they can have a look at just exactly what was accomplished by the individuals in this Assembly.

Also on page 222 there's a discussion to "renovate and expand the Food Processing Centre in Leduc." What are the specific plans for renovating and expanding the food processing plant in Leduc?

Also on page 222 what options are being considered for the Westerra Building in Stony Plain?

As my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry stated, certainly if the minister in due time can reply in writing if the answers aren't available immediately for these questions, that will be fine.

Mr. Chairman, in closing my questions at this time, I would like to thank the hon. minister for his attention, and I wish him well in his portfolio. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make these brief remarks vis-a-vis the 2001-2002 budget estimates for the Ministry of Infrastructure. The Department of Infrastructure has advanced a business plan that ostensibly identifies the priorities and concerns of the ministry. According to this plan, the people of Alberta are the primary concern, followed by their prosperity and their preservation.

Yet after reviewing the budget estimates for this fiscal year, it becomes clear that there's little agreement between those who created the business plan and those who completed the estimates. Indeed, projected spending of this ministry unmasks a profound ambivalence towards the people of Alberta at best and, at worst, sheer disdain for their prosperity and their preservation. With

certainly one who contrasts the business plan and the spending projections would be convinced that there might be two divergent schools of thought within the government department.

We are all well acquainted with the fact that school classroom sizes are growing steadily larger and that waiting lists for medical procedures are likewise growing steadily longer, yet it is the minister's intention to allow the Swan Hills treatment plant to burn more of our hard-earned dollars, \$14 million more than last year. The ministry is also proposing to spend \$19.4 million on centennial projects. This is in addition to tens of millions of dollars of centennial projects and celebrations that are being funded by other ministries like Community Development. Where, oh, where, Mr. Chairman, is that big, tough just-say-no Provincial Treasurer when all the ministers are having a party at taxpayers' expense?

My questions to the Minister of Infrastructure are these. First, how can the government further justify pouring yet another \$20 million into the Swan Hills treatment plant given the fact that it has already incinerated almost \$500 million of taxpayers' money during its troubled existence? Why do we continue to throw good money after bad when it comes to this costly white elephant? Does the government have an exit strategy when it comes to the bleeding of red ink as a result of taxpayers' support of this facility?

Second, what useful purpose is served by the expenditure of \$19.4 million for so-called centennial projects out of the Ministry of Infrastructure's budget? Am I saying that these funds are necessarily wasted? No, Mr. Chairman, I'm not, but there is no way of telling here. Are these funds being directed to community facilities owned by voluntary organizations? Are they going to schools and hospitals? Is the main purpose to provide photo ops for government MLAs to hand out cheques to community groups that lead up to the next election?

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, you're so cynical.

MR. MASON: Mr. Chairman, I'll just digress a little bit. I've certainly been involved in municipal government for many years before this and am quite aware of how government MLAs can show up regularly with a cheque in hand and how few times we saw opposition MLAs in the same position. You know, time and time again there was the government member, but of course our opposition members were often just empty handed. It's not difficult to be cynical about this government; that's for sure. I'm accused of being cynical but, I can tell you, with very good reason.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about energy rebates. There's an estimate here of \$598 million. The budget overview indicated that government expected to spend \$125 million on natural gas rebates under its natural gas price protection plan. Is the \$598 million in the Ministry of Infrastructure budget on top of the \$125 million, or is it part and parcel of the same program? If so, why is there a discrepancy between the two numbers?

Fourthly, the Ministry of Infrastructure is incorporating into its budget estimates spending not only for this budget year but is also spending for next year and for the year after that, and that's on page 275, Mr. Chairman, of the estimates. It's pretty clear when you look at the amounts being expended, which are going from about \$700 million last year to over \$2.1 billion this year. This is what I was trying to get at with the Provincial Treasurer in question period.

What we're seeing is the government including in this budget \$2.1 billion of spending, and that spending will take place in subsequent years. That's not in accordance with normal budgeting practices. Normal budgeting practice would be to put that aside in a reserve fund and clearly indicate that it was to be spent in future years. But instead we have future years' funding, \$2 billion worth, that's in this

budget, and the result is that the government has been able to show, despite its very conservative budgeting around oil and gas prices, a relatively small surplus for this year, when if you really took a look at it and carefully analyzed it according to normal budgeting processes, the budget would show a surplus of nearly \$3 billion. I think that is irregular, Mr. Chairman, and I think that it needs to be responded to in a little more detail than the answer we got from the Provincial Treasurer in question period last week.

A lot of this money is being paid to regional health authorities, school boards, and universities and colleges. Will the amount not just for this year but also for the following years be paid out of this year's budget? If the moneys are being paid out this year, will school boards and health authorities be allowed to put them into separate accounts and draw interest from these accounts? Will they be allowed to use the interest and spend it on things other than capital infrastructure? I think these are things we need to know.

Now, I want to just deal a little bit with the entire situation around utilization formulas. It's very clear that the government is withholding, as a matter of policy, funds for new school construction where they're needed as well as funds to rehabilitate and restore older schools, maintenance money, as a hammer over the heads of the school boards in this province to force them to close schools.

9:00

Now, time and time again the Minister of Learning, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the Premier have stood up and said: the government doesn't close schools; it's the school board that closes schools. They wash their hands of it like Pontius Pilate. But I can tell you that the school boards know and the parents know that the hammer is being held by the government, and it's a deliberate policy decision of this government to force school boards to close schools.

Often those schools are in the poorest neighbourhoods, where it is most difficult to move through busing. Often kids, for example, in these neighbourhoods are the most responsible members of the entire family. They get themselves up to go to school, and they're often late. They come to school hungry and they come to school late, but they got themselves there because they're the ones that are responsible in the family. This is all too common in some of these communities. This may not be something that's readily apparent to people who haven't spent time in the inner city. So if the child misses the bus, then there's no one to get him to the school in the next community. That's a really sad result, I'm sure unforeseen by the government, of closing some of these inner-city schools.

These inner-city schools don't necessarily need all kinds of fancy programs. It's more important to have a school in the neighbourhood, in the community where kids can walk and where there are small classes and caring teachers. It forms an essential link in maintaining at least the semblance of a healthy community in an inner-city neighbourhood. When you take these away, all hope of revitalizing that community is lost.

To revitalize some of these communities – and some of them could be very nice. They have tree-lined streets. They have nice older houses. They're close to downtown. They have great potential. But when you take away the school, no family will move there; they'll move somewhere else. So any attempts by the people in that community or by agencies or by the municipality to revitalize that community will not be successful after the school is closed. Of course, then you have more urban blight. You have conditions that breed more crime, more poverty, and the community continues to deteriorate. It's a very sad situation. I wish the government would come up with some creative ways to make more effective use of school space that didn't involve the closure of schools.

I think when we talk about the utilization formula, we need to also

take into account that the government insists that things like libraries, computer rooms, or leased-out space cannot be counted in the utilization formula. So attempts by the schools to use the space in other ways is completely irrelevant to the purpose that they set themselves of trying to revitalize the school. The formula makes it almost impossible for schools and school boards and communities to save these schools. Even if they find a good use for it, whether it's an external use and the school board gets a little bit of money from renting it out or an internal use like setting up a computer lab, it doesn't make any difference in terms of the overall utilization rate that the school board reports to the ministry. As a result, they don't get anything for it. I think it's really a sad situation.

I hope the government's review will move quickly in this respect. I wasn't able to get a good answer to that question earlier last week, but I hope it goes ahead. I think we need to raise the whole question of the rationale of the Infrastructure department. The assumption is that if it's a building, it should be in this department, so you get a division between this department operating and looking after buildings and another department making use of them. I don't think that's necessarily the most efficient way to deal with it.

I would like to suggest, Mr. Chairman, that the government in the process of this review take a look at transferring control over school buildings and particularly the maintenance of older schools back to the Ministry of Learning, away from the Department of Infrastructure. I don't think it's efficient to say that the building you're in is run by one department and the functions that go on in that building are run by a different department. One department should have control of all of its resources if it's going to use them effectively. So I'd encourage the government to take a look at that as part of their review. Certainly we need to have a more sensitive approach to the utilization formula than we have so far, and we need to have it soon because schools are closing very quickly. Alex Taylor school and McDougall school are already proposed for closure, and Sacred Heart is coming up. I think these are very tragic decisions that have been forced on the school boards.

So, Mr. Chairman, that will conclude my remarks with respect to the estimates of the Department of Infrastructure, and I look forward to the responses from the minister to my questions. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I, too, am pleased to have an opportunity to ask some questions about the Infrastructure budget. I guess I would like to put into question form the comments made by the previous speaker, and that is to ask: is consideration being given to returning the School Buildings Board to the Learning department? Is that under active consideration? School boards have indicated that the split of the buildings away from Learning has now doubled their work. They have to make their case with Learning, and now they have to also make their case with Infrastructure. It seems not to be a very efficient way for decisions to be made. So my question is: is there active consideration to returning the responsibility for school boards to the Learning department?

I wanted to talk, too, and ask some questions about the utilization formula. We've heard and we've been told that there are changes under way to the utilization formula, and I think it's time it was recognized for exactly what it is. It's a mechanism for capping the amount of money that's spent on new schools and school construction. It's a very blunt instrument for accomplishing those goals, and it's an instrument that is very, very hurtful.

I don't know how many school closing meetings the minister has attended since he's been Minister of Infrastructure, but the agony of school closure is not felt in this Assembly; it's felt by citizens in

those communities. When you attend those meetings and see the passion and the tears at decisions that are made that will close a school and, in many instances, close a community – and I don't know how many times the minister has attended those meetings. If he hasn't, I would urge him to attend a number of them and to see how you can't stand in this Assembly and make a policy and divorce yourself from what happens to citizens when that policy is implemented. You can't back away from the policy decision and say: oh, that's the school boards' fault. It's not. The school boards are implementing a provincial policy, and they're the ones that are held responsible.

So I would make a plea, if nothing else is done out of this discussion about Infrastructure, for the minister to spend some time at those school closure meetings and then to sit down and look at the utilization formula. Surely it does not serve us well when we have citizen against citizen, community against community, fighting over school facilities. Certainly we can be more creative in terms of the use of that space.

9:10

In terms of the use of that school building space, there's an item in the business plan to "establish approximately 100 Alberta Children's Initiative offices in existing and new leased space." My question to the minister is: are schools being considered for those children's initiative offices? What other creative uses of the space, community uses of that space is the ministry considering and would use, if the utilization formula does prevail, to help boards reduce their space and that would strengthen communities? I think we'd all agree that for many communities and neighbourhoods that community school is the heart of the community, and the more services that can be offered out of the building when there is space available would seem to be to the benefit of communities. So my question is specifically about those children's initiative offices and how much work has gone into making sure that they're in empty spaces.

In terms of empty space, again, I'd ask the minister to look at some of the things that have been done with space that has been closed and mothballed and then reopened. I give for an example the Bennett centre in the river valley here. The school board closed Bennett school for a number of years. It was mothballed, and then it was reopened as the Bennett environmental centre. It serves not just Edmonton public but serves the surrounding area, and classes come in from across the province. It preserved an old building that has a rich heritage in this community, and it also has served youngsters extremely well from across the province. So my question is: are boards being encouraged to mothball? Are they being encouraged to dispose of extra space? Is there active seeking of uses of that space which, like the Bennett centre, are possibilities?

I look at Donald Ross in the flats. I think the school board still maintains ownership of that building, but it's been used extensively. It was used by the Commonwealth Games, I think, when they were in the city. I believe it was used when they were planning the capital city parks area. The provincial government put money into that.

Again my plea is: can there be creative uses of that space that maintain it as a centre for the community and make it available should the opportunity for revitalization come about, that there's a school facility there? I think you'd agree that if a board disposes of land in the heart of the city, the chances of ever getting that back for school purposes are rather remote. It's going to be very, very difficult to acquire that land. It'll just be too expensive. So the concern about unused space.

I have another concern, and I should know the answer, but maybe the minister can tell me. What happens when a building is sold? Where do the proceeds go? Do they go to the local board, or do they

go back to the provincial government? What is done with buildings? For instance, I think of Glenora school in Edmonton. It was funded entirely out of the operational budget of the school board at that time. There were no provincial funds put into it. I think at the time the province indicated that they wouldn't support it, so it was funded out of the operational budget. What happens if a building like that is sold or, in the case of many buildings, where the province paid part of the building costs? I remember that when I was on the board, they would pay a percentage, and the local board through the local requisition picked up the difference. The local community then has an investment that is beyond the provincial government's investment in those buildings. What happens to that money when those buildings are sold?

I look at the business plan of the ministry, and there are some really interesting key strategies. I go back to the comments of the Auditor General. The Auditor General makes the comment:

The business plan is a performance contract with the Legislature and the public. When it does not clearly describe the performance measures then various interpretations are possible.

I wonder where the performance measures are. Are they coming? How will we know, for instance, if these objectives and key strategies are met? For instance, goal 4, number 3, "measure client satisfaction with services provided by Alberta Infrastructure through an annual survey of stakeholders and clients." What is the measure that is going to be used, and how will we know next year when we come back to this whether that measure has been met? I think that same question applies to a lot of the items in Infrastructure.

Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further comments, questions?

The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the members that have participated in this discussion. Now, there were a lot of questions, and we'll try to answer some of those questions that were asked. I want to just make a few comments on some things that were policy as opposed to direct questions on the business plan and on the budget.

The first one I want to comment on is the Swan Hills Special Waste Treatment Centre. As I said in answer to questions in question period, that plant is extremely important to the province of Alberta, and for the life of me I can't understand how people that pretend to be wanting to protect the environment are anxious that we shut that plant down. What is going to happen to that waste? Where is it going to go? The fact is that we are the only province that has no PCBs, and that's because of the Swan Hills plant. Also, the dioxans, the furans, some of those other hazardous materials: where are they going to go? What's going to be done with them?

I think it's just irresponsible for people to talk the way they are about that plant. Certainly we are going to try very hard to move it out to the private sector, but I can tell you that we are very anxious that that plant continue to operate and continue to keep this environment clean in the province of Alberta.

The energy rebate: I find that one kind of interesting as well. We have before us Bill 1, and that talks to the energy rebates in the future. I'm afraid that maybe I don't have a crystal ball like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, yet the fact is that we don't know. Maybe in the year 2004 there will be a spike. We don't know. This last one came up on us – nobody knew that was coming – and there may be one in the future. Bill 1 puts in place a mechanism so that in fact we can respond to those kinds of situations. So we need some money in the budget to operate that, and that's what the \$125 million is.

Talking about conservation and what we have done, currently the province has put in place a program, and we are well along the way

to addressing conservation in all of our buildings. As a matter of fact, we're 50 percent done. It's really interesting, as well, when you look at what the government has done as far as greenhouse gas emissions. We are 19 percent below – below – 1990 levels. Ask your kissing cousins in Ottawa where they're at in their whole infrastructure. They're a long ways from that.

There were comments made about the archives and where they might be going. I don't know. We're not that far along in any kind of planning.

I found it interesting that Edmonton-Highlands doesn't seem to realize that operating and maintenance are in the hands of the school boards. It's given to the school boards. We do not do the operating and maintenance. So when you talk about the lack of operating and maintenance, we give block funding from education to school boards for the operation and maintenance of their schools. That's not something that we do.

The utilization issue is an interesting one, but I'm sure that the hon. member would not be excited about going back to the old schools where you have grades 1, 2, and 3 in one room, one teacher: that sort of thing. That's what will happen if you're going to continue to have schools very close to one another and not having the pupils to put in them. So that's part of what this utilization is. It's not the only factor that leads to closing, but that is a part of it.

9:20

The use of old schools. Yes, very good comments, and it's something that we are currently looking at. When a school is closed, there are options. The first, of course: is there another use as a school? The second would be: is there use by the government for one of their departments? Then to nonprofit and then, of course, to the private sector.

THE CHAIRMAN: That concludes the time portion.

After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Infrastructure, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$2,832,240,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Transportation

THE CHAIRMAN: Again, to begin this evening, we'll call on the Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I start with my opening comments, I'd like to introduce the ministry staff that are with us this evening. The gentleman who bought a brand-new suit for the night's event, sitting in the front row, our new deputy, no stranger to many people here: Jay Ramotar. Gregg is right behind; Gregg is the chair of transportation safety services. We have Mr. Lyle O'Neill, the gentleman with the white hair over to the right, acting ADM, transportation and civil engineering. We have someone that's doing double duty today. He sat through the hon. Minister of Infrastructure's presentation and will sit through mine,

Ray Reshke, who is the assistant deputy minister of corporate services. He's doing duty for both departments. Brian Marcotte is executive director, policy and planning. Up front is Leanne Stangeland, director of communications. I know Winnie was here before; and of course Tom Hong, executive director of business management.

I'd like to thank them all for supporting me this evening, and I'd like to thank them for the excellent work over the past year. Quite frankly, they must be suckers for punishment, because they're still with me in this rearranged portfolio of Transportation.

Alberta's road systems are facing tremendous pressures as a result of the province's rapid economic growth. The flip side of growth pressures, of course, is growth opportunities, and developing a highway network which meets the needs for future years will only add to Alberta's future growth and prosperity.

The separation of Transportation into its own ministry shows how important safe and efficient highways continue to be to this government. Now that we have taken over responsibility for the former secondary highways and key primary highways through cities, it makes even more sense to have a ministry dedicated to these tasks.

Now, the main businesses of the department are transportation infrastructure and transportation safety. We'll keep working to continually improve the province's highways through the management of planning, design, construction, and maintenance activities.

A second core business of the ministry involves water and wastewater management as well as the management for the design, construction, and maintenance of major water management projects. Alberta Transportation will employ 824 people, with a total budget of \$1.54 billion. Taking on the responsibility for secondary highways and key primary highways through cities requires the recruitment of additional staff to undertake the appropriate level of support and operations. I'm glad to say that this will be achieved without additional funding. Budget dollars have been reallocated within the ministry to accommodate this requirement.

Also, Alberta Transportation and Infrastructure will share corporate support services including human resources, business management, information technology, and finance. This approach, of course, is consistent with the government's overall objective to share services and resources wherever feasible.

For the upcoming year we'll continue to carry out recommendations of the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure as they pertain to Transportation. To this end, we have received \$200 million in advance funding. Approximately \$35 million of the advance funding will be used to accelerate construction of the north/south trade corridor. The corridor runs from the U.S. border at Coutts to the B.C. border west of Grande Prairie. The highways making up the corridor will all be four lanes by the corridor's completion in 2007. The key objective is providing a safe and efficient highway corridor to accommodate increased trade traffic from the United States and Mexico. Since 1993 Alberta's trade with the United States has increased 60 percent, while trade with Mexico has gone up 279 percent. That is why the corridor is important.

Overall, Alberta Transportation will spend \$196 million in corridor-related projects this year. Major projects include continuing the twinning work on highway 43 between the junction of highway 16 west of Edmonton to the B.C./Alberta border west of Grande Prairie; the continued construction of Anthony Henday Drive, or the Edmonton southwest ring road, and this road will connect highway 2 south of Edmonton to highway 16 west of Edmonton; continuing the extension of the Deerfoot Trail in Calgary through the southern city limits to link up with highway 2 just outside of Okotoks; and the continued paving of highway 4 from Coutts to Lethbridge.

We will continue the Alberta cities transportation partnership

program in 2001-02. Under the program the cities of Edmonton and Calgary receive funding based on the equivalent of 5 cents per litre of road fuel delivered for sale in the respective cities. For Edmonton this translates into approximately \$65 million a year and \$85 million for Calgary. Other cities continue to receive the basic capital grant funding of approximately \$60 per capita. Towns, villages, and summer villages also receive cost-shared grants under the street improvement program. Total funding is \$51 million.

The grants to rural municipalities program provides annual formula-based grants to assist counties, municipal districts, special areas, and Metis settlements to develop and upgrade a network of local roads and bridges, and this program is budgeted at \$132 million for this year.

In addition to municipal transportation funding programs the Premier's task force also transferred full responsibility for former secondary highways to the province. This includes construction, maintenance, and rehabilitation. A budgetary shift from operating to capital expense comes from the department contracting out the work rather than giving grants to municipalities. Estimated spending: \$171 million.

The resource roads/new industry program will carry on. The program provides funding assistance to municipalities to upgrade local roads or bridges impacted by resource-based truck traffic. This program also assists municipalities to improve roads affected by the new industrial resource or value-added developments. Total funding: \$34 million.

Now, there's more to Alberta Transportation than building roads, and that is of course ensuring traffic safety. It's a vital function of this ministry. Transportation safety services estimates will increase \$3.1 million, or 15 percent, that again relocated within the ministry to accommodate the hiring of additional officers and will continue to do the work in areas like driver licensing, licensing enforcement, impaired driving programs, dangerous goods monitoring, and monitoring the commercial carrier industry.

Through innovative partnerships we'll support municipalities in solving their overall transportation, wastewater, and water infrastructure needs. The effective management of water resources aids our economic growth and enhances the quality of life for all Albertans. Funding for municipal water and wastewater is \$35 million in 2001-02 and \$33.6 million for water management infrastructure.

9:30

We are also supporting municipal infrastructure needs through the infrastructure Canada/Alberta program, ICAP for short. It's cost shared equally by three levels of government and targeted to green infrastructure projects and really to water and wastewater treatment upgrades. Over the program's six years we'll contribute \$171 million. We budgeted \$138 million this year for ICAP.

I wish to mention that \$200 million in program funding which was deferred last year in order to provide the partial funding for the energy rebates has been restored to the ministry and the municipal partnerships it was intended for.

Having efficient, world-class road systems is vital to Alberta in achieving its vast economic growth potential, and it's equally important to have, of course, safe roads in the province.

I was remiss earlier in making the introductions. Someone who has stuck with me since May of 1997 is, of course, my executive assistant, Ron Glen, who is also sitting up with the rest of the group.

Mr. Chairman, that brings my opening comments to a conclusion.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a

pleasure to rise this evening and make some comments and some observations on the Ministry of Transportation. I'd like to thank the hon. minister and his ministry staff for joining us here this evening and providing some insights into the ministry.

The first thing I'd like to do is commend the hon. Minister of Transportation on his previous job as minister of the supersized Ministry of Infrastructure. I'm sure he's enjoying the task of being able to focus on providing Alberta with the best blacktop in the country.

I have just a few remarks this evening, Mr. Chairman, before I begin my questions. As I requested last night in the Municipal Affairs estimates, I hope the minister would be able to receive a letter with additional questions if time does not permit all of our queries to come onto the table this evening. Thank you.

Unlike other ministries, Transportation is very, very focused. They build the roads and keep them safe. This seems to be the task at hand. Anyone in Alberta with even a short political memory will know that pavement is political in this province. One thing that I have found difficult in going through these estimates for this ministry – I mentioned this in the debate on the Infrastructure estimates, but I think it's important to repeat, Mr. Chairman – is that it is a difficult task in comparing year-to-year numbers when a ministry is always being reorganized. Albertans want their government to be accountable, and as a member of the Official Opposition it is my job to be their voice and to ask the tough questions. Well, when the numbers keep changing, the questions keep getting harder and harder to ask. While the business plan is detailed, I think there should be some mention of how this fits into the old ministry so that the reader has a better perspective on the new ministry.

Again, as I mentioned earlier in my comments on the Ministry of Infrastructure, it certainly would be quite appropriate and quite in order for there to be some explanation as to how the dollars flowed in the old ministry and how they impact the two new ministries which were formed when the split occurred.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I would like now to begin my questions. Once again, in looking at the whole performance measures, looking at the business plans and whatever, I see a set of performance measures that really to any persons looking at these do not make a whole lot of sense. I refer on page 442 here to Mechanical Safety of Commercial Vehicles. It says that the maximum percentage of inspected vehicles requiring on-site adjustments in 1999-2000 was 23.3 percent. Now, what does that mean? When does that become a meaningful figure? Well, it certainly doesn't become a meaningful figure until such time as we know how many vehicles were tested. Of course, at that point, then, we can determine just how many of these on-site adjustments were required. Then it really does become a meaningful number.

When we look at the targets for 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and so on, again percentages mean absolutely nothing, and it is very difficult to compare if we don't know how many vehicles were inspected. How can you have a target when you have not said how many vehicles are going to be tested? Again, when we have a random number that are selected, it gives us a percentage. I think that percentage with an adequate sample would prove to be true, but again we don't know how many vehicles are being tested year to year. I would certainly in future years like to see a much better system used for performance measures that are much, much more meaningful than straight percentages.

Now, then, moving forward here with my questions and looking at program 1, ministry support services, we see here that in the year 2001-2002 we have an operating estimate of \$13,960,000. We have an operating actual for the year 2000-2001 of \$17,589,000 and an operating budget for 2000-2001 of \$17,544,000. When we look at

the capital estimates for the current fiscal year, it is \$5,907,000, and for the previous fiscal year the capital actual was \$6 million as well as the capital budget.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

Now, again, to give us a real sense of just how these dollars are being spent, it is critical that we know how many full-time equivalents are employed under ministry support services in the year 2001-2002. If the minister could also please provide us with the breakdown of the full-time equivalents by the three subprograms: the minister's office, the deputy minister's office, and support services. Again, because of the split in the department, I would also like to know from the minister: is the number of full-time equivalents increasing? Is the overall budget decreasing? Are there several positions that have been left open in past years that are now being filled?

As well, I also noticed in here that there were capital projects. What I'd like to know is: what capital projects were funded by the \$6 million in capital investment in the year 2000-2001, and what will be funded in the fiscal year 2001-2002 with the \$5.9 million being requested in the estimate?

Also, if the minister could provide us a breakdown of the \$385,000 minister's office budget for 2001-2002, again, first of all, by the salaries for permanent positions, the salaries for nonpermanent positions, the salaries for contract positions, for travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and also hosting expenses.

9:40

Now, then, for the deputy minister's office, if the minister could also provide us with a breakdown of the \$385,000 that were budgeted for 2001-2002, again by the same categories: salaries for permanent positions, nonpermanent positions, contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses.

Another question I have for the minister: why are the operating expenses for ministry support services, line 1.0.3, dropping by \$3.629 million? What is being reduced to incur this type of savings? I think, as well, that when we look at the overall budget of the government this year, certainly it is good to see that we are saving money in some parts of departments.

Also, if the minister could please provide me with a breakdown of the \$13.19 million operating estimate for support services in the current fiscal year, 2001-2002, by the following: business planning and corporate support, communications, financial services, human resource services, information technology, and legal services.

Again, last year, Mr. Chairman, there was the Ministry of Infrastructure. This year there's the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Transportation. Both of these ministries show budgets for ministry support services for 2000-2001, but these numbers do not seem to match the approved estimates for the Ministry of Infrastructure for 2000-2001. The capital investment appears to reconcile – a portion of the approved amounts have been allocated to each of the new ministries – but the budgets for the minister's office and the deputy minister's office do not seem to split out. It is very difficult for Albertans to see how much the supersize cabinet is costing.

Accurate reporting on this account is very important. Back under the old ministry of transportation and utilities the minister's office had a budget of \$220,000, and public works had a ministerial budget of \$270,000. Under the superministry of Infrastructure the amount was \$388,000. Now that we have two new and improved ministries,

Infrastructure and Transportation, the combined costs for ministerial offices is now up to \$775,000. That's \$390,000 for Infrastructure and \$385,000 for Transportation. Would it be possible for the minister to check with the accountants and provide an explanation as to how they arrived at the 2000-2001 budgets and actual numbers for these ministries?

I would like now to move on to program 2, construction, upgrading, and operation of transportation infrastructure. Again, under this particular program I notice that we have an operating estimate for this current fiscal year of \$1,046,188,000. Our capital estimate for, again, this current fiscal year is \$476,573,000. My question to the minister in regards to program 2: how many full-time equivalents are employed under program 2, construction, upgrading, and operation of transportation infrastructure? If he could also provide us with the breakdown of full-time equivalents by subprograms in program 2.

The next area I'd like to move on to is line 2.1, transportation safety services, again a very critical part of transportation in this province. There are certainly situations in this province that we have to improve on in order for motorists to know that they are on safe highways, so we have, Mr. Chairman, the Transportation Safety Board, which is comprised of the Driver Control Board, the Motor Transport Board. This is a quasi-judicial body responsible for conducting hearings in the interest of public safety on firms or individuals referred by the courts, police, the registrar, transport inspectors, driver records, and the minister. The boards' hearing process deals with specific issues under the Motor Vehicle Administration Act, the Highway Traffic Act, the Motor Transport Act, and the Off-Highway Vehicle Act.

So my questions to the minister here under transportation safety services. What services are funded under transportation safety services? I would also like to know how many cases were heard before the Transportation Safety Board in the year 2000-2001. Also, is the caseload for the Transportation Safety Board expected to increase or decrease for the year 2001-2002?

Now, then, I noticed as well, reading through here, that one of the major strategies in the ministry business plan is to "develop and implement new initiatives to encourage the safe conduct of commercial carriers and drivers," and I think this is critical. These are the professionals that are on our roads, and they make a living when their machines are moving. They don't make much money when they're sitting still. So the amount of time they spend on the highways is critical, and the amount of time they spend behind the wheel is critical, particularly when we have seen the increase in gasoline and diesel prices. We hear on the news today that gasoline could be as much as a dollar a litre this summer, and if indeed gasoline rises to those heights, then it's certainly very, very possible that our diesel rates will go up. So the margin of profit for these drivers becomes less and less, and of course to make that up, then they have to work more and more.

My questions on transportation safety services to the minister. When we look at the safe conduct of commercial carriers and drivers, will this include the required use of electric on-board monitors to replace logbooks? What other plans is the minister considering in looking at this whole issue of how drivers log their time? I'm sure all of us have heard how many drivers keep two sets of books. I've never encountered any, but it is a story that is very common.

AN HON. MEMBER: You hear that in the coffee shops.

MR. BONNER: Yes, you definitely hear that in the coffee shops.

Mr. Chairman, government officials in Canada are proposing to allow truckers in Canada to drive up to 84 hours a week over

extended weeks. This compares to the 60 hours a week allowed in the United States. The new rule agreed to by federal and provincial governments is the same as that proposed by the Canadian Trucking Alliance in April of 1998 and clarified by the CTA in a public statement this past summer. The following are the essential features proposed by the trucking industry and agreed to by federal and provincial government officials in Halifax.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, one of the recommendations here is to increase the maximum driving shift from 13 to 14 hours. These are the longest in the regulated world. I would like to know what consultation took place in order to allow this increase of time on the highways. Again, that seems to be a contradiction when goal 2 is to "improve standards for the commercial carrier industry" and, along with federal, provincial, and territorial governments, "review and streamline hours of service legislation for commercial carriers and ensure the rules are consistently applied in Alberta." Now, how can we increase safety if we are allowing drivers to be on the road more and more?

9:50

As well, I see here that another recommendation is that there is to be a decrease in the maximum working shift from 15 to 14 hours. Of course that is good, but that means that somebody could drive for 14 hours straight. Then it would increase the daily rest period from 8 to 10 hours, but only 8 hours need to be consecutive. Again, this puts a tremendous strain on those drivers, and for anybody that is driving week in and week out for 14 hours per day, this certainly wears.

I think of a situation in northern Alberta where the air base at Cold Lake used to have their fuel hauled in by train. They lost a contract, so now the majority of that or all of that fuel is being trucked into the air base at Cold Lake. We have tractor trailers up and down that stretch of highway hauling this fuel. Now, if you've had a driver that's been on the road for 14 hours for any length of time and they are quite weary and fall asleep at the wheel, what we have is we have a rocket going down the highway. The biggest problem I have with this is that when we look at what's happening in the States, their amount of time is much less. It would seem to me that rather than us increasing the amount of time that drivers are allowed to be on the road, what we should be aiming at, particularly with a focus on this north/south corridor, is that rather than have these drivers going up and down the road, we try to harmonize that legislation with our neighbours to the south.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to continue where my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry left off, and that's dealing with highway systems. That's item 2.2.

The operating estimate is \$758 million. That rolls off the tongue. It's a lot of money. The actual operating budget is \$663 million, and the operating budget, again, is pegged to be \$665 million. Now, my question for the minister concerns the economic climate. How is Alberta's economic climate affecting labour and construction costs for the north/south trade corridor?

I watch with amazement the budgets. You know, it's almost an echo to the boom. I sometimes think that it wouldn't be prudent, but of course the infrastructure system has been left without major reinvestment for a period of time. As a result, in order to catch up, there has to be so much money spent. I realize that the traffic

volumes are increasing. And certainly things like the north/south corridor, the improvements in traffic flow, and arterial roads in Edmonton and in Calgary are significant improvements that will benefit all Albertans, but at some point I think we have to start looking at setting money aside in a special fund and use it in the future for roads.

When the economy slows down, there is more labour available. Construction costs will go down because materials and labour will be cheaper. Again, I would like to know: how is Alberta's economic climate affecting labour and construction costs for the north/south trade corridor? Other costs are going up because of the shortage of labour and in some situations a shortage of materials. Machines is another issue.

What sections of the corridor are being paved in 2001-2002, and when will the controversial section near Milk River be twinned? The Milk River highway has always been controversial in this Assembly, at least in the time that I have had the privilege of being a member. Has the department collected any accident statistics specific to the north/south trade corridor to show if the twinning project is improving safety on our highways? Again, why is the budget for operating expenses for provincial highways decreasing – this is program 2.2.2 – from \$356 million in 2000-2001 to roughly \$311 million in 2001-2002?

Another question for the minister is: what is included in capital investment for other road infrastructure, program 2.2.3, and why is this budget decreasing from \$7.9 million to \$5.4 million?

Now, at one time the idea of toll roads was floated in the Legislature, and the government rejected the idea not on principle but rather on economics. What are the department's views on toll roads? Is the government still looking at this as a possibility for Alberta drivers? It's not something that I would endorse, but who knows what this government is contemplating.

Program 2.3, municipal partnerships. This is very interesting. We're looking at a substantial difference between the operating estimate and the operating budget from one year to the next. Why did the department, again to the minister, only spend \$335 million of the \$539 million budget for municipal partnerships in the year 2000-2001? Why has the budget for Alberta cities transportation partnerships been reduced from \$256 million in 2000-2001 down to \$125.6 million in 2001-2002?

Now, the budget for the streets improvement program was \$60 million in 2000-2001, yet only \$25 million of this money was spent. That is amazing. I don't know how the streets are in Edmonton-Glenarry, but certainly in sections of Edmonton-Gold Bar there are some rather large potholes. Ball joints, tie-rod ends: sometimes I think they're going to fall off. This is quite a difference, but this year the estimate is \$51 million, down again from \$60 million. Can the minister provide some background on these numbers, specifically why the full budget was not spent. Was it a matter of material, labour costs, contracts? I'm very curious about that when I consider my own neighbourhood and exactly the conditions of the streets.

Again to the minister regarding municipal partnerships, program 2.3, why is the capital investment for resource roads dropping from \$4 million to \$1 million? What projects were funded in 2000-2001, and what projects are on the list for 2001-2002? Will the minister please provide a list of all the projects that were funded under the street improvement project in 2000-2001? It would be very interesting to see this. What streets were actually done, and how many kilometres of streets were actually improved?

10:00

Now, again under municipal water and wastewater grants, line 2.3.5, what projects were funded under this program in 2000-2001?

The budget for this program was \$29 million, yet again we see there was \$19 million spent. I don't know if the \$10 million was left on the table or where it went. For 2001-2002 the budget is set at \$35 million. Municipalities have said how hard it is to get money for water and wastewater projects because everyone seems to need money for this program. The waiting lists are so long that necessary projects can often be put on hold for a year or two until funding is available. What projects does the minister anticipate funding in 2001-2002?

Now, water management infrastructure. I understand here the 2001-2002 operating estimate was over \$33 million. For 2000-2001 the actual budget was \$32 million, and the operating budget was identical. It was also \$32 million. What projects were funded for the \$20 million spent on capital investment in water management infrastructure in 2000-2001, and what projects again are on the list for 2001-2002? What is the minister's view on the Meridian dam project in southern Alberta?

Now, on line item 2.5, infrastructure Canada/Alberta program, what projects does the minister anticipate funding with the infrastructure Canada/Alberta program? Could the minister please provide some background about the application and approval process for grants under this program? I certainly know of situations in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar where this money could be put to very good use, and I'm sure that also applies for Edmonton-Glenarry and Edmonton-Mill Woods as well.

In line 2.7, the financial transactions, the budget for consumption of inventories is increasing from \$9.5 million to 15 and a half million dollars. Could the minister please provide some explanation as to what is covered by this budget and the reason for the substantial increase in 2001-2002?

Mr. Chairman, I also have at this time some questions from the business plan, and these are questions about the business plan from the year 2001 to the year 2004. The first goal here is to improve transportation safety with Justice, the Solicitor General, Government Services, and Innovation and Science. There's going to be permission to "allow enforcement services electronic access to ministry transportation safety data." This is on page 337. Now, will the minister please provide some background information on the cross-ministry initiative to "allow enforcement services electronic access to ministry transportation safety data"?

On page 337 also there is discussion to "develop a process to license private sector mechanics to repair and inspect vehicles written off in Alberta or other provinces." I don't know if I'm at all in agreement with this, but my question to the minister at this time would be: what is the current process for inspection and repair of written-off vehicles, and how will this change with the new process to license private-sector mechanics to perform this service? Who will manage this process and set the standards?

Now, we have to be very, very careful about this, and I'm sure at some time the Minister of Government Services is certainly going to have an opinion on this. Every time we see a consumer advocate talk, there is always discussion about write-offs from other provinces winding up shiny and looking new on Alberta streets and highways, but in reality these are not safe vehicles, and the state of repair and the condition of them has led to not only frustrated consumers but unsafe conditions on the highways. Whenever I see this, it just amazes me where these vehicles come from, how many there will be. Will it be cars? Will it be trucks? Will it be tractor trailers for the transportation industry? I need a lot more information than this.

Now goal 2, enhance transportation infrastructure planning and management. On page 338: "evaluate long-term funding requirements for municipal infrastructure in conjunction with the [AUMA] and the [AAMD and C]." Will evaluating the long-term funding

requirements for municipal infrastructure take place in another Premier's task force on infrastructure, or will it take on some other form? Another question following from that one is: what is the time line for this evaluation?

Also on page 338 there's a discussion on exploring "opportunities for the deployment of Intelligent Transportation Systems technologies to improve the safety and efficiency of the provincial transportation network." What precisely is the intelligent transportation system? Where does the safety and efficiency of our highways need to be improved? Is this a government initiative, or is it a joint initiative with industry?

Goal 4, to improve access to global markets. "Partner with Canadian and United States governments and the State of Montana to operate a joint border crossing facility in Coutts." Will the minister provide some information on the joint border crossing facility at Coutts?

Now, on page 339 there is further discussion on evaluating "trends in rural transportation." Also on that page, to "promote the establishment of an efficient grain handling and transportation system that is based on commercial principles." How will the minister evaluate trends in rural transportation? Will the minister please table copies of any reports or studies the government has on the long-term effects of grain trucks and other agricultural vehicles on secondary paved and gravel roads? Another question for the hon. minister is: does the promotion of "the establishment of an efficient grain handling and transportation system that is based on commercial principles" mean that the minister is again looking at toll roads?

10:10

Now, the question that also comes to mind, Mr. Chairman – and it's again directed to the minister – is: at what point will I be able to drive to Calgary on a three-lane highway in both directions? As the province has grown, many of the hon. members that commute by automobile to Calgary who represent Calgary ridings are probably going to have to consider promoting this, and that's the idea of three lanes in each direction, north and south, between Calgary and Edmonton. I've looked at this. I'm sure there are studies being done by the minister's department, and I would be very anxious to have a glance at them. I would be now asking the hon. minister if he could table these, because I would like to see what sort of cost would be involved in this. I think the initial design of the road may have been included in the span on the overpasses. That would certainly benefit the economies of both cities, and it would certainly enhance safety. I'm very anxious to see the cost of this.

Now, I would also like to ask the minister if there's been a cost-benefit analysis done regarding the privatization of all the road maintenance that's gone on and what sort of quality control is being conducted as far as the quality of paving that's going on. I know there's a stretch of road out by Edson that had to be resurfaced. I for one as a regular commuter on that road to Jasper and to Hinton am not impressed at all with that surface. I've received a few gravel cracks in my windscreen because of that road, and I would like to know what sort of cost-benefit analysis is being done.

I'm disappointed that my time is up. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to ask some questions and to make some comments about the Transportation estimates and business plan before us this evening.

I wanted to start off, if I might, with some comments about the business plan. I know that the split-off from Infrastructure must

have caused some difficulties for the department and some difficulties for the staff, but I wondered why the advice of the Auditor General in terms of the preparation of business plans has largely been ignored by the Transportation department. I go back to what the Auditor General said in the last report. He made a number of recommendations about government business plans, and his first recommendation was:

We recommend that the Department of Treasury, in conjunction with other ministries, clearly define the core measures and targets in the government business plan.

So my question is: has the department been working with Treasury on the business plans that are presented in this department's portion of the budget?

The second recommendation talks about ministry business plans too. He says:

We recommend that ministries, with assistance from the Department of Treasury, improve the link between goals and core businesses in ministry business plans."

He has a third recommendation.

We recommend that ministries, in conjunction with the Department of Treasury, ensure that all performance measures in ministry business plans include clearly defined targets.

He goes on to make some comments that there needs to be further improvements to the targets. I think the criticisms that the Auditor General makes certainly apply to the business plans here.

If you look at the business plans of the ministry, the goals are set out fairly clearly, the objectives I think are fairly clear, and certainly the key strategies provide a great deal of detail for us. But when you look at, for instance, goal 4, which is to "improve access to global markets," there are four objectives: to develop the north/south trade corridor, encourage consistent trucking standards between Canada and the United States, and so on. Then you go over and look at the key performance measures for goal 4, and you only find one. That is the percentage of "four-laning open to travel." Well, it hardly is a performance measure that can be used to evaluate the objectives that are listed under goal 4 and completely misses any of the key strategies.

I know there's a footnote under one of them – it's not under this one – that measures are being developed. Surely, given the history of business plans and business plan development with this government since 1993, we're further along the road with the development of performance measures for the business plans. The performance measures here are really, really very limited, and in terms of judging the success of the department in assuring us that the money is being well spent, these are going to provide us really very limited information the next time we find ourselves looking at the business plan and trying to evaluate whether or not the money that the department had was well spent.

You know, I don't think I make too much of the matter, Mr. Chairman. The government has invested a great deal and has asked for the public's confidence in terms of its budgeting process based on the three-year business plans. They're referred to often by commentators and critics when they look at the government and its operations, and they're always looked on in a favourable light. Certainly the Auditor General has wholeheartedly adopted and promoted a system of performance measures.

I go back to the advice the Auditor General gave, and I mentioned it when we looked at the Department of Infrastructure.

The business plan is a performance contract with the Legislature and the public. When it does not clearly describe the performance measures then various interpretations are possible. Since the business plan is the basis against which performance is measured it is important that the desired measurement and expected results be clearly defined.

That's not the case, I don't think, with the Department of Transportation.

There has been a great deal of work done and a great deal of work that should give us confidence that things are headed in the right direction and that there is a pretty good articulation of goals. But the next step, that advice we need, the measures that would say, "Yes, this much progress has been made," or "No, in this area we aren't making the progress that we want" are not there. I think it's unfortunate, as I said, that we're this far along with the government claiming that business plans are a useful instrument in terms of the budgeting process and an instrument that makes transparent the government's operation and that the plans don't reflect those statements.

10:20

Given the number of questions there are about the Transportation budget, it goes back to the Auditor General, and his comment is: "In our view, clearly defined measures and targets in the business plan should not require extensive additional disclosure." He's saying that if you lay out the objectives and the goals of the department clearly and you put in place the appropriate measures, then we shouldn't be spending a great deal of time in this Legislature going back and asking for additional information. That's certainly not the case to this point.

So I would ask the minister in the terms I asked before: what work has been done with Treasury in terms of performance measures, and what can we expect in the future? What kind of work is in progress in terms of those performance measures?

I have a couple of specific questions. I'm not sure, at least for one of these questions, that this is the appropriate place to ask it, but maybe the minister can advise me. The concern is with ineligible drivers being kept off the road. I notice that there's been some work done by the department with the Solicitor General's department. The concern that's been raised by at least one of my constituents has been that drivers will obtain a licence, will show the insurance certificates, and then have their insurance canceled and will be driving on the highways without insurance yet still with a valid licence plate. I wondered if that problem has been addressed. Is there a process in place where, when insurance is canceled, the authorities are automatically alerted to the fact that there is a driver who now has a valid licence plate and is not insured? Exactly what is being done?

Again, I'm not sure this is the ministry that would address that problem, but it seems to me it could fall under Transportation in terms of expecting that those drivers would be kept off the road. If it hasn't, I wonder if it can't be pursued. I think I had at least one constituent very concerned. He'd been hit by a driver who had a valid licence plate but who had gone out and canceled his insurance, and it put the constituent in a very difficult position.

I look at the key strategies under "improve road user behaviour" and the number of really good programs that are under way there. Are those done in co-operation with the Department of Learning? The kinds of cross-ministry projects that are under way have been mentioned in a couple of places, but it isn't mentioned here in terms of promoting traffic safety and traffic safety messages. Are those done in conjunction with schools and with the Ministry of Learning?

Here is the reference I wanted, under goal 1, objective 3:

With Justice, Solicitor General, Government Services, and Innovation and Science, allow enforcement services electronic access to ministry transportation safety data.

So there's that cross-ministry co-operation there, and I wondered if the same was possible in terms of the problem I raised with uninsured drivers being on the highways of the province.

Again, if you look at the key strategies, they really cry for some

performance measures. Under "provide for the safe operation of railways under provincial jurisdiction through the proclamation of the new Railway Act," the objective is to "enhance rail safety." How are we going to know at the end of the day that rail safety has been enhanced? What are the kinds of measures that are going to be in place that will tell us there has been progress made on this? Will it be the number of rail accidents? Just exactly what will be the key measures? You can go through the strategies and pose that same question.

I wondered about providing the cities of Calgary and Edmonton with annual funding based on the 5 cents per litre of fuel delivered for road use and the provisions for other cities, if that is being found to be an adequate base for those municipalities and their use. Is it going to provide the kind of support they need to adequately provide transportation facilities in those cities?

I had a question about the north/south trade corridor. There's been a lot of confidence placed in the development of that corridor in terms of it increasing trade, and I wonder if there is information available, the information base those projections are based upon. You know, it seems to be accepted that if you twin the roads north and south, that will improve transportation and encourage trade, but is there any hard data to say that that is actually the case? Or will it just make driving and access for current users more convenient? I wondered if there was information that could be shared with us in terms of, yes, that in fact is going to increase trade. Is there some percentage figure that can be given to us to justify the expense that that project is costing taxpayers?

There's a question I had about the organization of the department itself. It seemed to me that in the past there was a great cutting of Transportation staff by one of the previous ministers. Now there are a number of strategies to build up that staff and to recruit additional staff. I wonder if we could have some information on that. Is this new initiative needed because of the cost cutting that went on before and the kind of staff that was lost? The strategies here seem to be identical, or at least some of them are, to those that we found in the Department of Infrastructure. Again, my question is: are we paying now a price for the kind of departmental cutting that went on before? It's under goal 5, objective 1 and objective 2, and it's the human resource plan that I would like some more information on from the minister.

I think, Mr. Chairman, that those are most of my comments. There have been a lot of questions raised this evening about the Transportation budget, and I look forward to the response from the minister.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: Any further questions?

I'll call upon the minister for his concluding remarks.

10:30

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I can't reply in five minutes to all of the questions that were raised but can assure the hon. members across the floor that we will respond to them as quickly as possible.

I do want to just make one comment. To provide a list, a description of every street in Alberta that was paved or rehabbed under the street improvement program will probably take half a year. Can you imagine hundreds of millions of dollars poured into street improvement, and you're going to say: west off X to . . . I mean, let's get a little serious here. We can put it all together, but be careful what you're asking for, because it takes reams and reams of people and information to put this all together to say just what street was paved in every community in Alberta. There's a lot of money

that was spent here, so I don't think we can give you the actual description of every street in just a couple days, because that's a heck of a lot of work.

With respect to, very quickly, new rules for driving, there is no agreement in place. The federal government had promised open consultation right across the country. They didn't have one consultation at all. Alberta was the only province that conducted consultations on hours of driving. We're not proceeding until we get the federal government to the table, and they seem to be reluctant to do that at this particular time. Contrary to what was said we're actually decreasing hours, not increasing.

The north/south trade corridor. The number of dollars spent on infrastructure in 10 years: we got about \$30 million back for the roughly \$600 million a year we send to Ottawa in fuel tax. We got some of it back. We can certainly accelerate even more the road program in the province. The accident rate on the north/south trade corridor: as we improve the road, definitely there is a change in the accidents, and we'll try and get a measurement on that.

Where it shows a decrease in budget, I'd like to remind the hon. members that it's actually as a result of accelerated funding in the previous year. As a result, the municipalities got an increase last year, and that's reflected in this year's estimates.

I want to reiterate that there is no policy being developed by the government for toll roads, regardless of the position taken by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that we must support them, I guess.

In municipal partnerships we've advanced funding. Edmonton saw almost a doubling in grants. They're now receiving 5 cents a litre of every litre of fuel sold in Edmonton. It goes directly to road infrastructure. That's a huge increase in grants. I believe it's about \$65 million for Edmonton.

ICAP, which is the infrastructure Canada/Alberta program: we're working with municipalities. We have the money in place now, but remember that the federal portion may not arrive here for at least six years.

The other thing is: I would like an example of some of the cars that have apparently been sold in Alberta that have been put together, pieced together here that come from other provinces. Can you give me an example of that and send that to me in writing so that we can respond? That's rather important, and I take that accusation quite seriously.

With respect to grain transportation, yes, there are a number of grain trucks on the highways. We've got to move a lot of the grain. Much of it is not leaving the province; it's going to value-added locations in the province. Again, there was some tie there to toll roads, and we're definitely not forming any kind of policy with respect to toll roads in the province.

Privatization of maintenance has saved us millions of dollars. We'll bring that forward to the Legislature.

I'd just like to say in closing that we are working very closely with

the Auditor General in developing performance measures that are easy to measure but also easy to communicate to fellow Albertans. We'll do whatever we can to reach some agreement on them, because a lot of it is rather subjective in terms of you may think this road is rather smooth but I may think it's a little rough. We'll do whatever we can to co-operate with the Auditor General.

The rest we'll bring together and send it in writing in a response.

THE CHAIRMAN: That concludes this part of the evening.

After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Transportation, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,542,628,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report the votes and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments:

Infrastructure: operating expense and capital investment, \$2,832,240,000.

Transportation: operating expense and capital investment, \$1,542,628,000

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:38 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 2, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 28 individuals from Calgary who are asking that Stockwell Day be "made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 25 people from Edmonton urging the Legislative Assembly "to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation" suit.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 31 residents of Calgary urging the Legislative Assembly "to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose."

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion or belief that human life is sacred.

head: **Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 94 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented Monday, April 30, 2001, and I can advise the House that all but two of the petitions comply with Standing Orders 85 to 89.

The committee has considered the remaining petitions and recommends to the Assembly that Standing Order 89(1)(b) be waived for the petition for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001, subject to the petitioner completing the necessary advertising before the committee hears the petitioner.

The committee also recommends that the petition for ING Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001, be deemed to have satisfied the requirements for advertising under Standing Order 86(1)(b).

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

THE SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of an information bulletin from Community Development commemorating the inaugural Grant MacEwan author awards, which took place today at Government House. I was honoured to represent our Premier and our government at this important inaugural awards ceremony and particularly privileged to present these inaugural awards to Mr. Fred Stenson of Calgary for his book *The Trade* and the Grant MacEwan author inaugural award also to Ms Erin Knight for her book *May Without Snow*. She's an Edmontonian, and she's the inaugural recipient of the Grant MacEwan young author scholarship. All of this was done in the presence and in the good company of Dr. MacEwan's daughter, Heather MacEwan Foran. I want to extend our heartfelt congratulations to these two winners, to Ms Knight and to Mr. Stenson, and to all the finalists who were in attendance.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table with the Assembly today the National Child Benefit Progress Report: 2000. Also, I have the 2000 annual report of the Alberta Association of Architects, the 1998-99 annual report of the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association, the 2000 annual report of the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta, the 2000 annual report of the Alberta Land Surveyors' Association, and the 1999-2000 financial statements of the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a press release dated April 25 from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board which addresses the rollout of the proposed public safety and sour gas implementation plans, and that responds to well over a year of consultation, public input, and comments by constituents across Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of 27 recommendations contained in the Tupper report called Integrity in Government in Alberta: Towards the Twenty First Century. This 1996 report reviewed the Conflicts of Interest Act, and these recommendations continue to call for adoption.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table this afternoon for the benefit of the Assembly a letter that I received through freedom of information from the Department of Municipal Affairs. This is dated January 10, 1994, and it indicates that there was a ministerial review of the certification process of pine shakes being conducted by the then minister of labour.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd table five copies of 162 letters, each from Calgary constituents and all of which were copied to the Minister of Learning, opposing the closure of Glenmeadows elementary school in Calgary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Anne Brown, spokesperson for the Heartland Citizens' Coalition. Ms Brown's group is concerned that the full environmental and public health implications to Alberta's heartland, a proposed 194 square kilometre industrial development to the northeast of Edmonton, have not been considered.

My second tabling is five copies of an article that appeared in a Dutch newspaper about the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. The article suggests that the former Environment minister supports importing foreign waste into Alberta to keep the plant operating.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, all concerned with power plants in the centre of cities which have been rejuvenated into something new and wonderful. The first is the home page from the Battersea Power Station Community Group detailing the work that they've done. It's being reborn into an office and shopping complex, the centre of a new residential area.

The second series of tablings, of which I have the appropriate five copies, is an additional newspaper article detailing how they have gone about transforming the Battersea power plant into this complex.

The final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is an excerpt from a web site for the Steam Plant Square, which is a redeveloped power plant in Spokane, Washington, a very similar building to the Rosedale power plant here in Edmonton, both of them excellent examples of what is possible.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with two tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a series of articles from the esteemed medical journal called *The Lancet* which outline in some detail the concerns that many international trade agreements represent for public health care.

The second tabling is five copies of a report outlining in great detail the concerns with the conflicts of interest in the Calgary regional health authority.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a letter from Margaret Coutts, president of the Red Deer River Naturalists. The Red Deer River Naturalists are concerned that the government is about to sign a deal with Spray Lakes Sawmills to log a significant part of Kananaskis without any public input.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The other day I had the honour and privilege of introducing to the Legislature a former colleague in the Legislature, Mr. Rollie Cook, the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. Mr. Cook has returned today to watch question period and has brought with him two special guests, Mr. and Mrs. Pan from Hebei, China, near Beijing. Mr. Pan is president of a large construction company that's looking at making investments in Alberta. Mr. and Mrs. Pan and Mr. Cook have joined us in the members' gallery, and I'd ask the House to join me in welcoming and saying [remarks in Chinese].

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to introduce a group of children from the A.H. Dakin school in Edson. There are 31 of them and five helpers. I would also like to express my thanks for them being here today during Education Week with their theme being A World of Opportunity. At this time I would like them to stand and be recognized.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through to the members of this Assembly Mr. Richard Arcand, a managing director of the newly opened Aboriginal Business Development Centre, whose vision is to develop, promote, and assist in sustenance of aboriginal entrepreneurs in the city of Edmonton. In 1991 Mr. Arcand was instrumental in the evolution of the Western Aboriginal Development Alliance group, an organization whose aim was to promote and enhance aboriginal employment and business development in the corporate sector. I would ask Mr. Arcand to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly a resident of Rocky Mountain House, an individual who has been described by a former education minister as one of the best high school principals in the province of Alberta. I'd asked Jimmy Clark to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 26 students from Alberta College. They are accompanied today by their teacher or group leader Miss Kim Rusnak. I see them in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 17 grades 4, 5, and 6 students from Queen Alexandra school, which is located in Edmonton-Strathcona. These students are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Jim Higgs and parents Mrs. Rosemary Litschel and Mr. Ron Cressey. They're all seated in the public gallery. Queen Alexandra school was built in 1906 and is the oldest operating school in Alberta and has a proud history of many achievements. I would now ask these guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a total of 14 visitors. Ten are grade 6 students from the Waskatenau school in the constituency of Redwater, which I'm proud to represent. Accompanying them are teacher Mrs. Barb Cyrynowski and parent helpers Mrs. Sandra Rozak, Mrs. Becky Mulak, and Mr. Zen Gurba. This being Education Week, it gives us a world of opportunity to visit the Legislature here, and I also had the opportunity to visit the school in Waskatenau. I can tell you that the quality of questions these students asked was very good, and I think you have to credit it to the teacher that teaches them but also to parents at home, because I'm sure that with some of the questions that came out, they must have sat at the kitchen table to discuss them. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Dan MacLennan, president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Accompanying Mr. MacLennan are Dan Tilleman, chair of local 52, and Barbara Jenkins. I will be meeting with this group later on this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Teachers' Salaries

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two days ago in this House the Premier defended the different wage increases offered to nurses and teachers by arguing that whereas teachers had received a 17 percent increase over the past four years, Alberta nurses had not. Nurses actually received 16.9 percent over the same four years. My question is to the Premier. Given that both teachers and nurses have in fact received similar wage increases over the past four years, what's the real reason the Premier is treating Alberta teachers differently than Alberta nurses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Learning supplement my answer. Before I provide an answer, I don't recall ever saying that nurses had not received a wage increase. I did allude to teachers having received a 17 percent wage increase I believe over a period of four years.

Relative to the situation vis-a-vis negotiations with the various school jurisdictions relative to teachers' salaries, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed the teachers have received a 17 percent increase since 1992-93. Included in that is a 5 percent decrease, where they have actually gone down to 12 percent net over that time frame.

The rationale for not treating teachers exactly the same as nurses is that they are different occupations. What we have done is we have taken what I feel is a much fairer look at the various salaries by comparing teachers with teachers in other jurisdictions across Canada. That way we compare teachers with teachers, nurses with nurses, doctors with doctors.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Is it fair that you limit school boards to a 6 percent increase for teachers or else take it out of instructional grants when you put no such limit when the health authorities were dealing with their nurses?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I can't comment on the health authorities, but I will comment on the statements that the hon. member has made. I'll draw the member back to the last 50 years or even more that has occurred in Alberta. Up until now what has occurred: the teacher increases come out of the general per student grants. Over the last 50 years the school boards have had to make the decision: should I give money to the teachers' salaries, or should I put the money into the classroom?

What I have done this time in this budget is I've included two pots of money. One pot of money must go to teachers, so at a minimum they must get the 4 percent and 2 percent. The school boards have the ability on the other 3 and a half percent, which I would remind the hon. member is a half a percent more than what they were expecting last year – they have the ability to use it for classroom issues. They have the ability to use it for teachers' salaries. They have the ability to use it for computers. They have the ability to use it as they wish, because during the election campaign, Mr. Speaker, I heard from the school boards that they wanted flexibility in their funds.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the Premier explain how his government gives school boards the spending flexibility to ensure teachers are paid fairly when actually they have to make the trade-off between fair wages and classroom instruction?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. minister just pointed out, school boards in this province have had to do that for the last 50 years or so. I believe that was the figure he used. The difference this time around and with respect to this budget is that a line item

has been put in guaranteeing teachers at least a 6 percent wage increase and out of the other component in the budget to allow school boards to negotiate for even a further increase if the school boards deem that an increase is warranted.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electricity Marketing

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has said that increased generation of electricity will lead to increased competition and choice for consumers. Well, another truck of groceries at the same store in town does not increase competition. My question is to the Premier. With so few retailers, how is an increased number of generators going to lead to increased choice for consumers?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker – and I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement – the whole issue of competition of course is a matter that can and will be adjudicated by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. In a letter to Mr. Lorne Olsvik – I imagine I'm going to have to table this letter, and I don't mind doing that – the minister says:

I do agree with you that retail competition has been slow to develop for smaller consumers. The government is working to help retail markets develop. As part of the government's 7-point Retail Transition Market Plan for electricity, a Retail Issues Subcommittee was established to address these issues. The Subcommittee is expected to provide its recommendations by the end of [this month].

So we recognize this as a problem, Mr. Speaker, and we are taking steps to address the problem.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board going to look at retailing options being proposed by new generators to determine if that application actually enhances competition and choice for consumers, or is it just going to be based on their ability to generate?

MR. KLEIN: Again, if the hon. minister wishes to supplement, if he so desires. I will quote further from the letter relative to this specific issue. The minister goes on to say, and he refers specifically to the ATCO retail component:

The EUB's approval will be also required for the sale of the ATCO retail businesses. The Board will determine, based on the public interest, if the sale should go ahead or what conditions or arrangements should be attached to the sale.

I would imagine this relates to any retailing component of electricity. This all of course refers to the whole issue of competition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The other side of the competitive aspect of this market is that we are seeing now expert companies start to handle groups of customers. Then we can expect to see further competition in that area, where at the household end you would conceivably have a company that would supply you with a multiplicity of services at a cheaper price.

So the competitive pressures of the marketplace, Mr. Speaker, come from two places: one, from companies offering multiple services; secondly, from increased power supply where people may decide to be in the retail business themselves. So there's increasing pressure to create more and more competition in the retail marketplace.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy. You're trying to tell the House that two marketers bundling goods together so that people don't have a choice actually creates more competition and more choice? I'm sorry, Mr. Minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you. We are trying to say that there are two marketplaces unfolding here, Mr. Speaker. We do know that more power generation, the type of generation that has been announced by Calpine, 250 megawatts – that would light 250,000-plus homes in Alberta per year. We're talking about 80 megawatts from Pan-Canadian, announced a week ago. We're talking about the 80 megawatts announced from TransCanada PipeLine. We're talking about well over 600 megawatts, or 10 to 12 percent of the power supply, being added as well as people who are in a position to deliver more efficiently services to the households of Albertans today.

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

Gas Marketing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A major role of the EUB is consumer protection, yet the EUB recently approved an application by ATCO Gas to pass a financing charge on to customers to cover some of the costs of natural gas. My questions are to the Premier. Why are customers being held accountable for business risks taken by marketers?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is simply the role of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board; that is, to determine what is fair for the producer or the deliverer of a service, whether it's gas or electricity, and what is in the public interest and what is fair for the consumer.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, if I could just add to that. Of course the member has seen the public hearings held by the Energy and Utilities Board with respect to gas pricing, but at no time when I reviewed the list of intervenors did I see the Liberal Party of Alberta in there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how can the Premier call the passing of financing fees by marketers on to the consumer consumer protection?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we don't direct the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to take into account specific items, but we do direct them and they have the mandate through legislation to determine what will be a reasonable rate of return for the producer and what steps need to be taken to protect the consumer.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it also gives the opportunity, as you see competitive marketplaces unfolding, for the market to determine what these prices are and how they should best be set. That's the whole fundamental foundation of both electricity competition in the marketplace as well as gas deregulation, which has been in place since 1985.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: does the Premier agree that exit fees of up to \$60 for a residential user to a marketer actually reduces competition and consumer choice?

MR. KLEIN: Well, you know, it's certainly not for me to comment, especially when there is a regulatory agency that has the power to adjudicate whether this fee is indeed fair or whether it isn't fair. Again I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. SMITH: That's exactly the point, Mr. Speaker, behind the hearings that took place. Again, if the member has information that he can put in front of a world-respected regulatory board, then he is more than welcome to put it forward in a public hearing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Conflict of Interest Court Case

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier said yesterday that he would be inquiring of the Attorney General about matters relating to a former member of the Alberta Gaming Commission. Exactly what concerns or facts did the Premier have that led him to decide to make these inquiries of the Attorney General?

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: A second here, please. It's my understanding that there currently is a case before the judicial system in the province of Alberta, and I want hon. members to be very, very careful about the line of questioning and any responses with respect to this matter.

Now, I'm going to look at the hon. Government House Leader, who is also the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and I'm going to ask him a question: is this matter currently before the courts? Yes. It is. So I want all hon. members to be very, very careful as we move forward here. I may interject again.

2:00

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to answer one component of the question, and that component I think deals with: why did I say something about this? The reason I said something was because I was asked. I mean, I didn't raise the issue. I was asked.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I will be very careful and will have only one supplementary question, in light of what the Premier has said and what you have advised.

Will the Premier assure the House that he will share all facts relating to this issue with the House at an appropriate time?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that, as you so appropriately pointed out, is before the courts.

Relative to how the case is being adjudicated, I'll defer to the hon. Justice minister and Attorney General. I don't know what more he can add.

THE SPEAKER: No, and we're going to stop right there. If the question is should the settlement of the court come to the Assembly, well, if somebody wants to table a court document that's public at the time, so be it.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Electricity Conservation

MR. LORD: Thank you. This government is providing short-term relief to Albertans who have recently been affected by the increasing price of electricity, and we've certainly heard a lot of good news about new plants being built to generate new megawatts of electricity supply to address longer term concerns. The same benefits, however, can also be accomplished by generating negative watts of power, or nega-watts, instead, which is energy supply freed up through new technology, conservation programs, and more efficient use of current supply already available to consumers. My question through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Energy is this. As a government do we have a strategy to generate nega-watts, and do we have plans to promote energy conservation technology and to assist with or create further incentives for average Albertans to reduce the energy consumption requirements in their own households?

MR. SMITH: I must compliment the member, Mr. Speaker, on a carefully, carefully crafted question. It certainly asked for a great deal of information.

I will say that one of the great parts of the Power Pool is that it gives new generators of different types of power a freely based marketplace to be able to put their power into play to be sold. Such is the reason that his former employer, the citizens in the city of Calgary, can now power their light-rail transit through the use of wind power.

So this government's message and, I'm sure, all governments' messages are on the importance of conservation. When it comes to conservation, it also talks about the associated effects of power generation, and that is of course the main reason why Climate Change Central was formed, which is a private/public partnership between Alberta industry, businesses, governments, and the environmental community. I know the Minister of Environment would want to respond with more details on Climate Change Central.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Just one question at a time, please.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: has the government ruled out any ideas or incentives to promoting energy-efficient retrofits in residential households such as interest-reduced government loans which could be repaid out of energy savings produced?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, \$300 has been distributed. As a matter of fact, my wife received her cheque yesterday, and we're quite thankful for that. I haven't got mine yet, but I will be able to make individual decisions with that money. For example, I know that the Auditor General – and there's a man who's close to a dollar – spent his money putting compact fluorescent lights through his own house, thereby reducing his power bill. So there are a number of options that individuals in Alberta can undertake with the rebates that are coming through, with the \$300, that allow them to make conservation choices. We know, as we use a nonrenewable fossil fuel for generation, that it is an important conservation measure. There are details to conservation that I know the Minister of Infrastructure has to offer the House as well.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sure, hon. minister, but we're going to proceed with the next question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental

question is to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Mr. Minister, has your department looked at improving or reviewing building code regulations to ensure that the very latest new energy-efficient technologies and approved energy-efficiency requirements and specifications are being incorporated into new residential and commercial construction?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta and stakeholders within Alberta have been working on a model national energy codes policy with the National Research Council, and in fact these codes prescribe energy-efficiency requirements in all houses and buildings within Alberta and, for that matter, across Alberta and all of Canada. I'm also very proud to say that they're looking at energy efficiencies in terms of the furnaces we use, the hot water tanks we use, and the lighting we use. As the hon. minister earlier mentioned, the official opening pertaining to Climate Change Central, the first of its kind in Canada, is going to be taking place in Calgary on Friday.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education in our province was founded on the ideal of public schools locally governed, supported from tax dollars, and open to all students regardless of a parent's or a guardian's ability to pay. The policies of this government are slowly but surely eroding that ideal. My questions are to the Premier. Given that provincial funding policies force our schools to charge registration fees, course fees, option fees, textbook fees, graphing calculator fees, program fees – and the list goes on – are our schools still truly public?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I'll have the hon. Minister of Learning supplement, but our public schools are indeed public. I don't know where the hon. member has been, but certainly as we go through the budget debate, he will find that we're spending something in the neighbourhood of \$4 billion – significant; those are big, big dollars – on public education. Four billion dollars. That is a lot of money.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In direct response to his question I would again take the hon. member back about 30 or 40 years. When I went to school, which was a fair amount of time ago now, I paid fees for textbook rental. I think everyone has for the last nth number of years. So to say that there's a threat to public education is, I think, pushing it considerably.

The other component, Mr. Speaker, is when it comes to fees for options. For example, if there is an option where a child is going on a field trip, if there's an option where a child is having special course material that is being brought in, that particular child needs to pay for that. If my child does not go into that class, why should my child be paying for another child to go on a field trip? It's as simple as that.

The other thing that I'll say is that in September of last year the Alberta School Boards Association brought out an excellent document on fees and fund-raising, and it set out that fees should not be charged for core educational materials. That is something that all school boards have complied with.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is again to the Premier. How accessible are our schools when a major school board in this province finds it necessary to create a half million dollar endowment fund to generate enough interest to cover the fees for needy students?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, to answer the fundamental question how accessible are the schools, well, the public schools are accessible to all children. I have to remind the hon. member that there is a legal obligation – a legal obligation – so it stands to reason that the schools have to be accessible to everyone if children are legally obligated and their parents are legally obligated to send them to school.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Given that the government has a plan that will allow postsecondary tuition fees to rise to a percentage of program costs, is there a similar plan in store for public school fees?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister provide the hon. member with details relative to that particular question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the fees that each school board provides or charges are completely different all around the province. Each school board takes a look at what they feel they need to charge. Again I draw the hon. member's attention to the ASBA document that was put out in September of last year. In it they gave out strict rules for fund-raising, and they gave out strict rules for school fees. The majority of school boards around this province are falling under that.

The other point I will say is that the very important thing that must be remembered here is what every school board in the province must do and, in fact, indeed does. If a child cannot afford the textbook fees or any other school equipment, the school board picks it up, leading to what the Premier said about being accessible to absolutely everyone in the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

New Power Generation Plants

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta needs new power plants to keep up with our strong economic growth. In a news release recently there has been talk of the Alberta government fast-tracking the approval of new generation plants, especially coal-fired plants, for which West Yellowhead has the best clean-burning coal in the world. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister explain fast-tracking and how it will affect Albertans?

MR. SMITH: Fast-tracking, Mr. Speaker, will get new power into the grid faster. Recently the federal Minister of the Environment was here. He seems to have a concern about our fast-tracking process or has made comments about it, and perhaps the Premier would like to add to those comments with respect to fast-tracking in the federal domain.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Why is the industry concentrating on coal rather than other sources of electrical generation?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that coal is a thermal source of energy that is much less expensive than natural gas and that once it's onstream, it can produce power for a great length of time at a reasonable cost. Alberta has well over 800 years of supply in only one series of reserves, and to get this power on and to get it into the service of Albertans is important to Albertans. It is important to Alberta business and is important to the future of secure power supply in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What is his ministry doing to ensure that the investment in energy research is focused on clean-burning power?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question for all Albertans. In this province we have an organization known as the Alberta Energy Research Institute, which is ably co-chaired by the Member from Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and they are working on a strategy which addresses the emergence of new energy in the new energy economy. Among those strategies are thrusts that include technology development in clean coal, value-added products and processes of Alberta's vast hydrocarbon resources, exploring renewable and alternative energy like wind, solar, and biomass, and accomplishing this while we sustain the environment.

In the research environment there are several parts to the research that you have to understand. The first one is to find a process that can deliver the clean power that we're seeking in this province. The second part is to take the process, once you've discovered it, and refine it to make sure that it's economically deliverable.

Mr. Speaker, research into the areas that I've mentioned, the clean-coal technologies, will ensure that Albertans get the value from our vast coal resources while keeping our electricity prices low and ensuring clean air.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Inland Cement Limited

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Environment confirmed that his department does not have a formal application from Inland Cement for their coal conversion project. He also rejected calls for a full environmental impact assessment because

this proposal that is coming forward from Inland is one which falls within the purview of the departmental review and departmental expertise and departmental jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, how does this minister know that the application will not go beyond the jurisdiction of his department if the final and formal application has not been submitted?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, we know that, Mr. Speaker, because we have had ongoing discussions with Inland. We have had public open houses. There has been a public meeting, and there are ongoing discussions. Now, if they try and change something in their formal application from what the ongoing discussions have already indicated, we will certainly rethink the process.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, when the minister said his department will consult with Alberta Health and Wellness about public comments received on the project, doesn't that show the application will be outside of departmental expertise and therefore should be subject to a full EIA?

DR. TAYLOR: No.

MS CARLSON: Perhaps he can answer this question, then, Mr. Speaker. What will be used as the baseline value for reviewing cumulative impact of the proposal: current emissions or some other value?

DR. TAYLOR: With the surrounding noise, Mr. Speaker, I was trying to hear that question, but I couldn't hear it. Can I ask her to repeat at least a central portion of it?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, the noise came from the direction area that the hon. minister is in, so the hon. minister has some responsibility.

Please repeat the question.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What will be used as the baseline value for reviewing cumulative impact of the proposal: current emissions or some other value?

DR. TAYLOR: That will all be part of the environmental impact review that we are doing and the baseline value will be determined and the cumulative effects will be examined.

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

Electricity Pricing

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Under deregulation producers agree to sell electricity to the Power Pool for a certain period of time and are paid according to the price paid to the last producer who signs on. This means there is an incentive to sign on early before all the anticipated demand is met and results in a fair return to all producers. However, if a producer who has agreed to sell electricity does not deliver, supply is reduced and prices go up. My question: why do producers who fail to meet their electricity delivery commitments not pay the difference between the original contract price and the increased price to the consumer resulting from their failure to deliver?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Suppliers are committed to a price and are expected to do everything they can to supply their customers. Of course, anybody who fails to deliver electricity loses the opportunity to sell that power. Power cannot be stored, so it creates an instant market opportunity.

Secondly, they still must find a way to meet any supply contracts, which then means going to the Power Pool, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that a stable supply of electricity remains in Alberta.

2:20

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister. That still doesn't force upon the producers the market reality that's necessary. The question is: how is it possible to benefit from market realities in the generation of electricity when the producers are shielded from the realities of the market?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the market surveillance administrator monitors this market and has the authority to report unusual behaviour and apply penalties accordingly. This would mean purposely withholding supply. Of course, we continue to have to go to the side where we can find ways to ensure that that power stays onstream, and even though the generator does lose the revenue for the sale of that power, they're expected to replace it through the Power Pool. Again the key is more supply, more options in the hands of Albertans for power.

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. minister: that still doesn't answer the question. Why should consumers pick up the tab when producers fail to meet their commitments?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the tab sits both in the hands of the market surveillance administrator and in the hands of the Power Pool, that replaces the power that is not, in fact, supplied by the producer or the generator.

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

Lobbyists Registry

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's reasoning for saying there is no need for lobbyist registration for this province is that Alberta doesn't subsidize private business, leaving limited opportunities for lobbyists to seek government largesse. Mr. Speaker, this is a red herring and a bit disingenuous, because private business and others have also been known to lobby government to seek legislation more favourable to their interests. A printout of the federal lobbyist public registry shows 539 pages of registrations, many of which are lobbyists and companies operating in Alberta. My questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Since Albertans can simply log onto the federal public registry web site and in a matter of moments find out which Alberta companies are lobbying the federal government, why are Albertans not allowed or not able to find out the same type of information about their own government? What's the big secret?

MR. COUTTS: Well, Mr. Speaker, my department is in charge of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act itself. We don't get into the actual administration within my department unless it affects my department. I'll take the question under advisement and get back to the hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Okay. Since there are many other benefits to be had from government besides funding, why does the government appear to be opposed to a lobbyists' registry, that would go a long way to making the government more open and accountable? The minister is also responsible for registries.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, our government is an open and accountable government. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, that was put in in 1994, certainly has contributed to that accountability and that openness that we have.

Again, in terms of the hon. member's question regarding lobbyists, I'll certainly take that under advisement and let her know.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. As well as that commitment, can the minister also commit to conducting a review of the

current rules governing lobbying, conflict of interest, and tendering of contracts?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, under freedom of information and protection of privacy there was a review done a couple of years ago, and it was done under the chairmanship of the hon. Minister of Gaming and the Member for Peace River. There was a commitment at that time that within a three- to four-year period freedom of information and protection of privacy would be and should be and could be reviewed again. I have made the commitment to this House. I have made a commitment to the AAMDC's organization, that I was speaking to here about a month ago, that everyone will have an opportunity to look at the next review, which will take place next year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Serious questions have been raised this week about the adequacy of the government's conflict of interest rules. There are also no rules in place in this province requiring those lobbying the government to either be registered or to divulge the payments they receive in exchange for influencing government decisions. [interjections] I'm going to continue; you don't know the question yet. My question is to the Premier. Why has the government failed to put in place legislative conflict of interest rules governing the conduct of senior public officials like the chairs of government agencies?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not so sure that it doesn't. I will have the hon. Minister of Government Services respond or maybe the Justice minister and Attorney General, but I believe there are conflict rules that apply to senior public service employees. We'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, there was a thorough review of the Conflicts of Interest Act sometime ago, chaired by a professor from the University of Alberta. A report was done. I believe it was an all-party committee which reviewed it. Recommendations were brought forward. Amendments were made to the act at that time. Not all of the recommendations were adopted, but it was a thorough review of the act. In that review I believe consideration was given to how far the conflict guidelines in our legislation should go and what types of senior officials should be covered by those guidelines in the Conflicts of Interest Act.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, why is there so much confusion on the government side about this issue when registering lobbyists is required, given the government's growing reliance on contracting out, which actually increases the opportunity for the private sector to seek government largesse?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an issue that simply hasn't been an issue until he's made it an issue. The way this government operates is such that any group, any individual, can write a letter, make representation. We have the standing policy committee system. I try to keep my door open as much as I possibly can. All the MLAs have their doors open. I'm sure the opposition members keep their doors open to any constituent or any person who has a concern with government or with a constituency problem.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know of a paid lobbyist in the province.

There are many, many paid lobbyists in Ottawa. I do know that various corporations, for instance, have government-relations people who deal with government. I know that many unions have government-relations people: the teachers, the ATA, EPCOR. I know that the mayor of the city of Edmonton feels free to come and see me or any minister regarding any particular matter. We don't consider that to be lobbying. We say that is the right and the responsibility. It's a responsibility of the government to be accessible to all people.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how does the government expect Albertans to believe that the kind of arrangements like those involving a former member of the Alberta Gaming Commission are not running rampant through this government . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Sorry; sorry. There's a matter before the courts. It's a criminal offence. We're not going to have aspersions in this Assembly about anything until it's over with.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there were two investigative reports on WCB completed last November, my question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment to reflect my constituents' pressing queries. What is the process and the time line the minister plans to release the government's response to the reports?

2:30

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by again publicly thanking the members of the MLA review committee and also the members of the committee that looked into the appeal system for all of their work. As a matter of fact, they have submitted 59 recommendations to our office for review in terms of the WCB. As we speak, we are finalizing the ministry response to those reports. I would anticipate starting through the internal government process on an imminent basis, hopefully within two to three weeks appearing at a standing policy committee. We will then be taking the ministry response to become the government response and of course revealing that to all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is: given that the WCB management is a major stakeholder on the subject matter, will the responses to the reports be made public?

MR. DUNFORD: Actually the response from WCB was one of, I believe, 94 responses that we had to the two reports. As it currently stands, I've not made public any of the particular responses, whether it be WCB or the Alberta Federation of Labour or any of the other recognized and organized groups here within the province. I plan, though, as part of the process, once the government response has been communicated, to work with the individual stakeholders that have made a response to determine in what manner we will communicate then with the public. Without trying to presuppose any sort of agreements, it certainly would be my wish that at the end of this day we could file all of the reports with the Legislature Library.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that you will release to the public the responses, would you consider putting it on the Internet so it's more accessible for other people?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I think that we've now reached a part in our history as it relates to technology that when we talk about making things public, I think we almost automatically assume that we're going to be putting things on a web site.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Water and Wastewater Grants

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Transportation. Isn't the significant budget increase for municipal water and wastewater grants an indication that Alberta's water infrastructure is in desperate need of repair?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we've always made an endeavour in this government to keep up with the ever increasing standards for good, clean water. There are a number of municipalities, as well, that are increasing in size and also require additional infrastructure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. What is the status of the waiting list for projects funded under municipal water and wastewater grants?

MR. STELMACH: The status as of last night and of course the presentation of the estimates to committee is that those lists will be getting smaller.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Has the department done any studies on the ability of the water and wastewater infrastructure to deal with low water tables in this province?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the water and wastewater portion of our budget is dedicated generally to urban municipalities: small towns, villages, summer villages, and of course larger urban municipalities, including cities. The issue the hon. member is raising I believe is the result of abnormally low snowfall for the last number of years. He is quite correct that water levels, the aquifers, are of course decreasing, and rural people especially are having difficulty accessing that water. However, I would submit that that issue has to be taken up jointly with the Minister of Environment. It's affecting large areas in our Deputy Premier's ministry and in ours as well.

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

Electricity Rebates

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Constituents have contacted my office over concerns with the Alberta energy tax refund cheques they have received or not received. The callers to my office are expressing concerns that they are not receiving the full \$150 rebate or none of it. To the Minister of Finance: can the minister explain why this is the case?

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On September 6, 2000, the energy rebate program was announced, and that program would see over two million Albertans receiving help for higher-than-expected energy costs in the home and at the gas pump. The second set of the \$150 cheques started to go out this week, at the start of the week, and I can report that some almost two million Albertans received their cheques without any difficulty whatsoever.

However, when we looked at this program and we were running it through the federal tax program for returning to Albertans, we determined that if in fact there were outstanding payments in regard to things like maintenance enforcement or taxation, through our tax agreement with the federal government those balances would be rectified with the \$150 on the second cheque. In most cases, though, what happened is that when someone got a cheque and it was less than the \$150, it was because there was an outstanding bill on their tax from either 1999 or even from this year. In some cases, though, Mr. Speaker, some people filed their tax returns electronically and subsequently sent in their cheque, and there was a crossover between the cheques being received with the federal tax department and the refund cheque coming back, so an adjustment was made. So there has been some difficulty with that, but it is being rectified.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. I have been told that in some of these cases Albertans who have paid up to date and have filed their 2000 federal income tax returns have still been seeing deductions off their \$150 energy tax refunds. Can the minister tell the House if anything can be done for these people?

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have had our officials from our department – my deputy has been in touch with the deputy minister in Ottawa and asked them to rectify the situation. If in fact there was this crossover between the filing of their tax returns for April 30 and the issuance of these cheques, could they in fact go back immediately and expedite a refund to those people that were inadvertently deducted on their \$150 cheque.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: can the minister explain to this House what she has done to ensure that Albertans get their rebate cheques, that rightfully are owed to them.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, as I say, my deputy has been in touch with the federal deputy, but we've also contacted the federal minister of customs and revenue and made sure that there's a follow-up process. They are co-operating fully to see that they expedite the refund of these cheques where they were inadvertently deducting payments that had been made on taxes.

2:40

Now, clearly, if you have a tax bill or a maintenance enforcement payment outstanding from last year, this \$150 will go as a credit towards that outstanding balance. So every entitled Albertan will in fact receive the full benefit of the \$150. Albeit some may be clearing a bill from the past, it's still a full benefit.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, very shortly we'll begin the process of dealing with seven hon. members in Recognitions.

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judge Rule Decorum

THE SPEAKER: There are two comments the chair would like to make arising out of question period.

First of all, the chair would like to draw to all hon. members' attention Standing Order 23(g). All members have the Standing Orders. It's very clear what the Standing Orders say. In particular, as a result of two series of questions today, I want to read again what Standing Order 23(g) says. It "refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination." Questions that are impacted by that statement, referring to "any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination," are clearly outside of the rules and not to be accepted in the House, particularly if the issue is

of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence and from the date of the filing of a notice of appeal until the date of a decision by an appellate court, or . . . where there is [any] probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate.

It's the chair's view that in a criminal matter there is very real risk of prejudice. I would also refer members to *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, starting at paragraph 506 in terms of such matters.

The second thing. There was more enthusiasm and energy in the Assembly today than we have experienced in the last eight or nine days. Energy and enthusiasm are okay – no problem at all with that – even from time to time good-natured interjections, if they're low key. Some people might call them heckling, and that might be in order as well. But it crosses the line where the heckling and the statements are of a derogatory nature, where they are denigrating or they are insulting of another member, particularly in the area of gender, age, disability, colour. The chair will not accept such items.

Today the chair received a number of notes from members saying that they didn't like what happened. Unfortunately, the chair did not hear them. It doesn't mean that they will not be found in *Hansard*, and the chair will review *Hansard* to see if any of these statements have been picked up. Should hon. members hear such statements, I would invite hon. members to rise on a point when they've heard such statements, and we will deal with them in this Assembly at the conclusion of question period. That is quite inappropriate.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Thirty seconds from now, the first recognition.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Coral Chovjka Kenman Gan

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Education Week, and I'd like to comment on the Great Kids awards that were announced by the Premier in October 1999 at the first Children's Forum to recognize outstanding young people of this province who positively contribute to their families, schools, and communities. It celebrates their compassion for others, generosity, desire to serve, and community leadership.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Alberta government and all Albertans I am proud to recognize the outstanding efforts of two young Norwood residents. Coral Chovjka is one of only 16 Albertans who received the Great Kids award. They had a ceremony in Calgary on February 19. I will be presenting Mr. Kenman Gan with an honourable mention award on May 4.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank these two Albertans for their outstanding contributions to their families, schools, communities,

and the province of Alberta. We are pleased to have Coral and Kenman as a winner and honourable mention of the 2001 Great Kids awards.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Nellie Laboucan

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 14, 2001, Alberta lost a truly remarkable woman. Born in 1887 and raised near Lac La Biche, Elder Nellie Laboucan, nee Ironvoice and Gladue, passed away at Atikameg, Alberta, at the age of 114 years. Known as Kookoom to those close to her, Nellie touched many lives during her lifetime, especially her 39 grandchildren, 96 great-grandchildren, 76 great-great-grandchildren, and four great-great-great-grandchildren. Nellie had in total 223 descendants.

Nellie was always concerned about the welfare of young people, welcoming anyone into her home. Whether it was a helping of stew that was always simmering on the stove or even a little bit of discipline, Nellie was selfless in her love and support. Somehow there was always enough to go around no matter who walked through the door.

Nellie Laboucan was an amazing centenarian who could hear and see well and had most of her own teeth right to the end of her life. Nellie leaves a wonderful testimonial to the human spirit.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

International Day of the Midwife

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize International Day of the Midwife this Saturday, May 5. In 1989 the Alberta Association of Midwives applied to the Health Disciplines Board for the designation of the discipline of midwifery. It took until 1992 for the designation to be granted, and finally in 1998 the midwifery registry was opened.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of Noreen Walker and the Alberta Association of Midwives, the Association for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth, the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, moms and their families, and many individuals.

While we have made great strides, Alberta women do not have access to the services of a midwife paid for by Alberta health care. This is not right. The government keeps asking for more and more pilot projects and studies, delaying the inevitable. I hope next year at this time I will be able to recognize the province for providing fully funded midwifery services to all Alberta women.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

**Tracy Lynne Poulin
Warren Griffin Letchford**

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Among us in Alberta are individuals who toil in their profession of eloquence but very seldom receive the public gratitude that they deserve, and it is teachers that I refer to. Yesterday I had the pleasure to hand out awards to finalists in the excellence in teaching awards program that was conducted in the Edmonton Catholic and the Edmonton public school boards.

Mr. Speaker, the writer Mr. Yeats once so eloquently said that

teaching and education is not a process of filling an empty bucket but rather lighting a fire. Indeed, these two fine individuals are lighting a fire in young individuals. It is my pleasure to recognize Tracy Lynne Poulin of Lorelei school and Warren Griffin Letchford of St. Lucy Catholic school, who are so graciously contributing to our community by teaching.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

**Carla-Joan Fahlman
Barbara Lynn Forbes**

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize two teachers who work in Edmonton-Rutherford. As members know, this being Education Week, the Edmonton public school board had their recognition of the 31 finalists in the Edmonton area last night. Edmonton-Rutherford had two finalists among the very many distinguished hardworking teachers.

The first that I'd like to recognize here today is Carla-Joan Fahlman. Carla has shown outstanding classroom management skills and intuitive knowledge about how students learn best. Incredible planning and a great sense of humour all help Carla achieve excellent results in student learning. She dedicates herself to her students in their becoming independent thinkers. She encourages leadership skills by teaching her students how to form an argument, understand another's point of view, and work together towards a solution. We've all been in Carla's class obviously.

The second teacher that I'd like to honour here is Barbara Lynn Forbes, who teaches at St. Boniface Catholic elementary school. Her parent handbook is truly a work of art. It provides parents an informative, comprehensive outline of their children's studies. She's a leader of the teachers and a key player and a key leader in the school. She keeps her very young students, five year olds, interested and involved in the learning process.

Colleagues, through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize and thank those among all the many hundreds of very dedicated teachers in our community. Thank you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Wilco Tymensen

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge a great Albertan, an educator, this afternoon. Wilco Tymensen has been nominated as a finalist for the 13th annual excellence in teaching awards program. His name was selected from a group of 400 educators from across the province who were originally nominated. What makes this award unique is that it is the highest recognition that can be received from not only fellow teachers but by students as well.

Mr. Tymensen is one of the most valuable assets to his school, the ACE Place Learning Centre, an alternative school in Taber, Alberta. He has taught a range of subjects to his students at this fine institution and also offers mentoring services for students, but what makes him valuable as a teacher is that he sees his classroom not only confined to the traditional in-class setting but any place where learning can occur. For example, Mr. Tymensen once seized a teaching moment when he explained the laws of physics to a student who had just fallen on a ski hill. Mr. Tymensen stands out to all of us as a model of the teaching profession, and I wish to thank him and congratulate him for that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Audrey Cormack

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a great Albertan, Ms Audrey Cormack, president of the Alberta Federation of Labour for the last six years. Ms Cormack has recently announced her decision not to seek a fourth term with the Alberta Federation of Labour. Her career began in the early 1980s, holding a variety of positions with her union, the Communications, Energy, and Paper Workers Union. In 1989 she broke new ground by being the first woman ever elected to serve as an executive officer for the AFL and later as its first woman president.

Audrey is a woman of great vision and commitment who knows that we can accomplish great things when we work together. She has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of Albertans and working people. She knows that now more than ever workers need strong voices and support and that making a life is as important as making a living.

As she leaves the province of Alberta later this month, we say good-bye to her with deep affection, appreciation, and admiration. Audrey, we thank you and wish you the best of luck.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before going to Orders of the Day, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: In the Speaker's gallery today are three individuals from a few miles away from the city of Edmonton: Robert Jackson, who is the reeve of the county of Barrhead and the chairman of Aspen health authority, Clem Fagnon, who is the chairman of the Westlock foundation and a councillor in the town of Westlock, and Robert Cable, who is the chief executive officer of the Aspen health authority. The three are in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive a warm welcome.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following notice having been given yesterday, I would move now that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following notice having been given yesterday, I will also move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 204
Medicare Protection Act**

[Debate adjourned May 1: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak against Bill 204, sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I have strong reservations about Bill 204. This government has already made a sound choice for the future of health care in Alberta with the Health Care Protection Act. We already did this because we are committed to listening to Albertans. We take their opinions and concerns seriously, and that is how we determine the direction of health care in our province. The Health Care Protection Act is an integral part of that direction. Bill 204 would repeal this act, and for that reason I cannot support it.

Why would we repeal an act that was just proclaimed? Why would we repeal an act that was just debated last session? During that debate we talked to many Albertans at length. In fact, the debate itself was very lengthy. Bill 11 was the most debated bill in the history of this Assembly at well over 40 hours.

Now, I've heard the stories of sitting until 1, 2, or 3 o'clock in the morning. I'm sure that every possible argument was raised during that time for all Albertans to consider. This government talked to Albertans both before and after the creation of the Health Care Protection Act. We listened to their concerns and to those of the people who work in the health care sector.

The Health Care Protection Act was not created in one night, and it encompasses the direct involvement of the people it was designed to protect. There was much information and misinformation distributed about the Health Care Protection Act. The information of course was distributed by this government, and the misinformation was distributed by the opposition parties. On March 12 of this year the people of Alberta indicated who they believed would best represent their interests in health care.

Before the act there were over 50 unregulated private clinics in Alberta. The people in this province wanted regulations and standards impressed upon these clinics. That is what the Health Care Protection Act does. It ensures that no private clinics can operate outside the control of the public health system. By request from the people of Alberta, the act has also made the contract procedure for all private health care facilities open and transparent. The Health Care Protection Act sets out the guidelines for the regional health authorities and specifically the College of Physicians and Surgeons to make sure that the clinics meet strict standards. Bill 204 would be repealing an act that works in favour of the people of Alberta.

The Health Care Protection Act is important because private clinics are not a unique fixture in just our province. In fact, there are hundreds all across Canada. Private clinics support minor procedures and surgeries for things like eye care, some reconstructive knee procedures, and other athletic and sports-related injuries. The current Health Care Protection Act prohibits the existence of private hospitals in Alberta, and therefore all major surgical procedures requiring more than 12 hours of postoperative care still must be done in a hospital.

In Alberta these private clinics provide tens of thousands of surgical procedures each year on behalf of the public system. These private facilities provide an extra source for care. They have lightened the load of certain surgeries on hospitals, and they help us

continue to reduce waiting lists. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Health Care Protection Act is such a good act that a former NDP Premier working for the Liberal federal government is looking at this act with great interest as he charts the course for the future of health care in Canada.

Now, a key objective of the Health Care Protection Act was to reduce waiting times. By contracting out minor surgeries, we can free up beds for major surgeries in our hospitals. Also, Mr. Speaker, these clinics are able to increase the number of surgeries they can perform by specializing in a smaller range of procedures. A private clinic can specialize in a certain kind of service, like providing MRIs, and develop greater efficiency, which subsequently takes pressure off the public system. They can free up extensive operating rooms and full-service hospitals for more complex and emergency procedures. I would like to remind this Assembly that any surgical procedure done in a private clinic under the Health Care Protection Act must first be approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. As well, the clinic itself must be an accredited facility which meets rigorous standards.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support Bill 204, and I urge all in this Assembly to do the same. Only by continuing to support the Health Care Protection Act can we continue to improve our health care system.

3:00

I have before me a copy of Bill 204, and there are some things in here that I am very concerned about. The third paragraph in the preamble says, "Whereas those principles are compromised, and the credibility of the public health care system is undermined." Mr. Speaker, these are statements that are absolutely wrong, and this is not true. This government has created an act that was created by much thought and care. There was a lot of consultation. There was a lot of professional opinion that went into the Alberta Health Care Protection Act. It does not compromise the principles of the Canada Health Act nor does it undermine the credibility of the public health care system. There are some very wrong statements as I look at Bill 204 and as I read it over.

Again, the people of Alberta obviously had the chance to say no if they did not like the Alberta Health Care Protection Act. The people of Alberta overwhelmingly said yes, said yes to this government and said yes to the bills that were debated in the last session. They said yes to the Alberta Health Care Protection Act.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleagues and all of the people that are concerned about this act will see that the Alberta Health Care Protection Act is in fact the way we want to see health care go in the future in the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 204 as it's going through the second reading. I'm pleased and proud that this bill is sponsored by a member of the New Democrat caucus and my esteemed colleague from Edmonton-Highlands.

By any measure, Mr. Speaker, health care is definitely one of the most important services delivered by government. More dollars are expended in health care than in any other government program. The health care system touches us all. While the need for health care services depends on our age and our health status, all of us have friends and family who would have faced financial ruin had it not been for Canada's universal health care system.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This Bill 204 is an important bill. It sets out a comprehensive set of rules both to improve timely access to public health care services and to set strict, enforceable limits on private, for-profit involvement in the health care system. Timely access to medically necessary health care services is essential if public support for our health care system is to be maintained. Unacceptably long waiting times lead inevitably to and result in the richer people jumping the queue if they're willing to pay privately for their needed diagnosis or treatment.

Unacceptably long waiting times are not unique to Alberta, but Alberta does have the financial resources to ensure timely access. I'm surprised that some members opposite will not be supporting setting legislated waiting times for medically necessary health services, whether it is for lifesaving MRIs or for lifesaving cancer treatment. Clearly, waiting time targets would require extensive consultation with affected stakeholders. Clearly, the needs of patients would have to be balanced against the available financial resources of government. These would not be easy decisions, but by the same token we as legislators should not be afraid to make such decisions.

I note that the Ministry of Health and Wellness is making some moves to address unacceptably long waiting times. I sincerely hope these efforts to relieve the pain and suffering of those being kept waiting are successful. However, where is the accountability back to this Legislature if the government fails to meet its waiting time targets? Bill 204 would bring such accountability into the system.

Bill 204 does more than just implement a patient bill of rights entitling Albertans to receive medically necessary or required health care services in a timely fashion. It also makes us as legislators more accountable by setting up a health care services commissioner as an officer of this Legislature. Bill 204 clearly sets out the duties of the health care services commissioner. Given that health care is one of the most important services delivered by government and received by Albertans, it is essential that citizens have some recourse if they believe that the public health care system has failed to deliver high-quality, timely care. The establishment of such a commissioner would do much to restore public confidence in our health care system.

I now wish to briefly address the provisions of Bill 204 that set clear and enforceable rules around the involvement of the private, for-profit sector in a publicly funded and publicly administered health care system. I may, Mr. Speaker, in passing make a comment here to my hon. colleague from Drayton Valley-Calmar, who just spoke on the bill, when he said that the esteemed former Premier of Saskatchewan is ready and happy to accept Bill 11 as part of his recommendations. I guess he knows more than I do about what this commissioner is thinking. I think he'd better have some conversation with his own government and do some more reading of what the commissioner is saying with respect to this bill and with respect to the role of the private, for-profit sector in the health care system.

The government's Bill 11, unlike Bill 204, does open the door wider for commercial business interests to directly deliver health care services funded by public dollars. Nobody said during the intense public debate last spring that Bill 11 would lead to the wholesale privatization of our public health care system overnight. Instead, Bill 11 is part and parcel of a creeping privatization of our public health care system.

Contrary to the statement made yesterday by the Member for Red Deer-North, Bill 11 puts no new rules and regulations in place for the existing 51 private clinics that are involved in doing day surgery. Instead, what Bill 11 does is allow private health facilities to perform, on contract with regional health authorities, complex surgeries that require overnight stays by patients. As a result of Bill

11, for the first time private, for-profit health care facilities in Alberta will be providing in-patient care.

Now, the government may for political reasons choose not to call these kinds of facilities hospitals. I know that the government did all kinds of surveys and held little group sessions to find out whether they should call these surgical facilities or whether they should call them what they are, hospitals. They decided that the people of Alberta didn't like them to be called hospitals, hence its avoidance of that term in Bill 11. But the fact remains that these kinds of facilities, which will be owned and operated on a commercial basis, will be hospitals in all but name.

Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act, will completely close the door to private hospitals owned on a commercial basis. In its entire history Alberta's hospitals have been owned and operated on a nonprofit basis. Let me underline this: whether they're private or public, they have been owned on a nonprofit basis and operated on a nonprofit basis. Essentially what Bill 204 does is restore this long-standing practice, from which the government's Bill 11 represents a radical departure.

I reject the proposition put forward yesterday by the Member for Red Deer-North that the government's election win was an endorsement of its health care privatization scheme. The same mantra was repeated just a moment ago by the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar. The same person is writing the speeches, I believe.

This privatization scheme generated an unprecedented amount of public concern just one year ago. Tens of thousands of Albertans wrote letters, sent e-mails, made phone calls, and attended public rallies, including rallies in front of this very Legislature one year ago today. Just because the governing party won the last election doesn't mean that Albertans endorsed every aspect of this government's agenda. Every public opinion poll that I'm aware of indicates that Albertans are strongly opposed to the government's plan to legalize private, for-profit hospitals by using its so-called Health Care Protection Act, Bill 11.

3:10

There are very sound reasons why Albertans were right to oppose the government's scheme. First of all, the government has provided no credible evidence that the private, for-profit sector will be able to deliver health care services any more cost-effectively than the public system. As mentioned yesterday by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, the overwhelming worldwide evidence is that increased reliance on the private, for-profit sector increases health care costs; it doesn't reduce them. It doesn't reduce waiting times or improve quality of patient care. Trying to run the health care system as a market commodity just will not work. If an increased reliance on the private, for-profit sector was the way to go, the U.S. would have the most cost-effective health care system in the world, but we all know that the U.S. has the least fair and most costly health care system among all developed countries.

Increased reliance on the private, for-profit sector to deliver publicly funded health care services will inevitably give rise to more conflicts of interest, and as evidence of this we need look no further than the existing situation in the Calgary regional health authority. A recent study on surgical contracts and conflicts of interest done by journalist Gillian Steward found that three of the private, for-profit surgical facilities that have current contracts with the CRHA are owned or partly owned by senior medical officers of the CRHA; second, that two of the five private, for-profit surgical facilities that provide virtually all of the eye surgery in the Calgary area or in the regional health authority are similarly owned by CRHA medical officers. As we expand these contracts into complex surgeries like hip replacements that necessitate overnight patient stays, these

conflicts of interest will multiply. This in itself is a good reason to support Bill 204 and repeal Bill 11.

Going further down the road to health care privatization also poses significant risks under international trade agreements. Under these trade agreements Alberta has no obligation to open the publicly funded health care system to commercial interests. However, once that decision has been made, foreign-owned corporations are given the same access to the health care system as Canadian-owned companies. There's no question that should access to contracted health services not be provided on the same basis to foreign companies as to Canadian companies, Canada would face a trade challenge. Some Alberta private day surgery clinics are already foreign owned. The Gimbel eye centres in Edmonton and Calgary were recently sold to U.S. interests without a peep from this government.

Given all of this, Mr. Speaker, there are compelling reasons for this Legislature to support Bill 204, to make it into a law so that for once and for all we can guarantee to Albertans that there will remain in place a well-funded, accountable, publicly owned health care system and that services remain at their disposal as they need them. I'm therefore both proud and pleased to support Bill 204.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One year has certainly made a great deal of difference in the perception of Albertans with respect to the Health Care Protection Act. Last week I was just thinking about the previous year. I was at the Fort Saskatchewan trade fair for the whole weekend, Friday night and Saturday and most of Sunday, and as people came through last week, there were all sorts of comments and we had good discussions about where the government was going with budgets and what was coming forward and congratulating our government on being re-elected with a considerably increased majority.

The difference was really notable. A year prior at the same trade fair the opposition had a booth a few doors down and were encouraging folks to sign petitions. They were telling them about how terrible the Health Care Protection Act was, terms like "creeping privatization," the same kind of terms that we heard in the last speech and a few speeches yesterday, the same kind of speeches from before in *Hansard*. I took the opportunity to flip through some and saw all of the negative statements that were made and the dire consequences, the end of health care that was soon upon us.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, those folks in Fort Saskatchewan at that trade fair last year were really concerned. They had been told these messages by the opposition, that the health care system was soon to end, that it would no longer be there. One of the messages I had for them a year ago was, "Let's wait and see. Let's see what happens in a year. Even better, let's see what happens in five years and see if, in fact, our health care system has completely deteriorated." "If it has deteriorated," I told them, "then turf us out. Turf me out personally, and elect the candidate that was just down the hall who had a booth there and was saying all those negative things about the Health Care Protection Act."

So, in fact, this dialogue went on at length last year, and we see that the Health Care Protection Act has served Albertans well. We will see in the four years hence what we were talking about at that trade fair a year ago, that things are going to be even better than they are today, and they will be better because of the concern and commitment expressed by this government and the enactment of legislation like the Health Care Protection Act.

It's hard to understand sometimes how come there was as much confusion as there was. I recall going to talk to a grade 6 class at one of the schools last year in the midst of the health care debate. Actually, it was subsequent to the passing of the Health Care Protection Act. We were talking about government funding, and one of the students asked the question: where does government revenue come from? A bunch of students got through the things like property taxes and income taxes and all the different kinds of taxes that exist, liquor tax and so on and so forth. They'd been well taught by their teacher. It was a really impressive bunch of students.

One of the students came up with another source of revenue. He said: after the government privatizes all these hospitals, people will have to pay so much money for all the health care services that the government's going to rake in all kinds of money for this. I looked at this fellow and said: what is this fellow's name? When I realized who he was and who his folks were, people that I knew, I started to understand. This is the message this same person as a professional had been out there communicating to the public and, in fact, to his own family, completely misunderstanding the intent of the Health Care Protection Act.

Somehow it had been turned around to be filled with dire consequences, the same kind of concern expressed over and over again as recorded in *Hansard* from before and the same kinds of concerns expressed incorrectly in the last few speeches as well. They're still filled with those claims. Those are the kinds of claims that are incorrect but do concern Albertans and cause confusion and uncertainty.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, the concern probably is caused because we really like our health care system. We know it's evolved over the past 35 or 40 years, something like that, into the health care system it is today. Its funding has changed a great deal as well. It was once funded equally by the provinces and the federal government, and now it's become mostly a provincially funded program. About 30 percent of our budget, a little over, goes into health care, and about 5 percent of the federal budget is dedicated to health care. I'll put it another way. Our province contributes about 87 percent while the federal government contributes about 13 percent of the expenditures in health care in Alberta. This is similar to other provinces as well.

We also like the way it appears to be unique in the world for the level of service to the citizens and the adherence also to the five basic principles of the Canada Health Act. One of the benefits for sure of the debate last year – prior to the introduction of the Health Care Protection Act and the great debate that followed, I bet there wasn't any more than a handful of people in the province that knew the five basic principles of the Canada Health Act. After months of debate and whatnot the principles were much better understood by Albertans, the principle of universality, where all insured Albertans are entitled to all insured services provided in the province; the principle of comprehensiveness, where all medically necessary services are insured; the principle of accessibility, where there's access to all insured services provided uniformly and reasonable compensation is paid for those services provided; the principle of portability, where health care services can be utilized by insured Albertans in other provinces; and also public administration, where health care is publicly administered and publicly funded.

I should commend the member. He made a commitment a year ago, and he has followed through on that commitment to bring forward a bill that he promised to bring forward. It may have been misguided. It may not have been a good way to deal with the issue, but in fact it was a commitment made to the constituents. He's fulfilling that commitment and, therefore, as a private member has

the opportunity to bring that forward. We have in this Assembly the opportunity to discuss and look at whatever we may consider to be the benefits of this bill and consider its weaknesses and evaluate it against the Health Care Protection Act, passed by this government a few months ago, and decide whether, in fact, it should be passed or rejected. So that is the task of this Assembly, and that is the task that we will consider, and we will debate and conclude that debate in a few minutes actually from now.

We also as Albertans reject the American style two-tier health care system, the system where citizens obtain different levels of care based on the kind of money they have or the kind of insurance policy they bought or their employer bought for them. Following the principles of the Canada Health Act, our system is equal and free, and that is enshrined in the Health Care Protection Act.

We know it's not a cost-free system. We know it's paid for through our tax dollars, our resource revenues, and even our medicare premiums, which provide about 10 percent of the cost of health care in Alberta. We know, too, that the cost of health care provided under the Alberta health act and under Alberta health care is around \$6 billion. For the 3 million Albertans that means that for every man, woman, and child the expenditure in health care in this province is about \$2,000 every year.

If we consider some aspects of our current health care system, we know there are around 5,000 different surgical procedures identified and regulated by the medical profession and most of those are paid for by medicare. There are about 150 of those procedures that are currently done in privately owned surgical facilities, surgical facilities that have been approved under the Alberta Health Care Protection Act and that are being done, have been done in the past, and will continue to be done to benefit all Albertans. The contracts can be found on the Internet. If you wish to see what the contracts are with different health care facilities, you can look them up and see what, in fact, their reason for existing is, what they do, and what their authorization was from essentially, in the end, the minister of health.

The doctors in those facilities are paid by Alberta health care for whatever operation, whether it is a cataract removal or something else. They are paid that same amount of dollars whether the cataract is removed in the Fort Saskatchewan hospital or the Royal Alex or, in fact, the Gimbel Eye Centre. The costs of the building and the support staff are paid in both cases by Alberta health care, and it's paid through the local health authority with funding provided by the citizens of Alberta through the government. Those costs are called facility fees, and a patient cannot pay the facility fees.

In some of the speeches we see talk about patients being charged for medically insured services. That's not the case. It's against the Canada Health Act. I believe it's inappropriate to make those kinds of claims when, in fact, it's not possible. It's not the intention of the Health Care Protection Act, and to read that into the act and make those claims serves only to confuse and bring discredit to the member who may be making those claims.

We know, too, that the private sector plays a large role in the delivery of health care, and the public system pays for some parts but not for others. There are chiropractors, opticians, optometrists, dentists, pharmacies, drug companies, ambulances, physiotherapy, child psychologists, walk-in clinics, medicentres, and long-term care facilities for older seniors.

We recognize, too, though, that there are many challenges in the delivery of health care. Earlier the federal government challenged the provinces to be innovative and do something to reduce wait lists, increase the number of doctors and nurses available, implement more home care, and reduce hospital stays. Those challenges are the same in every province, and as has been mentioned, Roy Romanow

with his committee has said that they will be looking at the role of the private sector in health care. He said yesterday that he will explore the idea of allowing private-sector facilities to provide more publicly funded health care services. That move by the federally appointed former NDP Premier is an interesting one. He's recognizing that it's necessary to look outside the box and to see what options do exist.

There are several initiatives that here in Alberta we have put forward. The six-point plan was put forward to protect and improve our health care system. That six-point plan had the following points: first of all, to improve access to publicly funded services; second, to improve the management of the health system; third, to enhance the quality of health services; and fourth, to increase emphasis on health promotion and disease and accident prevention. We as members recently had delivered to our desks some information about the Injury Awareness and Prevention Centre, and the members that had opportunity to read that would notice that they are working on preventing accidents; for example, a fall or some other injury that causes a spinal cord injury. In the first few weeks after that injury, millions of dollars, or at least a million, in excess of a million, would be spent in care of that individual for something that was preventable and resources that could go to another aspect of the health facilities.

3:30

The fifth point is to continue to foster new ideas to improve our health system. We do not see in Bill 204 any new ideas that would improve our health care system.

Finally, point 6: take steps to "protect the publicly funded system" from external threats. Well, the Health Care Protection Act does serve to do that, and to repeal the Health Care Protection Act would be inappropriate and also irresponsible.

Without the Health Care Protection Act we knew that private hospitals could in fact start up and go ahead and charge facility fees, and Alberta would lose transfer payments in the process. The Health Care Protection Act prevents that. To repeal it would leave those opportunities open to somebody who was perhaps interested in starting up a private facility without the approval and without the permission and putting the government or the citizens of this province at risk of losing transfer payments from the federal government.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, the Health Care Protection Act is essential to the sound and regulated operation of any private health clinics in Alberta. Without it there would be limited protection for patients in this province, and there would not be reasonable limits on how those clinics operate.

Alberta is a leader in protecting the principles of the Canada Health Act. We were the first to put an end to the ad hoc licensing of private facilities, and we've set down firm regulations for their conduct. To repeal the Health Care Protection Act would seriously undermine the interests of all Albertans. The act is specifically designed to protect health users as well as the taxpayers of Alberta. The Health Care Protection Act provides stability for the entire health care system, and there must be ongoing assurances that licensed clinics are meeting cost-benefit performance standards while also complementing the public system. Any contracts determined to have the potential to negatively affect publicly administered hospitals are identified, and if there's no net benefit to the regional health authority, the health authority is obligated to terminate that contract or not to enter into it if it's proposed.

Mr. Speaker, through cost-effectiveness and regular performance measures, Alberta provides timely medical services to those in need without regard for their ability to pay, and that fulfills our ongoing commitment to the Canada Health Act. As my colleagues have noted, Bill 204 would focus on developing firmly established targets

for waiting times. The issue of waiting times has been discussed and researched across the country, and many interesting conclusions have been drawn from a 1997 Health Canada study. The study found that waiting lists are unmanageable and are arbitrary indicators of health care performance.

In Alberta we're more concerned with measuring the number of surgical and diagnostic procedures and also the quality of those procedures. Those who are in urgent need of surgery or diagnostics will receive the highest priorities, while others will wait a little while longer. For some, the waiting times will be much longer, and for others there'll be no waiting time at all. The length of the line is variable from case to case, and it's not the best measure of performance of the health care system.

I would, Mr. Speaker, encourage all members of the Assembly to reject Bill 204.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have the opportunity to support Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act. I think that it is timely that we do have this debate resurfacing here in the Legislature approximately one year from the time that we had the past debate and to take a look at the information available to us in terms of whether or not it is still a really good idea to ensure that we have a strengthened and strong public health care system by guaranteeing that funding and timely access to health care services are available.

Do we need a patients' bill of rights in this province? I believe we do. If we don't have that in place, then we see a steady erosion of people's abilities to access the kind of health care they need. Is the idea of a health care service commissioner a good idea? I think so. We have a Privacy Commissioner, and health care services are equally as important, Mr. Speaker, so I support that.

Should the Health Care Protection Act be repealed? Well, we've talked about that for a long time. In fact we brought in a bill, Bill 221, last fall in the 2000 session that did exactly that; it repealed Bill 11. So we've been on the record about that for a long time, as we also have, Mr. Speaker, about a patients' bill of rights. It was introduced in this Legislature in 1998 by our former leader and good friend Grant Mitchell. Certainly the government was quite happy to vote that down at that point in time, but it's still a good issue and something that needs to be talked about.

A former speaker, the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, said that Bill 11 was necessary in order to be able to rein in private operators in the health care system. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would challenge that comment. I don't think that it is accurate. I think there are many other options for this government to do that, not the least of which is their very favourite one, which is regulations. So there were lots of avenues open for them to be able to pursue the kinds of controls that are needed to ensure that we have some control over private operators in this province.

I think we're still getting the same kinds of questions throughout the province, Mr. Speaker, that we did during the Bill 11 debate and haven't got good answers for them and have seen a government who is still quite happy to put forward their rhetoric on this particular issue but not very much substantive background information to support whether increase in privatization in this province is the right way to go in health care.

Interestingly enough, I recently attended a conference on globalization in the eastern United States where a number of people came to talk about the privatization of health care and what impact that has on our country and countries. There were many senior-level

bureaucrats from the federal government there, Mr. Speaker, people who are studying what's happening in Alberta and taking a look at what's happening across Canada and globally on this issue. There were a number of academics from both Canada and the States and Europe present and presenters who were academics from Europe talking about the impact of globalization and privatization on health care.

It was interesting to hear what they had to say, Mr. Speaker. The greatest emphasis by both bureaucrats and academics from the States and from Canada was on the need for us to take a look at the Americanized system as a real anomaly, a system that absolutely doesn't work, a system that is the costliest medical system in the world to administer and one that gives very poor service: in fact, service rates in the bottom third of all countries in the world, certainly down there with many Third World countries, whom we would normally say provided really substandard care. What they talked about there was what drives that system to be a system that is impractical to operate, costly, and not effective in terms of the care it gives to the users of the system on a dollar-for-dollar basis, and it is the immense privatization.

There's a great deal of documentation available to support that. In spite of what we've heard from government members, the documentation is science based. It's independent. It would be something they'd be trotting out happily if it supported their argument, but it doesn't. So we need to take a look at that and take a look at the reasons why they're unwilling to use this kind of information. There is no doubt that looking at a system that has such high administration costs in it and such poor service delivery is not a system that we should try to adapt or monitor.

3:40

We're still getting, like I said before, the same question as we did before the election, and that is: are private hospitals cheaper? You know, this government is driven by the almighty buck, and they think that everything that's privatized is going to be better, but that isn't the case, Mr. Speaker. We have some basic services that we have found out are not better when they're privatized, and health care is one of them. We can just look to our neighbours to the south to have that verified, or we can look to Britain, where they've had a parallel system running that has been not good at all. A privatized system drives costs up, and I think there are many reasons to substantiate that. In fact, a private system is more expensive and less efficient.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So if we think about why that is, one of the reasons is competition for practitioners, be they nurses or doctors within the system. When you run two parallel systems, private systems can charge more, therefore pay practitioners higher rates of dollars. So what does that do, Mr. Speaker? It not only increases the costs of service delivery to the end users but also drives up the costs in the public system, because then suddenly the public system has to be competitive in the wage market or else they lose all their doctors. They just move from one system to the other, and we've seen lots of examples of that, particularly in the British system, where we have seen many studies that will indicate that the doctors who have to provide some public service minimize their hours there, thereby creating long, long waiting lists, forcing people to see the same doctor on the private side and pay the higher dollars. So it's certainly an issue that we have to think about and talk about and a good reason to support this bill, I think.

There are cost gaps between profit and not-for-profit hospitals and

how they operate, and they widen. There are lots of good reasons for that. We're seeing that in the public system. There's no expectation of profit at the end of the day, but when private investors put dollars into the system, they expect a return on their money. Somebody pays for that, Mr. Speaker, and it's us. It's us in the cost of medical services.

The administration costs drive up the costs. When we take a look at comparisons between systems that are private and that are public, we see that the administration costs are significantly higher than what they are in public systems. They have to have administrators to deal with all the HMOs or whatever kinds of private insurance providers they have. They have administrators to deal with marketing aspects, technology aspects, investor relations, corporate filings. There can be all the legal filings other than taxes, securities filings. All that stuff is costly and takes up a lot of time, Mr. Speaker, and somebody pays for it.

We don't have that in the public system. It's not necessary, and it's good that it's not necessary. We have other added expenses in the private system like the salary costs, not just the monthly expenses but the benefit packages that are used to attract people to the system. We saw that with nurses and doctors here who were attracted stateside because of the great benefit packages – stock options, pension plans, extended other kinds of benefits – and somebody pays for those. Once again, it's the user. Income taxes, then, on profits too are an issue with corporate filings. We also have the subsequent costs of doing business in terms of taxes, and all of that stuff has to be factored into a public system: all add-on costs, all not necessary in a public system. The dollars, if managed correctly, Mr. Speaker, can go directly to providing frontline services.

Now, I don't say that that system is perfect as it stands today, Mr. Speaker. We hear concerns from people within the system who say that even now in the public system we have administrative costs that are too high and that we need to see some of that trickle down to service providers on the front lines, be they cleaning staff, nurses, aides, or doctors. I think that's an efficiency that we always need to be improving on, but no doubt it is half the cost that it would be in a private system, so we have to think about that.

This government talks a lot about market forces driving down prices and costs. Well, it hasn't worked in electricity so far, Mr. Speaker, and it isn't going to work in health care either. Health care is an anomaly. It's different than a lot of other kinds of consumer goods, and it's a perfect example of market failure, where the market, in fact, doesn't work, where you can't supply enough services to meet the demand. Where the service is specialized and often can be pitched to the patient in a fashion where the patient or the user of this service can't verify or justify the services that they need, the system is then open to taking advantage of people who don't have a lot of technical background or medical expertise. So this is not a system that lends itself to competition.

It's hard for patients or users of the system to comparison shop, Mr. Speaker. It's not fun running around trying to check out different doctors or how you can substitute one product for another. It's tough to do that. They just often don't have the ability or the technical expertise to be able to do that, and they're just open to being manipulated or otherwise talked into services that may or may not be necessary. They don't have any ability to judge the quality of the service and the cost-effectiveness of the service that's being brought forward. It isn't really that kind of commodity. You can take a look at two apples sitting on a shelf and make a decision about which one to purchase, but it isn't that easy when you're talking about medical services. So I think that's something that we have to consider in this.

Another question we hear all the time is: will for-profit health care

raise costs to the public system? Yes, they do. There are all kinds of issues that need to be addressed. Conflict of interest in those systems is something that we've talked about in this Legislature before and something that is a possibility with elected RHAs. We've had some discussions about that in terms of who sits on the boards, who makes the decisions, and who gets to decide who's making the money at the end of the day. We know that historically in this province it isn't the average person who benefits from those kinds of deals, Mr. Speaker, and I see no reason for that to change.

This government talks all the time about shorter waiting lists in a private system or else how ineffective waiting lists are as a measure of performance. They argue both sides of that case. I think it's interesting that they do that when it's convenient. They talk about how we shouldn't be using waiting lists as a measure, and then we'll hear the minister also talk about waiting lists having been shortened.

In fact, when we took a look at the cataract operations in this province – and we spent some time doing this during Bill 11 debate – what we found was that those regions offering completely public cataract services were not only cheaper but had the least long waiting lists. That was Lethbridge region, Mr. Speaker, that provided a completely public service at a much lower cost and with much reduced waiting lists. Edmonton was a good example of being a middle example of costs, where I think it's about 80 percent of the services were provided publicly. The waiting lists were substantially lower than those that were all provided by private operators like in Calgary, where it was a completely private system. They had the longest possible waiting lists and the highest cost.

3:50

So there just isn't any way you can justify a private system being better than a public system based on either evidence available from other jurisdictions or evidence available right here in this province. It'll be interesting to see how this unfolds, and it's certainly a concern for us as we see more private operators cropping up in Alberta, particularly from the international agreement side.

I think what we'll find with NAFTA is that once the doors are opened to these private operators, it's a very slippery slope, and this province will fall off that slope very quickly. They won't be able to shut the doors and say: this is enough; we have enough private operators in here now. The public system down the road looks like it could be completely eroded, and that might be okay if everybody can afford to pay, but everybody can't afford to pay. In fact, I would suggest that most of the members in this Assembly would have a hard time financing a serious health problem within their family at the cost of current services, not to mention the escalating cost of those in the future, and I think that's something that we need to be very concerned about. It's easier to make sure that you have all of the steps in place before you move forward with something like this.

We saw this with the deregulation. Had the government put the rules in place before deregulation happened, it might have worked, Mr. Speaker. As it is now, we have a very costly boondoggle on our hands for the next couple of years at least, perhaps longer than that. Who pays when we do? Ultimately, we hope deregulation will sort itself out. Ultimately, privatized health care won't sort itself out, because there is no mechanism for us to revert to a system that is publicly funded or publicly based. Once this system erodes to the point where it isn't providing adequate services for people at any level, it'll just be gone, and what about those people who can't afford to pay?

As the opposition, when part of our role is to be the watchdog of government, it's very important for us to raise these concerns. When part of our role is to be the spokesperson for those people who feel they are not represented by this government, then it's important for

us to bring those issues forward. In this case, in a privatized health care system, there are many people who are not represented by the government: the poor, the middle-income earners, people who have chronic health problems, people who have children who have chronic health problems. Those people are not represented by private health care and this government.

So it's important that we continue at every possible opportunity to talk about these issues and keep them in front of the people of this province and keep them in front of the government, because we've known in the past that there have been cases where this government has changed its mind or incorporated some of our good ideas into legislation. Mr. Speaker, it takes a long time for this government to listen to anybody, particularly to the opposition, but it does happen, and we're quite happy to continue to put forward the arguments that people in this province are asking us to do.

That concludes what I have to say about this bill at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments on this bill. Much was said over the past session of this Legislature. Much was said after the session. Much was said during even this past election campaign.

I read the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands' bill with some interest, and I am curious as to why anyone would want to replace the Health Care Protection Act, which is totally complete in its protection of our public system, with this bill, which is wholly inadequate. It would take more than the 20 minutes I've been allowed to point out the inadequacies of it, but I'm going to try. I'm going to remind people that we had a good debate about this, and it was the focus of both opposition parties for their election bid. It failed dismally, and this bill should fail as well.

The issue is this, Mr. Speaker. They are entirely on the wrong tack. It is not an issue of private or public. It is the issue of offering quality health services in a timely fashion. That's the issue the people I talked to are concerned with. In fact, I held four meetings in my constituency. I admit I didn't have a large turnout at any of them, but the people who were interested did come. You know, we sat down with the actual bill and went through it clause by clause, and they were shocked and dismayed and annoyed that they had been listening to such wrong, wrong information on the bill.

The fact is that the Health Care Protection Act does first in its preamble outline the responsibility of the government of Alberta "to provide leadership and support . . . of quality health services." Another part of it talks about all of the principles of universality, comprehensiveness, accessibility. There is a correlation in these two bills in that respect, and I commend the hon. member for that.

It talks about excellence in the health system, which this does not. This does not talk about excellence. It talks about a narrow system, an outdated system, that nobody – nobody – in the private system should ever offer a service, whether it's needed or whether it's a quality service. It doesn't talk about the qualifications of the provider, which this bill does. It talks about government, in my view, in reading this, determining who should provide health services.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a firm believer that health professionals are in a better position than this Legislature to determine who should provide the services. Frankly, if I have a choice between the College of Physicians and Surgeons determining a facility and if the people who operate in that facility are qualified to provide me services over the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, with all due respect I'm going to pick the College of Physicians and Surgeons every time.

We should talk about – and I wish there had been more support from both opposition parties – who has the funding responsibility

and what the Canada Health Act really is, because the Canada Health Act is a funding mechanism. That's what it is. You can wrap yourself in the flag, you can wave it around, but it talks about funding, and it talks about penalty, and it talks about doctors and hospitals. That's what it talks about. It doesn't talk about the services that are important to our seniors, like allied health services, like access to optometry, to physiotherapy, to chiropractic, to podiatry, to all of those things that are important. It doesn't talk about rehab. It doesn't talk about home care. It doesn't talk about those support services that are of huge importance to our seniors' population in this province. In fact, under the Canada Health Act you wouldn't be compelled to offer MRI services. The only part that's compulsory under that is the reading of the MRI, which is done by a radiologist. That's the doctor's side of it.

So I think it's time we had a discussion about health care, not ideology, and to me this is about ideology, not about ensuring that the people of this province have quality health care.

Let's ask the federal government why their contribution to health services in this country, in this province is 13 percent when it used to be 50 percent. Well, they will tell you – and I've heard all of the stories, as all of us have – that with tax credits and that if you only take the narrow part of the health system that it covers, they're much higher than that, and they are somewhat if you take that all in but nowhere near the 50-50 that we started with.

Let's talk about who has the opportunity to raise money and the responsibility to pass it on to the province delivering the services: the federal government, who collect the vast amount of taxes – income, excise, GST, all of those things – and don't deliver health programs. They have a serious responsibility, and some of that I believe they carry out very well. In protection, in disease, in licensing there are some very good things. Some years ago when I inquired how many people in that vast array of civil service in Ottawa actually worked on the Canada Health Act, it was about 25. You know, there's something wrong with this.

4:00

So I looked at this, and I thought there must be something in here that's going to improve over Bill 11. Does it state that no person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta? Well, I found that in the Health Care Protection Act, the first article. I found:

No physician shall provide a surgical service in Alberta, and no dentist shall provide an insured surgical service in Alberta, except in

- (a) a public hospital, or
- (b) an approved surgical facility.

I didn't find that in here. I may have missed a page, and I'd like the hon. member to correct me if I'm wrong.

I found out that queue-jumping is prohibited, not in this bill but in the Health Care Protection Act, and it's very clear in article 3. I found out in article 4 that no person could be charged an extra fee for a service associated with a medically necessary service. I'm not sure that's very clear in this area although there is a vehicle in section 10(2) for that to happen, but it's much clearer in this bill, and I would have commended the reading of this bill to the hon. member to get a few more sections. Some of them are close.

I went on and found other sections about payment, where it's prohibited and where under special circumstances it might happen. I found out that if it did happen, the patient had the full explanation of what the service was for. I found out that they couldn't be refused service because of inability to pay or saying that they wouldn't pay, but I found it in the Health Care Protection Act, not in this bill.

The area that's very important to me I found in part 2 of the Health Care Protection Act, and that is the area of the conditions of operation. It states in there that

No person shall operate a surgical facility at which insured surgical services are provided unless

- (a) the surgical facility is accredited as required by section 11(1)(b).

That's important to me when I go for medical services. I want to know that that facility is accredited. I want to know that it has been visited and inspected by people that know the system. I found out in that section that the operator of that facility has to have an agreement with the regional health authority. I thought that was excellent.

I went on and found out that the minister in approving a facility has a number of conditions that he or she must meet: that there must be a defined need, that it must be shown that it is efficient to operate both in the delivery and on the financial side of it. I found out that of course they would have to be accredited. I found out something that was incredibly important to me, that the minister could also refuse to approve a facility, and I think that provision is incredibly important.

So when I went through this bill from the hon. member, which I think he put forward in good faith, I found it woefully lacking in some of the areas that are important to me and to my constituents, the people I talk to, the people that said: I want quality services, I want timely access, and I want to ensure that the practitioners who are delivering those services and the facility they're delivering them in are accredited. As I say, I'm afraid this bill doesn't do it.

Now, the interesting part of the bill to me is the health care services commissioner. The Health Care Protection Act has a provision in it for a health advisory committee, which I thought would be quite adequate. I looked at what the health care services commissioner would do that this other body might not. Well, reporting: I think the other body could do that. Laying a copy of the report: I think that could be done. I see that a select committee might be called, which I would support if it were going to improve somebody's health status in the province, because I'm really talking about measures that will improve people's health status rather than things that are in my view – in my view and I may be wrong – more ideologically driven than they are health delivery.

The other thing that I found that was lacking in this bill was any ability to think outside the box, to look at new and innovative ways of delivering services. When we look at the health budget in this province and in other provinces across the country and we see that they are rising from 30 to 35 to 40-plus percent of budgets, you have to wonder where the line is. There's no way that you can sustain a system unless you look for new ways to deliver services.

I found it interesting in my experience over the years when a new technology would come in. MRIs are a good example. It's a wonderful diagnostic tool, but what I want to know is how much less we're using the other diagnostics. MRIs are new. Have we reduced costs by not using other diagnostics as often? When a new drug comes in that allows a patient to go home and have a quality of life rather than being in an institution, does that save us some dollars? We have a health economics group that I think looks at some of those issues for us.

There isn't a member in this Legislature on either side of this House in any party that doesn't want a quality health system. There isn't a member in this House that I know that doesn't support a publicly funded and administered system. I believe members on both sides of the House agree on those points. Where we do disagree is on how to achieve that. I can tell hon. members that unless we look at this with some innovation, with some idea just a step forward – the same is not always better. We all feel comfortable if we don't change anything. Change is frightening for everyone, but what's more frightening to me would be the loss of a

system that everyone in this country cherishes and I believe we all want to fight for.

I'd like to see a bill come in that really forces us to look at innovation. I am hopeful that Mr. Romanow's committee is going to deal with that. However, I'm a little discouraged because the Prime Minister had another committee in place – and I think he actually co-chaired it – maybe four or five, six, seven years ago. We had three members on it from Alberta. They wrote a very good report, and unfortunately very few if any of the recommendations have been carried out or followed except by the provinces of their own volition. So I worry that this committee might do very good work and then the responsibility for carrying this out might fall back to the provinces, who do not have the ability to raise the funds in the same way that our partners in the federal government have.

4:10

You know, members, “profit” is not a bad word. “Private” is not a bad word. The private sector is what drives this province and allows us to enjoy the highest quality of health services in this country. The private sector is the engine of our economy. We exist with them in the public system by being the supporters of the delivery of some quality services.

The biggest danger to our health system is not the Health Care Protection Act, or Bill 11. The biggest danger is the narrow vision that many of us have that if we change anything, the sky will fall, the earth will shake, and our health system will disappear. Well, you tell me why after this time, after hearing this – and I've heard it for some years – “Doomsday; it's going down,” the Capital region has been named two years in a row in Canada as the best deliverer of health services. Tell me, hon. members, why. Tell me: how could that happen? We know that the Health Care Protection Act has been in place for a year, has been proclaimed for some time, and you know what? They're doing better and better. They contract though. They contract. You know what? They're doing well.

The other thing I want to ask the hon. member is if he had the time or the opportunity to read the act that's in the Saskatchewan Legislature on this issue. If you want to read a permissive act that would allow, actually by my reading of it, for-profit hospitals, then read the Saskatchewan legislation. Have a look at it.

We asked the federal government, when they were kind of coming around making comments, just one thing. Would you do a review of all the legislation in Canada in every province, and if we are lacking in some area, we'll look at changing our legislation. But don't look at us in isolation because we're Alberta, because we are innovative, and because our health system is working pretty well. Look at every piece of legislation in this country and then tell us where we're lacking. You know, we're still waiting for that answer.

So I have a little problem when I'm trying to determine in my own mind what the real agenda is. Well, I can tell you what the real agenda is from this member's point of view. As a person who represents a very large rural riding which depends on the cities of Calgary, of Edmonton, of Medicine Hat, of Red Deer, and to some extent maybe Lethbridge for the assistance in delivery of health services, our interest is quality health care. Our interest is having it provided in a quality facility and by qualified physicians.

When I asked my constituents how they would feel about the Gimbel health clinic being shut down, they were appalled. They were absolutely appalled. You know, when I thought about it, I was too, because who has really brought that surgery to what it is today? I remember people when they had to lay in hospitals for it. [Mrs. McClellan's speaking time expired] My, the time flies.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Highlands to close debate, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND Party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a distinguished teacher and Edmontonian, David Eggen, who is sitting in the public gallery. David ran for the New Democrats in Edmonton-Centre in the last provincial election. I ask David to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MRS. GORDON: I, too, Mr. Speaker, would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you someone who is sitting in the public gallery, probably not a stranger to many, Mr. Pat Brennen, who hails from Parkland county. He is a councillor with the Parkland county and on the Northlands board. He is standing in the public gallery. I would ask that you give him the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 204

Medicare Protection Act

(*continued*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to close debate.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin, I wonder if you could enlighten me as to the amount of time I might have left to conclude my remarks.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Five minutes.

MR. MASON: Five minutes. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to be able to conclude debate on second reading of Bill 204. I'm quite proud of Bill 204 and would certainly recommend it to all members of the Assembly.

It does three main things, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it enshrines the five principles of the Canada Health Act in the clauses of the legislation itself, and they are therefore stronger and more binding than if they were just placed in the preamble, as Bill 11 does.

Secondly, it does set minimum standards for health care, including limits on waiting lists and a ban on queue-jumping, something which the government's legislation fails to do.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, it prohibits outright private, for-profit hospitals and clinics, something which the government's legislation clearly does not do.

Now, I'd like to respond briefly to the comments of the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. He talks about Bill 11 protecting the principles of the Canada Health Act, and I suppose that it does, Mr. Speaker, but I think that it's not nearly as strong as it could be. He says that repealing the government's legislation leaves us open to sanctions from the federal government, but I remind members of the Assembly that it was the Conservative government of Alberta that incurred those sanctions by continuing to promote balance

billing, otherwise known as extra billing, and it was the federal government that forced Alberta to heel. I wasn't in politics at that time, but I sure remember the squealing and the howling from this government when the federal government did the right thing and enforced the Canada Health Act. If they hadn't done that, you can imagine what we might be paying.

I want to talk about the comments that a number of members have said about Roy Romanow being open to consider private aspects in the health care system. Of course he's open. He's got to study all aspects of it, and certainly this government would squawk a great deal if he wasn't open to it. But what will he find, Mr. Speaker? When he looks at all of the research that's been done about which kinds of systems work well, which kinds of systems are cheaper and reduce waiting lists and provide good services, he will find a mass of evidence that a publicly funded, publicly owned and operated health care system achieves those goals best.

When he looks for the evidence on the side of private health care, what will he find? Well, he'll find just what this government found – and it's only come to light as a result of a freedom of information request. The government's evidence for private health care amounted to nothing, nada, zip, not a thing, not a speck of evidence to indicate that private health care provides better outcomes than public health care, and that is the difference between this bill, Bill 204, and the government's legislation. The government's legislation is based on a foundation of sand. There is nothing there to support the principles that the hon. Deputy Premier has talked about. On the contrary, my bill is supported by virtually every major study that has been done on the economics of health care.

MR. NORRIS: *Pravda*. Proletariat. You're Red.

MR. MASON: Don't Red bait me, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, I take exception to this yappy old minister across the way here. He's so damned pleased with himself, he can't . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please address through the chair, and that will avoid any such confrontations.

MR. MASON: I find that completely unacceptable from a minister of the Crown.

Now, I want to say something about the comments of the hon. Deputy Premier. I am honoured that they would bring in a heavy hitter like this to speak to my bill. I appreciate it, but she's talked about thinking outside the box, as all the government members are wont to do. They're all wont to talk about thinking outside the box. What does it really mean, Mr. Speaker? It's a code word for relentless experimentation and search for the Holy Grail of privatization.

4:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The five minutes are up, so we have to call for the vote.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: You are calling a point of order.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I'd like you to rule on the use of the language that's just been used repeatedly from the other side of the House when this member was speaking. Those words that were used: I'd like you to look at the *Hansard* and rule on whether or not

those words and those expressions are parliamentary. It's offensive to hear this kind of accusation made without regard to the dignity and the respect with which we need to deal with each other in this House.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair was unable to hear those words, and a ruling will be made once the *Hansard* has been referred to.

On the motion for second reading of Bill 204, Medicare Protection Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:21 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Pannu
Bonner	Massey	Taft
Carlson		

Against the motion:

Abbott	Horner	Ouellette
Ady	Jacobs	Rathgeber
Broda	Jonson	Renner
Cao	Lord	Shariff
Cardinal	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Cenaiko	Lukaszyk	Stelmach
Danyluk	Lund	Stevens
DeLong	Marz	Strang
Friedel	Masyk	Tannas
Fritz	McClellan	Tarchuk
Gordon	McClelland	Taylor
Graham	McFarland	VanderBurg
Haley	Melchin	Vandermeer
Herard	Norris	Zwozdesky
Hlady	O'Neill	

Totals:	For – 7	Against – 44
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[Motion lost]

Bill 205 Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture is an integral part of Alberta's economy and is of significant importance to those of us residing in the Lacombe-Stettler constituency. Unfortunately, many Alberta farmers have been hit with a combination of factors over the last four years, factors certainly beyond their control, including low commodity prices, rising input costs, multiple weather related problems, and, most recently, changes made or changes now being contemplated in some jurisdictions to local land use bylaws that threaten the long-term sustainability of livestock production and overall viability of these family farms.

Viability of the overall livestock industry is important and at risk.

In order for you, the members of this Assembly, to better understand the current issues surrounding livestock production and expansion in Lacombe county, it is necessary for me to begin by first providing you with a short historical perspective.

The presence of large numbers of livestock has been part of the western Canadian landscape for thousands of years. These animals, of course, were buffalo, or bison, and they have sustained First Nations people for hundreds of generations. Their effect on the landscape was at times very dramatic and would today be called threatening and pollutant. With the coming of European settlers approximately 125 years ago, agriculture replaced hunting as the way of life, and attention became focused primarily on producing grain for export markets. Vast quantities were grown and sold, millions of people were fed, and relative prosperity prevailed on the Canadian prairies.

But times have changed, Mr. Speaker, and our agriculture sector has had to deal with the many, many challenges of this change. Countries that were once customers have become competitors. Making a living producing grain for export has become more difficult, but farmers in Alberta are moving ahead, meeting these challenges by diversifying, moving out of the box, adapting to changing market conditions by expanding their production in new areas, particularly specialty crops and livestock.

My farmers are no different. They, too, have had to rethink their farming operations, with emphasis on adapting quickly and with resilience to pressure from a moving target, the ever changing global marketplace. My farmers recognize that as a family farm they must increase production capacity and maximize value from their existing land base to remain economically sound. Flexibility is also key. On August 3, 2000, things changed significantly for livestock production, for livestock producers operating within the jurisdictional boundaries of Lacombe county. This was the day that council gave second and third readings to a new land use bylaw that, quite simply, has gone way, way too far. This poorly conceived bylaw is punitive, excessive, and severely hampers and/or restricts now existing operators from expanding.

Allow me to explain, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, these changes were made in haste without prior due consideration given to consulting with affected stakeholders. In fact, according to producers this bylaw was rammed through in less than a month, with the county repeatedly rejecting all attempts by responsible producers for discussion, resolve, or compromise. I, along with 600-plus others, attended the only public meeting held, and it was in my opinion a complete sham. Most came seeking clarification, needing answers, wanting answers, and hoping, hope upon hope, for an extension of time. Questions were certainly raised, but no answers were given. No dialogue took place. Nothing was clarified. No rationale was stated as to why these changes were needed, and absolutely no consideration was given to the repeated requests by many for a full review involving the entire industry. It literally made a joke of what should constitute a public hearing process and what it should accomplish.

4:40

What has this done, and what does it mean to the individual livestock producers now existing and operating in Lacombe county? More than likely a dairy farmer or a hog farmer, the ongoing viability of his entire operation is threatened. His lifelong investment in land, buildings, and equipment is jeopardized, the assets he owns greatly devalued. His resale value, if he has one, is greatly diminished. The way of life for him and his family and often his family before him, his father and grandfather, the quality of life and the life they have lived has suddenly become compromised. The

banks he has used are now questioning his operation long term in relationship to his borrowing requirements. The flexibility he very much needs is decreased dramatically, if not entirely gone. Neighbours, friends, and family are fighting over who is right, who is wrong, and where we are going. He knows he is represented by a council who refuses to acknowledge his contribution at the local level, his contribution to the agriculture sector as a whole, knows that this same council doesn't seem to care whether he can continue to operate successfully in their jurisdiction, and his existing farmstead is now not in compliance with the amended land use bylaw.

Throughout the area the effects are dramatic and evident: the divisiveness, the uncertainty, the confusion, the conflict, the pessimism, and the questions. Why is this happening, and why now? One truly has to ponder the drafters' intent with these bylaws. What is the reasoning? Do the drafters not realize the full implications of what they have written, or have the council and councillors made this decision, with the majority making the decision? Do they not support nor will they endorse livestock production? Though I can't give an answer to that, I can tell this Assembly that today in Lacombe county we have a very much divided community. It's time for the province to get involved, to take action, action aimed at equity, fairness, and consistency. Producers only want what they deserve: clear, concise, and understandable rules under which they must operate, the same rules that would apply to all, regardless of where they live or where they farm.

Producers universally recognize and accept that they must adopt best management practices and ensure responsible stewardship and sustainability, but these practices must be set out in consistent guidelines that are not subject to arbitrary change or arbitrary interpretation. These producers need predictability. They need some level of protection from continually being harassed by frivolous challenges to their ongoing farm business operations. Their business needs are basically the same as those of other important sectors in Alberta relative to the Alberta economy and critical to the Alberta advantage, namely the oil and gas industry and the petrochemical industry.

This is in fact, Mr. Speaker, the very essence and thrust of Bill 205 and the amendment relative to section 619.1 of the Municipal Government Act. I would like to see us elevate the status of livestock production to the level of importance similar to natural resource development within the province of Alberta.

Let me go back for a few minutes and explain for your benefit and the benefit of the members in greater detail why many of my existing farmsteads are now not in compliance with the new land use bylaw and what it means to the individual operator. The reason is thus: the new bylaw requires that livestock operators own all of the land within the minimum distance separation setback. So it must be entirely on one consolidated parcel. Previously the minimum distance separation under the old bylaw allowed operators to encroach on a neighbour's property, and expansion was allowed if the neighbour provided consent. So simply stated, most of my existing livestock operators today do not own the land with the new setback requirements.

Because of the grandfathering provisions contained in the Municipal Government Act, these farmsteads have now been designated as a nonconforming use by Lacombe county. However, there are complications and severe ramifications. There are two circumstances where grandfathering does not protect a nonconforming use. Number one, where the building is damaged by fire and needs to be rebuilt. This means that any existing operation in Lacombe county that does not contain the minimum distance separation on its own property would not be allowed to rebuild on their present site after a major fire. This leads, of course, to a

number of questions, one being: what happens with insurance proceeds? It's my understanding that if you don't build on the site where the fire was, you are just paid half the proceeds.

Number two, where the building or use is vacant for greater than six months. So if a producer ceases the use of his operation for six months or more, he would have to apply for a new development permit and move his buildings. I have no idea where he is supposed to move his buildings, but in order to comply with the setback requirements, this is what would have to happen.

Now, why would an operator cease to operate? Possibly out of necessity; he's ill and needs time to hopefully recover; he decides to temporarily shut down his operation because what he is producing is at depressed commodity prices; he decides to sell his operation, but it's taking more than six months to find a buyer. Again, I ask this Assembly: is this fair?

I recall a quote something to the effect of: necessity is often the mother of invention. Such is the case with this situation. As a direct result of the changes made last summer the Lacombe County, Partners in Agriculture was formed. This group's membership is well over 600-plus local residents from the livestock sector and agriculture businesses in the Lacombe region, and they are working diligently to see if they can assist in implementing changes. They have taken much time and care and have spent considerable dollars to review this entire situation and are committed not only to livestock production in Lacombe county but seek changes necessary for the betterment of the industry as a whole, provincewide now and with sustainability well into the future.

Their mission: the preservation of economically viable family farms living in harmony within the rural community.

Their goals. As most are responsible producers, many second- or third-generation farmers, they are seeking a balance between environmental protection and commonsense regulation. These goals include greater regulatory certainty, science-based standards, fully enforceable legislation protecting right to farm, public education regarding the importance of agriculture, and industry education regarding leading-edge management practices.

4:50

I would like to share a quote with you from the Lacombe County, Partners in Agriculture:

We want to work with the province and establish a regulatory framework that protects the environment and human health but allows producers to operate if they meet certain criteria . . . The real problem is that municipal governments lack the expertise or technical knowledge to address these issues and instead resort to these [very] restrictive By-Laws. Until that's fixed, livestock producers will continue to face unreasonable hurdles.

Could, Mr. Speaker, the code of practice 2000, the code that's used for the safe handling of manure, or any amendments thereto not be successfully entrenched in legislation? There is so much that needs to be talked about regarding this issue. This is a huge issue not only in Lacombe county but in many other parts of the province, and unfortunately a 20-minute speech does not allow me to touch on very many aspects of it. I know and appreciate that the province of Alberta is working to resolve many of these outstanding issues. I'm very pleased that we can see some changes and the industry can carry on and do what they want to do; that is, farm. As I said, in 20 minutes unfortunately one cannot cover everything that's involved. My intent today was to make this Assembly aware of the situation as it relates to my constituency. It's a critical situation, one that needs our resolve.

Agriculture is very, very important to everyone, not only to farmers. It's also very important to rural communities. Your communities, my communities, the town of Stettler, the town of

Lacombe, the village of Mirror, the village of Donalda rely heavily and are dependent on their surrounding agricultural community, and all of us in Alberta, in Canada, in the world enjoy and want to continue to enjoy the bounties that these farmers produce and grow. Nothing beats Alberta meat.

Yes, I'm convinced that common ground can be found. It will of course require commitment and action by this government and the industry to mitigate as much as possible the many concerns related to the impact of livestock production and expansion on Alberta's environment and rural landscape, but I'm confident that it can be done. Yes, it will also require more education and a greater willingness on the part of opponents of the industry to recognize the importance of this sector and that sustainable, well-managed livestock development is not inherently bad.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege this afternoon to rise to speak to Bill 205. You know, the issue of how we deal with all of the impacts of intensive livestock has been a debate that's been going on basically the whole nine years now that I've been involved in the Legislature. We've seen a lot of different impact studies done and issues that have been looked at in terms of how best to deal with both the impact of the intensive livestock operation on the community but also how to deal with some of the issues that come up in the context of fairness and openness and the kind of participatory decision-making. The government has undertaken two and a half different consultations, and they have basically led to what now is, I think, a fairly well-documented and accepted code of practice for handling livestock waste and for dealing with the issues of siting.

The issue is: how do we deal with it in the context of trying to make some of the recommendations in there actually functional and promote the decision-making that goes on in the community? Bill 205 is effectively going to take a lot of the conflict, a lot of the technical aspects of the debate out of the hands of the community. It will put it into an agency that will effectively be making the environmental waste handling, siting decisions associated with: how do we deal with an intensive livestock operation? It'll take those away from the local community.

If we look at some of the aspects of the Municipal Government Act and look at them from the perspective of section 619, we have to basically question whether or not this is the best place to insert some kind of control or decision-making into it. Because basically under subsection 1(3) we end up there saying that the local community has no chance to override a decision that's made by one of these agencies that are going to be designated to approve essentially an environmental plan for the intensive livestock operation in question. The end result then is that if an application is made, the local community has to accept the siting and the location and the final decision. They can't overrule it using local parameters.

In effect what we're seeing here is, I guess, two things. One is that a local community would essentially have to have a very solid, a very well-thought-out, a very encompassing land use plan and zoning criteria in place before such an application was considered so that when it came back, the community would in effect be in a situation to say: okay; yes, this intensive livestock operation fits our community land use plan, our zoning plans, and that's the place it can go. If we look at the flexibility that local municipalities have in designing their land use plans and putting in place their predetermined zoning requirements, they don't have the flexibility that would give them that much say over how or where one of these intensive livestock operations gets situated.

The other option, then, is essentially: if we don't have this well-thought-out plan in place, the local community basically has no choice for second thought, for a reconsideration of what impact such an activity would have on the way they see their community. We end up then in a situation where if this kind of arm's-length decision can be made about the environmental aspects, that's extremely useful.

Mr. Speaker, I've been to a number of community meetings, appeal panels, land use board meetings. What we've heard there on a constant basis is, you know, just basically discussions about the technical aspects of whether or not a business plan for an intensive livestock operation is environmentally sound. This gets into some extremely technical aspects.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Bill 205 would go a long way to address that. The province, by appointing or designating a particular agency to undertake the environmental approval, could take out of the local community debate around a lot of the technical issues that the expertise is not necessarily always available to all parties in the community. It might be available to the planning appeal board or to the county council or MD council. It might be available to the applicant. But for each of the people, in terms of either their wish to be a supporter or an opponent to an application, they don't have the technical expertise. So moving the technical discussion, the technical question away from the appeal panel, away from the local community, that's a good idea. I think that's kind of what we have seen in some of the discussions that are going on with respect to how should the intensive livestock waste-handling system be implemented in the province.

5:00

I spent a lot of time last fall at the AAMDC convention, and just one after another the councillors or the reeves were coming up and saying: "What are we going to do about this. How are we going to handle it?" How will we effectively have common standards for environmental protection, common standards for the issue of all of the technical aspects that are necessary?" But what is most important to the local community is the ability to still have some say over the lifestyle that they are going to live in conjunction with these intensive livestock operations.

What I'd suggest is that, you know, this is a very effective way to deal with the technical aspects, but on a stand-alone basis it effectively takes away from the community any ability to deal with the definition of the kind of community they want, unless they are given a time frame up front to basically put in place a comprehensive land use plan for their community. When I read through the Municipal Government Act and I talk to the councillors out there, when I talk to community people, talk to even some of their land use individuals, the people who actually get involved working with groups who are either a proponent or an opponent to some of these issues, they're saying that the Municipal Government Act right now doesn't provide the flexibility to the local rural municipalities to deal with the kind of zoning and the kind of land use planning that they'd like to see.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What I would like to suggest is that we look at this as a convenient way to handle the technical aspects of intensive livestock. You know, when you talk to individuals even in the livestock sectors, whether it's cattle or hogs or poultry, they're all saying: "Yes, we want to know the ground rules. We want to know what is expected

of us, and we want to have a firm commitment that if we live up to these standards, the neighbours will as well." That's what's important and that's what's good about this kind of a process, when you deal with it from a provincial or agency-type review. What it doesn't have, though, is that partnership that's necessary to provide a sense of self-control or self-determination for the local communities. Right now they look at their own land use planning options, and basically they don't have the ability to deal with any of the kinds of questions that are associated with how they can develop their own community.

Mr. Speaker, some of the suggestions that have come up – and I think some of them are very good. What we need to do is have within the zoning options that are available for rural municipalities the kind of flexibility that an urban municipality has in the gradients of particular types of classifications of land use that are available. Some of the suggestions that have come up from some of the rural municipalities indicate that they would like to be able to say: okay; if we've got a park or a place that individuals and groups attend on a regular basis, maybe what we need to have is a buffer area around it. Well, they would perceive the buffer area to be larger than the minimum-distance requirements in the guidelines.

So what we want to do is say okay; let's give them the option of, say, from around their park going out a mile or two miles and let them zone that into a particular type of agriculture land. Then the next couple of miles have it zoned a different kind of agriculture land, and then after that maybe that's where they'll be willing to allow for the zoning that would encourage and permit the establishment of, you know, some of the larger sized intensive livestock operations. The cutoffs that are available in the code of practice are in some cases really quite modest in terms of the potential environmental impact or the community impact that could result from the establishment of these kinds of operations.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that there's an awful lot of difference between a 1,000-head feedlot – there's a quantum increase to a 10,000- or 15,000-head feedlot. There's a significant increase again as you get up into 25,000 or 30,000 or 40,000 head. We see some of these applications now being made for very large multi-unit hog operations, where the impact there becomes very, very significant, and we need to deal with giving the local communities a sense that, yes, they have the ability to deal with how their community is going to develop. We give that freedom and we give that flexibility to urban areas. Why don't we provide it to the local area in rural Alberta as well so that they have control over what's going on: the kinds of businesses, the size of businesses, and the degree to which the business they're allowing into their community interacts with the rest of the community, the different aspects of the community, whether it's residential, whether it's recreational, whether it's commercial/industrial as opposed to just agricultural.

I think what we need to do in the context of Bill 205 at this time is look at it in terms of its kind of threat, not necessarily a threat but its potential use whereby a decision is made totally away from the community about whether or not a particular type of activity can occur in that community, and then the community has no second chance. What we need to do is build into this a situation where the community says: yes, we want it; we want it sitting there. Then let's do the environmental analysis, let's do the technical review, let's look at whether or not that particular site can provide an adequate business plan for that intensive livestock operation, and then if it can, everybody's happy. The community has said that it's okay if it's there, then we've looked at the technical aspects and we've said that, yes, it's a sound business proposal, and that's when we should go ahead with it.

It seems to me that if Bill 205 were to further amend the Municipi-

pal Government Act and further deal with the flexibility that would provide local municipalities within their land use planning framework the option to deal with zoning different levels of land use classification, then what we would have is a set of options which would give us an environmentally sound water quality, air quality, and the whole function of land use: to prevent land degradation. These kinds of issues would all be addressed by the technical review, but the community still has its own say about the kind of issue that comes up. I think if we track through the incidents that have gone on – and I know the member sponsoring the bill has had a number of comments about how these issues have divided communities. Mr. Speaker, we need to act and act quickly to prevent that kind of community impact.

5:10

What we want to do is make sure that in a sense we have a situation where the community still feels it has a say, where the community can determine how it wants to grow and on what basis it wants to grow but which will also give a reasonable signal to a lot of other individuals that, yes, we are committed to protecting the environment and that we're committed to protecting the land base of the province.

We have to look at it, Mr. Speaker, from the perspective of how these kinds of guidelines and rules really do deal with the issues of the local community. Given the time frame that we've had, we've had some contacts made with people out in the community, and the general sense is that this bill would provide a very sound environmental review process based on the code of practice, but it does take away from the community any sense that they are in control of what their community is all about. Until we can get those kinds of issues addressed and those kinds of concerns addressed on behalf of the community – the role of government is to deal with the issues of how communities can be run, directed, and legislated to deal with the community as the people who are there.

What we want to do is look at it from the point of view of: is this bill truly giving the people of the community a sense? If we're talking about the people who are involved in the business, then this serves their interests probably very adequately, but when you look at the neighbours who are there, the rest of the community, the adjoining individuals, even the current code of practice doesn't address the necessity for the community to feel comfortable with what's going on and the community to have a sense that this is what we want, what we need, or what we enjoy in our community and what will give our community an economic benefit and also a sense that we do have an aspect within it that we care about each other and that the quality of life and the style of life and the ability to move about in the community are priorities.

So, Mr. Speaker, on that basis, at this point in time I would suggest that we not support this bill, delay it, adjourn it, or amend it when it gets to committee stage so that what happens is we can make sure that this act is further amended to make sure that those local people do have the final say about the kind of community they want. Otherwise, I don't think that in this form and with just this part of it I can support it.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 205, the Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001. This bill raises some very important but contentious and complex issues in rural Alberta and certainly issues that I've been familiar with as a rural councillor for

17 years. I think I'm a little bit familiar, as well, with the issues in the mover's constituency, having known a number of the people involved there for many years and having attended the public hearing that she spoke about in her opening comments. So I certainly understand why she would like to bring forth her proposal to this Assembly to resolve this issue.

Mr. Speaker, in principle I agree that something certainly needs to be done to provide direction to the intensive livestock industry so that they may know what the rules are and have the assurance that they, in fact, can develop and expand their operations if they meet that certain standard. This is something, however, they are unable to do.

Intensive livestock operations are a very important part of our agriculture industry, especially the value-added agriculture industry in this province, and a very vital market for our feed grain industry, that is having some difficulty, and I raised some questions about that in the House just yesterday.

As it stands now, Mr. Speaker, ILOs are finding that even though they may meet the conditions of the local land use bylaws and provincial health and environmental standards, they're invariably appealed, and they feel that they're losing those appeals on a regular basis based on emotions rather than hard facts. Certainly I'm not saying that people aren't justified in being concerned when they think that an intensive livestock development in their community is going to jeopardize the enjoyment and value of their homes and their property and even perhaps restrict further development of that property. Of course, pollution and odour and health concerns are invariably the reasons that they cite for appeal, but many of these concerns are based on perception rather than facts. Many of the older ILOs that have existed for some time are utilizing outdated management practices. They are existing under the rules of the day that they were permitted to adhere to, and they haven't been updated. I'm not denying that they're causing some problems.

The industry has made great strides, however, in the last 10 to 20 years, and I'm pleased to say that in some small way I think I was a part of that, being involved in local government. They've improved their management practices, they've improved their facilities, and they've improved by embracing new technologies. In spite of those improvements, perceptions that the public has of all ILOs still remain quite negative even to the point of being very divisive and confrontational in our farm communities. Bill 205 appears to be an attempt to rectify this situation. However, I'm not convinced that I can support this particular bill the way it is.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that Bill 205 is going to produce the desired effects that the communities are seeking. I'm aware that this government has been undertaking a review of the whole intensive livestock issue, and the hon. Member for Leduc has been chairing a committee which I understand has conducted extensive public consultations on this matter.

As I said before, as a former reeve and councillor with the MD of Kneehill and the chairman of the development appeal board there, I've had ample opportunity to deal with this issue, and, Mr. Speaker, I believe we provided leadership to the industry as well as other municipalities.

One of the concerns I have with supporting Bill 205 at this time, Mr. Speaker, is that I feel it's premature, especially with the expected report from the committee that's chaired by the hon. Member for Leduc, as I stated before. I know I'd feel better equipped to make a decision, as I'm sure all members in this House would, if we had the advantage of having that feedback from the public and the industry stakeholders. It's my understanding from reading this bill that municipalities' concerns certainly would not be met, because they have grave concerns over land use decisions being

transferred from the local level to the provincial level. The way this is written, that's exactly what this would do. This is a drastic change from the current legislation, and I'm concerned that not enough consultation has gone into this particular bill.

In light of the fact that there is a government committee which has consulted with the public, I would have to say that although I do strongly support looking at changes to the current system governing ILOs, I do not believe Bill 205 adequately addresses all the concerns that need to be addressed. It may reduce the appeals by restricting them, but it's not going to reduce the desire for an appeal. So I don't believe it's the answer at this time.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks, and I'd like to move adjournment on the debate on the motion for second reading of Bill 205.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, earlier today, hon. members, a situation developed in the Assembly which has required a wee bit of investigation. The chair is understanding that when one hon. member was speaking, there was an interjection by another hon. member.

5:20

Looking at the text of what occurred, this basically is what was said. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands was speaking.

And that is the difference between this bill, 204, and the government's legislation. The government's legislation is based on a foundation of sand. There is nothing there to support the principles that the hon. Deputy Premier has talked about.

On the contrary, my bill is supported by virtually every major study that has been done on the economics of health care.

Then we had an interjection by the hon. Minister of Economic Development: "Pravda. Proletariat. You're Red." Then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands went on to say:

Don't Red bait me, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, I take exception to this yappy old minister across the way here. He's so damned pleased with himself he can't . . .

The Acting Speaker went on to say, "Please address through the chair, and that will avoid any such confrontations." The hon.

Member for Edmonton-Highlands then went on to say, "I find that completely unacceptable from a minister of the Crown."

Well, hon. members, Standing Orders, your rules, 13(1) says:

The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and shall decide questions of order.

Then 13(4) says:

When a member is speaking, no person shall . . .

(b) interrupt that member, except to raise a point of order.

The English language is a wonderful language, and words generally have meanings that are usually accepted by most people and understood by most people. Sometimes in the context, though, these words have multiple interpretations. Just so as to ensure that there's absolutely no misrepresentation or no misunderstanding on this matter, the chair would like to have this matter brought to a successful conclusion and would call on the Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, earlier today while listening to the hon. member speak, I let my Irish heritage get the best of me, and I saw red while he was talking. I would like to go on record as apologizing for references that I made to certain magazines that he might subscribe to. It was not my intention to indicate that he was any of those things, and for that I apologize to the Speaker, to the hon. member, and to the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene tonight, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would all members in favour of the motion please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. It's carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 2, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/02

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: **Main Estimates 2001-2002**

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. Again, as usual, we ask that there only be one member standing and talking at a time. We must remind hon. members that the House leaders' agreement constitutes two hours for questions.

Health and Wellness

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll start off, then, with the hon. minister for his opening comments.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to present the Alberta Health and Wellness budget for 2001-2002 for your approval.

Colleagues, public health care in Alberta faces a herculean task: to help the 3 million people of this province with the full range of their diverse, acute, rehabilitative, and long-term health needs to achieve optimal health and wellness. The biggest issue we face is not our commitment to that goal; it is our ability to sustain that commitment in the face of a growing and aging population, a health workforce that is nearing retirement, the impact of new technologies on budgets and training, public expectations of access, and a growing concern over the ever increasing cost. As we look ahead, our biggest challenge is to ensure that our health care system will continue to be there with the right service at the right time and by the right professional.

The Health and Wellness budget covered by the business plan for 2001 to 2003 is dedicated to maintaining the health system while we continue to consult on and discuss how our system must evolve if we are to meet Albertans' health needs in the future. The 28 percent increase in health expenditures over the next three years simply to maintain our health system shows how urgently that evolution is needed. I look forward to seeing the results of the Romanow commission, the outcomes of the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, and most importantly the results of discussions with health providers and people in this province as we seek to develop made-in-Alberta solutions to sustainable quality care.

For example, our business plan makes a commitment to review how health services are used, examine policies and guidelines for community rehabilitation and related services, and consult on new directions for primary care. Until we receive the recommendations and are able to act on them, we must work to maintain our health services for the benefit of Albertans. This budget addresses the costs of retaining our health workforce in the face of stiff domestic and international competition for professional staff, maintaining services to meet the rising demand, continuing to underwrite prescription drugs, protecting the wellness of Albertans, and staying in the lead in health systems management.

It is not just our population that is aging. A large portion of our health workforce is nearing retirement. The inevitable loss of thousands of workers at a time when the demand for services is increasing lends urgency to strategies that keep and attract health professionals to maintain our workforce, let alone help it grow. Doctors and nurses agree that recent contract agreements will help attract professionals, but the increase in salaries and benefits will

cost us over \$700 million over the next two years, \$390 million in the first year alone. In addition, \$34.5 million in the first year will pay for more physician services provided to a growing and aging population, while an added \$4.1 million will help maintain our physician workforce by increasing support for physician training programs such as academic health education, residency programs, rural medical education, and the international medical graduate program.

To address the growing costs of physicians, we are exploring alternative compensation for doctors through pilot projects that also improve patient services. An example is the Crowfoot Village Family Practice in Calgary, where physicians are paid a fixed rate based on the number of patients they treat rather than the standard fee for service. This allows physicians to spend the time that a patient needs.

This budget includes an additional \$7.5 million in the first year for the medical services delivery innovation fund to support more alternative physician payment plans. Another \$5 million will go into a fund to meet the unique needs of specialists who provide province-wide services, specialists like heart and transplant surgeons and neurologists.

The higher cost of health care workers is just one indication of the pressure our growing and aging population is having on our health system. In this budget we are allocating over \$250 million simply to maintain services in an environment of higher demand for programs and supports. For example, we expect it will cost health authorities \$51 million more just to provide the same health services to a growing provincial population.

Allied with that are corresponding increases in other patient services: \$7 million more in acute care coverage; an equal amount for higher caseloads at AADAC; \$3.6 million more for ambulance services; \$3.1 million for growth in Aids to Daily Living. Another \$43 million will cover both the higher cost and higher usage of drugs those doctors prescribe. Eighty percent of all prescriptions are used by seniors, and \$12 million of the total is for cancer drugs.

We see the further impact of growth on the cost of blood services, \$10 million more; public health laboratory work, \$1.1 million more; out-of-province health care, an additional \$3.5 million; and \$7.3 million for higher demand in allied health care such as chiropractors and extended benefits for seniors. Providing MRI scans to meet the growing demand will cost an additional \$13.4 million in operating costs for the new MRI units and buying public services from private MRI providers.

Maintaining our health workforce and health services addresses only one of our core businesses, which is to "lead and support a system for the delivery of quality health services. But we have another core business, and that is to "encourage and support healthy living." A sizable portion of our budget increase is aimed at maintaining the health and safety of Albertans. While that is a laudable goal in itself, focusing on wellness has the added benefit of helping to sustain our acute and long-term care services. A healthy and injury-free Albertan has less need for acute care or rehabilitation. To the extent that exercise, diet, and avoiding tobacco can have a positive impact on one's health, there can be a corresponding impact on long-term care as well. To maintain the health of Albertans, this budget includes a significant investment in wellness activities.

We must start with an increased investment in protecting and maintaining the health of our children. In all, this budget has increased its allocations for our children by more than \$29 million over the next three years. We are investing \$10.8 million in strategies with other ministries to improve children's health, including children's mental health, \$3.2 million to AADAC for

youth at risk initiatives, and \$1 million more in perinatal care for newborns. To protect against disease, we are allocating \$10.2 million to immunize Albertans, mostly children, against meningitis and \$4 million for other vaccines to protect children from other diseases like chicken pox. I'm also targeting \$1 million to tobacco reduction, primarily to initiatives aimed at children.

For other Albertans we've increased our support for breast cancer screening by \$3.6 million, and I am allocating \$2 million to pharmacy information and \$2.5 million to continuing care information and accountability in year 1, growing to almost \$6 million in year 2.

One of our most potent tools in serving and protecting the health of Albertans is information. Quick access to health information not only supports service delivery. In the case of pharmacy information it can avoid potentially harmful drug interactions, and it provides the basis for other decisions that can have an impact on health. In the first year of this budget \$10 million will help equip health offices with information systems to support the exchange of information. This investment is the groundwork to support information sharing that will help sustain our health system in the future.

The emphasis on maintenance in this budget does not minimize our commitment to improvement. Our first business plan goal is to sustain and improve health services delivery, and goal 2 is to improve Albertans' health and well being. One of the most important features we want and need is to maintain our leadership in health care delivery in Canada for the benefit of Albertans. The new MRI scan rate of 24 per 1,000 population will meet the growing demand, but it is also the highest scan rate in Canada.

8:10

Alberta has the highest organ and tissue donation rate in Canada and is recognized as a leader in transplant surgery and care, and this is why the federal government has located the national secretariat on organ and tissue donation in this province. In addition, Alberta is exploring its own organ and tissue strategy. This coming year we will support that strategy by increasing the allocation to \$1.8 million in year 1, and that grows to \$8.9 million in year 3.

The first point of contact with the health system is primary care. In the fall of 2000, at a primary health care conference, health care providers gathered to celebrate the conclusion of the pilot projects that explored new ways of delivering primary care and reviewed some of the aspects of those projects. As we complete our assessment of the completed projects, we will work with the health system to explore what primary care in Alberta could and should look like.

I'll conclude with this. In this budget \$13.7 million is set aside to develop Alberta's primary care system that will maintain and improve access to services for Albertans to medical care and wellness initiatives that maintain health.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will speak to the budget. I won't say that I'm pleased to speak to the budget. I think in many ways it's a step in the right direction, but I do have serious questions about the entire process.

Let me begin by setting the context. A budget is a plan about how to spend money, how money will be spent, and as with every plan this budget has a context. We can start from the global context. I tabled some articles today from the esteemed medical journal *The Lancet* which discuss at some length great concerns about the growing pressures of globalization on health care systems throughout the world and how that trend is replacing the number one goal of

health care, which has been patient and health care delivery, with a new goal, the goal of maximizing profits. The globalization trend, of course, is being felt in Canada and Alberta, and it's a significant part of the context we face.

In the continental context, closer to home, we of course live in the shadow of a very powerful country, the United States, and the American model of health care delivery is probably being studied more than any other. It teaches us many things, mostly what not to do when it comes to delivering health care. It's worth noting that Americans are spending about twice what Albertans are spending on health care per capita for a health care system that provides no coverage whatsoever to about 15 percent of their population and seriously limited coverage to another 35 or 40 percent. In fact, the kind of coverage that Canadians enjoy would be the envy of a majority of Americans. We are getting it for about half the cost, and I'm sure we all appreciate that here.

One of the great problems with the American health care system is that it's a massive intertwining of public, nonprofit, and for-profit interests. There's a huge public component to America's health care system. Astonishing as it may seem, more tax money per person goes into health care in the U.S. than it does in Canada. In short, then, their system is so inefficient as the mix that it is that as a society they are spending far more per capita than Canadians on health care, including more tax money for a system that leaves a large portion of their population with reduced or even no health care coverage. My great concern is that in recent years we've been heading down the road towards a mix of for-profit and public interests that looks more and more like the American system and that this budget shows no sign of stopping that or, indeed, of even making it visible or traceable.

In the national context our budget faces a range of challenges and opportunities. We have the Romanow and Kirby reviews. We have the aging of the health care workforce, which is a serious problem in this province and across the country. The average age of RNs in Alberta now exceeds 45, and we are not replacing them with anywhere near the sufficient numbers. Partly as a result of that, of course, we are in a situation of interprovincial competition for workers of all kinds. We also face the ethical challenges presented by new technologies and new treatments. Undoubtedly certain portions of the budget address these new technologies and treatments, and we must down the long road address the ethical questions that these raise.

Finally, our own provincial context. Health care spending in Alberta has been on a roller-coaster ride in the past 20 years, a roller-coaster ride that reflects almost perfectly the booms and busts of our economy. In the early 1980s, 20 years ago, health care spending in Alberta soared. In the later 1980s, when the price of oil and gas was very low, health care spending was squeezed and flattened right out. In the first half of the 1990s health care spending in Alberta was chopped with drastic speed and severity, more than any other province, with literally almost 15,000 health care workers losing their jobs or having their jobs downgraded.

Now we are back on the upswing of the roller coaster, where we're seeing rapid and enormous surges in health care spending. Is it any wonder that our health care system seems in turmoil? Is it any wonder that health care workers are burned out and that many who were pushed out a few years ago have no interest in returning? We have to get beyond this approach to health care budgeting and onto an approach that is based on the services that are needed. A system that is driven by services rather than surpluses is what we need.

So what are we trying to achieve with this plan? What is the government trying to achieve with their budget? Well, their mission statement is "to maintain and improve the health and wellness of

Albertans by leading and working collaboratively with citizens and stakeholders.” What does that mean? How do we interpret that? How does that translate? As the minister indicated in his opening comments, the ministry’s budget identifies two core businesses. I want to take issue, in fact, with the use of the term “business.” The government is not in the health care business; it’s in the health care service. We are not customers of health care; we are citizens here, expecting a public service. It’s fine for a government to run in a businesslike fashion, but neither a government nor a health care system is a business in itself.

Nonetheless, using the terminology of the department, one of their businesses is to “lead and support a system for the delivery of quality health services.” The second is to “encourage and support healthy living.” I’ll talk for a moment about the second one first. It is, as the minister referred to in his opening remarks, very important. It has to do with prevention of disease and with maintaining the health and welfare of the public so people do not need doctors and hospitals and diagnostic services.

One of the best indicators of the health of a society is the equality of wealth distribution within that society. There’s remarkable research from countries throughout the world showing a very close correlation between the extent or the size of the range between the higher and lower income groups in a society and the level of illness. The greater the inequity of income in a society, the greater the levels of illness. Similarly, a society in which there is a reasonably equitable distribution of wealth typically has higher health indicators and longer life expectancies. I’m concerned – and this is certainly not just the minister of health’s issue – that Alberta is headed in the wrong direction on this kind of an indicator for health care and that the impact of the growing gap between the bottom and the top of Alberta’s income levels is already being felt in this budget and will be felt even more sharply in future ones.

There are, of course, some areas, any number of areas, which deserve commendation in the budget in terms of this second business. I note one that I’m aware of from outside of the budget: the Health for Two project, which is supported in part by the Capital health authority and entails a special support program for single moms and their newborn babies. As well, smoking cessation programs are of course of great importance. Automotive and car safety programs are of great importance.

8:20

But let’s set those aside, and let’s talk for a minute about the first so-called core business identified by the ministry, which is to “lead and support a system for the delivery of quality health services.” Here I come to perhaps the most important comment I can make in this or any other discussion on budgets: this budget is to a great extent practically meaningless. Why do I say that? Because all the budgets of the RHAs are presented without any detail whatsoever. There’s no indication of capital costs versus labour costs, of drug costs, of program costs. We have no clue about how much will be spent on preventative health care versus active treatment. How much is going to be spent on long-term care? None of us here know, with perhaps the exception of the minister, nor will we learn from these documents.

In fact, if you turn to page 201 of the Budget 2001 business plans, 3 and a half billion dollars is listed on one line without any detail. That’s about 15 percent of the entire expenditure of this government, and there is no way of getting more detail in these budget documents that I can see except the breakdown into the various RHAs, which tells us very little. This in my opinion makes a farce of this budget process and diminishes legislative accountability to a rubber-stamp process.

The RHA budgets themselves will not come to this Assembly. We’re being asked to approve 3 and a half billion dollars without any meaningful knowledge of how it will be spent. On this basis I feel – and this is for the record – like I must participate in this discussion with great reluctance and with a sense that it is a failed attempt at accountability. Indeed, I considered personally boycotting this discussion.

How much are we approving for staff? Don’t know. How much are we approving for administrative overhead, which this government has been so proud of cutting? We don’t know. How much is going to prevention; how much to active treatment; how much to long-term care? Don’t know. How about how much is going for information systems? Is it a million? Is it \$5 million? Is it \$100 million? Don’t know. Is this accountability? How much is going for MRIs? The minister’s comments talked about \$13 million for MRIs. There’s no MRI line in the budget. Is that 13 million additional dollars? How does that compare to the year before and the year before that? We don’t know. How much is going to private nursing homes? Governments used to tell us that, let me remind you, but they don’t any longer. No wonder the public is nervous about conflict of interest.

Let’s look at what was available in the estimates of 10 years ago or 12 years ago. Of course, even then the estimates weren’t a wealth of information, but at least something could be gleaned. I just pulled this one, no particular purpose, off the shelf: 1988-89 government estimates, page 227, hospitals and medical care. What do we have? Well, we have a detailed listing: program supports, major urban medical and referral centres, specialized active care, rural community-based hospital facilities, community-based hospital facilities over 40 beds, capital support – there was actually a capital line in those days – salaries, wages, and employee benefits.

On page 229 the Legislature debated and could approve, in a way that we have no opportunity to do, items such as auxiliary hospital budgets, district nursing homes. How about this one? Private nursing homes. That was a separate line that could be traced in the estimates of 10 years ago that has disappeared. Voluntary nursing homes. Capital support. Those items could be seen and debated and approved in former estimates and budgets, and they have disappeared from these ones.

With that in mind, I’d suggest that we really need to determine what the RHAs actually are. Are they agents of the minister, are they agents of this Assembly, or are they self-governing organizations similar to school boards? I think we must, we absolutely must in the future include regional health authority budgets in detail in these estimates or we are simply failing in our duty as legislators to hold public dollars accountable.

I might ask: what basis are the RHAs operating on now? If there’s no detail in this budget, what’s their authority for operating now? What budget do they have? And if the minister has access to their business plans and their budgets now, why aren’t those available to us? When will the RHAs’ individual budgets be made available to the minister?

Let me now turn to a longer look into the future: my concerns with this budget as to sustainability and responsibility. I have – I know the minister shares these concerns, and I think he shares them sincerely – profound doubts that this government is constructing a sustainable health care system. I look, for example, at the increase in doctors’ fees. The rise in spending projected in this budget from 2000-2001 to 2003-04 is from \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion, an increase of about 50 percent. Is that sustainable? Clearly not over the long run. Budget and cost overruns in recent years in the health budget indicate a poor record of planning and a poor system of controls.

I’m also noticing in the budget – maybe it’s justified, and maybe

it's not; we'll never know, or maybe the minister can answer for us – there's a drop in staff at the department. Who will there be to ensure the long-term coherence of Alberta's health care system? Again I must warn the Assembly that turning more and more of our health care delivery over to investor-owned, for-profit corporations is a recipe for disaster, a surefire way to crash the sustainability of our health care system. Yesterday there was a brief exchange with one of the ministers on the expected rate of return; I believe it was the Minister of Economic Development. I suggested to him that for-profit health care corporations were looking for an annual growth in revenues of 15 to 20 percent a year and that by bringing these organizations into our health care system, we were courting disaster.

Let me quote from a company called MDS, a major multinational that is in a large joint venture with the Calgary regional health authority. This is from MDS's own web site.

MDS aims to double its revenues in five years while providing earnings per share growth at a compound rate of 15% over the same period . . . MDS has achieved compound annual growth in both operating income and earnings per share over the past five years in excess of the 15% target established by the Company . . . MDS is organized . . . to make senior management of each sector accountable to Corporate management and the Board of Directors for the achievement of growth objectives.

We bring those parties into our health care system at our peril.

The Gimbel eye clinic has also aimed and achieved at various times in its existence similar growth rates, as have a number of other companies contracting to the Alberta department of health.

Mr. Chairman, for the moment I'll stop there, and I'll save other comments for later. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to spend another fun-filled night discussing government estimates, health being the topic tonight. First of all, I'd like to thank many of the minister's staff that are here listening. I know that they review what we say and answer the questions and sometimes even have the opportunity to act on some of our suggestions. I'm hoping that with the topic I'm going to be talking about first tonight, that will in fact be the case, that we are going to see over the next year, even though not many dollars are dedicated in this particular budget, some goals and directions, more resources dedicated to mental health. I think that's where I want to focus the majority of my time this evening.

8:30

If we take a look at this year's budget and look for specifically targeted dollars for anything to do with mental health, we have to look quite hard to find anything specifically identified. As my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview said, there isn't a great deal of detail available in these budgets that we can scrutinize and compare from year to year and see if we've had an effective use of the dollars.

Mr. Chairman, I think it's common knowledge in the business world that the issue isn't how much money you spend in a particular area. It's whether or not you're getting value for that money and whether you've increased the efficiencies and the operating abilities to get more value than you did the year before. Can we say that's true about Health? I don't think so. We've seen a lot of money dumped into this department in the last year for spot funding or for specific projects, some to beef up some existing problems, but we don't actually see many benefits that are over and above what we had in prior years as outcomes for those dollars. I would think we can particularly say that's true when we talk about mental health.

What we've seen since I've been in this Legislature is that there

has been less of an emphasis on providing support for people with mental health issues in the community. If we take a look structurally, we've seen people literally being thrown out of institutions and back into the community without the necessary follow-up support that helps those people have the stability, the structure they need to manage within the communities. What we see as a result of that are many more street people, many more people living in abject poverty who for a variety of reasons aren't able to manage their lives and therefore manage their money and organize themselves to live any kind of decent life, never mind lives that contribute to their well-being or the well-being of other Albertans. Those are primarily mental health issues.

If we take a look at program 1 and try to find some dollars that are dedicated to mental health, we have to go three-quarters of the way down page 238 to find the dollars. The Mental Health Patient Advocate's office is dedicated \$309,000 this year, which isn't very much money when you consider that the deputy minister's office is allocated \$395,000. So when we see the proportion of dollars that are allocated and what share mental health gets, it isn't very much.

When we try to take a look at the line items and pull out any dollars dedicated to mental health, once again it's tough to see much there, Mr. Chairman. If we go to program 2, we do see the Alberta Mental Health Board at \$216,813,000, certainly in the middle of the pack in terms of spending but not much of a proportion of the \$3.6 million that's being spent in that total subprogram.

If we keep flipping through the budget and we start to look at the ministry business plan summary, we should be able to see some sort of resources dedicated to mental health. Mr. Chairman, guess what? It's not here. When we go down to the key strategies and take a look at all these excellent key strategies that are laid out here – improving access, improving management, enhancing quality of health services – we come to the one that I think should include mental health as an issue. It talks about “increasing emphasis on promoting wellness for Albertans and preventing disease and accidents.” You'd think we'd find some reference here to mental health and well-being and, even more specific, to age groups, because we are finding specific problems with children and mental health. It should be in one of these seven bullets that are outlined here, but it isn't. It's missing. So my question is: why is it missing? Why don't we see a key strategy being aimed at mental health?

There's no doubt that in the work that has been done, the studies that have been done in the area, spending some money up front on mental health issues saves us dollars down the road, not just within the health system, Mr. Chairman, but within the justice system. Many of the people who have mental health problems end up in justice institutions. Most recently a University of Alberta study found that 34 percent of male inmates in provincial penal institutions suffer from a mental illness like schizophrenia or bipolar depression. It's expensive to keep those folks in those institutions, and I wonder if that's a good use of our tax dollars or of benefit to those people. I think those are issues that we need to start thinking about and start taking a look at a more preventative model.

We all know that there are huge draws on health care dollars, so this government needs to start spending those dollars in a much smarter and more accountable fashion. I would suggest that in conjunction with a number of other preventative measures some focus and attention should be given to mental health. If we take a look at it, the stats would indicate that one in five Albertans will suffer from some kind of mental disorder during their lifetime. If those can be caught, managed, and controlled early on, then we save society from a lot of issues and problems including a lot of social issues involved with keeping families together, which is said to be a priority of this government, but we don't actually see the kind of

support coming through that allows that to happen and allows children to grow up to be healthy and happy human beings. I think those are important issues.

When we talk about mental health, among the 10 leading causes of disabilities of mental illness are things like alcohol abuse, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, all disorders, Mr. Chairman, that we know are at least controllable if not correctable. What it means when people fall into a mental illness is that they're not able to be fully functioning people in any kind of social or working capacity.

In fact, 30 percent of those visits to doctors' offices are for emotional reasons. If you could cut out 30 percent of the visits to doctors' offices, take a look at what that does to the budget. I think those would be dollars well spent to even take a small portion of the 30 percent of the dollars that are spent on doctors' visits right now and dedicate some of that money. Let's take half of it and put it in mental health work and prevention and see what happens to our health care budgets and see what the outcomes are not only in terms of dollars but in terms of people's happiness and ability to contribute to society. I think that's important to talk about.

When we talk about mental health, there are other health issues that fall out of that. People who have mental illnesses have suppressed immune systems. They're more susceptible to other kinds of illnesses and disease. Therefore they become a greater drain on the system, be those respiratory kinds of ailments like colds and the flu or more serious like cancer and heart attacks, which are very, very costly illnesses when we put those people into our health care system. So I think those are issues that we need to be talking about.

What do we need in this area, Mr. Chairman? What we hear from the Alberta Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health is that we need some vision and a strategic plan. We need to work towards a balanced system in this province, and I think the information they have available is very good and would be a good guideline for the health department to follow. I would ask the minister if he will respond to this. Will he do it? Why hasn't he? What steps are they taking now? Are they going to be working towards a strategic plan that deals with mental illness and well-being that would be balanced and brought together by many people, by stakeholders, which would include users of the system and providers of the system in addition to the government service departments? I think that would be a question I have that I would like the minister to answer.

8:40

Why don't we have an integrated system for mental health services? I know that the government in some ways has tried to work to a more integrated system across ministries and within departments, but so far it just isn't happening. So I'd like to know if the minister could answer: what are the roadblocks to providing a fully integrated system in terms of putting together all the key stakeholders and coming up with plans that will have outcomes that are measurable, tangible outcomes that we can see some benefits from?

Will the minister in committing to a strategic plan here make a firm commitment to evaluating, to having performance indicators, and to measuring outcomes at the overall system level, the program level, and then the individual level? Could he answer that question for me? Are they looking towards doing this? If they are, what are the time lines on this? When can we expect some progress reports? If they're not, why not, Mr. Chairman? I think that would be a very effective use of tax dollars.

What's happening on the prevention side? Are we taking a look at a co-ordinated approach that emphasizes both education, prevention, promotion, and treatment? How many dollars are being

allocated to that? Why aren't we seeing the outcomes here? Why don't we see the minister tabling information? Why don't we hear groups that are working in this area come out and congratulate this government on a job well done? I'd be happy to congratulate the government on a job well done if we could see that it was really happening.

The AAMIMH talks about specific needs, and I would like the minister to tell me how far they're going in terms of achieving these specific needs. If they haven't addressed them yet, when can we expect some feedback on them? What they're asking for is an explicit vision shared by stakeholders. They're asking for an explicitly laid out implementation plan with regular progress reviews. They're asking for consolidated and protected funding envelopes that can be used flexibly but only for mental health. They're asking for a plan of concrete, measurable outcomes. They're asking for regular monitoring for program and system accountability. They're asking for one regional local authority with overall responsibility for mental health delivery. They're asking for community-based services near people's homes. They're asking for a common, confidential, consumer-centred information system. They're not really asking for much, Mr. Chairman, just a basic system that would be measurable and would have some significant, positive outcomes for users of the system.

I'm asking for one recommendation to be added to this, and that's for the government to recognize the importance of this issue and dedicate this as a priority. I'm looking forward to seeing in next year's budgets this area laid out in the key strategies and sometime between now and next year's budgets the minister standing up in this House and telling us what a good job he's done. I think that would be excellent and certainly something that needs to be done.

Another thing this organization talks about is the need for adequate funding directed to priority areas including acute psychiatric care in regional general hospitals. I don't know about the rest of the Members of this Legislative Assembly, but I know that throughout the years I've received several panicked phone calls from parents or caregivers for people who need to be admitted to acute psychiatric care facilities and can't get in because there just aren't enough beds. Often these people are suicidal, or they're a direct threat to those they live with or sometimes work with.

This is an abysmal situation, Mr. Chairman, when we can't meet this bare minimum need. You can't put somebody who is having an acute psychotic episode in a waiting line. It just doesn't work. It doesn't meet their needs, and it just isn't good enough. What happens to those people? They end up in the justice system, or they end up on the street, or they end up killing themselves, or they end up hurting people they live with.

This organization says that what is needed here are additional beds in acute care general hospitals. I can't emphasize that strongly enough. All of us who have dealt at the constituency level know this to be a fact, Mr. Chairman, and I would ask the minister what he's doing in this regard and when we can expect a dedication of more beds there.

What they're asking for also is a systematic reallocation of funds to priority areas that could address the community support gaps in the current system. [interjection] Very true. You know, these people get admitted to the system, then they get discharged, and there isn't any follow-up care or any transition care for them when they go back into their home environment. Without that transition support, Mr. Chairman, how can we expect people to go back and be fully functioning? It just doesn't work. It's an impossibility. It's an impossible burden on their families, who are expected to fill in that gap when they aren't trained, when they're under stress, and when there are all kinds of underlying problems involved in that. So I

would ask the minister how he is addressing that particular need and when we can expect some feedback on it.

They're also asking for providing funds on the basis of targeted outcomes and a requirement for ongoing evaluation and benchmarking for best practices. Well, go figure, Mr. Chairman. They're asking for something that the Auditor General has asked for not once, not twice, but many times. In fact, it's a part of the 37 recommendations made to the department for improving systems accountability from 1995 to 1999, also listed in the year 1999-2000 Auditor General report as amongst one of the requirements, once again, for the ministry to get to.

So what's the problem, Mr. Chairman? Can the minister answer that for us? Why aren't they there? They're not doing a good job of measuring and reporting the performance of the health system. The Auditor General is recommending that

the Department of Health and Wellness, in cooperation with health authorities, continue with implementation steps for improving performance measurement and reporting on the quality of health services.

It isn't really a very tough thing to do. Businesses do it every year and do it very successfully. You have to measure what it is you're doing, and you have to work towards improving it. How can you improve it if you can't even measure it, Mr. Chairman? I'm hoping the minister can comment on that for me.

Two more items I'd like to talk about in the brief moments I have left: one is children's mental health, and the other one is comprehensive community-based systems. I think both are very important. We'll talk about the community-based systems first. What we have is a system that isn't balanced. It needs to be. We need to see increased mental health funding for beds in general hospitals and community and home-based services. So the flow-through follow-up work and the acute care side of it.

This integrated system has to include a continuum of crisis response and emergency service. A big issue. When there's a flare-up in a home, who comes? The police, not necessarily mental health support. So where do people go in the first place? They go into the justice system, the last place someone with mental illness should be, Mr. Chairman, and a misuse of resources there, poorly allocated in that case, and we end up with incurring costs within the system that aren't needed and aren't justified. So there needs to be some sort of crisis response system put in place that meets the needs of the people. Housing alternatives – lots of people with mental illness, Mr. Chairman, who can't support families.

In the few seconds I have left I want to talk about children's mental health. You know, this is so important. Thirty percent of the children in this province suffer from some kind of psychiatric disorder, and we really need to dedicate some resources to solving that problem. Policy framework on children's mental health services would start to help that. Will the minister do that? Will he give us some feedback on when we can expect that?

What about those services for kids who are in child welfare, for young offenders, and for children with complex needs? We see the Children's Advocate having addressed that as an issue in his latest report, Mr. Chairman, a well written report. I would ask the minister of health to respond on the areas that should be a part of his responsibility, which includes laterally going into the Justice department, into education, and into social services. So I'm looking forward to answers on those questions.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, unless you're planning to move to the opposition, you're not on.

We have right now the hon. leader of the third party, followed by Edmonton-Gold Bar.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not entirely sure about the time I have at my disposal, so maybe I'll start with some specific questions. How much time do I have?

THE CHAIRMAN: Twenty minutes.

DR. PANNU: Twenty minutes? Okay.

Let me then start with some general comments, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise and make some comments on the budget estimates for the Ministry of Health and Wellness for the budget year 2001-2002. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview made some very broad observations about the context in which we need to look at this budget. I concur with many of the observations he has made and the concerns he has expressed.

I think the primary global set of forces that are at work which seem to affect our debates about the future of public health care and the question of what to spend and how to spend and where to spend the public dollars that we have to provide health care services and who should be the providers are all driven by a general sort of expansion of multinational business interest activities across areas that previously, at least in this country, were out of bounds for private, for-profit economic activity. So multinationals are very much interested, of course, as are national private interests, in moving into areas of health, education, and so forth. It's in that context that the debates about health and, in particular, debates related to the expenditures that we incur for the delivery of health services must be assessed.

One of the claims not generally made that seems like an article of faith with many governments, including this one, is that market competition in every area of economic and social order works in the same way and has similar results, an assumption which, Mr. Chairman, is highly questionable. Enormously weighty evidence draws attention to the fact that markets do not work, particularly in the areas of health and perhaps education.

Nevertheless, since this government is committed to bringing the market into health care to enhance the role of private, for-profit agencies of delivery of services, I think it is incumbent on it to be transparent in its budget and make every effort it possibly can to show how the budgeted dollars will be apportioned between the public providers and the private, for-profit providers.

It's impossible to get any idea from the budget documents with respect to that very weighty question, which the government I think should feel obliged to address, given its open public commitment to increasing its reliance on for-profit agencies of delivery in the area of health care. Transparency, accountability, honesty I think all require that the budget documents pay attention to that and desegregate the manner in which these moneys will go in one direction or the other. There is no evidence of that happening here, so it's impossible to hold the government accountable with respect to its claims that either the delivery of the services will become more accessible because private, for-profit agents are involved and/or, secondly, that such services can be delivered more economically than would be the case within the public sector. So these claims remain just claims, no evidence one way or the other, either produced by its own efforts reflected in its budget estimates.

Looking at some of the goals in the business plan general statements, one thing I find missing under the core businesses, "lead and support a system for the delivery of quality health services" – I think perhaps advisedly the government has left open the question of whether the system is predominantly public, will remain public, or whether it's just a system in which different blends of the public/private will work together in tandem or in competition with each other. That's a very interesting omission. It seems to be deliberate.

There is no indication here that the government is committed to keeping the system as public as sometimes the government claims it intends to do.

Two or three other things under the goals. There is the question of prevention. The second goal: "strategies for protection, promotion and prevention." When looking through the detailed business plans here, goals 1, 2, and 3, I'm trying to see if there are any performance measures that will help us see whether or not the government has made any efforts and whether those efforts made any measurable difference in the area of prevention of ill health rather than simply providing treatment to Albertans who get sick. So prevention is used as an empty word. There is no commitment at the level of performance and the ability of the government to measure its own performance and allow its own performance to be measured when it comes to prevention.

Similarly, I was looking in the four areas under the key strategies. "Improving access to quality publicly funded health services": there is a bullet on "improvement of access to home care and continuing care." Again, under that section in the elaborate strategies and key performance indicators I found absolutely no mention of what kind of performance measures are being developed or are already in place to assess this commitment made; that is, to the improvement of access to home care.

We do not know, of course, what portion of the budget for home care is going to be targeted for the private, for-profit sector and if there's any portion of that budget that will go for the nonprofit sector delivery of home care services. Again, it is difficult from this budget to make any judgments about whether the statements made here and the allocations made are justified or not and on what grounds.

Similarly, in the area of primary health care, "enhancing the quality of health services," the first bullet is about "health system reform with focus on primary health care." No indication anywhere under strategies or key performance measures that this goal is taken seriously in the budget. There is nothing about any performance measures and indicators that will be available to members of the Assembly to assess whether or not the government means what it says and whether it can be held accountable for what it claims it's trying to do.

So with those general observations having been stated, Mr. Chairman, I will just move to a few specific questions. On the positive side one will have to of course agree that the government is putting significantly increased financial resources into the health care system. After years of cuts both in real terms and in terms of inflation and population growth the government appears to be reinvesting in the health care system.

I also note that for the first time the ministry of health business plan contains targets for waiting times for some health care services. While those targets are a bit vague and do not cover a sufficient range of health care services, again I think I'm willing to concede that this is a step in the right direction.

9:00

It's hard to overstate the importance that properly funded health care services play in the lives of Albertans. Properly funded and delivered health care services are literally a matter of life and death to tens of thousands of Albertans.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

My questions to the Minister of Health and Wellness are these. I've got four or five of them, so I'll just state them. My first question relates to the key performance measures contained on page 244 of the estimates book. Is the government planning to incorpo-

rate additional performance measures in terms of waiting times? Why is it taking so long to put these performance measures in place? In terms of persons waiting, where's the benchmark being used for persons waiting for MRIs or for a bed in a long-term care facility?

My second question relates to the provision for the write-off of health care premiums. Why the steep rise in the amount of the write-offs between the estimate of \$28.6 million for last year and the actual writeoff of \$50.4 million? Why this difference of nearly \$22 million? In light of this, why has the government only provided \$28.9 million for health care premium write-offs next year? Where is the connection between what it in fact will cost the government to write it off and the actual budget provided for that write-off? Finally, why doesn't the government recognize the fact that these high write-off levels clearly show that health care premiums are simply unaffordable for a growing number of Albertans? Why won't the government commit to eliminating or at least phasing out an unfair health tax that clearly imposes an oppressive financial burden on Albertans?

My third question. I note that the government spent \$250,000 last year and the same amount this year on the so-called Premier's Advisory Council on Health. This was a council of so-called health care experts that was appointed through Bill 11. This is a council that's heavily weighted in favour of interests who support further privatization of our health care system. What are we getting for our \$250,000 a year? Albertans haven't heard a boo from this council since it was appointed last fall. What is it doing? What can we show for the amount of money that it takes to keep that council alive?

My next question relates to the government funding of Blue Cross benefits programs. I understand that most of this funding goes to subsidize prescription drug costs for low-income Albertans and seniors. Prescription drug costs are the most rapidly expanding area of health care expenditures, and I note that there is a further 11 percent increase projected for these benefits. Then as I was looking through the estimates book, there is a section on sustainability of the system. Where is this concern with sustainability reflected in looking for ways of limiting, containing, and bringing down the drug-related costs to the system? There's no indication in the budget or in the goals that are stated in the business plan or in the strategies that are indicated here that the government is looking for ways of cutting down, containing, and limiting the costs of drugs that are exponentially increasing in this system, yet we talk about the concern about sustainability that this government has.

Is the government using strategies such as bulk purchasing and reference-based pricing – that is, use of the cheapest available drug including generics – in order to keep a lid on drug costs, and if not, why not? Why is there hesitation, why is there reluctance to look at ways of saving money for Albertans, saving taxpayer dollars by using best practices used by other jurisdictions relative to the purchase of drugs and reduction of costs related to those purchases?

My final question, Mr. Chairman, has to do with the Alberta Wellnet initiative. This initiative shows up in several places. Expenditures total tens of millions of dollars this year on top of the tens of millions that have been spent on this telemedicine initiative in previous years. The Auditor General has commented in his past reports on the vast amounts of money and the slow pace of progress in completing this initiative. I'm wondering if the minister can enlighten this Assembly on what the status of the Wellnet initiative is and when taxpayers can reasonably expect an end to the enormous sums that have been expended on it.

I will stop at this point, Mr. Chairman, and take a chance later, perhaps, to enter the debate. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to get an opportunity to question the hon. minister tonight regarding the critical portfolio of Health and Wellness. Now, this is obviously the largest budget, well in excess of \$6 billion, and as was noted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, it is welcome funding. I certainly hope that it is being put to good use.

I see in the general overview of the department that the mission of the ministry is "to maintain and improve the health and wellness of Albertans by leading and working collaboratively with citizens and stakeholders." Now, this is the mission statement on page 193 of the business plan. I would also have liked to have seen in there: and also to foster, enhance, and promote public health care in this province. Unfortunately, that has been missed in the mission statement, and I believe it is significant.

Mr. Chairman, this year's budget estimates for the department are roughly \$950 million more than the department's budget estimates from last year. This is as close to a \$1 billion difference as one could get, and the department's responsibilities have actually become smaller. I note that the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board is no longer with the department. Also, the department doesn't have an associate minister, another change from last year.

Given the department's stated major goals for Alberta's health care system, including "to improve the health and wellness of Albertans through provincial strategies for protection, promotion and prevention," we in the Official Opposition would be interested in knowing what those strategies are and whether the department has employed cost-benefit analyses on those strategies to ensure that Albertans' dollars are being spent wisely and prudently. For example, will the ministry consider such programs as pharmacare as part of a prevention strategy? It would appear that if more Albertans had easier access to prescription pharmaceutical products, fewer Albertans would have to deal with chronic health problems because they simply cannot afford the products.

Another place where the ministry could go a long way toward its stated goal of preventive strategies is in the area of diabetes. Costs for persons with diabetes can range from \$300 to as much as \$1,000 a month. Currently Alberta health care insurance covers a fraction of the potential monthly costs for Albertans dealing with this condition. Some 90,000 Albertans have been diagnosed with diabetes. For seniors on limited incomes the additional out-of-pocket expenses associated with diabetes, including diet, testing, and medication, are a serious hardship. Sustainable, direct funding, funding that would help Albertans burdened with not only the weight of diabetic symptoms but also the costs associated with treating those symptoms, would show a true commitment to preventive or health promotion strategies.

Now, Mr. Chairman, will the minister please provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses of \$6.24 billion for 2001-2002 by object for the following components: health care workers' salaries, permanent, nonpermanent, and contracted positions. A little while ago we heard about the efforts that were made to train and recruit health care professionals, and I think this is a reasonable request.

9:10

The recent pay raises provided to physicians and nurses are generally a good thing. We need to pay our health care workers adequately and fairly, but we also need to know how many health care workers, if any, are left out of pay raises or benefit packages or

educational opportunities because they are on contract, particularly those involved in home care, or don't qualify because they are part-time workers. It is only fair that we properly compensate persons working in the health care field, but we also need to know whether the amounts paid to health care workers, the amounts budgeted to pay health care workers, are sustainable amounts.

Nurses certainly took wage rollbacks, as did many other public service workers in the early 1990s. It is patently unfair to give workers a certain wage and then at some time in the future expect those workers to accept another wage rollback. It's poor planning. What Alberta health care workers and all Albertans need is sustainability in funding and stability, a combination of that and long-term planning of the workforce. This hasn't been done in the past. There have been reports done by the regional health authorities, Mr. Chairman, paid for with tax dollars and hidden from public view and discussion, and we have now an expensive problem to fix, and we are fortunate in this province that we had the financial resources to at least try to fix it. It's been mismanagement. It's been past mismanagement.

Now, Mr. Chairman, will the minister please provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses of the \$6.24 billion for 2001-2002 by object for the following component: contracts, all contracted-out insured medical services with all regional health authorities. During the Bill 11 debates the minister and the Premier assured Albertans that contracted-out insured medical services would result in both higher quality health care services and more cost-effective health care service delivery. I on behalf of the Official Opposition would like to know how much money each of the regional health authorities spent on contracted-out insured services to private providers. I would also like to know how much the department spent on doing the cost-benefit or performance measure analysis on these contracts.

Another question is whether the department relied on only one cost-benefit performance measure analysis or whether the department relied on more than one to get a truer picture of the quality of health care and the cost-effectiveness of health care service delivery? We all know, Mr. Chairman, that there was no study done that could prove the cost-effectiveness of Bill 11. There was none, zip. They were blank pages, and now the blank pages seem to be apparently reflected in blank stares, but that is the reality. They were just simply blank pages. There was no backup to the argument. None. Absolutely none.

Now, Mr. Chairman, will the minister provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses of \$6.24 billion for 2001-2002 by object for advertising, promotion expenditures? Another question to the minister regarding these estimates: is the minister planning any more hard-sell legislation in the order of Bill 11 that will require promotion? Certainly there was a lot of promoting done in regards to Bill 11, and I don't know if I should even be asking these questions in Health and Wellness estimates. I probably should wait for Executive Council and the bureau, the Public Affairs Bureau. You know, it sort of reminds me of, is reminiscent of J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, but that's another matter.

Now, health care insurance premium revenue. This was covered by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I just want one clarification. Was it \$22 million or \$28 million that was the write-off in 2001-2002? I understand the actual write-off was \$50 million, but why does the 2001-2002 budget estimate have a write-off of only \$28.8 million? I would like to know what the difference is here. Although the minister has already indicated that he did not see Alberta families having difficulty paying the premiums as the reason for more than \$50 million in health care premium write-offs, maybe the minister would like to explain why more than \$50 million again

has been written off. We're sure the minister isn't suggesting that the write-offs are attributable to scam artists or to people who don't pay on principle or people who are looking to hoodwink the system.

In budget item reference line 1.0.1, the minister's office, the estimate here of \$487,000 for operating expenses represents an increase of \$13,000 over the last year's budget. What accounts for this increase, given that the minister's office has less responsibility this year than last? Again in reference to the PDDPB, which has moved. Continuing along this line of questioning, what is the breakdown in the minister's office budget for 2001-2002 by salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and also hosting expenses?

Now, the deputy minister's office: what happened here? In the deputy minister's office there is \$395,000 in the budget for 2001-2002. Again, could I have a breakdown, please, of salaries for permanent positions, nonpermanent positions, and contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, hosting expenses, and dry cleaning. Again to the minister: why is the deputy minister's budget increasing by \$12,000?

Now, public communications. I'm sure this was a branch of the department or of the minister's office that was quite busy in the last year. That's reference line 1.0.4. The estimate is an increase of \$20,000 over the previous budget, and of course I'm very interested in finding out what accounts for the \$20,000 difference between the 2001-2002 budget estimate and the 2000-2001 actual expenditures.

During the Bill 11 debate, Mr. Chairman, the government supposedly spent some \$1.7 million on so-called information on the bill. Where did that money come from? Because with these numbers, the department only spent \$1.3 million on public communications, so where did this money come from for this campaign? We have very little money in this province for the needy. We can't seem to increase the rates for those on SFI; there are perhaps 27,000, 29,000 files at the moment. We've got no money for any of this. We've got our priorities, I think, wrong. We can casually spend \$1.7 million on so-called information, or it could be disinformation for all I know. I don't know, but I'm very concerned about that.

9:20

Now, health accountability. That's again going farther down the page, reference 1.0.6, Mr. Chairman. My first question to the minister: what accounts for the \$7.28 million operating expense increase between the 2001-2002 budget estimate and the year 2000-2001 actual expenditure? There appears to be a pattern here, given that the 2000-2001 capital investment estimate was \$1.1 million, the year 2000-2001 capital investment actually is \$2 million, and the 2001-2002 capital investment estimate sits at \$1.15 million. Can we expect that the 2001-2002 capital investment actually will again be slightly over \$2 million? If so, why not simply make the estimate more in line with what the actual expenditure will likely be? Also, what is the breakdown for the department's 2001-2002 operating expense estimate of \$31.8 million?

Now, program 2, health services, Mr. Chairman. I see my time is running down, and I have a question that I don't want to neglect to ask. That is in the statement of operations by programs. The onetime energy rebate of \$40 million: I can assume that that is to all the regional health authorities and the two other boards. I would like a breakdown on that \$40 million figure, please. How much of it was used for natural gas rebates, and how much of it was used for electricity rebates? I'm told – I'm shocked and appalled – that I will never know that figure, but I'm very curious about that. That's a \$40 million hit. How much was used for electricity, and how much was used for natural gas? I imagine one would just have to go to,

say, the University of Alberta hospital and see the meter that would be outside that institution. I would think the meter dials would be moving quite rapidly, and also the electricity consumption there I think would be enormous. I would appreciate very much an answer forthwith to that question.

Program 2 on health services: the regional health authorities, reference line 2.3. How did the department arrive at its 2001-2002 gross expense estimates for each of the 17 regional health authorities?

My next question would be on reference line 2.3.22, supplemental capital equipment funding. There is an operating expense estimate for the year 2001-02 of \$48.9 million. Actually the operating expense the year before was \$98.7 million. What accounts for the decreased funding for capital equipment between the year 2001-02 and the operating expense estimate and the 2000-2001 operating expense actual? That's a significant difference.

Line 2.4.1., Mr. Chairman, the Calgary regional health authority. Now, we have to have a review of this. In the year 2001-2002 the gross expense estimate was \$170 million. In the year 2000-2001 the gross expense actually was \$154 million. For 2001 the estimate was \$149 million roughly. Okay. My question to the minister is: what accounts for the difference between the 2000-2001 gross expense estimate and the 2001-2002 gross expense estimate? Again, what is the breakdown of the 2001-2002 gross expense estimate?

With those questions, I will look forward to the answers from the minister.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Centre, please.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. I'm not happy about this budget, but I'm sure glad for the opportunity to speak to it and get some questions on the record, which I'm assuming will be answered in writing and forwarded to me. So a couple of different areas I'd like to cover tonight. I have a number of questions and issues around seniors' health care. I'd like to look at the performance measurements, and I'd like to look at the department responses to the Auditor General.

Starting with seniors' health, this is certainly an issue for me with the number of seniors that I have living in Edmonton-Centre. It's always the number one concern on the hit parade. It is the issue I hear the most about. It's also the issue that our constituency office does the most casework on, without fail, and has been for five years now. So what the Department of Health and Wellness is doing, where they're putting the money, what the performance outcomes are expected to be, and what are the key performance indicators are of great interest to me.

We know now that our traditional method of treating seniors, especially seniors that are in acute care, is not the most successful way to be treating them. I know that there are three specialized geriatric units in the province. My question is: is the Department of Health and Wellness looking at increasing the number of those units or expanding the capacity of the units that are in existence?

There are a number of issues that they have been proven to deal with expediently. Of course the obvious one, which has already been mentioned this evening, is overmedication, and there are a number of issues around that. You get seniors who end up going to different doctors or, frankly, being sent to different specialists, all of whom are prescribing medication. You may not have a central, controlling physician who is actually keeping track of all the different kinds of medication that everybody is on and cross-checking that they're not taking a medication that's either canceling out a different kind of medication or causing complications when it's

used in combination with another drug. So certainly when the frail elderly get onto these units, that's the first thing they do: get the list of all the medications that people are on.

There are a number of other issues around that. It may well be for some seniors that they'll take the full prescription from the doctors they like, but they're not so keen on taking the prescription from the doctors they don't like, and that also contributes to the difficulties with medication and seniors. So there's a lot of work that we have to do still in Alberta to be able to manage that, and we know that these three units are successful at it. I'm looking for answers to the two questions I've already asked and whether there are any plans as part of the rest of the three-year plan. I've gone through it and I don't see it in here, so I'd like that confirmed or some indication given.

9:30

Some of the other issues raised around those specialized units. For example, when a person goes into the hospital and they're not well, usually they end up lying flat on their back in a hospital bed and are getting the treatment or whatever is necessary for their ailment. That doesn't work for seniors. We've all heard the stories of somebody who went in with the flu or a broken hip or something like that and a couple of weeks go by, three or four weeks, and now they've got pneumonia. Eventually these people can die from pneumonia. You think: well, how on earth did that happen? They were in a hospital. Part of it is that they need to get up and move around every day, and our hospital system is not set up to do that. We need to keep people lying flat on their backs being good in their rooms, and we need to be able to get seniors up and move them around in order keep their system working properly. So a number of issues around that and any information that's forthcoming on those units.

I'd also be interested in how much these units are costing overall and if I could get a breakdown for the costs on those three different units that exist in Alberta already. What are the staffing costs specific to that and any overhead or operational costs that are specific to those units' operation.

I'd also like to talk about prevention for seniors. Now, one of the two biggest issues in my constituency – and as Seniors critic for the Official Opposition I can also say for many other seniors in Alberta and for their families – is availability of home care. I'd like to know what the percentage breakdown is of funding for home care that goes to subacute care and what percentage goes to home care for assistance to seniors, to the frail elderly? The figure I had heard previously was that two-thirds of funding in home care in fact goes to subacute care, leaving only one-third of the funding going specifically to seniors. So I'd like to get that specified, please.

I'm also interested, if there is an increase in home care in this budget, whether the increase is satisfying a volume increase – in other words, more people that the system is trying to satisfy – or is it that more funding is being given to each area to give better service to the same number of people?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

That sort of issue keeps coming up as I examine the government's estimates. Many of the increases are in fact just reflecting population increase, volume increase, demand on the system in other words, but it's not actually giving better quality care in any way, shape, or form. So I'd like to get that breakdown. If I could get that breakdown also by the health regions, I would appreciate it.

Certainly there is a disconnect that we have in this government between what is being said about the desire to keep seniors in their

own homes as long as possible and the kinds of services and support we're actually offering in order to that. There's a disconnect there between the goal and the reality, and I'm encouraging the government to look at that very carefully, because this is one of the most obvious areas to be successful in this.

We need to look carefully at the kind of care that's being offered through home care. We need to look at standards of care. We need to look at staffing and at the contracts that are being signed with home care providers. Is there detail in those contracts about the wage that the staff that in fact go out and offer the service are getting? What is the percentage of profit that's built into it if it's a private business? What is the administrative percentage that's being taken off as well?

We're not getting enough home care out there to assist these seniors and keep them in their own homes. There are other stresses that are causing seniors to leave their homes and move into either subsidized care or some other kind of accommodation or even into institutional care like long-term care or auxiliary hospitals. Certainly home care is our easiest and most direct avenue to keep seniors in their own home. In many cases they just need a little bit of help, perhaps to get up in the morning or get going or have breakfast, or assistance with various aids, prosthetics, or getting into wheelchairs or scooters or whatever. I think we're failing in that. I'm interested in what the long-term plans are there and exactly how much money is actually going into that system and how much is filtering down to the seniors.

The second part of that is housekeeping. This is the other thing that I hear about so much from seniors. Now, I don't know whether there is a lack of public education and the government just not being clear on people's expectations about housekeeping. First of all, most people think home care is going to include housekeeping services, and it doesn't. Home care is personal care. No, they're not going to do your dishes or wash your floor, but for many seniors that is the yes or no between staying in their own homes.

When we look at housekeeping services, again I want to know the same kinds of answers. How much is in the housekeeping budget? How much is allocated to each of the regional health authorities? What is the breakdown in the way the contracts are allocated? If it's not a contract situation, if it's a direct delivery from the regional health authority, fine. What's the staff wage? What's the percentage for administration and overhead? If there's an increase in this budget, then what is the increase a reflection of? Is it a volume increase, or is it in fact money to provide better quality service? Those are the questions I want answered in that area.

Now, we go on to more prevention, still under the category of prevention for seniors' care. I have been lobbying for some time to have the government consider funding or a funding program for seniors' centres, which exist across the province and which in many cases truly are prevention in that these programs are getting seniors out of their homes, are getting them active and walking around. They often offer a lunch or a nutrition program. They're offering all kinds of classes, self-education. They have educational seminars. They bring in speakers. They have activities to engage people's minds, to keep their bodies active. You know, there are all kinds. I'm sure anybody that's walked into a seniors' centre has seen the tai chi classes and the weight lifting and the dancing and all those kinds of physical exercise classes and the great encouragement to do so. We know that is health prevention. It is wellness. It's a wellness model. These seniors' centres are frontline deliverers of this service and are not getting any assistance.

This government likes to use user fees, but we have a generation of seniors right now, and all seniors are on a fixed income. They don't get any more money. What they've got is fixed, so they can't

continue to pay higher and higher and more and more user fees. Eventually they say, "I can't do this anymore," and they sit at home. Then there's a disintegration in their mental health. There's a disintegration in their physical health. There may well be additional problems with eating proper food and eating three times a day. So I really see these centres as preventative medicine. I'm still urging the government to look at a system whereby there is funding to these centres, you know, based on an amount of money per signed-up member that they have or whatever kind of system the government wants to look at to make sure they're funding reasonably and not setting up a system that's open to abuse. I think it's still something to be looked at.

In particular, I'm wondering about one of the centres that's in my riding, which is West Edmonton Seniors. It got into a situation where it had been renting space in the General hospital at a very reasonable rent, and then Caritas took over the administration of the building. The rent started to go up. They went from something like \$345 a month for rent into the \$3,000 range. I'm sorry. I don't have the figures in front of me, so I may be not quite accurate on that. I'm sure you've got all the information. You can check it. They got into this ping-pong game, being bounced back and forth between Community Development, which at that point was responsible for seniors' funding, Infrastructure, and Health and Wellness, none of which seemed to be willing to take responsibility for this group. We were going to lose this service. I'm wondering: what was the end result of that? Was there funding from any or all of these departments? I'm also looking for what kind of other preventative health models are being put in place to assist seniors.

9:40

The obvious question coming out of the election is: why didn't the government eliminate health care premiums for seniors? I'm interested in what the exact amount of money is that is taken in from health care premiums charged to seniors less the administration costs, less the subsidy costs for those seniors who are receiving a full or partial subsidy. What is the actual net amount of money that this government takes in on health care premiums from seniors? So I'd like all three of those figures, please.

I'm hoping that I'm going to get another chance to raise these issues, but I'm aware of time restrictions here. I'm going to move on to the performance measurements. Now, when I look at the public accounts from '99-2000, Alberta Ministry of Health and Wellness, section 1, pages 71, 72, and 73, we actually do have a listing there of key performance measures. I think a number of these are flawed and aren't really measuring what they need to be measuring, but some of them do in fact give us something we can work with here.

I look in the budget documents at the business plans for Budget 2001. I am looking for key performance measurements, and in this department, lo and behold, I actually find some. This is a wonderful night for me, to actually find key performance measurements. However, when I try and match these back and forth between what is being admitted to in the last fiscal year and what is being set forward in this fiscal year, we don't have a match. So are you changing your performance measurements year to year? What happened to the old ones? Where did the new ones come from? I'd like to see some kind of direct comparison between these.

I do notice that on page 195 of the business plan we are getting key performance measurements like 1.A, which is actually listing targets for waiting list times. Very good. Now, you've actually got something you can measure against here. But then when I get into targets like 1.C, "ratings of quality of care received, percent who report that quality of care personally received is 'excellent' or 'good'", that's an incredibly subjective performance measure done

by a survey of people who are on their way out of the hospital. I don't find that these kinds of performance measurements are a useful management tool, and it's certainly not incredibly useful for someone who is trying to scrutinize the performance of the government in this particular department.

Here's another one, 1.D: "Percent of persons, who have received a service, who are satisfied with the way the service was provided." Now, how is that a useful management tool? I think we have to move beyond these kinds of performance measurements which are simply surveys of satisfaction of clients. We have to start moving to ones that are more useful.

Now, we have some in here like 2.D, "childhood immunization coverage rates, percent of two year old children who have received the recommended immunizations." That's a more useful target if what you're trying to do is make sure that all children at a certain age are immunized.

When I go back and look at breast screening, 2.C, "screening rate for breast cancer, percent of women age 50-69 receiving mammogram every two years," you've got a target of 75 percent screened. That needs to be linked to a clear indicator of whether we have a reduction in new breast cancer cases so that we actually know whether what has been done here is achieving something. It's moving from doing to achieving, from measuring what you're doing to measuring what you've actually achieved as a result of what you've put in place. So I encourage the government to continue with this.

I'm also looking for why there isn't a direct correlation between the performance measurements of the previous year and the performance measurements of this year. This is an ongoing deficiency in what this government has done across the board, where performance measurements are changed every year. So you've no way of looking and saying: oh, yes, over this five-year period we are able to track along and see that we've actually improved or achieved something here.

In changing these performance measurements every single year, you have lost the usefulness of this as a management tool. It's of no use to the public or to the opposition as a scrutiny tool for what the government is doing and whether in fact we are getting value for our money. What are we achieving with the money that's being spent on these various initiatives?

Very briefly, the last I'd like to look at is a quick comparison of the Auditor General's recommendations and the government's response. I'm seeing that almost all the recommendations are accepted, but I do not see anything actually happening with that.

Thanks very much. I look forward to continued debate on this budget.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I won't take too long here just to get a handful of questions on the record on information I would like to be provided, information that in some ways is comparable to what used to be brought to this Assembly and I believe ought to be brought to the Assembly again.

There did used to be a much larger number of hospital and health care and auxiliary home and nursing home districts, and the department managed to work with all of those to come up with line items. I'm sure it can be done again now with a mere 17 regional health authorities and a couple of provincial health boards.

What I would like by regional health authority is their capital and operating budgets. I would like by regional health authority information on their expenditures on for-profit, voluntary, and public nursing homes, which did used to be provided.

I would like by RHA expenditures on for-profit and public surgical procedures and again by RHA expenditures on for-profit and public diagnostic procedures. I would like by RHA expenditures on board expenses for the RHA boards themselves and, of course, for the provincial boards. I would like to see estimates for RHA expenditures on drugs and estimates by RHA on expenditures on information systems. Exactly how much are we spending on information systems in Alberta Health? I hope the minister will provide that information in a timely fashion.

I will finish with just a handful of comments. I think there are some bright lights, and there is certainly some reason for optimism in the health care system. Initiatives such as the Northeast health centre in Edmonton are to be commended as examples of successful primary care, and I think the work of the western Canada waiting list project, the first report of which was released yesterday, is commendable and will help us make some sense of the chronic confusion over what really is a waiting list.

I would encourage the minister to look very seriously at a pharmacare program. Drug costs, as he well knows, are out of control or certainly are soaring in Alberta, and across the province it's an obvious direct correlation with having the drug industry run the system without a coherent public program. So we need a coherent public pharmacare program.

I would encourage expansion of home care to help take pressure off the active treatment and acute care system. We are going to be taking a long, hard look at long-term care delivery in this province and watching it very closely, and I hope the minister's expenditures reflect that priority.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I stop. Thank you.

9:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I'm glad I was able to get in a bit more time to ask some more questions here. I was on questioning performance measurements and responses to the Auditor General's report from '99-2000, and in particular there have been repeated requests for the government to include the regional health authorities' individual reporting in a consolidated report. In fact, although the government has repeatedly said that they agree with this and they'll look at it and they're going to do it and achieve it, year after year I look at the public accounts and the Auditor General is saying yet again that this hasn't been done. So what is the issue with the government being unable to achieve this? It's never really been detailed, and I'm interested in why we are looking at this.

We have a situation where the government has set up a delegated administrative organization, a DAO, in their regional health authorities. I know that this was a clear and deliberate move on the part of the government to shift responsibility for provision of services to these regional health authorities. I think there are long arguments about whether this is appropriate, and they did not shift with that a clear accountability line, and I continue to look for that line of accountability.

Often we would, for example, ask questions of the minister or the Premier in question period about the regional health authorities or actions that the regional health authorities have taken. We'd ask that question to the minister or the Premier, and we'd be told: sorry; ask the regional health authorities. So you'd go and ask the regional health authorities, and they'd say: well, we don't really have an answer for that because we're essentially, certainly through our budget provision, under the control of the government; go back and ask them. So on things like, you know, waiting lists and provision of services – and we've gone round and round in a circle on that one.

Certainly when we start to take accountability to taxpayers seriously, it's important that those budgets and public accounts be presented in their entirety and in the consolidated statement with what's brought forward from the government under the Department of Health and Wellness.

On a slightly different topic here. I'm interested in public communications. There was a great deal of debate around Bill 11 and a number of questions asked, saying how much money is being spent to convince the public of the government's point of view, and we were told repeatedly by the Premier: no problem, you can get every detail out of the public accounts. Well, I've looked in the public accounts, and it's not there. So I'm looking again in this year's budget for a breakdown of exactly how the communications money is spent.

I'll continue to pursue the expenditures around the Bill 11 debate through another avenue, but I would like to know exactly what the breakdown is on the public communications budgets in the Department of Health and Wellness. Where does this money come from? How is it expended? What is it expended on? How much of it is for advertising? How much is for printing? How much is for postage? I want to see the complete breakdown of what this communications money is spent on here. I believe a number of checklists were provided in the past from the Official Opposition to the government. Those checklists are still around. Perhaps they could consult that for the kind of breakdown I am looking for.

I'm glad I was able to get in those last two sections' worth of questions, and I know there are additional questions coming from my colleague. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The hon. minister is reminded that only one person is standing and talking at a time.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to be able to finish my comments; however, if the minister wanted to get up and take a little time, I'm sure we could have agreement in the House for that too.

Some of the things that I didn't have a chance to talk about when I was standing before and talking about the health estimates were the expenses in program 3.0.1, which is the assistance to Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, the operating expenses and the operating expenses funded by lotteries. What we see here is a significant increase, almost a 20 percent increase in funding from last year to this year. That's a problem, Mr. Chairman, because most of those new dollars are funding for people with addictions. Where's the greatest increase in addictions coming from? From VLTs and gambling. It's AADAC money, and while we're seeing a significant increase in revenues from gambling-related activities, we are also seeing a significant increase in costs.

The most direct costs that we see are in this line item, 3.0.1, but there are many social costs involved in this too. I would ask the minister of health to undertake a costing of all related areas with regard to problems created by gambling. They are all health issues and addiction issues whether we see them in the social system through social services or services provided to children because families aren't providing for them due to addiction problems or whether we're seeing them in the Justice area because the people are within that system for whatever reasons or that we are seeing them in the direct health costs. I would ask the minister if he would undertake a review of that and compile the associated costs so that we can get an accurate idea of what it actually costs us to bring in those gambling revenues.

We see some interesting things here in the Alberta Alcohol and

Drug Abuse Commission. When they talk about the actions and achievements, they say that the action contributed to cross-government initiatives including Alberta partners on fetal alcohol syndrome, Alberta children's initiative, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, aboriginal policy framework, and Alberta's strategic plan for seniors. All of those are related issues, so if the minister comes back and says that he can't do what I had asked because it isn't specifically within his department, I would challenge that and say that there are actions under way within the government departments and related departments that are starting to track that information. I think it is available. I think it's very important for them to compile it, and we would like to see it presented and measured against the assistance they are giving in this particular program. So if they could do that.

Now, I understand that there have been some changes to AADAC in the last couple of years, some reorganizational changes in terms of where the delivery of service is. I know that there was some consolidation happening with regard to their programming into the downtown area. I don't know where to find that specifically in these programs or goals. Perhaps it's all rolled into 3.0.1, but if the minister could elaborate on that, I would appreciate that.

You know, there was a concern with the consolidation of AADAC into the downtown areas, that some people wouldn't use those services anymore because they didn't want to be in areas where they could be readily identified by people that they knew. They wanted to go to the outlying centres for the services. They didn't want people to know that they were in these programs. So I'm wondering what happened to the stats for the people using these services. Was there a drop when they consolidated the offices? If so, did they track down why that drop was? How is the consolidation working? Did they save any money? Is it costing more money? If we could get some information on that, it would certainly be helpful for us to be able to assess the viability of those operations. What are the people who are working within the system and the users of the system in AADAC saying, Mr. Chairman? Do they do satisfaction surveys for both the people who provide services and those who use the services there? I think that would be one measure that would be very interesting to see and would be a way of actually properly evaluating the outcomes of some of those dollars that are spent.

10:00

I never had a chance to really go through the Auditor General's report on Health and Wellness, Mr. Chairman, but in fact there are seven key recommendations that were made by the AG last year with regard to Health and Wellness. I wonder if the minister could report back to us in terms of the progress they have made in achieving those objectives. Are we going to see these same recommendations come forward next year, or has there been some progress made? I won't have enough time in the few minutes that are left to me to go through the seven recommendations, starting with number 17 and carrying through the various sections of Health and Wellness, but if the minister could specifically comment on those for us, that would be appreciated.

I think that there were some excellent comments being made. "Accountability for the cost and quality of health services" is a very important issue, Mr. Chairman. We need to know that we're getting value for our money. We need to know that these systems are properly in place prior to our seeing any more privatization of health care services. If all we're going to do is layer different kinds of services on the province, what we're going to do is get different layers of bureaucracy and problems. We want to know that the department has moved forward on these various recommendations and has made significant progress on them, not just token progress

or no progress at all, before this province moves into a system that will be more of a parallel system with the additional privatization that we're going to see.

You know, there's been lots of talk in the AG's report and lots of talk in this Assembly about the various health authorities in the regions and some of the problems that have occurred in there in terms of deficit budgeting and extra strain on the regions because of extra costs associated with those authorities. I'm wondering, Mr. Chairman, what progress has been made there. That's a little bit about what recommendation 18 talks about, "a joint strategy for improving the implementation of authorized business plans," with Health and Wellness and the health authorities. I see this as a critical recommendation and something that definitely needs to be brought in-line.

There have been some significant changes. We've had problems with deficit budgets and deficit budget plans being submitted. The Auditor General remarks on how patterns of prior years have continued, that we haven't seen a change in spite of the recommendations that he's made. Why is that happening, Mr. Chairman? I think that's a valid question to ask here.

Also, the Auditor General comments on interim funding and how that has increased more in terms of the budget than annual budget increases. So what that means is that in fact this department isn't actually budgeting. It's setting up a forecast and then dumping more money in as it's available or as the minister can lobby for it. That is not sustainable, as we all know, in any kind of fashion, particularly in health care. We have to provide both stability and sustainability. People need to know that the system is going to be there for them when they need it, and they're going to need to have some idea of what it's going to be like to be in the system. What kind of service are they going to get? When are they going to get the service? Is it going to meet their needs, and is there going to be bridging from acute care service to whatever they need as they move back into their home?

We know at a constituency level that that bridging service is nominal at best and is a real issue when we talk about home care and lack of home care and what it takes to get people out of the costly health care system in terms of hospital use and back into the home, where people do recover faster if they have adequate supervision and proper support provided than they do in a hospital bed. But the problem with what's happening now is that we see all kinds of horror stories where people are released from hospitals when they either have very little support at home or no support at home and can't get enough support from the home care system. I think that's an area we need to seriously look at in terms of cutting down the bricks and mortar costs of hospitals and also from the preventative side. If we can provide a little support to these people before they become acute users of the system, then that's going to be a benefit for everybody. So I think that's something that needs to be done.

Did the department follow through with recommendation 19, that "the Department of Health and Wellness take a lead role in working with health authorities in reporting the costs of key service outputs"? Clearly, the department has some expertise in this area, Mr. Chairman, and we would hope that they would share that expertise and the people they have that know how to do this in terms of training these health authorities on how to both report and measure outputs. I think that's an important aspect that needs to be done.

Tied in with the seven major recommendations are a number of minor recommendations that the Auditor General has talked about, and one of those is timely reporting. Not reporting in a timely fashion in the business world would mean that you would lose shareholders and customers. Why doesn't that happen when government departments don't provide timely reports? It seems like

there's no accountability at that level, and it's something that the Auditor General has remarked on. It's surprising to me that it isn't in itself a major recommendation, because I think that it's quite important.

In talking about recommendation 19, the Auditor General makes a comment that "there has been little change in reporting the cost of outputs," and what he talks about is linking costs with outputs in terms of assisting resource allocation and providing readers of annual reports with information that's meaningful about a particular authority's operations. Once again, basic accounting principles. It is hard to believe that it doesn't happen, but clearly it's something that's been an ongoing issue.

What he talks about then is that he reviewed

fifteen annual reports issued by RHAs in 1999 [and] twelve did not contain management discussion of financial position and risks.

Fourteen reports did not present information on the costs of outputs.

Well, who's training these guys? Mr. Chairman, it's practically inexcusable behaviour that we see here, and clearly the government needs to be doing something. So if the minister could give us a progress update on this. I don't even think it would be reasonable if we had 10 percent of those authorities not reporting in a proper fashion. That would be one and a half of them. When we talk about 12 and 14 of them not bringing forward proper management discussions or information on the costs of outputs, you have to really be concerned about the way they are managing themselves.

Why wouldn't the minister of health have seen this as an important enough issue to ensure that these RHAs were properly trained? This is a problem with a government that makes decisions by the seat of their pants and says: well, we'll just cut costs, and we'll figure out afterwards whether it worked or not and where we need to make improvements. It isn't a very responsible way to manage, and it certainly is a costly way to manage. If you were truly interested in reductions of costs and finding efficiencies, what you'd do is devise the framework, figure out what the issues are, the process to move through the framework, try and anticipate where the issues are going to be that could arise, try and fix them before they occur, and then have a fairly manageable plan as you move through the process.

That's completely the opposite of what this government has done, and consequently they waste money. When you can't measure what's happening and you don't properly report what's happening, you get a system that has a number of inefficiencies and abuses built into it in terms of costs. So I would think that this should be a very high priority for the minister of health, and I'm hoping that when he reports back to us in terms of what progress they've made, that progress is going to be substantive in nature, Mr. Chairman.

Then we talk about recommendation 20, where the AG recommends

that the Department of Health and Wellness develop a process for reporting the full cost of delivering health services for the population of each health region of Alberta as a means of supporting business planning decisions and the accountability of regional health authorities.

Once again, pretty basic information that isn't done. How is it that this department, that spends so much money, cannot tell us what the costs are for each region by population? Of course, you'd have to do some tracking costs, because people move in and out of regions depending on expertise and need, but that's not very tough to do. Businesses do it all the time, Mr. Chairman, so I don't understand why this happens. Consolidated financial reporting in businesses, in global entities happens all the time. Certainly this isn't as complicated as many global entities are, and the government should be able to do that. We're just talking about 17 regions. It's not the end of the world and certainly should be well within their mandate.

10:10

Another interesting point he makes that doesn't make it to a key recommendation is that there is no information accounting for the full cost of health services provided to regional populations. Too bad again, because that means there really isn't an understanding of basic population-based funding.

Some good recommendations in here from the Auditor General. As I asked, I would like a report back on the progress made on all of those and how many recommendations they expect to be coming forward in the next report. Mr. Chairman, I hope it's fewer than seven. I hope the Auditor General is going to be able to say that there aren't any recommendations that weren't completed from the last time and that the new recommendations he comes forward with are fine-tuning. We're a long ways from there.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister to conclude our deliberations.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'll undertake to review *Hansard* and provide written answers to questions asked this evening. As far as the suggestions and undertakings that have been asked by members opposite, I will look at those suggestions as part of our business planning process and budget review for next year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$6,241,417,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the Department of Health and Wellness: operating expense and capital investment, \$6,241,417.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the Committee of the Whole to order. Again, as before, one person standing and talking at a time would be the order of the day.

Bill 1
Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure this evening – or maybe I should say tonight – to stand and speak to the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. This is kind of a chance to go through now and look at some of the issues that are outlined in the sectional material, but I also want to talk briefly about some of the basic premises of how the bill operates and how it's put together and deal with it from the perspective of, you know, what it tells Albertans about how this bill will operate on their behalf and how they will be able to see the effectiveness of it or the degree to which it will work.

If we look at the bill itself as it is printed and put together, we end up basically with a bill that shows a lot of material undefined, undetermined, and not clearly outlined. A consumer that was really looking at this bill wouldn't have any idea to any degree other than the fact that there potentially could be and there might be situations or circumstances under which they could expect to get a rebate or payment to protect against high prices.

You know, this is one of the issues that we really need to look at in the context of the kinds of expectations we're going to create as we go out and try and market this to Albertans and make them feel comfortable that this piece of legislation will truly provide them with a sense of comfort. What we have to do is look at it from the perspective of: what can we tell them with this? Basically, at this point in time we can just tell them that there's going to be an Alberta price determined, and if the price that is prescribed by the minister is different or is above that market price or the Alberta price, then they'll be able to deal with some kind of a trigger mechanism, which we don't really know, because that's going to be defined in the regulations.

So what we've got is basically a whole set of uncertainties that are out there that are going to be put together by regulations. If we look at section 7 in the bill, it goes through and tells us that the minister or the Lieutenant Governor in Council can go through and basically redefine or restructure this whole price protection system in any way they see in order to achieve the objectives that they set out.

The whole set of providing for definitions by regulation is here. The question comes up in the context of: when you start off section 1 with a series of definitions in it, why do you have a clause in the regulations component that allows for the Lieutenant Governor in Council to further put forward definitions? If we're going to try and modify the concept of this bill and the application of this bill in a significant enough way that we need to have new definitions put into it, I guess I would suggest that that would be a reason to come back to this Legislature, because by changing definitions we're effectively changing the direction, the philosophy, the application of the bill.

To me that's much different than when we have regulations that talk about setting a level of a rebate or a protected price or a target price, because these are in essence variables that we expect to change on a year-to-year basis, and conditions surrounding them are expected to change.

But when we're starting to talk about how we deal with definitions that are in a piece of legislation, then what we see is that these are the kinds of things that to me, in essence, we should be putting right into the legislation under section 1, where all the other items that are going to be important to the legislation are actually defined. This includes all of the aspects that talk about how you define the eligible consumer, the types of substances that can be subsidized. These kinds of things are all defined in the definitions section, and we have to look at that and wonder why we're going to be able to change those definitions when we get into the regulatory part.

10:20

The issue comes up in terms of what we want to do with this bill in the context of trying to put together some mechanism of price protection. We need to make sure that these kinds of issues are considered by the minister when they put forward the regulations and put forward the formulas or whatever they're going to use to trigger the Alberta prices, and that is basically the issue of: what is it we want to do in the context of protecting the price for Alberta consumers, our users of gas?

When we get to these kinds of situations in the regulations where we're talking about the level and the trigger point for the regulations, if we want to set it at an absolute level, then what this does is give the consumer a basic upper point that they'll be able to expect or plan on and build their decision-making around. But if we're also going to look at it in the context of some of the true aspects of a market economy, which most of us stand to support, we have to make sure as we go about determining the level of price that we're going to be supporting that we look at it in the context of: how does that fit with the market? How are we influencing the relative prices so that we don't affect decision-making either by consumers or by intermediate users, input users?

This is important, because if we do these kinds of things that actually influence the relative price of the product, we bias in favour of different types of energy the relative decisions that are being made, and that can have ongoing impacts and implications for the business community, the energy community, and Albertans as a whole as we interfere with the level to which the true market gets to operate in consumer decision-making.

The thing we have to make sure of is that we look at a lot of the benefits that come from a true market-based system, and that is the fact that as we go trying to set out a program that triggers off a price and provides a rebate, what in essence we're doing is sending a signal to consumers that we don't have to worry about conservation the way we should. If we have cyclical patterns that bring price spikes, what that does is send a signal to a consumer that says that, you know, you should think about conservation, you should think about investments that will reduce your consumption, and you should think about changing to alternative sources of fuel, whereas if we protect that, those kinds of signals aren't felt as strongly.

You know, Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of cases, if you follow the literature, that talk about consumer decision-making, and if prices just gradually filter up or filter down, the reaction of the consumer is a lot less imminent, or immediate, than if there are spikes at certain times. What you'll find is that when the spikes occur, there's a real significant change in consumer behaviour. It then kind of moderates through the period when the spike changes, either up or down, and then what you end up with is that you get a real stable transition in the use of that rather than what comes with this kind of consistent price system, where there's no real shock to

make consumers think about what they're doing in the context of their consumption patterns.

When we have to look at that, we want to make sure that we in essence make sure the price that we choose and the mechanism that we use for making the payments are consistent with allowing the signals of a marketplace to really transfer through to the consumers. So when we deal with it, you know, what we want to do is make sure that in the regulations, as that part of it comes up when they start developing those regulations, let's not do like we did this winter and just put the gas rebate or the price protection rebate onto the gas bill, because that doesn't send the signal that it should.

It would be quite easy for us as the administrators, the directors of this rebate program to use the utility companies as an agent, even to the point that if they were to go out and actually send a bill and have the full cost of that gas on the bill and then the next day send a rebate cheque instead of having it deducted off the bill – and we could, you know, use the utility company to send that out. But what it does is provide the bill with the true cost of the product so that the consumer can truly see what is going on, and then they get another piece of paper in their hand which is basically the rebate cheque, and they say: gee, you know, if I were to actually conserve here, I could spend this on something other than my gas bill. That's important, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I sat there this winter, especially this last month. My bill came just the other day, and during the past two or three years I've been looking at heating bills that have been \$200 to \$250. One month it actually went up over \$300. When it got up to that \$300 mark, I was saying to myself: gee, I've got to start thinking about this. This winter, when we actually had the high prices, where the market was trying to send a signal saying, "Prices are high, you should think about conservation," I was getting bills that were \$75, \$80, or \$100. That doesn't send the right signal to the consumer.

So as we put these regulations together so that we end up making sure that we don't interfere with the market, I hope the ministers look at this and say: we've got to make sure market signals transfer through to the consumer and the consumer sees that true cost so that they will begin to undertake and be responsive and respond to those signals so that they can actually implement conservation. Because when we give them a subsidized bill, there's no incentive for conservation. One of the best ways we can undertake to get control of our markets, to get reaction is through conservation. We can save, reduce demand. That's just as good as increasing supply if we can do it through proper market signals.

Some of the other aspects that come up within the bill are quite useful, I guess. One of them is the actual use of clause 3(1), that deals with vendors, so we in essence have built right into this a set of conditions which will really encourage anyone who is an agent incorporating the gas on behalf of someone else – you can make sure that you end up with this coming in to deal with the aspect of how those signals get sent and how the money gets to the actual consumer that we want it to go to. So that kind of message also gets through.

10:30

As we look at some of the sections in here, they indicate that some of this rebate can be going to industrial or manufacturing consumers. We want to make sure here that this is not subject to any of the NAFTA conditions, that we don't create situations that will in essence precipitate or possibly bring forth a set of countervail duties or countervail actions by a foreign government. The aspects that we want to look at there basically are how we deal with that fairness, with the perception of the rebate program in the context of how it influences and affects international trade and international marketing.

When the minister is allowed to make regulations which talk about who the eligible consumers are, I guess the question that

comes up is: will we see differences from one application to the next of who eligible consumers might be? Can we see a situation where it might go only to the municipal or industrial/commercial users? Some other times it will only go to residences? When we define a set of parameters for these conditions or for the definition of who the eligible consumers are, we want to make sure that we are dealing with it in a consistent way. If we're looking at it in terms of how best to protect, the residential consumer is probably the one that we should be looking at in any way possible.

Now, I guess the aspect that we look at in that context is also an issue of – you know, there was legislation on the books already, the Natural Gas Rebates Act, that would have allowed basically a lot of these kinds of programs to be implemented, so you kind of question why it is that we're dealing with this new piece of legislation as it's being put forward. We need to look at how it's going to be effective in getting out and getting material put in place so that we can deal with, I guess, achieving the end that we wanted from this piece of legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I think that as we go through this, you know, we're going to see that there are some other issues that come up. We've got some amendments that we're going to be proposing to some sections of it, and what we'll do then is look through and see how some of the different aspects come about.

I guess the one concluding comment I'll make is: we go at length in this act to talk about how to deal with vendors or pass-through activities. One of the comments that was asked the other day was why we couldn't have done the same thing with the acreage payment that went out to farmers in the sense that we should have been putting restrictions on it that had it passed through to the current operator as opposed to some previous list of farmers who may not now have the same need for the money. We've got a very easy way to deal with pass-through requirements here, and that same kind of situation could have been used in that other legislation. So we have to kind of look at that.

Mr. Chairman, I think my time's just about up. I'll let others have a chance, and maybe I'll contribute more as the clock ticks on. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Other members need to be reminded that we would have only one member standing and talking at a time.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is quite a bill here. It indeed is quite a bill. As I said before, it's the classic slogan bill. It is certainly not necessary, but whenever you see a bill like this, you have to think to yourself that it has to be proved. There are many things that I have to question with this legislation. The first thing that comes to mind is that the gas that is going to be used to determine whether or not a rebate should exist does not necessarily, as I understand it here, have to come from within the boundaries of Alberta. I'm curious to know: in the drafting of this legislation, was that taken into consideration? Now, that is certainly my interpretation here, that the gas that would be eligible for rebate would not necessarily come from within the boundaries of Alberta.

Now, I've done some research on this, and unfortunately in the time this evening that we've had to devote to health care estimates, I never got a chance to get the statutes from the cupboard. There are at least four bills in one form or another that are currently statutes of this province that deal with natural gas, the transfer of it in pipelines, the development of it in gas fields. Of course, there's the Natural Gas Rebates Act. There's the Gas Utilities Act. Part 1 of that act, as I understand, has legislation to enforce price mechanisms. This is totally unnecessary, this bill.

We need to just look at the Natural Gas Rebates Act, and I believe

that would have been enough. In fact, when I look at that bill, it is much better than this. One of our ace researchers, Mr. Kaplan, used to talk about having price cushions. In that legislation it would be very easy to have a fund. Money could be set aside to deal with these real sharp spikes in natural gas prices. So I cannot understand why we just didn't leave this alone, why we need this legislation.

Now, the national residential gas reference price. In my remarks earlier in committee I was questioning how this is going to be established. Are we going to use NEB figures? Are we going to use market figures? Are we going to use figures from as far away as Louisiana? Who knows? There are issues in here of remedies. If this act is to be violated, what are the penalties? The definition of a vendor. Why no definition of a vendor? What happens – and this is a perfect time, Mr. Chairman, when we're discussing rebates to vendors – for instance, if the vendor is generating electricity?

Now, we're going to have to live with this bill. We look at the massive majority after the last election, and reality tells me that this bill is going to become law, and with that fact staring me in the face, the only thing we can do is try to improve it. It's our job.

When you look at a vendor and the possibility in this legislation that a vendor could be someone who is supplying gas for electricity generation, natural gas fired generating stations, is this in the best interests of all Albertans? This could become a vast money pit, and we have to distinguish between natural gas that would be used for, say, a 275-megawatt generating station and the gas that would be used – and possibly something that we're going to have to look at in the future is solution gas that's flared at various sites across this province, whether it be a compressor station, a battery, any sort of that waste gas.

10:40

It's odd that years ago in this province – and I've talked to lots of people who grew up in the southern half of the province – when the oil and gas industry was first being developed in this province, possibly in the constituency of Highwood, natural gas at one time would have been all flared off. It was just considered a nuisance, and fortunately now it's a very, very valuable product not only for heating but also as a value-added product for the petrochemical industry or as a feedstock for fertilizer plants. I could go on and on. It's gone from a nuisance to a very valuable commodity in a period of 70 years.

Now, Mr. Chairman, if we look at the difference between solution gas – and perhaps instead of flaring it, at some time in the future there will be incentives to make small-scale turbine generators that would supply power for the industrial facility where it is located and perhaps a few residences or farms or ranches that are in the immediate area. Depending upon the volume of the gas, it would be useful to supply a small portion to the provincewide grid. This would be a sound use of a product that at this time is being flared. It could be used as a source in conjunction with a turbine to produce electricity. That's solution gas, and that's a little different than natural gas. One has to be very careful here.

I think we need to know more about who precisely a vendor is going to be in this bill, and I'm sure other members are going to have questions also on exactly who will be a vendor. I don't think we should leave that up to regulations, particularly when we consider that a vendor possibly could be someone who is going to be involved in subsidizing electricity generation.

I was at a TransAlta function this evening, and I don't know how that corporation would feel if someone else was receiving the fuel subsidy. Of course, the majority of their power comes from coal-fired generators. I don't think that's fair.

Also, Mr. Chairman, we need to discuss further this whole idea of

price protection. That legislation, as I said earlier, also exists in current statutes. The Minister of Energy has all this information readily available.

We need to think of an auditing system as well. We have \$125 million set aside for further natural gas rebates already. Who's to say what sort of auditing process there is to ensure that that money gets to its intended destination? Earlier, in health care estimates, I noted the \$40 million in energy rebates that went to the health authorities. I was shocked and appalled to hear: can't find out; don't know.

This is why an auditing process is so vital in this bill, and I don't see any such initiative anywhere, Mr. Chairman. We talk about being accountable. How are we to know when the rebates are going to kick in exactly where the money is going? Not only have we spent that \$40 million amount on energy rebates in the health budget, but we've spent billions already on natural gas rebates. Now, what sort of control or auditing function should we have? I think that would be an interesting discussion for all members of this Assembly to have. When you consider that in this bill we are going to be sheltering consumers from the escalating price of natural gas, we have to realize that we have to have mechanisms in place to ensure that if this has to happen, the taxpayers are getting their value – it's \$125 million to start – because this is probably going to continue in one form or another.

I don't think we will see natural gas prices retreat to their former levels, not anytime soon. I would remind all hon. members of the pipelines that are being engineered to the north. If there was enough gas here, we wouldn't have to be developing resources farther away from the markets in the south. That's why there's going to be a long-term price that is far greater than what existed two years ago. So legislation like this is going to be used; there's no doubt about that. But this bill, Mr. Chairman? I really don't think that this bill is necessary.

The Alberta price: in this act, "Alberta price" means the price of marketable gas determined in accordance with the regulations." Eligible consumer: the definition will also be subject to the regulations. Now, marketable gas is defined as in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act. This definition also exists interestingly enough in the Gas Resources Preservation Act.

That's another statute that I unfortunately forgot to mention, the Gas Resources Preservation Act. Almost sounds like the heritage savings trust fund in some sort of way. Of course, the previous governments were planning on making the heritage savings trust fund larger by prudent management of our gas resources. There is another bill already in the statutes cupboard that could be used. But it is interesting that marketable gas is already defined in a couple of pieces of legislation, and further along in this debate, Mr. Chairman, when I get access to the cupboards – I was doing research here the other day – I'm going to further elaborate on the legislation that already exists.

10:50

Now, I talked about price protection and what role the federal government, the NEB, will play, in the opinion of the Minister of Energy. It's unfortunate that at this time I don't have the exact wording of the latest NEB report, but I note with interest that they are concerned about a Canadian price. There's also talk of having a continental price. It was a direct contradiction of the debate that's occurring in the American Senate. The Senators in America are very concerned about the supply and cost of their natural gas. The Senators are in the process of developing legislation, as I understand it, that is going to have conservation measures. This is another issue that I don't see in this, measures relating to conservation.

My earlier remarks about the use of solution gas as possibly a source of fuel for further generation is one that I would encourage all

hon. members to think about. The Americans are looking at a plan of conservation. They're looking at opening up more of their own lands for drilling and further exploration. They're certainly looking at opening up more land in Alaska, and they're also concerned about the strategic storage of natural gas. They're looking at a series of underground caverns. Now, in Fort Saskatchewan we have developed some rather large underground caverns. This is a noteworthy item because if we had large volumes of gas stored, that is a form of price protection, Mr. Chairman. We could draw off that supply as the price went up.

Now, there are some people who think that we could perhaps influence prices that way, by drawing off. In Fort Saskatchewan and even if we went farther, towards Bruderheim, I'm sure there are lots of places where we could develop high-pressure underground storage facilities. If the price went high for natural gas, then the Minister of Energy could demand that this gas be removed slowly and sold into the market. We could perhaps protect consumers that way. We could certainly help out.

This gas could be bought and injected into those underground storage facilities as a form of price protection whenever we're in between the heating and air-conditioning seasons, like we're almost in right now, with the heating system in the northern climates and the air-conditioning in the southern climates, when gas is usually cheaper. Buy low; sell into the market high. Market forces. I'm learning more and more about market forces all the time. I have no problem with market forces, none whatsoever, and I'm confident in their ability to have a price that is real.

Now, Mr. Chairman, we forget sometimes about former acts in this Assembly.

Oh, goodness. My time is up for the moment. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to have my first opportunity, actually, to speak on this particular bill. An interesting bill it is that we have before us. It's a flagship bill of the government, and it's a bill with essentially no substance, no detail either, and consequently no accountability for the government in this bill. What we see is a bill where literally half of the substance of the bill is designated to be made up afterwards by regulations, so away from the scrutiny of the Legislature, and that's a bit of a problem for us, no two ways about it.

We see a bill that's a blank cheque for the government to write the rules and write the cheques for the people of the province, to be determined at some future date how and when and the criteria for how that will be determined. We have a little problem with that, not only that that kind of information should come to the floor of the Legislature so that it can be scrutinized by all legislators but have the opportunity and the time to take it out to all stakeholder groups and have them scrutinize the regulations and then be brought back in. That would be the democratic way to go through this process and to actually be able to determine what it is the people want for this legislation and how it should be processed.

A particular concern to me in terms of letting this government write a blank cheque for these regulations and the process is that they haven't been able to successfully manage the rebate process so far. The plan was announced back in September. The first set of cheques came out in January, the second set of cheques were mailed this week, and there are a few problems with that process, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, we haven't heard a good explanation yet for their rationale in having the cheques delivered by the federal government. We weren't told and neither were Albertans told that people who had

outstanding debts with the federal government, no relationship with the provincial government but with the federal government, would have dollars withheld from their rebate cheques until those other balances were cleared up.

Well, if people were actually looking to use that money to offset the cost of their gas bills, then they're out of luck, Mr. Chairman. I know of families who had projected that rebate into their budgets and were counting on getting the money, so they got a double whammy in essence. You know, people who have outstanding balances with Revenue Canada aren't all deadbeat parents or people who deliberately don't pay their taxes. Often they're people who are caught in circumstances unawares or through no fault of their own, through things that have happened in their lives, and are just trying to get caught up. People in that particular kind of instance need this rebate, and they are particularly the people who are not getting it.

The provincial government decided to do this through a process which they didn't ask people about, a process where they may not be getting their money, and we're starting to get those complaints in the constituency offices now. Then there's that whole group of people who hadn't filed on time either for . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the conversation has not yet reached a crescendo, but we wanted to preclude that by asking you to soften your voices or, if you want to enter into a lively discussion, to go and get a coffee or juice and go outside. It was reaching such a pitch that we could no longer hear the hon. member. So, hon. members, the courtesy of the House is to allow the person that has been recognized to speak without being drowned out by extraneous conversation.

Hon. member.

11:00

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that courtesy. It's pretty clear from the feedback we received that not all members, I'm sure, were concerned that they couldn't hear me. I'm sure that after the number of times I've been on my feet this evening, many hon. members are sick and tired of the sound of my voice. But you know, it's not me who sets the agenda for the evening. It's the government. So take it up with your own House leader if you don't like it.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: I was on the topic of the rebates and talking about the people who for whatever reason hadn't filed their taxes by the time the rebates were announced last fall, Mr. Chairman. There are a number of those people who subsequently filed, which is what the government told them to do. They were told then that they would get their rebate cheques together, a \$300 cheque, or they would get the first rebate soon and the next rebate at the appropriate time, which is this week. That hasn't happened for some of these folks. Some of the people who have filed have yet to receive the first rebate cheque and of course haven't received the second. So my question to the appropriate ministers, and I believe in this case it would be the Energy minister and the Finance minister, is: what happened in this process? Why haven't those people got their cheques? Who should they be calling, Mr. Chairman?

Now, there was a question in question period today dealing with this particular issue. I fully expected the minister to explain the circumstances for those people and to subsequently tell us what the process would be for those people who haven't received their first cheque yet. So I look forward to receiving that answer, and so does my son, Mr. Chairman, because he is one of those people who

haven't received their cheque yet. He feels quite let down by this government. No surprise to me, but it was a bit of a surprise to him. So if we could get the answer to that question, that would be very beneficial.

We also think that this bill is unreasonable from another perspective, Mr. Chairman. We think it's inappropriate for the Legislative Assembly to pass a bill that will allow for unknown transfers of dollars. That's the blank cheque part of this bill. We don't know yet at what level the government's going to set the rebate kick-in rate. We don't know how that may change over time. We don't know how many dollars that will cost. We don't know any part of the process in terms of how the government's going to assign the rebate allocation.

Are they going to say that when it hits a certain point in terms of cost, 100 percent of that amount is going to be rebated back to Albertans? If it's a true rebate, a true sharing of the revenues of surplus funds, that's what the government would do. They would kick all the money back into the pockets of the people. Or are they going to kick back some percentage of the rebate amount, Mr. Chairman? We don't know that.

The government is going to decide at their leisure sometime in the future, and that's a problem, because we are in the mess right now. People need to budget. They need to forecast. They need to be able to anticipate what kind of money they're going to be receiving in the next year. Maybe to this government, Mr. Chairman, \$300 isn't a lot of money, but there are a lot of people in this province for whom \$300 is a great deal of money. It's substantive in nature, and they need to know when it's coming, how it's coming so they can appropriately plan their lives.

We think that's a problem. It just can't be proper parliamentary process to allow a government to go off and write blank cheques in this kind of manner. Why bring in a bill at all, Mr. Chairman, is my question. If that's the intention of the government – and we have seen the government do things like this in the past – then why bring a bill to the floor of the Legislature at all? It's really an affront to the parliamentary system when we see something like this come in that really doesn't have any substance in it. It's regulations to be determined elsewhere.

We know what happens with regulations in this province. They get written up and decided upon behind closed doors. We have a Law and Regulations Committee, Mr. Chairman, that doesn't meet. We know it doesn't meet, so they are never going to be scrutinized by anything other than cabinet. I don't know what kind of input backbenchers have into that process, but I'm assuming it's little or none. I'm wondering even if they will have any backbenchers assigned to a committee that will determine regulations. I doubt it. I'm sure this is going to be an inner-circle decision and that people are just going to have to swallow the outcome, whether they like it or not, regardless of which side of the House they're on and regardless of what their constituents are saying. So for sure that's a real problem for us.

There is no mechanism here that's concrete for providing the rebates: how they kick in, when they kick in, and what time they kick in. You know, there was a problem, I think, with the way the rebates came now. We got them in January, and we got them in April. People need help on a monthly basis. It's hard, when you live on a limited income, to manage from paycheque to paycheque. Having a lump sum come once every quarter is helpful at the moment it comes, but it doesn't get you through those months in between. So we would like to have seen in this bill some sort of concrete mechanisms that would have told us how the rebates would be allocated and a consistent manner in which they would come. It's

more costly for the government to administer on a monthly basis, but if the true intent of the dollars is to offset the cost of gas, then that's what they should be doing.

We see that the triggers for providing the rebates are unknown. An issue for us. They need to be laid out not just for us in terms of legislative scrutiny but for people to plan.

The definitions in this bill, this flimsy little bill that we have before us, are very unclear, once again an indication that this government likely doesn't quite know what it's doing in this instance. Once again, an issue that we brought up years ago. I remember standing in this Legislature in 1995 talking about what would happen with deregulation, and until closure was brought in, we talked about how important it was for the government to set out the rules early in the game for everybody in order to keep the transition from regulation to deregulation as easy as possible for producers and subsequently for users of the system.

What we ended up with after all this time, Mr. Chairman, is not really a deregulated system. What we have is a reregulated system. It isn't deregulation by any stretch of the imagination. It isn't a free-market system. We've got only a couple of major producers, who are raking in absolutely obscene profits at this point in time on the backs of taxpayers. The government is trying to mollify taxpayers to some degree by bringing in these rebates, but in fact it was a poorly thought out plan, even though lots of stakeholders told the government what the issues were going to be.

It wasn't just the Official Opposition who talked about the need for the rules to be put in place early, about how important they were. Industry was telling government the same thing. Industry was also telling them that they were not going to move forward on building plants for additional capacity until they knew what the rules were going to be. In fact, their hands were tied. It's tough to get financing for building these megaplants from financial institutions or from shareholders when they don't in fact know what the rules of the game are going to be. So their hands were tied on their side.

Why would they take that kind of leap of faith that this government knows what it's doing? Those were the times when we were just rolling out of some of the greatest boondoggles in the history of this province. I think about MagCan and NovAtel and Bovar, billions of dollars absolutely squandered because the government had no clue what they were doing when they interfered in business, and here they are right back interfering again through forms of reregulation. So industry was smart to hold their fire and not look for financing or start to build excess capacity until they absolutely had to, Mr. Chairman. They were forced to do that prior to their even knowing what the rules were.

We remember the kerfuffle that was occurring in the province prior to Christmas of this year. I think industry was a little shaken by what was going on, and they needed some certainty in the marketplace so that they could provide services. When there's no certainty, there's no stability, and when there's no stability in the marketplace, prices skyrocket. That's exactly what happened here. We don't have to look any further than this front bench, that is supposed to be making decisions, to see where the blame actually lies. So those are certainly some problems.

11:10

With this bill we're talking about stability, sustainability, and affordability of the rebates and the whole processing system. In this bill too many items are left to the discretion of the minister, and that's a real problem. Mr. Chairman, more needs to be explained in terms of how this bill is going to unfold, and it has to be laid out before the Legislature before we can be expected to give the minister the okay to go forward with this.

Do we need some relief for citizens in the province? Yes. Is the process by which they have decided who gets the rebates fair and reasonable? I doubt it. When my 17-year-old son, who has no expectation of participating in paying the bills of the house, is getting rebates, you have to wonder how the decisions were made. When we see people in some condo associations and some apartments not seeing those rebates actually reflected in their costs, we have to wonder about the process. We'd like to see tabled here the criteria the government used to determine what those rebates should be. Certainly I would like to see that, and I'm sure that's something that many other people in the Assembly would like to see.

We need to know why the government thinks the current legislation isn't adequate or can't be amended to meet the needs. Why this particular bill? That hasn't been explained by the minister and is an issue for us, I think. There is already existing legislation that provides for rebates, and what we see here I think with this bill is a bit of showboating, Mr. Chairman. Was it really necessary, or was it just a flag to raise up on the pole and show that this government had something to say in this session? In essence, the rest of the legislation we've seen here is basically housekeeping, very minor in nature, not substantive, doesn't show any leadership, doesn't show any long-term strategy in terms of where this government is going or where they think Albertans should be going. So I think those are all issues of concern for us.

Certainly I'm looking forward to some prolonged debate on all the amendments that we're going to be seeing coming forward both from ourselves and the other opposition party in the Legislature. That will give us some time to get some feedback from Albertans on what they think about these sections. We have quite a number of stakeholders who have been consulted in this process. We haven't got information back from many of them. However, some, like the Alberta Chamber of Resources, we have heard quite a bit from, not just directly to us but through the media. This is an organization that I would think traditionally is quite supportive of the government and its actions, but they certainly had a lot to say about this particular bill. I can't think of anything they've had to say that was positive, other than their spokesperson having said that it has a heartwarming title. But it's a mixture of failings.

A good point, I think. It sounds nice, but it isn't very substantive, Mr. Chairman, and that sums up a lot of what this government does. They trot out nice sounding ideas and bills and legislation, but when you scratch below the surface, you see that there are any number of failings and that quite often they lack substance. So I think that's a good point. This particular chamber had some questions that I don't think have been answered yet on this issue. They want to know what measure of protection the bill will provide for people. They want some stability. They want to know where this is going, and that hasn't happened yet.

I haven't even begun to talk, Mr. Chairman, about the environmental costs of these rebates. You know, what they're doing here is essentially market interference. How can we expect to be looking towards alternative energy sources in this province either from a producer's perspective, a marketer's perspective, or a consumer's perspective when the government is artificially subsidizing prices in the province? Of course, they artificially created the price increases, so maybe in the short term there is a good reason for doing that, but in the long term we have to take a look at what this kind of market interference does to the economy and to the future of Albertans in terms of research and development opportunities.

You know, if we're the only place on the globe that is subsidizing these prices, then there is very little incentive for producers to look

for alternative energy sources or to spend research and development dollars on sourcing those sources out. So what happens is that they get left out in the competitive race for new ideas and new forms of energy. They'll be a step behind other players in the marketplace, Mr. Chairman, and when you're talking about a global marketplace, that can be substantially, I think, a real problem. When we look at it from the consumer side, there are also issues outstanding.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take this opportunity to make a few comments on this bill during committee stage and certainly to urge support for a bill that will put into law a commitment that we made to the people of this province to protect the people of this province in the time of unexpected spikes in natural gas prices.

I wanted to just also make a couple of comments about the importance of this industry to our province. Certainly, Mr. Chairman, this is an industry that has benefited us greatly. It's a commodity that, fortunately for us in this province, trades in the continental market, trades east and west, north and south, and provides great benefits to the people of this province. Bill 1 will ensure that while we reap those benefits, the people who own the resource will also receive protection from unexpected spikes. So certainly I would support this bill.

I've listened rather carefully to some of the comments that have been made tonight. I tried to associate them with what was in the bill, which is really an enabling piece of legislation which talks about ascertaining a price of the commodity and putting a protection price in place. I find little correlation to some of the comments I've heard tonight to the bill, but perhaps it's just because it's late and I'm not hearing well.

Mr. Chairman, I have more comments that I want to make on this bill, but at this time I'd like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

11:20

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 1.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very interesting day indeed, and I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[At 11:21 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 3, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and of our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a rare honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly constituents of mine that are seated in your gallery, especially when they're the proud grandparents of a wonderful young lady that members will know as your head page, Ms Laura Gill. Laura has recently been selected for a position as a page in the House of Commons page program in Ottawa beginning in September of this year. She is one of four young Albertans to be chosen. She will attend either Carleton or Ottawa university on a scholarship given to those fortunate enough and, indeed, deserving enough to be chosen as House of Commons pages. I would ask that Ed and Emilie Zentner along with their son Gerard and his two children, Matthew and Emilie, please stand and receive not only the warmest welcome of the Assembly but our appreciation for their granddaughter's dedicated service to this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 20 residents of Morinville, 186 residents of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and 52 residents of Calgary. The petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to introduce legislation "to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday, Wednesday, May 2, regarding Stockwell Day's defamation litigation be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition that I submitted yesterday be read.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday to the Assembly be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

Bill 9

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 9, being the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill will streamline award processes of the financial benefit program and focus resources on innocent victims of violent crime in Alberta. Bill 9 extends the time limit from one to two years for victims applying for a financial award and grants increased authority to the program to dismiss frivolous claims.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

Bill 10

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and introduce Bill 10, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001.

The Traffic Safety Act itself was passed in 1999 but not yet proclaimed. The 2001 amendment will improve the existing act and make it ready for implementation in 2002. Highlights of the changes include the establishment of an administrative licence suspension process for new drivers under the graduated driver licensing program relating to zero alcohol tolerance; fine-tuning of the Alberta administrative licence suspension program by adding an immediate 24-hour suspension for persons providing a breath sample of over .08 or for failure to provide a breath sample. This is in addition to the current AALS program already in place. Other technical and administrative changes are also included to enhance the current legislation. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be able to introduce these amendments to the Traffic Safety Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 10 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly this afternoon five copies of The Lobbyist Final Report, dealing with WCB reform, done by a Calgary injured worker, Allan Jobson. This man makes a big difference in the lives of many injured workers by assisting them with their WCB process gratis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings today. The first one is a letter that I received from Mr. Darrell Park, a retired geologist who lives in Bragg Creek, Alberta, expressing serious concerns about the proposed forest management agreement with Spray Lakes Sawmills giving "this company sweeping rights to the timber" covering the reserve areas and also about the future of Bighorn wildland park.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of the government of Alberta news release dated May 29, 1997, regarding the Tupper report recommendations.

The third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter dated March 9, 2001, from Mr. Brian Tobin, the federal Minister of Industry, addressed to Ms Susan Whelan, chair of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology. This letter deals with the matters pertaining to consultants/lobbyists and their conflicts of interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. I would like to table five copies of a report entitled Losing Ground: The Slow Decline of Workers' Rights and Privileges in Alberta from 1975 to 2000. It was published by the Alberta Federation of Labour and released today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter dated February 2, 1999, from members of the Congress of the United States, and it's addressed to the President of Colombia, President Arango.

The second tabling is an address by President Arango at the 12th presidential summit, that occurred in Lima, Peru.

The third tabling I have today is an article from TIME.com, and it is entitled Defending His Strategy. It is written about President Arango, again.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another in the series I've been tabling to show positive examples of other uses for the Rosedale power plant. This particular tabling is selections from the web site of the Oregon museum of science, showing the conversion of their old power station L into a science centre.

Thanks very much.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of 51 senior high school students from across our province who are visiting the Legislature this week for the Forum for Young Albertans. The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning experience which provides the opportunity for close study of provincial and local politics. Joining this group of enthusiastic young Albertans is Mr. Jason Blair Stolz, executive director of the Forum for Young Albertans. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce some individuals who've played an important and instrumental role in the development of Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, which I've just introduced. Cal Wrathall is the director of victims services and co-chair of the review committee. Dennis Willner is the operational manager of the financial benefit program and co-chair of the review committee. Linda Unger and Brenda Young are financial benefit officers with the Alberta Solicitor General. I ask them to rise today and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour today to introduce to you and through you I would guess 95 percent of the public gallery, who are from Hazel Cameron elementary school in Vulcan, Alberta. They got on the bus at quarter to 6 this morning, and they're here for Education Week. They're going to tour the Bennett centre tomorrow and have a presentation on trees and forests, which they're studying in their course. With them today are 18 parent helpers; their bus driver, Gordon McLean; and their teachers Toni Garlock and Jenn Garbutt. In the interest of time I'd like to table the names of all the helpers that have come with the students. I've got five copies. I would ask all of them up there to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today for me to stand here and introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly two ladies in our members' gallery. One lady is here from California by way of Texas and is quite a student of U.S. politics. She is here for three days and wanted to see how our system operated. Her name is Pat Wirth. The second lady I've known for 50 years, and she is someone that is extremely close to me, my sister, Judy Mills. I would ask that they both stand and receive the warm applause of this House.

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you stakeholders who have provided valuable support and input to staff from the Department of Transportation. At this time I would like to introduce to the House the following people: Staff Sergeant Kees Kikkert, RCMP, Stony Plain; Constable Glenn Stark from the Edmonton Police Service; Eloise Leckie,

president of People Against Impaired Driving; and Doug Hollands, president of the Alberta Motor Association. I would like to ask these individuals to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly a very close friend of mine from the constituency of Fort McMurray. Blake Robert was born and raised in Fort McMurray, and he now calls Fort McMurray his home again. He was twice elected as PC Youth's vice-president of organization, north. He's traveled throughout all parts of this province in terms of working with young people. He's here with us today, and it's my pleasure to ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of all members of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two fabulous women from the Edmonton-Centre constituency office. The first is a woman whom I pried away from the theatre community. She was a very well-known stage manager; now she's going to manage me. [interjections] She'll do well. That's Betty Hushlak, the new constituency manager for Edmonton-Centre. Also joining her in the public gallery is Sunita Chowdhury. She is our summer placement student, and we welcome her to Edmonton-Centre. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly the summer constituency assistant for Edmonton-Riverview. Her name is Jayne McPhee, and she's seated in the public gallery. Jayne has recently completed her fourth year of political science at the U of A. Her focus has been Canadian government policy and politics. She now has the theory and is looking forward to getting some practical experience. I'd ask Jayne to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get to rise and introduce guests from Lethbridge-East. I'd like to introduce Stan Klassen this afternoon. He's part of the board of the Chinook health region, but he's also the executive director for the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association and in that role has had a lot of input into the issues that are important to agriculture and southern Alberta. I'd ask Stan to rise and be recognized by the House. He's in the members' gallery.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before proceeding to Ministerial Statements, might we revert to Reading and Receiving Petitions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**
(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Further to the report of the Standing Committee on Private Bills, which was concurred in by the Assembly yesterday, I move now that the petitions for private bills presented in the Assembly on Monday, April 30, 2001, now be deemed to be read and received.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

Education Week

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise before you in the middle of Education Week to speak about Alberta's learning system. Each year the province designates a week dedicated to celebrate learning. This year Education Week is April 29 to May 5, and the chosen theme is A World of Opportunity.

I had the privilege this week of attending the opening of the Strathmore storefront school. This school began operation in 1996 with an enrollment of eight students, and as of April 2001 there were 140 students enrolled. Between 60 to 65 percent of the students end up returning to the regular school system. Fifty percent of the graduates have gone on to postsecondary education. These students have overcome their unique personal issues and tragedies that caused them to drop out of the traditional school system.

This did not happen by accident. The Golden Hills school division had the foresight to establish and continue funding this school. The community embraced the concept by providing space and furniture and generally assisting whenever help was needed. But the unsung heroes of the Strathmore storefront school are the principal, Denise Peterson, and her staff. Denise has the compassion and ability to make the school a success, but more importantly, she cares for and about her students 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. She and her staff are providing a world of opportunity for their students on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, the many school boards we have like Golden Hills, the many communities we have like Strathmore, the many unsung heroes like Denise Peterson are what makes the world of opportunity for the students of Alberta. As parents and politicians this government and Legislative Assembly thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

1:50

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Roman orator and master teacher Quintilian, the source of many of our public education ideas, would be pleased with the theme of Education Week this year. Quintilian firmly believed that schools should open a world of opportunity for students.

Education Week provides an annual opportunity for citizens to celebrate and rededicate themselves to the ideal of public schools, schools that offer excellent programs, schools that are open to all students regardless of their ability or their parents' capacity to pay, schools that are fully funded from the public purse, and schools that play a vital role in the intellectual life of a community.

We are fortunate in Alberta to have widespread support for the work of our schools. In that context our public schools are confidently able to respond to changing conditions and public interests. We have seen their mandate broaden to be much more inclusive, and they are inclusive, Mr. Speaker. Our public system itself includes fully funded Catholic schools. Within our two school systems alternative programs serve a wide range of community, parent, and student interests: the international baccalaureate program, advanced placement programs, a host of languages from French and Ukrainian to Mandarin and Cree, the performing arts, the fine arts, religion-based programs, and even an exclusive girls' school.

Historically, an important extension of our public K to 12 schools has been the development of our public colleges, institutes, and universities. We must ensure that they, too, meet our ideal of offering excellent programs accessible to all qualified Albertans and sustained by adequate, long-term public funds. The Official Opposition will continue to make proposals and to measure the government's performance with these ideals in mind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Lobbyist Registry

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Premier. Is it the policy of this government that free and open access to government is an important matter of public interest and that lobbying public officeholders is a legitimate activity?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, relative to the first component of the question, yes, this government is open and accessible. As a matter of fact, it's a fundamental policy of this government to have an open-door policy so we can hear the legitimate concerns of our constituents.

Now, relative to the issue of lobbyists, I guess everyone who approaches government is a lobbyist in one way, shape, or form. Very seldom do people approach government without wanting something. Mind you, there was an exception yesterday when the Capital regional health authority held a luncheon to, believe it or not, thank the government for all it has done to bolster health care in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is it also not the policy of this government that it is desirable that public officeholders and the public be able to know who is attempting to influence government and that free and open access to government should not be impeded?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is not impeded. You know, I have probably on average three, four meetings a day in my office with constituents, representatives of various institutions, some for-profits and some not-for-profits, all wanting to discuss an issue and in many cases wanting something from the government. It's the policy of this government to maintain an open door to hear from all of our constituents on matters that concern them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier agrees with these four basic principles of open and transparent government, then I would ask him: why is it that he's opposed to a lobbyist registry for Alberta where Albertans will know individuals who are being paid to get influence to the government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member now alludes to paid lobbyists, people who are paid specifically to lobby the government on behalf of organizations or individuals. It's not fair of the hon. member to say that I am opposed. What I have said to the media is that there has been no call for a lobbyist registry in this province. I don't get any cards and letters and phone calls on this particular issue.

But I will tell the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that we will have the hon. Minister of Government Services revisit this particular issue, find out what's being done in other provinces, the expense involved, how much of a bureaucracy has to be created to undertake a lobbyist registry, and in light of the openness and the accountability of this government, if one in fact is needed.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the Premier on that suggestion. Given that that was my next question, I'd like to just basically pass my question. He did a very good job of committing to that kind of public scrutiny.

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, we'll move to the third Official Opposition main question. But before doing that, we'll recognize that today is the anniversary of the birth of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Given that it is a requirement that donors to political parties are listed in public documents, why not have those companies or individuals paid to lobby MLAs directly also made public through a lobbyist registry?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think I've already answered those questions. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition asked ostensibly the same question.

I reiterate and repeat that this has not been an issue. I don't get a lot of cards and letters and phone calls on this particular matter, the reason being that we are an open and accessible government and the whole issue of paid lobbyists simply has not been an issue. It has not been before this caucus, this government. It has never been raised, at least not in the past five years. The last time this issue was raised was the result of the Tupper report in 1997.

Relative to the Conflicts of Interest Act and recommendations in that act with respect to lobbyists, I will have the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General respond, because there is a requirement in that act, I believe, for a review of the situation within five years.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's essentially right. The Conflicts of Interest Act was brought in in this province and provided for an automatic review every five years. The first review, I believe, resulted in what's called the Tupper report, and that was dealt with by this House in 1997. I presume that the next five-year review would be coming up fairly shortly, 1997 being about four years ago. So it is up for review. Also, as the hon. Premier has indicated, he's asked the Minister of Government Services to review the efficacy of registries across the country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Also to the Premier. I appreciate that he's undertaken to review or research, but given that the Tupper report recommendations were in fact not fully implemented by this government, I'm asking now if the Premier is willing to establish a lobbyist registry.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what I said earlier. We will

look into the situation. Again, this has not been an issue. Now, there has been in recent days some lobbying going on to have us bring about a lobbyist registry. The Liberals are lobbying; the media are lobbying. No one else is lobbying, but because we have some people lobbying, we will look at the whole issue of lobbyists.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:00

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask now if the Premier is willing to fully implement the recommendations of the Tupper report.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, we said that we would review this particular situation. There is nothing to compel government to accept all or any recommendations contained in any report. As I understand it, many of the recommendations in the Tupper report were accepted. Some were rejected. That is a matter for government to decide: what recommendations we're going to accept and what recommendations we're going to reject.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Tupper report on integrity in government in Alberta strongly recommended that legislated conflicts of interest rules govern the conduct not only of elected members but also appointed officials such as the chairs of provincial agencies. Four years ago in its response to the Tupper report the government rejected this important recommendation. My questions are to the Premier. Given the enormous power wielded by senior appointed officials, how can the government justify not having a legislated code of ethics in place to govern their conduct, as recommended by the Tupper report?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out earlier, there is a provision in the Conflicts of Interest Act that requires a five-year review of the act, and since the leader of the third party is also now on the lobbying bandwagon, we will look into that as well.

DR. PANNU: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier is promising that he is going to undertake a serious review of it, I will forgo asking the next two questions. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is not about lobbyists. It's to the Minister of Revenue. During our recent campaign door-knocking in my constituency I found that there was a real sense that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund has been loaned out and that there's virtually no money left in it for a rainy day and that it, in fact, has been squandered. I know that between 1977 and '82 six provinces borrowed money from the Alberta heritage savings trust fund: Manitoba, Quebec, Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. How many loans from these provinces and their corporations are outstanding on the Alberta heritage savings trust fund books today?

MR. MELCHIN: Given the goodwill nature of our Legislative Assembly this afternoon, this is a tremendous time to tell the great story of the heritage fund.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. minister, it isn't. This is the question period.

MR. MELCHIN: I'd be honoured to answer the question.

In fact, you know, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund is not squandered at all. It actually has over \$12.2 billion of real money. This month of May is actually the 25th anniversary since the creation of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and I would like to assure all Albertans that this fund has been there and will be there for all Albertans and their benefit in the future.

With respect to his particular question on the loans, there were a number of loans that were given out starting back in the 1970s. The last loan was in 1982. We have had over \$1.9 billion loaned to various provinces over that period of time. We have received on an average over 12.5 percent interest rate return on all of those loans, no missed payments, and the last one was repaid just this past December from the province of Nova Scotia. So all of those loans as of December of 2000 have now been repaid.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a newly appointed member to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, can the minister tell me in his wisdom: is there a mechanism in that fund to ensure that fair returns are returned to Albertans?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. To the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. This fund has actually performed exceptionally well over the past few years. It's actually averaged over 7.9 percent return over the last three years. It has quite a diversified portfolio: short- and long-term investments, equities, bonds, Canadian and international investment. It has a very diversified portfolio and is benchmarked against a number of well-known indices in Canada and the United States and throughout the world. This portfolio in its benchmark, be it in the bonds, be it in the equities, on average has outperformed all of the benchmarking over the past number of years.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the same minister. This government presently has \$6.9 billion in debt. Is there a way that we can use our heritage savings trust fund to pay this debt down?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. That as well as many other ideas have been suggested for use of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. In 1995, actually, that was put in a survey to all Albertans: "What would you have us do with that fund? Should it be liquidated? Should it be used to pay down the debt? Or should we retain it?" Overwhelmingly Albertans have said that they would wish that we retain that fund and that its emphasis be turned from not just investment in capital projects but to maximize its return over the long term. That's precisely what this government has done over the last number of years. It has followed the advice of all Albertans to maximize its return and ensure that it is there for the future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The chief medical officer of the Calgary regional health authority is paid over \$240,000 annually by the authority to act as senior manager of medical services in Calgary. As a result, he has extensive access to information that is not generally available and has substantial influence over the delivery of medical services including contracting out. Yet a search of corporate documents today shows that members of his immediate family, including his wife, own a substantial share in a corporation that has contracts with the CRHA worth over \$1 million. To the Premier: is it the policy of this government that this kind of arrangement is acceptable?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are conflict of interest guidelines for regional health authorities. They're very clear, and they have to be followed. If there is deemed to be a conflict and if there is evidence that can be produced to show conclusively that there is a conflict, then the RHA is compelled to take appropriate action to make sure that that conflict ceases.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, for the record, is it the position of the Premier that the conflict of interest policies of the Calgary regional health authority are adequate?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I believe them to be adequate, but here's what I would suggest. I would suggest that the hon. member file or lodge an official complaint asking for an investigation, certainly in concurrence with the rules of conflict of interest as it relates to the Calgary regional health authority, and see if in fact there is a conflict.

2:10

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, in fact such information has been brought to the attention of the Ombudsman, of the Attorney General,* and of others. Where now should this issue be brought?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure of the process for lodging such a complaint or having an investigation into the particular allegation. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General can shed some light on what course of action the hon. member might take.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. Premier indicated precisely what needs to be done. If there's an allegation of conflict of interest with respect to a matter before the Calgary regional health authority, that is the first place that the complaint should be taken: to the Calgary regional health authority to ask them to investigate pursuant to their conflict of interest guidelines.

If there's information brought to the attention of my office – and I'm not aware that it has been, but I would accept the indication that it's been sent to my office – we will certainly look at it and refer it, as I do with any allegation of that nature that would be brought to the attention of my office, to our special prosecutions section to look at and refer to police if there's a criminal investigation involved or to look into it if it deals with an issue which we should be dealing with through the special prosecutions. But the first place for a conflict of interest allegation to be raised is with the authority in which the allegation resides, and in this case that would appear to be the Calgary regional health authority.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. VANDERMEER: Mr. Speaker, in the days following Budget 2001, as I've met and talked with my constituents, some have raised

concerns about increased spending and whether or not it is affordable. My questions are for the Minister of Finance. Is the \$21.6 billion in spending that was announced in Budget 2001 sustainable?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I won't go through the entire budget debate, but I do believe that what's important for Albertans to remember is that the \$21.6 billion that is being expended this year is actually broken into two components, the first being the \$18 billion for ongoing program spending that our government has supported, and it was the wish of Albertans to see that program spending maintained.

Second is the onetime spending, and it is one time. It's this year only. It's the \$3.2 billion that is being spent through Infrastructure to play catch-up and deal with some of the pressing needs that have been on the list for a number of years. This year we were able to accommodate this because of the additional operating cash flow that we were fortunate enough to experience. An example for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning is that we are going to deal with the long-awaited completion of the Anthony Henday road, that I have heard about, quite frankly, as an MLA since 1989. So we're delighted that the community of Edmonton is going to have that ring road completed through this onetime spending, but it won't be there next year.

MR. VANDERMEER: Mr. Speaker, also to the Minister of Finance: is there any way this government could reduce its current planned spending levels?

MRS. NELSON: Well, actually, Mr. Speaker, that would be a Finance minister's dream come true. We are always encouraging departments: don't spend money where you don't have to; don't spend it because it's allocated; in fact, turn it back in lapsed dollars.

I have to say that in this up-and-coming business planning process I have asked departments and colleagues, when they go through the business planning process, to go inside and make sure that they focus on what are core elements for government. If you're bringing forward new ideas, you have to be pretty much prepared to take the old ones out so that it's not a piling-up. Program spending must be contained. It cannot go up. It has to come down or at least, at the bare minimum, be maintained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERMEER: No further questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Government Aircraft

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Infrastructure. How many airplanes does the government own or use or lease for its exclusive use?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, he'll have to repeat the question. I couldn't understand what it was when he said it.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the question was addressed to the hon. Minister of Transportation, and the hon. Minister of Infrastructure responded. Sorry; if hon. members can't hear, they had all better lower their temperatures and start listening. That's their job at this time.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

*See p. 358, left col., para. 11

MR. BONNER: I'll repeat the question for the minister. How many airplanes does the government own or lease for its exclusive use?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we currently have three King Airs and the Dash within the government. We also have now I believe it's four water bombers, that are used for forest fire fighting.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister: given that a key strategy identified in the Department of Infrastructure's business plan is to "ensure government aircraft are allocated according to established priorities," what are the priorities for the use of those aircraft?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the ones that the government owns, the King Airs and the Dash, are used extensively in things like air ambulance. They're used in transporting personnel for forest fire fighting. They're used for the Executive Council. The Lieutenant Governor uses them. There's a host of areas. In fact, they're very, very cost efficient when it comes to moving personnel around, and within the ministries the staff of the ministries use the aircraft. This is a big province, long distances, and this is a very, very efficient way of moving personnel around the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister release copies of the passenger manifests of flight records from 1997 to the present for all government planes?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, this has been going on for years. These manifests have been available for I don't know how many years now. I believe it was even maybe when the hon. Speaker was the minister responsible for aircraft that he started to release those. So it's many years ago.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Union Organizing Practices

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a constituent of mine raised concerns about an organizing tactic normally practised in the construction sector called salting. Union supporters or members apply to nonunion jobs in an attempt to organize their workers. Once the union is established, the new employees leave, and employers are often left with union contracts they can't afford. My question is to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Can the minister tell us if this practice of salting is legal?

THE SPEAKER: That's a legal interpretation here, and you know what the rule is.

The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, salting is a recognized tactic that is used within the union movement and within the construction sector, as the hon. member has pointed out. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, a practice such as salting is legal not only in Alberta but in all jurisdictions within Canada. It certainly falls within the area of the basic human right of an employee to either bargain individually or to decide to bargain collectively.

Now, whether or not the intent of the writers of legislation contemplated such a tactic on the part of the union movement would be a matter of research and probably further debate. But in answer

to the direct question, salting is a legal methodology in this jurisdiction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:20

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Can employers ask job applicants whether or not they belong to or support a union?

MR. DUNFORD: They do ask such questions with a great deal of risk involved. If they decide to ask the question prior to hiring and then they don't hire the person, under the terms of the Labour Relations Code that employee has the right then to bring an unfair labour practice charge with the Labour Relations Board against that employer. Now, if in fact the employee has been hired and then they ask that question and it's in relationship to perhaps ongoing pension availability and those sorts of benefit type of things, then it is not illegal. But I would want to caution any employer involved in a recruitment plan that if he's going to ask that type of question, he has to be very, very careful what he does with the answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Is there any appeal process that an employer can use if they have been affected by this practice?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, there is, Mr. Speaker. How it works out is a practical matter. When the union, perhaps having used the availability of so-called salted employees, applies for a certification of that union, there is going to be a determination of who are the employees, then, that are entitled to vote on that certificate application. At that particular point in time, if the employer wishes to object to the names that would actually be on the list of those eligible to vote, that would be the time to bring it up. The Labour Relations Board would then make a determination, as they have the right to do under the Labour Relations Code, and of course the majority then of those that vote will determine whether or not a certification goes ahead or whether in fact it is defeated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Teachers' Salaries

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "I can't get involved . . . as the government in the negotiations directly." These are the words of the Premier in this Assembly on April 13, 1999. Yet through the budget and musings outside the Assembly the Premier has inserted the government into the middle of teacher/school board collective bargaining. My questions are to the Premier. Why has the policy of noninvolvement in negotiations been changed with respect to teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I repeat what the Minister of Learning has said a number of times in this Legislative Assembly, and that is that the 6 percent line item is there to give some assurances to teachers that that is the least they will get. There is the flexibility also within the budget for various school jurisdictions to negotiate that amount up if they so desire or to use those dollars in other areas as those areas pertain to education.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I notice that today is Thursday,

May 3, and the estimate designated by the Official Opposition for discussion today is Learning. Perhaps some of these questions might be held for later.

The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Yes. These are policy questions, Mr. Speaker.

My second question is to the Premier. Were teaching contract negotiators consulting on this change in government policy?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if there was consultation, I wasn't involved. I'll defer to the hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most important thing to remember here is that there have not been any changes in the negotiation with teachers. There is a minimum amount that will be given to school boards to pass on for teachers. The negotiation of the contracts will still be between the ATA locals and the school boards involved.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. How does the government decide which sets of negotiations merit government interference?

MR. KLEIN: I don't know – that's an interesting question – because we don't interfere, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Learning in conjunction with the Minister of Finance and all of their colleagues in this government are doing the teachers a favour by saying that a line item in the budget will be included to guarantee, to ensure notwithstanding everything else but as it pertains to the funding of Learning: you will get at least a 6 percent increase.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Workers' Rights

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. In the report that I tabled today entitled *Losing Ground: The Slow Decline of Workers' Rights and Privileges in Alberta 1975-2000*, it indicates that the real average weekly wage in Alberta has declined from \$681.97 in 1975 to \$642.81 in real, year 2000 dollars, a 5.7 percent drop. To the Premier. How does the Premier explain this drop in the real wages of working people in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, all reports are, I would suggest, subjective. You know, you can read into those reports what you want to read into those reports. You can assign people to write reports to obtain the conclusions that might be beneficial or might be of interest to a particular cause or organization like the New Democrats. All I know is that relative to quality of life issues in this province and the earnings of Albertans, I don't hear many people complaining. As a matter of fact, we have people moving to this province in droves to take advantage of our economic growth and prosperity.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier. Why is the Premier unfamiliar with the real wages in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I am not unfamiliar with the real wages in this province. I am a wage earner. The hon. member is a wage earner. It doesn't look like he's suffering, you know. Most people

in this province are wage earners, and I get the impression that most wage earners in this province are very, very happy with the money they earn.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the report also shows that unionized workers earn on average 18.3 percent more than non-unionized workers, will the Premier tell the Assembly why Alberta labour legislation makes it more difficult to organize workers than in any other province in this country?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true, and to shed some more light on it, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's quite a statement. Of course we were talking earlier about lobbying, and I guess this is just another example of it. Under the provisions of the Labour Relations Code any employee in this province that wishes to join a union, there is a process in place. There is ample opportunity for union movement to become certified. The reason that Alberta enjoys such a low union percentage isn't the fact that people can't get organized; it's that they don't want to be organized.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Seniors' Benefits

MR. MASZYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Seniors. I have spoken with seniors who are concerned about the obstacles they face due to the high cost of basic necessities; for example, rent, food, clothing, and the little things as they occur. When can seniors expect to see the increases in funding to them that were announced in the new budget?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSZYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I might start by saying that Alberta has the best program in the country for needy seniors. However, having said that, there is a significant number of seniors who are above the thresholds yet their income is low, where there's a great amount of concern. We have tried to address these special-needs people in this year's budget by increasing the area of the special-needs program. We'll be asking for increases in the special needs also. As well, there is 28 some odd million dollars being directed towards improving seniors' housing. Between the shelter components and the Alberta seniors' benefit programs, Mr. Speaker, we touch about one out of three seniors in this province with respect to aiding them in shelters.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASZYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One final question. The increase in funding that they're going to receive: when will they see this increase?

MR. WOLOSZYN: Mr. Speaker, we normally adjust the seniors' programs on July 1. In addition to the 10 to 14 percent increases that seniors in the program received last year, we're looking at an increase of about 4 percent on July 1 of this year to the people on the program. I might say, Mr. Speaker, that this is anticipating a 2 percent increase in the cost-of-living index. We're trying to stay ahead of that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Boilers Safety Association Annual Report

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Minister of Municipal Affairs presented to the Legislative Assembly here the 1999 annual report of the Alberta Boilers Safety Association. This report indicated that 10,805 new vessels were produced and inspected in Alberta's fabrication shops, compared to 14,420 items the year before. My first question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Given that this report indicates a 25 percent decline in pressure vessels manufactured in Alberta shops, how is the Department of Economic Development ensuring that Alberta manufacturers are treated fairly while competing for all the work currently that is going on in Alberta?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you. I'll decline that to the Minister of Justice, unless I misunderstood the question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, your second question, please.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Economic Development: is it the department's policy to receive quarterly reports from all construction projects in Alberta regarding purchase and contracts awarded by location, divided into the following economic sectors: aboriginal, local, provincial, Canadian, and international?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, and I apologize, Mr. Speaker and hon. members. I misunderstood the first question.

I will take that under advisement. I'd like to look at the report, and I'll get an answer back to the hon. member as soon as possible.

MR. MacDONALD: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Economic Development: what policy is the department taking to protect qualified Alberta fabricators from unfair competition from South Korean manufacturers, who are dumping in this province pressure vessels and heat exchangers?

Thank you.

MR. NORRIS: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, not having seen the report he's referring to, I'll look to read it and get an answer to him. I would comment that Alberta has the best business climate in all the world. Our net migration continues to rise. Business increases are at an unprecedented level. So I will get an answer back to the hon. member but remind him that Alberta is the place to be.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Energy Conservation Initiatives

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today through you is to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure. The city of Calgary was able to identify and is now proceeding with energy conservation initiatives within city-owned or city-associated buildings, initiatives that are expected to reap \$100 million in benefits just in the next 10 years alone as well as meet an estimated 50 percent of the entire city

of Calgary's Kyoto commitments on greenhouse gas reduction. It was able to do this without incurring any major capital expenditures through performance contracting, in which all costs are paid for up front by the contractors and then recovered by them entirely through energy savings experience. My question is: has your department fully explored all opportunities to undertake performance contracting initiatives within all provincially owned buildings?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we have taken advantage of the very same type of contracting that the hon. member refers to. As a matter of fact, we started out with buildings that we own in excess of a thousand square metres. We currently are 50 percent complete. This has been done through contracting. The contractors will in fact get their money out of the contracts through the savings, and it's basically in the five- to seven-year time frame. We are also now moving forward to complete the whole project, getting into the areas with less than a thousand square metres, and we hope to have that completed within the next year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Is there a report which could be tabled quantifying estimated greenhouse gas reductions and energy conservation dollars savings that have been produced thus far from the province's initiatives?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member brought up another area that we've been very active in. As a matter of fact, it started back in about 1995, and that's looking at our greenhouse gas emissions. It's very interesting to note that we have reduced the amount of emissions to some 422 kilotonnes last year. Our target for reduction was down to 464 kilotonnes, so you can see that we're well ahead of the target. As a matter of fact, since 1990 we've reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by some 19.8 percent. The energy savings have gone – as an example, in 1995 we used 1,909 megajoules, and last year we used only 1,812 within our enterprises. So in fact there is very good progress being made.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister. I'm wondering if the minister's department has developed a public relations campaign or effort or nominated employees or departments for awards to promote and highlight the provincial government's considerable accomplishments in this area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure that in fact we as a government have sold our accomplishments as well as we could have, because quite frankly the government has led the way in conservation and the reduction in greenhouse gases, as was called for by the Kyoto agreement. As a matter of fact, when we started in 1995, what we did was set up a committee that looked at all of the operations within government and took action where we knew there was a payback within three years. That, of course, has been completed, and now we're moving on to the more difficult areas to reduce our consumption and reduce the emissions.

National DNA Data Bank

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, the recent provincial budget con-

tained \$1.1 million in funding for the DNA data bank. I'm aware that the data bank came into existence with the proclamation of the federal government's DNA Identification Act last spring. My questions are to the hon. Solicitor General. Is the DNA data bank now available to policing services and agencies in Alberta?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, the national DNA data bank is in place as we speak. This data bank contains DNA obtained from crime scenes and DNA profiles of adult and young offenders who meet specific criteria. A three-year agreement between Alberta and Canada regarding biological casework analysis is in place, and Alberta police services are accessing the DNA data bank now. DNA samples are being taken from crime scenes in Alberta and from offenders according to the regulations set out. The data bank is a very important investigation tool and is strongly supported by the police in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:40

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Solicitor General: how will the \$1.1 million in provincial government funding be used?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, under the agreement between Alberta and the federal government Canada has paid the costs of DNA biological casework analysis for the past year. Starting in 2001-2002 Alberta will pay 55 percent of the biological casework analysis conducted for police services in the province. The federal government is responsible for the balance of the cost. The cost-sharing agreement is consistent with the way costs are being handled in other jurisdictions, and we anticipate that the cost to Albertans, as the member has indicated, will be \$1.1 million per year. The provincial funding will permit over 400 DNA samples to be collected and examined in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the Solicitor General: have we obtained any results regarding the DNA data bank?

MRS. FORSYTH: The answer is yes, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year Alberta received its first hit in the data bank. An offender was convicted of sexual assault in Brooks. The DNA bank registered a match with the offender's DNA against an unsolved sexual assault case in Stony Plain. We're pleased that the project is working. Again, the government supports the police services in this initiative.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have exhausted the list of hon. members who wanted to participate today, but just a couple of points of clarification arising out of business yesterday.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you asked for clarification of a point.

Calgary Regional Health Authority (continued)

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to clarify one of my statements. I stated that the issue on conflict of interest in the Calgary regional health authority had been brought to the attention of the authority itself, the Ombudsman, and the Attorney General. I meant to say Auditor General.* I will now see that it's brought to the attention of the Attorney General. Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling **Members' Apology**

THE SPEAKER: Yesterday afternoon in the business of the House there was an exchange between two hon. members, and towards the end of the day the chair called upon the hon. Minister of Economic Development to deal with part of it. The chair now calls on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to deal with the remaining portion of the matter.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hon. Minister of Economic Development stood in the House and apologized for some words that he directed in our direction. I appreciate that, and I accept the apology.

I would also like to apologize in turn, Mr. Speaker, to him and to the Assembly for some intemperate language that I used in response.

THE SPEAKER: May I say thank you to both hon. members, who I believe are honourable.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests (reversion)

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly during Education Week three of Alberta's finest teachers. These three teachers are 2001 excellence in teaching awards finalists. They teach at Victoria School of Performing and Visual Arts, known by many as Vic Comp. These three outstanding teachers are: Gail Annett, who teaches grade 2 primary years international baccalaureate students; Kelly Chernischenko, who is a mathematics teacher to middle years international baccalaureate students and is also an excellent basketball coach; and Wendy Sorenson, who is a science teacher to middle years international baccalaureate students and is a counselor. These three teachers make learning a joy for their students. Would my three colleagues please stand – they are standing – and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call upon the first of four hon. members.

head: Members' Statements

North American Occupational Safety and Health Week

REV. ABBOTT: Mr. Speaker, May 6 to 12 is North American Occupational Safety and Health, or NAOSH, Week. NAOSH Week focuses the attention of employers, employees, and the general public in Canada, the United States, and Mexico on the importance of preventing illness and injury in the workplace. This year's theme is Prevention Is the Cure.

In Alberta workplace safety is more important than ever. Our workforce has expanded from 1 million in 1990 to 1.7 million today, and we were short 30,000 workers in the province last year. This means that we have very few veteran workers to be hired, and many new inexperienced workers are entering our job sites.

Inexperienced workers are far more likely to be injured on the job. Forty percent of all lost-time claims come from workers in their first year at a job. Last year for the first time in a decade our lost-time claim rate went up. That fact should concern every member of this House and also every Albertan. We know that a major part of this increase was caused by the inexperience of many workers. In order

*See p. 354, left col., para 5

to reduce the lost-time claim rate, we must make sure that our employers focus on accident prevention and take extra care with new workers and employees. Accidents can be prevented. Care and training is the cure.

NAOSH Week is an excellent opportunity to reinforce and strengthen our commitment to occupational safety and health by increasing public awareness. To achieve good results in occupational safety and health prevention, we need corporate executives who exercise leadership and responsibility, employers who give their full support and commitment, occupational safety and health committees who demonstrate their effectiveness, and governments that exercise vigilance.

Through NAOSH Week we are striving to increase employers', employees', and the public's understanding of the benefits of investment in occupational safety and health, to raise awareness of the role and contribution of safety and health professionals, to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses by encouraging new safety and health activities, and to make information available to employers and workers so they can make their work sites safer.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

National Composting Awareness Week

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about national composting week and the importance of resource conservation. Composting is, of course, about dealing with our leftovers and waste.

Long before hip and trendy urbanites began building compost bins behind their homes, farmers were composting. They knew the value of putting the leftovers and waste products back into the land. Composting has become a way of life for many in this province. In 1998 Alberta had 84 of the 344 centralized composting facilities in the country.

The Alberta Agriculture Research Institute has a number of composting research projects that involve large industry and small operators. These projects look at improving the quality of the waste products coming into the process as well as recovering gases and developing markets for the final product. There are significant commercial benefits as well as positive impacts on air and water quality from this type of research. Here in Edmonton 70 percent of the residential waste is diverted from the landfill because of the city's state-of-the-art composting facility and related programs.

As we take time to consider the importance of composting, it is equally important to remember the importance of conservation. The most positive impact we can have on the quality of our air, water, and land is to conserve and reduce the amounts of resources we use. Whether those resources are metal and wood, oil and gas, or water, we have a responsibility to use only what we need. Sometimes we may find that we are using more of something than we really need because of its inexpensive cost. While the purchase price of the final product may be low, we have a duty to consider the environmental impact of all of our purchases.

National composting week recognizes the importance of dealing with products at the end of the cycle, but it is equally important to be responsible with what comes into the cycle at the start.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak about teachers during Education Week, about our teachers

who contribute so much within the school community and in the larger community in which they reside. An important way to recognize teachers is through this government's excellence in teaching awards program. Through this program nearly 5,500 teachers have been nominated for the awards. Whether or not a teacher becomes a finalist, they're honoured by the recognition through nomination by students, parents, and colleagues.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize the four finalists from the constituency of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the Hon. David Hancock. The teachers are Shelley Lynn Hardie, Lansdowne school; Linda Margaret Jackson, Brander Gardens elementary school; Charlotte Marlene McKellar, Lansdowne school; Dolores Mae Whiting, Lansdowne school.

I also want to recognize five teachers from the constituency of the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, the Hon. Mark Norris: Yvette Aline Casavant, St. Martha school; Karlene Rae Chorney, S. Bruce Smith school; Linda Marie Parr, S. Bruce Smith school; Christine Carol Sankey, Our Lady of the Prairies elementary school; and Janice Lynn Smith, Lymburn school.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate all of the nominees, the finalists, and the 20 teachers who will be honoured in Calgary this Saturday. I'm especially pleased to be able to congratulate the 47 finalists from the city of Edmonton. I would like to table this list of 47 Edmonton teacher finalists.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

School Board Trustees

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Education Week I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Alberta's school trustees. School boards have come a long way from the early days in our province, when they were the very first locally elected governance body in most districts. Now they are responsible for multimillion dollar budgets, programs that no one ever imagined would be part of a public school curriculum, and classroom accommodation problems that would amaze the stewards of those early one-room schools.

Changes in the past number of years have made life difficult for school boards. They've been subjected to change that has weakened their authority. They've had their boundaries change, enlarging many into huge geographic areas. They have lost the ability in any meaningful way to levy taxes for local needs. They can no longer independently hire their own superintendent. In spite of these changes, outstanding men and women continue to serve the community in trustee positions. Once elected, they work in the best interests of our children, and they make an enormous difference.

A recent example is the part they played in working with teachers, superintendents, and school business officials to create a vision and an agenda for public education in the province. This hallmark document sets out the goal of educating all children well and then details the conditions that must prevail if that goal is to be accomplished. This document and the daily work of trustees have shown that trustees in spite of what has happened to them will continue to be a powerful force in the education of our children.

Horace Mann once feared that school boards would become yes-men instead of watchmen. Alberta school trustees are neither. They are leaders, dedicated men and women determined to take an active part in improving the public schools of this province.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair does never, never interfere or interject when members are giving their statements, but at the conclusion I would just like to point out to hon. members again that it is really not appropriate and within our rules to basically individually name hon. members by name. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, who is a distinguished teacher, certainly knows that in the environment of education one called the educator puts out the message and hopefully the student will absorb the message. This is not to suggest for a moment that this is the relationship, but it's just metaphoric if nothing else.

Just so that there is not an inundation of calls coming to the office in the next few days, the chair would also like to point out that in addition to being Education Week, National Composting Awareness Week, Alberta Library Week, and National Summer Safety Week, which have all been mentioned by hon. members, this part of May is also still part of the Easter Seal Mail Campaign, also part of Girl Guides Sandwich Cookie Weeks, also part of Hire-A-Student Office Openings. May is also Asian Pacific Heritage Month, Better Speech and Hearing Month, Cystic Fibrosis Month, MedicAlert Month, Motorcycle and Bicycle Safety Awareness Month, Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month, Red Shield Appeal Month, Child Find's Green Ribbon of Hope Campaign, and Light the Way Home Campaign. Arbor Day is May 3, World Press Freedom Day is May 3, the 7th Annual International Pet Adopt-A-Thon goes May 4 to 6, Alberta Search and Rescue Day is May 5, and all Albertans will relish in joining the Annual Highway Clean-Up on May 5 as well.

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the government share their projected government House business for next week with us at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, May 7, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we anticipate dealing with Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act; Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act; and Bill 10, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act. Time permitting, in Committee of the Whole we would deal with Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act; Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act; and Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. Under address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, it being day 10, the motion to engross and present the address in reply and as per the Order Paper. On Monday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, day 5 of the supply estimates, the main estimates of the departments of Gaming and Justice, and time permitting in Committee of the Whole on bills 7, 2, and 1 and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday, May 8, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 12, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001; Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Amendment Act; and Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, all of which are anticipated for introduction for first reading on Monday, and as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply the main estimates for International and Intergovernmental Relations and Economic Development, and in Committee of the Whole on bills 7, 2, and 1 and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, May 9, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, as designated, the estimates for Human

Resources, and in Committee of the Whole as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 10, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading supplementary and interim supply bills, bills 5 and 6; Committee of Supply as designated, Children's Services; and thereafter as per the Order Paper.

head: **Orders of the Day**

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

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 5, supplementary estimates, at this point in time. We have some serious concerns about the lack of planning within the government's budgetary process. We see before us supplementary estimates asking for significant dollars for the second time in this 2000-2001 year. We believe that the continued resorting to supplementary supply is symptomatic of this government's inability to plan. It's certainly not the way it would have been done in private industry and is a significant issue for us.

Given that we have much other business to deal with this afternoon, specifically the Learning estimates within the budget, I would at this time, Mr. Chairman, ask to adjourn debate on this particular bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

3:00

DR. TAFT: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I note that this is a bill with a value of \$7.4 billion, and I also note that it appears there is not a single government MLA who has any opinion on spending that large an amount of money. I'm very concerned about that. There is in this bill no mention of objectives for the spending. There are no performance measures. I certainly realize that there will be budget debates that incorporate some of these issues, but frankly those come after the money is approved, as I understand it, and it's like closing the barn doors after the horse has gone.

I do think it's worth reading into the record the percent of a number of the departments' budgets that are being approved here with no meaningful debate whatsoever. For example, we will be through this approving 58.1 percent of the entire annual budget of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. We are approving here, apparently to nobody's particular interest in the Assembly today, 51.9 percent of the Agriculture, Food and Rural Development budget. We are approving a third of the Children's Services budget. We are approving 35 percent of the Community

Development budget. Again, no debates. A quarter of the Economic Development budget.

MR. HANCOCK: A point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Point of order. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's unfortunate that I have to raise a point of order for the first time in this session. Under section 23(h), making allegations against members, I think it's entirely inappropriate for the member to use time in debate in the House to suggest that other members are not interested in the debate because they have not had either the opportunity or the inclination to speak in the House on a particular matter. It's totally inappropriate to try on a unilateral basis to put that type of a statement on the record of the House when we have had many different opportunities to speak about the estimates. In this case in particular, we're talking about interim supply, which of course, as every hon. member knows, is supplanted by the main supply, which is what we're dealing with as soon as this debate ends.

So it's quite inappropriate to impute motives or to make allegations against all members of the House that we're not interested in supply and we're not interested in the money that's being spent and allocated by this appropriation bill, and I think he should be asked to withdraw those comments.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The Government House Leader is being argumentative in nature. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview was simply stating the obvious, that on these particular estimates we have not seen the government or other members from the government caucus participate in this debate, and he was stating a fact.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the point of order, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: I shall continue, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Did you want to speak on the point of order?

DR. TAFT: No, I won't speak on the point of order. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, this is an opportunity for anyone to participate in debate, and that opportunity is provided to everyone. Members have the option of either speaking to any subject or not speaking to that subject, and there are many different stages of the bill at which members can speak. Therefore, I think it is probably inappropriate to generalize such statements for every member of the House. So hopefully you will all take that into consideration before you generalize a statement that impacts every other member of the House.

You may now proceed.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I shall continue with some observations, but I'll take the hon. member's comments and the chairman's comments into consideration.

Debate Continued

DR. TAFT: We are approving here over 40 percent of the budget of the Department of Environment, 48.5 percent of the budget of the Department of Finance, 68.5 percent of the annual spending on Infrastructure, 36 percent on International and Intergovernmental affairs, 40 percent on Sustainable Resource Development, and almost 42 percent on Transportation. In my opinion, although I understand how this fits into the budgetary process, for us to be in a situation where we are having to make these approvals is unfortunate, and I hope that we're not in this situation again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report progress on bills 5 and 6.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following: bills 5 and 6.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair would like to make a brief statement just so all hon. members are clear on what will occur this afternoon. The Official Opposition has designated the estimates of the Department of Learning for consideration by the Committee of Supply this afternoon. Under paragraph 9 of the House leaders' agreement of April 10, when appropriation bills are considered prior to the calling of the Committee of Supply, the committee shall vote on the estimates of the department it is then considering by 5:10 p.m. The Committee of Supply will then rise and report.

Of course under Standing Order 61(4), when any appropriation Bill has been considered by the Committee of the Whole, the chair is to put a single question on the bill or bills which must be decided without debate or amendment. This must occur at 5:15.

Accordingly, if consideration of the estimates for the Department of Learning is not completed by 5:10 this afternoon, the chair will call the question on the estimates pursuant to the House leaders' agreement, after which the committee will report to the Assembly in time to resolve back to Committee of the Whole to consider the appropriation bills.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

Learning

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will keep this

extremely brief. In accordance with the House leaders' agreement I will not be speaking again to these estimates, and I will be taking the questions that have been asked by the opposition under advisement and will respond to them on a written basis. Therefore I look forward to the questions as they are put forward in the Assembly.

I would say that we are presently voting on an estimate of \$4.8 billion, Mr. Chairman, which represents an increase in the basic K to 12 education system, an increase for the school boards of 8.4 percent, for postsecondaries of 8 percent, and in student finance of adult learning of 22 percent.

Mr. Chairman, I feel that this is an excellent budget, and I look forward to answering the questions that the opposition will pose before us.

Thank you.

3:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the minister being willing to respond in writing to the questions that we raise this afternoon.

It is a lot of money. I'm not sure what the calculation would be in terms of how much we're spending per minute on this particular budget item, but it's a very important budget for Albertans and one that affects some of our most valuable citizens, our children and young people.

I'd like to start off with looking at goal 1 on page 273 and to ask for some comments and make some observations about the program there. The strategy is to

develop policy and program responses to recommendations from the Native Education Policy Review that will support the Government of Alberta goal of improving Aboriginal well-being, self reliance and employability.

That's an important goal, Mr. Chairman, and it's coupled with the strategy that follows: "develop a plan to collect Aboriginal student data and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of programming." I applaud the department for doing this at this time.

I think there has been some very, very unfortunate public airing of the performance of native students in the province. I'm not sure what the motive was for making those achievement measures public, but I do know that the public airing of results when they aren't the best is a disservice to the people who are working to try to make things better. They find it very disheartening to see the results of their work, as hard as they work, made public, and they suffer a kind of criticism from that publication. It makes their work in the classroom and in communities much more difficult. So I'm delighted that the government has seen fit to include this as a strategy and to include it under goal 1, having a high-quality learning environment.

With that I would have a couple of questions. Just how soon will the policy and program responses be available? When can we expect to see them? What programs is the government actually looking at? What specific programs are they looking at in terms of that particular strategy?

The achievement data from aboriginal students I assume will be similar to the achievement data collected on other students in the province. I would ask if it's possible, not just with the aboriginal student data but with achievement results for all students in the province, to get an indication of the performance of female and male students, whether that can be sorted out. I've had a visit from a citizen who's really concerned about national figures and international figures that show the performance of boys lagging far behind that of their female counterparts. I think it would be an important

piece of information to have to see if that is the situation in Alberta, that boys don't perform as well as girls.

What prompted the question to be raised by the visitor was the Rutherford scholarships and his attendance at an awards ceremony where he noted that the number of Rutherford scholarships that were awarded to female students far exceeded those that were awarded to male students. I think it would be an interesting piece of information to have, and it would be a useful piece of information, particularly when we look at native populations. So I'm pleased the project is under way. I look forward to the information.

I wonder, too, just before I leave that, if achievement test data from that population is as important at this point as maybe diagnostic information. I would ask the government if they have considered implementing diagnostic tests that would actually help teachers working with aboriginal children plan programs for those children based on their situation at the beginning of the year instead of what we seem to be into, a cycle of constantly measuring and measuring and measuring at the end of the year. So that would be my question. Have they considered diagnostic tests, and if not, will they in terms of actually helping make a difference to the performance of these youngsters?

I'd like to talk about special education. A strategy here is to "develop and implement an action plan to address the recommendations of the Special Education Review." Special education, I think, Mr. Chairman, really does need some attention. I must have, as many MLAs in the Assembly must have, at least a dozen or 15 really, really difficult cases where I've heard from parents about their concerns with the inability of the school system to meet the needs of their child. Most of them are long tales, tales of parents trying to work with schools, tales of schools trying to provide programs, parents going to the private sector for help, trying to hire their own specialist to help, yet in the end all of it not proving satisfactory in terms of providing programs for their children.

I don't know what can be done. There's a high level of frustration in terms of special-needs programs. We took the opportunity last fall to hold two town halls. One was held in Edmonton, and one was held in Calgary at McDougall Centre. Parents with children with special needs attended those sessions, and it was a listing of the kinds of difficulties that these parents are experiencing with the special-needs programming as it now exists in the province. So any information that we can get in terms of that action plan. Who's going to be involved in it? I would really hope that parents who are having difficulty with special-needs programs would be contacted and would be asked to make a contribution to putting in place that plan. I think it would be worth the time and effort that involving those parents would involve.

I'd like to comment on the evaluation of the results of the class size reduction pilot. I'm not quite sure what it means to evaluate that project. It was \$500,000 that was spent. The results were known before the project was undertaken. It confirmed the research that has been found across the continent, that class size does make a difference. Certainly other things make a difference: the teacher, the number of children you're working with, the kinds of resources, the subject you're working on. Those things all make a difference, but overlaying all of that is class size, and we know it makes a difference.

3:20

I urge the government to come forth with some targets, some idea of where we're going in this province with respect to class size. The Official Opposition later in this session will be introducing a bill to that effect, again to try to keep on the public agenda the issue of class size because it is so important in terms of the achievement of youngsters in our schools. It's one thing we know. A lot of

educational research is not very conclusive, but this is one piece of research that is conclusive. We know it makes a difference, and I think it's time to stop procrastinating and do something about it. The time is now with this item in this budget.

Some questions about the Minister's Forum on Lifelong Learning. We've been to a number of ministerial forums in the last number of years, and there always seems to be a bit of a disconnect between the things that are said at those forums and what actually happens in the classrooms and the laboratories and lecture theatres of this province. I wonder if there has ever been any evaluation of those forums and if there is an evaluation planned of this forum to ensure that the things and the recommendations that come out of those discussions actually make a difference to learners in this province.

There's an interesting notion that's going to be looked at in the forum, and that's Campus Alberta. I think that'll be welcomed by postsecondary institutions in the province, where there have been more questions raised about Campus Alberta than any real knowledge of what exactly it means and what exactly the goals are and what the implications are for the 27 institutions in the province as that concept is implemented. I'll look forward to the work that's done on Campus Alberta.

I would also like to know in terms of that forum: who will participate? How is the list drawn up? Again, on what basis are people invited to that forum? I think it would be a useful piece of information to know who is represented there. I've been to a number of the forums, as I indicated earlier, and going back to reflect on some of those forums, I had no idea, for instance, that degree-granting status would be offered by private vocational schools in the province. It seemed to come right out of the blue. I don't recall any previous discussions about that, and that I guess is one of the reasons that what goes on at these forums and tracking what happens to the recommendations I think is important.

I look at the request for a framework for Access and Learning Television, an accountability framework, and I think that that's something we can look forward to. I'd like to know who's going to be involved in that framework, who will be making the contributions. What is the nature of the accountability that the Department of Learning is looking for? Is it in terms of viewing audience? Just what is the nature of the accountability that the department is pursuing?

Implementing the recommendations of the school councils again is a good step. I think it's timely that those recommendations are being implemented, and I'd like to know who's involved in making the decisions in terms of which recommendations will be implemented. Will those recommendations be accompanied by performance measures so that unlike the recommendations that have come out of special-needs reviews, somewhere down the road we'll be able to look back and say: this is exactly how far we've come along in terms of this recommendation; this is where we are? So the performance measures there I think will be an important part.

I'd like to, if I might, look at the strategy to implement a kindergarten to grade 12 information and communication technology program of studies. It seems to me that the department has gone ahead and seems almost oblivious to conditions in the classrooms and in schools as they make their plans. Acquiring hardware, acquiring software, and evergreening are extremely huge problems for schools. Many schools are not able to hold casinos and have the proceeds of those casinos offered in terms of buying software and hardware. In talking to school after school, it's a very, very difficult problem. How do they keep up-to-date? How do they acquire equipment in the first place?

To proceed with a curriculum and program specification without first ensuring that there are going to be the tools in schools and in

classrooms and in teachers' and in students' hands to ensure that the program can be conducted seems to me to be almost irresponsible. I would look forward to some comment from the minister in terms of how money is going to be spent to ensure that the basics are there before teachers and students are asked to embark on a program of studies.

Connected to that is the safe and appropriate use of the Internet project. It would be interesting to know if there has been a pilot project done on this. Has there been some work done preliminary to this item appearing in the budget? How many schools are going to be part of the project? Is it to be a universal program, or is it to be selective? Again, will there be some performance measures that we'll be able to look at a year or two years hence to say, "Yes, we've made progress," or "No, we need to do more work in this area"? It's an interesting project. I think it's one that concerns parents.

I've heard from parents from a variety of school jurisdictions across the province concerned with the access that their youngsters have at school to the Internet, concerned with some of the releases that they've been asked to sign in terms of their youngsters' use of the Internet in the schools. Many parents are just a little worried in terms of what's happening with the Internet and the school's use of the Internet.

I had one parent ask if he could have his youngster excluded from the use of the Internet in school, and he was a little upset when he was told that, no, that was not possible, that that was part of the school programming, and that the school would not take any responsibility should the youngster stray onto sites the parent thought were inappropriate. It's an area that needs some work, and it needs some measures so that we can tell whether or not we've achieved the kinds of goals that we think appropriate.

Those are some of the questions I have in terms of the program of studies, except I'd like, if I could, to talk a little bit about the western Canada protocol in social studies. I have had a representation from a teacher who is very, very concerned with the western Canada protocol in social studies. I think one of the major complaints was that the protocol has pushed content down from upper grades into lower grades, and it's now going to offer an inappropriate academic load for students at all grades. The whole appropriateness of the protocol has at least this individual very worried, and it's an individual who I respect and has some background in teaching.

3:30

So I would like to know what kind of critique of the protocol is being done. Are there external evaluations of the protocol that will assure us that the demands being made, both contentwise and learningwise, are appropriate for the age level that the protocol is aimed at?

I'd like to also know who represents Alberta Learning at the protocol deliberations and if we could have a list of not the names but the positions those people hold in terms of making decisions about what is appropriate for social studies classrooms in this province.

I wonder if we could have some information on the cost of the protocol, what it's cost to this point and projections of where we may be going. I know it's a huge project. It's a very ambitious project, and it's one where support has come and gone in some provinces, but the project still seems to be held together, so I would like some information.

I think that that's my time for now, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to asking questions further on. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to the Learning budget estimates for this upcoming year, the year 2001-2002. Learning is a big deal in my constituency. Certainly, in the past election it was a serious topic of discussion at the doors and at the forums. People are very concerned that their children are going to have adequate access to education both at the postsecondary levels and in the K to 12 areas. They have specific concerns with a variety of issues, particularly, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about, learning difficulties and issues such as that within the school system.

We spend a lot of money on education in this province, Mr. Chairman, but the question, I don't think, and the point of this discussion is not how much is spent but whether we're getting value for those dollars that are spent. This continues to be a huge issue, and it would seem that the answer is: not always. In fact, we may have a misplacement of dollars in some particular areas.

When talking to people in the constituency during the election, I would ask what their key areas of concern were. Education was always the number one, two, or three issue. That hasn't changed since the first time that I was elected back in 1993. It continues to remain to be in the top three of concerns for people in the area.

Something did change this time though, and that was the areas of concern for people. When they would express education as an issue, I would say to them: are you most concerned about postsecondary education, K to 12, or both? The first two terms that I ran, Mr. Chairman, people said K to 12. They saw that most of the funding problems and the areas of concern for them in terms of service delivery were in the K to 12 areas. This time many more people said that postsecondary education was a priority, but the vast majority of people said that both areas were their key concern.

That's an interesting change, Mr. Chairman, and when we take a look at the makeup and the demographics of the constituency, we can see that it's aging, that many more people like myself and our own family are taking a look at the next stage of education for the children. They're getting older. They're starting to graduate. They're looking at postsecondary institutes, and they're seeing a number of challenges there. They're seeing that it's costly to get into postsecondary education. They are seeing that it isn't always that easy to have access to those areas, that there are some limitations on what it is that they can take and also that not always do we have a preparation system in the K to 12 system that adequately gets them ready for going into postsecondary education: in particular, concerns around the math programs and a disconnect between what people in the K to 12 system as teachers and counselors have been told and are passing on as information to these kids getting ready to go into advanced education, as there are requirements that advanced institutions of learning have for these kids coming in.

These new math pure programs are causing a great deal of concern. Counselors and teachers are telling the students that they don't need to have math pure to get in to all faculties and all postsecondary institutes, yet these very same institutes are demanding that that's a preliminary standard that the students coming in have. So that's an issue, and it holds people up in their planning.

I think the transition from a high school to a postsecondary institute is tough enough on kids. We don't need to add any extra burdens. They don't need to get to the end of grade 12 or the last quarter of grade 12 or make their applications to postsecondary institutes and find out that what they've taken, regardless of what they've been told by instructors and counselors, isn't going to be good enough to get them into the faculties they want. That's an issue that I would like the minister to respond to and tell us how that particular problem is being satisfied. I think that's an issue that needs to be addressed.

Student loans, still a big problem in my constituency, Mr. Chairman, and the access for students who are living at home and who have parents who are working and are middle-class earners – that's the vast majority of the people in my constituency. Most of those young people don't qualify for student loans. It's tough for them to find the dollars to be able to go to school at today's costs, and at the kind of minimum wage and the kind of job offers we see for young people, few of them can earn enough money throughout the school year or over the course of the summer to pay for their tuition fees aside from other costs. Sometimes they can pay them in portions, in which case they pay a penalty. They end up paying surcharges on those dollars. So that's an issue that needs to be addressed.

I know the minister likes to talk about remissions and things of that nature, which work very well for those who qualify, but what about for those young people who don't? I still think that there are some ongoing issues there. The degree of debt load that young people are coming out of institutes with is amazing and formidable, and sometimes I wonder why they're prepared to undertake that kind of a debt. It shouldn't be necessary in this kind of a province.

Mr. Chairman, we're penalizing our young people by not allowing them access to a public education system that will prepare them to be competitive in the global marketplace. We are also penalizing ourselves when we do that because bringing up the average wage and education level of the people who inhabit this province is a benefit to all of us regardless of where we stand in the social structure of the province. It is particularly a benefit, can be a benefit to low-income earners, because as people earn more income and pay more income tax, there are more dollars available for those kinds of baseline programs that help people in this province. I would like the minister to consider that and give some feedback on that particular point.

I was interested in the comments my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods had to say about the Supernet. I think that is an interesting program that the province has undertaken, one that they're quite happy to pat themselves on the back for, Mr. Chairman, but one that is also fraught with a number of difficulties.

Recently I had the opportunity to talk to a fellow who is actively involved in bringing the Supernet to the outside borders of communities and schools. I asked him how he thought the schools were going to bring those lines inside and into the classroom. He said that it didn't really matter, that the issue was really getting it to the outside of the building and that people would find a way to bring it inside. I said to him: "What about the kinds of funding constraints we see on education institutes right now? Are those dollars going to be available to bring it inside?" He said: no, he didn't expect so. He thought that schools and parents could find innovative ways of providing that service delivery.

3:40

So then I said to him: what are you doing in your own kids' school? He's got kids in high school. He said: we have no idea, but we'll probably look for a corporate sponsorship or do some kind of fund-raising endeavours or the teachers can make choices, and we can have fewer teachers or fewer other services in order to spend the dollars to bring the lines inside. So I thought that was an interesting choice. He was willing to sacrifice quite a bit to get those lines inside the school, certainly willing to sacrifice teachers or any other supplies they may need for the year. That's interesting, because those same teachers are going to be needed to help those students move along in terms of their learning process with the Supernet itself. So he didn't really care. He said: if you bring it there, they'll find a way in. I said: "What about low-income schools? There are lots of schools who are not going to be in a position to be able to

fund those lines inside.” He said: well, too bad. His kids didn’t go to a low-income school, so it didn’t really matter to him. That was an interesting comment on the part of social responsibility for the province.

I said to him: do you believe that corporate sponsorship is the way to make these computers accessible inside the school system? He said: whatever it takes. He didn’t see anything wrong with having Coke signs stamped on the side of the computers, and if that’s what it took to get them in, then that was more important than not having access in there and that, in fact, corporate sponsorship could take care of evergreening issues and things of that nature and other kinds of technical support. So it’s interesting that that’s where he thinks this is going. I don’t necessarily disagree with him in terms of that’s where it’s going, but I certainly disagree with him in terms of that’s the right way to handle the situation.

I think those are the kinds of issues that we should have before us for a matter of debate in this Legislature and so far haven’t, Mr. Chairman. This is going to be another one of those decisions that is made behind closed doors, where the ball is bounced across to the schools to pick up, and then the government turns its back and doesn’t really care how it happens. It’ll be interesting to see how this unfolds in the coming year. I’d be interested to hear the minister’s comments on what he thinks about corporate sponsorship, what he thinks about what low-income schools would do in this regard, and how he thinks schools are going to fund this. Not only that part of it, but what about the in-service training for the teachers who are going to have to keep on top of the kinds of issues that there are with regard to the Supernet being available in the schools? So if we could have some feedback on that, I’d appreciate it.

I’d like to now go specifically to some of the programs and ask some questions there. When I take a look at program 1, which is the ministry support services, it’s interesting to note that more dollars are being asked for this year. There is, in fact, an increase in ministry support of 1.8 million additional dollars being asked for in these particular estimates, so I’d like some information, Mr. Chairman, if we could, on what those dollars are going to be spent on. Always a concern when we see more dollars going into administration in education rather than on frontline support, where we know that it’s desperately needed, which would be in the classroom. What are we going to see those dollars spent on in terms of full-time equivalent positions within the ministry? How much is going to be in administrative support? Could we get some kind of a breakdown of what those dollars would be? I think particularly we need to be quite insistent that specifics on administrative dollars are available to people so that they can judge whether or not those dollars are being well spent.

If we take a look at program 2, we’re talking here about supports for basic learning, and I have a few questions here. Once again we see an increase here, \$1.3 million in this case, Mr. Chairman. That’s a question for us. That \$1.3 million is the total 2001-02 being higher than the estimated actual of 2000-01, so some specific explanation in terms of why those dollars are there would be helpful.

When we take a look at the total 2000-2001 estimate, the actual is \$2.3 million higher than the 2001-2002 estimate. Once again, the question here is why? Some detail in terms of what the increase is allocated to. Are we seeing full-time equivalent positions being added in this case? What will those positions be? What new programs are being supported by this increase? I think that we’re quite interested in new programs that add value, not just reorganizing of old programs but something that is benchmarked and monitored for value. That’s the issue, I think, for us, and certainly for me as a parent that’s what I want to know, how those dollars are being spent.

How many programs are being supported by this increase, Mr. Chairman? If we could have that information, too, it would be very helpful. In fact, the breakdown of all the programs being supported by this line item would be helpful. We don’t get that information. It’s very much consolidated in these budget books. We don’t have briefings by the department in this regard, which would be helpful. If we had a little more detail on where the government was going and how they were spending their dollars, it would be helpful. I know that I can often get those kinds of briefings in the ministries that I’m the critic for, and I find them immensely helpful. It cuts down on some of the concerns that show up in question period, and it sometimes helps us share good-news stories that the government is involved in. So I would suggest to this department, too, that that is something they might want to take a look at.

If we go to vote 2.2.1, operating support for basic education, I’ve got a few questions. Quite a bit of money is being spent here, \$1.9 billion that we’re taking a look at on the operating expense side. Can the minister tell us why there is a \$3 million increase in the operating expenses for education? What operating expense items does this cover? We’d like some detail once again here. How much is allocated to each expense item that this increase covers? There’s not a concern about spending more dollars if we’re getting value for the dollars, but the issue always is value, and we can’t determine that if we don’t know what the detail is. Then we can compare it to outcomes. So that’s quite helpful for us.

In this line item, too, are operating expenses funded by the lotteries. I have issues with lottery dollars being spent on education, but perhaps I’ll keep those concerns for when we get into the lottery debates. I’m not sure why these dollars aren’t just consolidated in here when it looks like virtually everything else is consolidated. Maybe we could get from the minister an explanation for why these are specifically broken out.

Questions on this. Why has the 2001-2002 line item for operating expenses funded by lotteries doubled from 2000-2001? Why are the lottery funds being used to fund education operating expenses in general? There must be some kind of rationale that the government has for that. We’d certainly like to hear it, and I’d like to be able to share that information in a format that we can send out to the PACs in the constituencies because it’s certainly a concern for them. In fact, some schools are deliberately choosing not to do additional fund-raising in their schools through gambling revenues, yet in fact some of their operations are being funded by the government from gambling revenues. So if we could get some information there, that would be helpful to us.

We’d also like to know if it’s sustainable to use lottery fund revenue to fund education in the future. Sustainability is important in some of the other areas, but it’s crucially important here in education that we know our children can receive the same quality or higher quality education from year to year. So we want to know what will happen to those funds if lottery revenues dry up or if it’s deemed fit that they should be used in some other area. If we could get some explanation there, that would be helpful.

3:50

Another question on this particular line item: will the ministry continue to increase its reliance on lottery funding for education? We’ve seen since I’ve been in this Legislature a significant increase in the number of dollars that we receive from lottery funding. It’s been a big concern for us. We certainly ask for that kind of funding to be stopped. The removal of VLTs some years ago I still think was a good idea. When we see the vast number of dollars coming in in general revenue, we see that the government is quite happy to take those dollars and allocate them to whatever catches their fancy for

that particular year, not sustainable, I don't think, when we run it right into program funding and of concern to all of us. So we would like some information on why they've decided to undertake that kind of funding, how they justify it, information that we can literally share with people in the community.

I think, Mr. Chairman, those are most of my questions at this time. We'll see where everybody else gets on these particular estimates. I do have concerns about early childhood services support, private schools, and public and separate school board support.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat at this time.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure this afternoon to speak to the budget estimates for the Ministry of Learning and, as well, to look at one area in particular in the budget that deals with our apprenticeship and industry training programs here in the province.

Now, then, we realize that the apprenticeship and industry training programs here in the province are industry driven and that these programs are supported by the government. Under the guidance of the apprenticeship board, the system relies on an Alberta-wide network of local and provincial apprenticeship committees and operational training committees, and their responsibility is to represent the interests of over 50 trades and crafts here in the province. As well, their responsibility is to set industry-based standards to develop course outlines upon which the technical training is based for our young people or for people entering apprenticeship and industry training, a very, very critical responsibility here in the province. It deals with an area in industry and in business today where we have a tremendous shortage of workers.

Part of the reflection that I take upon this is that when we look at the average age of our people in the trades industry here today, it is somewhere in the neighbourhood of between 46 to 48 years of age, and of course that represents a huge top-end or older population. It presents a problem as we look to the future. We are going to have a very, very serious shortage of tradespeople in this province in the very near future. In fact, I think one of the limits to growth in this province, particularly right now, when we do have an enormous strain for trained and qualified personnel, is that companies cannot get the trained personnel they need. As a result, we certainly see some raiding on other companies. We certainly see a great influx of workers into this province as a result of our high demands for skilled labour. We do have a very, very serious shortage here in this province.

Now, as well, this puts other stresses on the system. Certainly institutions such as NAIT and SAIT are major trainers of our tradespeople here in the province. Of course, they take time out of each particular year for experience on the job and return to these education facilities to get the education part of the trade completed.

In looking at the budget items here, I cannot determine whether these institutions have had an increase in their funding, whether their funding has remained the same, or whether their funding has decreased, particularly at this critical time when all indicators show that we definitely need more people in skilled labour, not only today but down the road as well. When we see indicators in the economy that we are having growth periods until at least 2005, when we have indicators that show us that many of the people in the trades will be retiring in the next five to 10 years, then of course it certainly indicates that we are going to need an influx of skilled labour.

When we look at what the product is that our institutions in this province have put out in the way of skilled labour through the

apprenticeship training programs, we see a very, very high-quality skilled worker. These workers are not only respected in this province, Mr. Chairman; they're respected in this country and in other nations throughout the world. I think of our workers particularly in the oil industry and the pipeline industry that have absolutely no difficulty getting jobs anywhere in the world. In fact, they're sought after and sought rather highly for their talents.

One of the things that we are experiencing even in industry here today is that when other tradespeople come to Alberta, there is no standardization of training between provinces. The standards as set, for example, in Newfoundland or Quebec or Ontario are different from what we have here in Alberta. I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods speak earlier of the western Canada protocol. Certainly in our school system we are making every attempt to harmonize our education system across this country and, particularly through the western Canada protocol, to do it in this region of the country. I know that there are certain attempts by organizations in the various provinces to get together and try and harmonize these standards. So what I would hope the minister could provide is an update as to how these standards are going to be harmonized and where the discussions on that are at this particular time.

Now, then, what we have here because of the different standards is different barriers for each of our somewhere over 50 trades to mobility between the provinces. Not only do we have that difference, Mr. Chairman, we also have differences in the level of certification when it comes to workers in this province compared to other provinces. As well, in this province we also have a number of apprenticeship centres in the major centres, and they have a specific responsibility to monitor the apprentices when they're out on the job. I think overall, from the results that we see, they do an excellent job.

As well, what's happened here in the province is that we have a number of emerging growth centres, areas in this province where we've had rapid growth, where we've had a great deal of demand for apprentices, where they are working. In these particular communities, what I would like to know is: what are the plans to establish in these emerging growth centres apprenticeship centres so that apprentices in these rapidly growing areas will also have the same quality of help and assistance as they go through their apprenticeship?

4:00

We certainly know that local apprenticeship committees have played a very, very major role in this province. They have certainly led to greater communication amongst all apprentices, and this has certainly led to a great strengthening and development of partnerships throughout the province. It certainly is one of the reasons that we have been able to develop the quality of apprenticeship program that we do have here.

With growth and with the demand for skilled labour and apprentices in this province I think we have to look at another side that we have to concentrate on as well, Mr. Chairman. That is that when I look at the statistics for 1999 of workers who were injured in the workplace or encountered industrial disease, it was serious enough in this province that 35,000 workers had to miss at least one day of work. When we also look, there were 27 workers a day who were injured in this province and were in their first six months of being on the job. So certainly experience on the job is a big problem.

We can't help but wonder in this situation if some of these apprentices were being asked or required to do jobs that they were not trained for yet or whether they were not properly supervised. Again I think that it is critical that we have in place the proper apprenticeship centres that can monitor new apprentices and

certainly to make the workplace a much safer place, and this is through the education of these apprentices. We certainly all realize in this Assembly and in the workplace that this is money well spent, that if we can prevent these workplace injuries, then it certainly is a much lower cost item in the long term than the strains and the demands that it will put on the system. So my next question to the minister in this regard is: how are we dealing with monitoring these apprentices in these particular areas of growth, the emerging areas of growth? What is the opportunity of developing and establishing these centres where we can monitor apprentices?

As well, what is happening here in the province is that the rate of injured workers, particularly young workers, is growing at a much greater rate than our workforce, than the percentage that our workforce is growing. It indicates that we don't have enough training in safety for these people. I know that the WCB certainly has done an excellent job in developing safety programs, but it also indicates here that we have not done enough.

DR. TAFT: A lot of injuries occur in the first six months.

MR. BONNER: Yes, especially when the injuries are occurring within the first six months.

Therefore, what I would like to know is if the ministry has looked at the possibility of introducing a safety component into the apprenticeship program or expanding what is in the program presently.

In looking at the business plans for the ministry, I was quite happy to see here that the percentage of Albertans age 17 and older that are attending credit and noncredit program courses grew from 32 percent in 1998-99 to 33 percent in 1999-2000. I see that our target for next year, the year 2001-2002, is still 33 percent. When we have such a demand in the skilled trades area, why wouldn't we expect this figure to rise, especially when I see that the target for the year 2003-2004 is 36 percent?

Now, Mr. Chairman, when I look at goal 2 in the business plans, I see that the outcome here is that "learners demonstrate high standards." I see as well here that under this section one of the bullets is to "enhance awareness of education and training attained in other countries for entry into trades and professions and educational institutions." Certainly we do want opportunities for people that arrive in Canada, but it would seem to me that rather than us looking for people from other countries, again, we train our own. It is the same situation we have in education, where we are all of a sudden short of teachers, so we're going to look outside the province of Alberta when we have an excellent facility right across the river which has a remarkable record of training teachers for this province. These are foreseeable, these are predictable, and that is why I can't understand why we wait until we are in this situation, why we haven't properly prepared for these.

Now, one of the programs that I'm particularly happy to see and that is gaining popularity is the high school registered apprenticeship program scholarship initiative. This is one of those areas that will certainly attract our graduates here in Alberta to enter the apprenticeship program, and it is also an excellent opportunity and a new opportunity for school-to-work transition.

When we are promoting the high school registered apprenticeship program, I do have a few questions here that I would like to ask the minister. The first question is: how is the registered apprenticeship program scholarship initiative going to be promoted to high school students? Again I think that this is critical, because every indicator is that we are going to have a tremendous shortage in this province, and who better to attract into those positions than our own youth, who are constantly looking for these good jobs?

Now, then, as well I would like to know: if we are going to pay proper attention to the registered apprenticeship program scholarship initiative, then what is this promotion going to cost? How many young people will be impacted by it? Could the minister please indicate which communities will receive the benefit from this program? Is it going to be open to students across the province, or are they going to have to be in certain cities or just where we have apprenticeship boards or whatever? So if the minister could please provide that information for me. Another one of my questions is: how much is the total program going to cost?

4:10

Now, Mr. Chairman, I did have some questions here as well on program 3, the support for adult learning. Under apprenticeship and industry training I see that our gross expense for the fiscal year 2000-2001 was \$10,793,000 – that was under the operating expense – and for this year it is \$12,337,000. My question here to the minister would certainly be: where are these extra dollars going in the operating expense? To what institutions are they going? Again, is that amount for our facilities at NAIT and SAIT increasing, decreasing, or remaining the same?

Finally, when we look at our amortization of capital assets, I see that in last year's fiscal program it was at \$36,000, and this year it has increased to \$186,000. That is quite an increase in the amortization of capital assets.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to rise and speak to the estimates for the Department of Learning, in large part because the largest single educational institution in Alberta is in my constituency – and indeed it's one of the largest in the country – the University of Alberta. As well, there's a campus of Grant MacEwan Community College in my constituency and in addition, of course, a large number of schools.

There's no question that for me personally and for my constituents education is an exceedingly high priority, a highly valued government program, a public service that ranks up there with health care and justice and other areas as being of absolutely paramount importance to a successful society and, indeed, to successful individuals.

In going through material from the Department of Learning in the Budget 2001 business plans, on page 278 I notice in the outcomes two or three areas worth commenting on. One is the outcome that "learners are well prepared for citizenship." That gets at perhaps the single most important aspect certainly of advanced education and of all education.

I know so much of our education system now seems to be geared towards training people for jobs, and that's commendable and that's fine and important. But in doing that, we don't want to lose track of the role of education, the fundamental role and perhaps even the original role of education going back to the academies of ancient Greece: creating citizens. I'm pleased to see that the business plan for the Department of Learning pays some attention to that. They have strategies to "develop learning opportunities that will build an active and responsible citizenry." I would be curious to know how citizenry is defined here, what it means, and indeed how this information presented on page 278 of the plan is compiled.

It does suggest here that public satisfaction that learners are well prepared for citizenship among high school students actually is a bit

low, 41 percent. The target I guess isn't that high either. It's 42 percent. I'd encourage both the target and the achievement of that target to be raised. The results are a bit higher for postsecondary, for adult learners, at 65 percent. Nonetheless, it's a difficult concept to measure, and I would like more background on exactly what is being measured here, but commendation to the minister and to the department for paying some attention to that.

On the same page there is a graph or chart discussing the more practical or certainly the more economically oriented aspect of education, which is employment rates. It's worth noting here how high education corresponds directly with employability. I note that employment rates for vocational college graduates are 85 percent, and then the employment rates rise from there to the highest level, which is not private university colleges but in fact the general universities, which I assume mean the University of Alberta, of Calgary, of Lethbridge, and Athabasca University, of which 96 percent of graduates are employed. I think that's commendable. We need to keep on that kind of a target, of course remembering that it's not just the education but the entire economy that assists us in achieving that.

There are some specific issues I would like to raise in these discussions concerning postsecondary education. I have had inquiries, that I have in fact raised here in question period, from constituents who are concerned about the cost of education and, in particular, specifically the cost of housing at universities. There is some attention paid here to reviewing the tuition fee policy for universities.

I think we mustn't lose track of other living expenses that students face when they are attending university or college, and among those probably the greatest are housing costs. So some attention by the department to housing costs would probably be in order. We're going to see those costs jump as a result of the soaring costs of natural gas and electricity, and I would repeat my encouragement to the department that in their budgeting and in their financing they ensure that any rebates that are provided to educational institutions for energy costs flow through and cover that and offset the costs of student housing.

Tuition fees are also an ongoing issue for many of my constituents and of course for citizens across Alberta, not just the students themselves but their parents, their grandparents, who may be supporting them as they attend postsecondary training. I am very concerned that the tuition fee increases in the last decade have far exceeded the rate of inflation. While they have doubled or tripled, I don't think there is any measurement that would suggest that the quality of education the students are receiving has doubled or tripled. We need to watch tuition fees, and I would encourage any budget activity at all that was undertaken here to ensure that tuition fees are flattened right out and, indeed preferably, that tuition fees be reduced. So I have questions here about how soon the tuition fee policy review will be completed and what it's likely to find, what its recommendations will be, when we can see that tabled in the Assembly.

I would also like to just raise a handful of questions around education for aboriginal populations. I notice from time to time in the business plans there is mention of opportunities for aboriginal groups or aboriginal individuals to further their education. I would encourage that particular attention in resources be paid to that area, as we are all I think well aware of the particular problems that our aboriginal populations face when it comes to achieving levels of education that will help them get along in a modern society.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I think I will take my seat. Thank you very much.

4:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to focus on issues that have received less attention than others. Several of my colleagues in the House have already spoken on the estimates for this very important department in our government. I heard a few comments that encourage me to believe that government is paying more attention than it has in the past to issues of chronic underfunding for our learning system, both K to 12 and postsecondary. There are some indications here that some steps are being taken. So I certainly want to acknowledge that. Looking at the business plan, there is certainly more attention to detail in this department's business plan than I found in some other departments. So, again, I think the minister and his staff deserve some credit for this.

Having said that, the key issue that I will focus on, of course, at the postsecondary level is a worrisome development that has taken place over the last 12 months, that I want to visit for a moment: the approval of a private, for-profit postsecondary institution in this province being given the accreditation for it to offer degree-granting status so that it could offer degrees to Alberta students and others who may enroll in its programs. This is not only a private college; it's a private, for-profit corporation, a large one with a great big array of commercial activities, a corporation that's listed on the New York Stock Exchange with billions of dollars of capitalization and therefore has shareholder interests to look after as distinct from educational challenges to meet seriously. The first and foremost obligation of a private, for-profit corporation listed on a reputable stock exchange is a force to generate and maximize profit and to be accountable first and foremost to its shareholders.

I asked the minister some time ago a question on whether or not this college will now receive public funds, and his answer to my question at that time was unequivocally clear that not a cent of public dollars will go to this. I was certainly reassured by his clear answer, but the questions do arise, given the fact that we live within a framework defined by NAFTA, as to the rights of corporations to have access to resources, facilities, conditions that apply to local or national economic players. So the national treatment chapter of NAFTA gives me some concern, and I would like the minister perhaps in his response to explicitly address that issue.

Has he got sound legal advice on it, and will he be willing to share that advice with us so that we are assured that the DeVry institute's accreditation to become a profit-making, degree-granting institution in the province will not subject provincial revenues and resources to go to all other claimants that might want to enter the field and thereby open the opportunities for privatization of postsecondary education? That certainly is an issue that continues to worry me. I know that the minister takes concerns like this seriously, so I expect that I and the House will be hearing from him on this specific issue.

Looking at the business plan – again, I'm looking at page 275 – there is the issue of the section on outcomes: "affordability, financial need," and "the learning system is affordable," and "accessibility." These three sections, I think, deal with the issue of equal opportunity, which has long been very closely linked to the goals of publicly funded public education systems in Canada and elsewhere over the last 50, 60 years. I'm trying to track down here a reference to the words "equal opportunity," and I have not as yet been able to find it. Maybe the minister can assist me to see whether or not there is an explicit commitment or statement of intention of the government and the minister stated somewhere here. The reason I raise this question is because some of my constituents certainly are affected by this government's tuition fee policies relative to postsecondary education in particular.

I was visiting a storefront high school on Whyte Avenue in my constituency about six months ago. I visited with students and teachers and talked with students who had for one reason or other dropped out of school some years ago and had now returned and were doing well and on the way to completing their high school diploma at a level of performance that would qualify them to enter, if they so chose, college or university education. When I asked them about their plans for college or university, the clear answer was: no way; can't afford it. So this question of affordability, when it's addressed without linking it to ensuring opportunity for every Albertan who is qualified and willing to go to a postsecondary institution, without linking the whole question of opportunity and how it is the obligation of a government, the obligation associated with good governance that all qualified citizens be treated equally – that kind of commitment I think is missing here. The word "affordability" seems to not address the question that I'm raising here, so maybe the minister will help me understand how he and his plans plan to address how this budget reflects the commitments to the ideal and the principle of equal opportunity.

4:30

Another matter, Mr. Chairman, a general matter that I want to raise – I was at the press conference this afternoon at the press availability of the Premier. He was asked some questions about skilled labour shortages, the shortages of people in Alberta with high levels of skills which will require postsecondary education training. He started musing about perhaps the need to enter into agreements that will facilitate easy movement back and forth across national borders so that in this province we could address the problem of such labour shortages by importing people and immediately followed it by saying that he wanted to assure Albertans that any such entry, if it's eased, will not be at the expense of job opportunities for Albertans.

The point here that he missed, of course, is: why these shortages? They are not merely the result of the economic growth that's taking place. It's clearly also the result, the cumulative effect, the impact of the ever growing cost of postsecondary education that impacts students' decisions once they are about to finish their high school on whether or not to proceed to the postsecondary level to seek or obtain the qualifications and the skills they need to enter the labour force at a level of skill and training for which we are now saying there aren't enough people around.

I think we need to pay some attention to this. There's no point, on the one hand, of alluding to the problem of growing labour shortages and then not being able to link it to the very policies of the government that may over a period of time have created the situation that we're now trying to address. If we don't pay attention to it today, then the situation is likely to get more serious rather than abating. So that's the other issue that I wanted to draw to the attention of the government and the minister for some comments, if possible.

Making education more costly is clearly something that needs to be acknowledged. When you make it more costly, you're going to reduce the demand for it. To some extent that's a simple, I guess, economics 101 kind of observation that I make.

I was speaking this morning to Alberta high school students who were here at the Forum for Young Albertans. I was listening to them very carefully in terms of the questions they were asking. They're concerned. Many of these students come from perhaps relatively economically well-off families, but they're concerned about their own perception about the very high cost of going to college or university in this province. I'm talking about just a few hours ago. Five or six hours ago I was speaking with these students, addressing

their questions, and I came back with the clear impression that there is a growing concern among young Albertans about the government's failure to take action in order to contain the costs of going to college. They don't understand why in this province there should be such indifference on the part of the government to addressing this question.

Of course, there is in the business plans an indication that the government is undertaking a review of the tuition fee policy. I guess my question to the minister on that one is: what are the terms of reference? Is a reduction of tuition fees, a rollback of tuition fees one of the possibilities included in this review? What's the time line? When would we hear about it? When will the government in fact complete this review and act upon this review? Who is doing the review, and to what extent is public input sought and secured on a very wide basis before this review is completed and recommendations or conclusions are drawn from it?

The next point I want to make again of a general nature is that there's a danger, Mr. Chairman, that I read into the way the targeting of additional funds to universities for faculty retention is being used here. They are certainly targeted to certain faculties, certain areas, very specific areas which are perceived to be directly connected with the economic growth needs of the province. I submit that this is a very narrow view of the role of postsecondary education, I expect more or less exclusively seen as a means of economic growth rather than as an endeavour worthy of our investment and commitment as a society that's highly educated and civilized and is committed to the ideal of pursuit of knowledge in all areas of human activity, be it philosophical, cultural, artistic, social, or economic and scientific.

The result, as I hear from my colleagues on campuses across this province, of such policies of targeting funds specifically only for certain areas in the university is the growing marginalization of studies in liberal arts and humanities across our campuses, and I think that's a dangerous trend that needs to be stemmed. It's not just a perception on the part of a few who may be concerned about this as a very generalized concern. I hear about it quite a lot regardless of which campus I visit or what time of the year I go there.

So there is, I think, a blind spot here in the business plan, in the vision that directs the business plan and the budget, the issue of what postsecondary education and what education as a general human endeavour is about, whether we need to conceive it more broadly, more imaginatively or whether we should reduce it simply to skills training and production of knowledge merely and exclusively for the purposes of enhancing economic growth. Not that economic growth is not important, but to reduce education to that purpose and to that purpose alone is shortsighted, is misguided.

Mr. Chairman, let me see if there are a few other points I can make here in the remaining three minutes or so that I have. I also want to not be remiss in noting that the business plan does include a reference to education for citizenship. Citizenship as a goal of education is a very noble goal, a very important goal for a democracy, for a democratic government, and for our future democratic developments, particularly in light of the risks that we face as we meet the world under the new model of corporate globalization. The threat to democratic norms, the attempt to narrow the view of democratic forums such as Legislatures is real, and we need to pay more attention at the level of education of our young to make sure that they begin to look at citizenship in this new light, in the new context, which does pose some serious threats to the viability of vibrant, democratic institutions and their functions and the role of citizens in determining and shaping their own future as democratic actors in the process.

These are some of my general comments. I have some specific

questions on the budget, about three or four pages of questions, but I think I will now wait for another opportunity, maybe this afternoon if I have it, to put that on the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to continue and look at the K to 12 system with some questions about the Alberta initiative for school improvement. I notice that there's been a dramatic increase in the budget to \$65 million for that project. Again, I wonder what the intent of the government is in terms of that being a continuing budget item and also raise the concern in terms of adding to the increased number of earmarked funds that school boards have to work with. It, I think, detracts from the need to make adequate the basic per pupil grant and to address the problems of that grant being inadequate.

4:40

I have some specific questions about the AISI projects, and I would like to know how the results of the projects are going to be communicated so that all students in the province benefit from the research that's being undertaken. I guess I would like some assurance that the projects aren't being initiated because boards are underfunded and they're using this as a mechanism to bolster their budget as one of few alternatives they have in terms of adding to the basic budget. I'd like to be assured that that's not the case.

In the case of the class size study in Edmonton I was disappointed with the spin that was put on the results. The results, I think, were fairly conclusive in terms of the benefits of smaller class sizes, yet having spent the \$500,000 to confirm what was known from jurisdictions elsewhere, it seems that the government made every effort to downplay those results and to negate the findings. I find it curious to spend the money, to get the results, and then to deny that the benefits should be applied to all students across the province.

It makes me a little suspicious of the AISI programs. I know from discussions that there are some exciting projects under way. There are some good things being done, but I'm, again, suspicious of the context that we find ourselves in and somewhat alarmed at the rapid growth of the budget for those earmarked funds.

I'd like to move, then, from that to the "strategy for parents with children aged 0 - 6 to improve family literacy practices and children's readiness for school." I applaud this strategy and the resources that are being put into it, Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that this is money that's going to be very well spent.

I look at some of the rather ambitious programs undertaken in some of the American states to improve literacy: a state where the governor got personally involved in leading a tutorial project for parents and interested members of the public who were interested in working with youngsters in a tutorial capacity, projects where industry and businesses were encouraged to have employees devote part of their week to reading to children or working with a specific child in a school. Those industries and businesses were willing to give employees time off to go to the schools to do that kind of work. I think it's part of that recognition of how important it is for us to get to young children at a very early age to make sure they all end up capable of reading and having the kind of skills that they're going to need to be successful once they hit the formal learning system.

I wondered in terms of this specific strategy who has been consulted. Who are the stakeholders that they have talked to regarding this strategy? Is there a priority in terms of the communities where the work will be undertaken? For instance, are our inner-

city, low socioeconomic areas on a priority list, where the work will be first done? Again, will we have in place a group of performance measures that will allow us to see the progress on this project? I think it's a worthy project and one that the opposition certainly supports.

The second part of that is the "best assessment 'tools' for describing levels of development and learning in preschool children." Again, a long-overdue project and a long-overdue investment in terms of young learners, preschool children, in helping make sure that we diagnose at an early age any difficulties and the strengths that those youngsters have.

I have some questions about exactly what the inventory is and how it's going to be applied. Who's going to be responsible for the inventory and working with youngsters? Is it one that's going to be generally available in schools, or will it be through the children's initiative? Just exactly how is the inventory going to be delivered, and who's going to be involved in assessing the results of the project and the progress on it?

That leads to the third strategy: "develop an action plan to implement recommendations from the Primary Programs Curriculum consultation." Again, a good project, a good strategy that needs our support. I'll be interested in the action plan that actually comes forward. I'd be interested, again, in knowing who is going to be involved in developing that plan and what kind of time lines they have in mind in terms of completing and implementing those recommendations. Is there a time frame being attached to that work? Again, will there be performance measures so that we can come back to this at a later date and assess progress?

I think the evaluation of the early literacy program is worth while. It's one of those projects that I think was destined to be successful before it was ever undertaken. If you talk to people that have been involved doing it, they're certainly enthusiastic. I feel that the resources committed to that have been worth while. The only caveat is that, again, it's money that's earmarked for a specific reason, and it takes away the flexibility of schools to respond to the needs of students as they best see fit.

I did have a question in terms of: will youngsters that have been home schooled be part of that evaluation? What about charter schools? Will they, too, be made part of that evaluation? I have some questions about home schools and their participation in a number of these initiatives. Has there been thought given to an evaluation of the home schooling that goes on in the province other than the kind of monitoring that goes on by boards that umbrella those students? How successful is the home schooling program, and are we certain that children are being well served with the program?

I would like, then, if I could, to skip over to that portion of the budget that deals with financing postsecondary institutions. In particular, I have some questions about program 3, support for adult learning, and item 3.1.5, other program support. Just what exactly is included in that line item? It's gone from \$9,870,000 to \$15,540,000. It's a dramatic increase, so I'd be interested in knowing what's happened in terms of expansion or just why there is such a dramatic increase and what that increase covers.

4:50

A similar question with the line below it, 3.1.6, the international qualifications assessment. I know there are a lot of students coming to the province, but it seems to be a fairly large increase from the previous budget. Could we have some explanation as to what caused that increase?

As I look down at the grants to postsecondary institutions, Mr. Chairman, I notice, for instance, that the grants to universities on line 3.2.4 have increased by about 4 percent over the last budget and that

the grants for technical institutes – my math may not be right, but I think it's something less than 3 percent that those basic grants have increased. That seems to me not to really cover the cost of increases that those institutions would face over a year, to say nothing of salary grid advancements by faculty and instructors. I guess when I look at the earmarked funds and the growth in them, I get the feeling that there is less and less confidence by the government in those institutions to spend the money that they have wisely. So the overall grants are being kept minimal, yet earmarked funds again, money under the funded envelopes, have grown rapidly.

In particular, the one that I think concerns me the most is the money that's now found its way into the access fund. It's gone from \$70,331,000 to \$101,004,000 in terms of funding those access places, and it seems to me that the major criteria for that fund has been the opening of student places in institutions. I've heard time and time again that the fund does not adequately cover the costs of opening those spaces, that it's a way of controlling the faculties and institutes and colleges. There's an inordinate amount of money spent in trying to get the other proposals and to administer those proposals once they've been accepted. I wonder if the government and the ministry have considered evaluating the access fund from any other perspective than the number of student places that it opens. I worry about the large growth and the impact that has on the autonomy of institutions to determine where they think the resources to serve their student body are best spent.

I also look at, again with a little alarm, the faculty retention envelope. I'm sure it's welcomed by the institutions, but again it earmarks money for a specific area and takes away the autonomy of those institutions to deal with faculty retention difficulties in ways that might more appropriately fit their institution. I haven't got the figures before me, but if you look back over the amount of increase in earmarked funds through the funding envelopes over the last number of years, the increase has been really very dramatic. I think it may have accomplished some good things, but I think it comes at a high price for the independence of institutions.

I wanted to spend a few minutes, if I might, looking at item 4.3, the student loans issue. Again, I have some questions about the loans and the loans program. The government is I think rightly proud of the remission program, and I was pleased that the remission program has now been made automatic. There were a number of students that left institutions unaware that they were eligible for remission. I talked to a number of students who said that even though they knew about it, they were sent running around from place to place trying to find exactly how they applied for the remission. So I'm glad now that it's an automatic remission that they get.

In talking about the loans program, I wonder if the government really does have a good handle on how much students are in debt. The debt that the government accounts for is the debt that's accounted for through government programs. As I talk to students, the loans that they have from government sources are for many of them only part of the debt that they've incurred in trying to secure an education, and many of them are carrying large amounts of private debt that add to that burden. So I think we may fool ourselves when we just look at the amount of debt that's been incurred to government. I wonder if the government has ever considered undertaking a study, an evaluation of the loans program and trying to get a handle on what students' costs actually are in accessing programs and the kind of financing that they find themselves forced to engage in in terms of completing those programs.

I would be interested in knowing just exactly the impact of tuition increases and the loans program on students. I hear students talk about having to have a number of part-time jobs to keep going, to pay expenses. The welfare loads at institutions have increased. So

I would encourage the government to undertake a fairly thorough study of student costs in our province and the ability of students to finance those costs.

One of the other questions I had about the remission program was the impact on students who have incurred debt previously and weren't aware of or didn't access a remission program. Is there any retroactivity in those programs? Can they go back and ask for relief if they left the institutions three or four or five years ago and didn't seek that relief at that time? I'd be interested in knowing if the department has addressed that problem.

With those comments, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm cognizant of the fact that only limited time remains, so I will try to limit my comments to the K to grade 12 level in my specific comments on the estimates in the budget. I note that the budgetary increase this year comes from a 3.5 percent increase in per pupil grants and a further 4 percent provision being made and intended to cover increases in teachers' salaries. On the issue of teachers' salaries, lots has been said in this House over the last week and today, but I want to put on record some of my concerns here.

5:00

It was clear that it's the first time, that I'm aware of, that the government has actually tried to set the fiscal parameters around collective bargaining between the Alberta Teachers' Association and local school boards. There is no question that this is a significant departure from past practice in which school boards negotiated collective agreements with the teachers and other staff and government provided the necessary financial resources to assist school boards in meeting their obligations.

In this year's budget, in my view, the government's approach certainly looks heavy handed, arbitrary, and represents unacceptable interference with free collective bargaining. My question, of course, to the minister is: why are teachers being singled out in this way? The government has not taken this approach in negotiations between provincial health authorities and nurses. The government has not taken this approach in terms of negotiating with doctors. The government has not taken this approach in negotiations with other staff, nonteaching staff employed by school boards. So why this double standard when it comes to the provincial teachers?

Meeting with the press the other day, when they asked me, I tried to be charitable towards the government and simply said: it's unfortunate that teachers' negotiations are coming off; the election is over. For the nurses and doctors the negotiations came just before the election. So it's the reality of politics, that every government, including this one, responds to pressures more quickly and positively on the eve of an election. But once the election is over, those pressures are gone and teachers get treated rather shabbily.

There was another suggestion made to me and that was: are teachers being punished because of their role in the provincial election? I said: I don't think so. Both of these explanations, in light of the fact the government has really failed to explain why it is making this radical departure from previous practice, do meet sort of a test of plausibility. So take your pick: whether it's teachers being targeted because they did things politically that the government didn't like or whether they simply happen to come for consideration after the election, not before it.

Depending upon how you add up the numbers, doctors and nurses received increases between 17 and 30 percent in their remuneration packages for the next two or so years. Yet teachers are being

restricted to – it's called now a minimum – 6 percent over two years. The president of the School Boards Association expressed their concerns that this really is putting school boards in a very difficult situation, where they have to choose between cutting back services provided at the classroom level, including their ability to consider reducing class sizes on the one hand, and paying teachers what school boards think they, in fact, deserve.

So why the government has taken this step is a question that continues to be asked again and again. The government's explanations simply don't cut the mustard or don't make sense. They are not persuasive. I submit that this is a recipe for conflict with the province's teachers at a time when there's a growing teacher shortage, and it's unfortunate that the government seems to be mainly responsible for creating this potential for conflict.

My final question on teachers' salaries is this: how does the minister plan to allocate these funds to school boards? The formula for allocating per pupil grants is fairly well understood, but what formula will be used to allocate the increases for teachers' salaries to school boards?

My second set of questions relates to this government's failure to take meaningful action to reduce class sizes. A report on class sizes, which included a pilot project involving 12 public schools in Edmonton, was completed last November. This government sat on the report until the election was over. They didn't allow the issue of class size reduction to become an election issue on the pretext that they were still considering the report. The minister tried to give the impression that he was favourably inclined to take positive action on this but no action in this budget. The class size report clearly shows that the vast majority of students benefited from reduced class sizes in the pilot project, yet one searches in vain for a specific allocation in these budget estimates to assist school boards in reducing class sizes. The 3.5 percent increase in per pupil grant is there. I welcome this, but it will simply allow school boards to more or less keep up with the inflationary side of the equation and not be able to take positive steps towards the reduction of class size. Why would the government on the one hand provide an allocation for increases in teachers' salaries and yet on the other hand fail to make a specific provision for a reduction in class sizes, especially in the lower grades? All I can say is lack of political will or disingenuous interest in reducing class size by doing nothing about it.

My next question at this level relates to support for private schools. I note that there is about an 11 percent increase in estimated spending for instructional grants to private schools. This is on top of an even larger increase in private school funding last year. In total over the two years there has been a 40 percent increase in private school funding. My question is: why? Is the increase driven by an increase in enrolments in private schools? Is it driven by some other considerations? I think the minister owes us an answer.

There are only a couple of minutes remaining, Mr. Chairman, so I guess I won't start on the next segment of my speech here. I'll conclude by saying that I'm disappointed in the fact that the minister hasn't addressed the questions I've raised, certainly not addressed to my satisfaction. I know he has not addressed these questions to the satisfaction of school boards, and he hasn't addressed this question to the satisfaction of parents and public education advocacy groups and certainly not to the satisfaction of teachers in this province.

The postsecondary students who are expecting the minister to take some action, to give them some hope, to take some action on his promises that he was making to students – and again we find that there's no action on the question of either freezing tuition fees or much less any indication that any time soon this government is thinking of beginning to roll back or reduce tuition fees in this

province for our postsecondary students. That's a real disappointment, I guess, for the thousands and thousands of postsecondary students who made representations to this government through all kinds of means, by meeting with the standing committee, by signing petitions, yet there is no action. Again, I don't understand why, why the government is refusing to take any positive action on that score.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will now vacate the floor.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I see that we have a very short time remaining to us, and I'd like to put some concluding remarks on the record in terms of the Learning budget estimates. We see that we spend a lot of money in this province on learning, but what we also see is that there are still a great many areas where we're having problems with how those dollars are spent. So I would urge the minister to respond not only to the questions raised this afternoon but to the heart of the issues and tell us how in the long term he expects to respond to the issues that have been brought forward, I think all legitimate and substantive in nature.

We're looking forward to getting his responses on this, Mr. Chairman. We hope that we will see those responses before the end of this particular legislative session. The speed at which we're rolling through these bills, it's going to be before the end of this month. I know that puts some pressure on his department, but certainly it would be helpful for us, so if we have follow-up issues, we can follow a particular point.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to the leaders' agreement I have to put forward the question. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Learning, are you ready for the vote?

5:10

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$3,582,159,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$83,000,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following department.

Learning: operating expense and capital investment, \$3,582,159,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$83,000,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

[Title and preamble agreed to]

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 5
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001
(continued)

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[The clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Motion carried]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 5 and 6.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Bill 6
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001
(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[The clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[At 5:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 7, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Hon. members, would you please remain standing after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Now would you please join in the singing of our national anthem as we're led by Mr. Paul Lorieau. Please participate in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'd like to ask that the petition I presented last week be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 12

Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 12, being the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill standardizes sales and lease agreements and provides implied warranty and parts availability for farm implements. It also sets out the process for dealer/distributor termination. The proposed amendments provide harmonization between the prairie provinces and will enhance interprovincial trade as conflicting or dissimilar legislation requirements are removed. Manitoba has recently completed their legislative harmonization amendments, and Saskatchewan is currently reviewing their act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 12 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

Bill 13

Farm Implement Dealerships Act

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 13, being the Farm Implement Dealerships Act.

This bill defines cause, process, and remedy for dealer termination by distributors. The act is designed to improve competition and remove restrictions placed on farm implement dealerships by distributors. Similar legislation has already been passed in Saskatchewan in December '99 and in Manitoba and P.E.I.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 13 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Bill 16

School Amendment Act, 2001

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the School Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill provides solutions to issues that in some cases have been with us for more than a hundred years.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a first time]

Bill 207

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill would enable apprentices and tradespeople to deduct the cost above \$500 of their tools used in employment.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the requisite number of copies of The Special Areas Trust Account. These statements present the financial position of the account and the results of its operation and cash flows for the last fiscal year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table copies of a letter which I received from a Ms Kathy Howery, co-chair, Edmonton Advocates for Public Education. She attaches to the letter results of a survey essentially answering the question, "Is class size jeopardizing your child's education?" The answer is overwhelmingly yes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today a letter from Ms Margaret Brown in support of the Alberta College of Social Workers in their demand that MLAs debate the welfare payments.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to table for the information of the Assembly the environmental policy of AT Plastics Inc., one of the largest employers in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings today. The first is 11 letters from concerned Albertans regarding the severe staff shortages in day care, and these letters urge the government to get involved in setting fair wage standards for day care workers across this province.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter dated March 21, 2001, from the Claresholm Child Care Society. The Claresholm Child Care Society is a nonprofit organization that provides much-needed child care services to Claresholm and the surrounding communities. The letter outlines the society's concern about the lack of day care funding and its impact on child care.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is another tabling which gives an example of what's possible with the Rosedale power plant. This is five copies of selections of the web site for the powerhouse museum in Sydney, Australia. Particularly significant is the amount of work they've done on aboriginal artifacts and space for them in the museum, particularly considering the significance of the site to aboriginal peoples in Australia.

Thank you.

1:40

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two gentlemen who are seated in the members' gallery. They are Jason Randhawa, who is the president and CEO of WavePoint Systems Inc., and Mr. Randy Boissonnault, who works and is the chairperson of the board for the Centre for Family Literacy. As I said, they are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 22 enthusiastic grade 6 students from Erskine school in Erskine, Alberta, accompanied by teacher Mr. Hank Boer and parent helpers Mrs. Terri Kelloway and Mrs. Kim O'Neill. Seated in the members' gallery, I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two outstanding Calgarians seated in the members' gallery. Skip McDonald is a distinguished land developer as well as being a founding member of the Calgary regional health authority board, with whom I worked very closely during my tenure with the CRHA. He's also on the board of directors for the Glenbow Museum. Michael Robinson is the president and CEO of the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, which provides a learning experience and atmosphere for more than 200,000 visitors each year. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very special honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my STEP student from the constituency office in Mayerthorpe, Joel Giebelhaus. Joel is entering his second year at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., and is a history/political science major. Joel is interested in possibly pursuing a career in politics after graduation. I would ask that my guest, seated in the members' gallery, please stand and receive the warmest welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 18 students from Victoria composite high school. Now, I know this is a school with great meaning for the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and I know he's going to chat with them afterwards, but I have the honour of introducing them as the school is in my riding. So we have 18 students, and they are joined by their instructor, Mr. Keith Kostek, and by parent helper Ms Diane Luzny. I would ask them to please rise now and accept the warm greeting of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'd like to introduce to you and through you 22 students from St. Patrick school and their teacher, Mrs. Michelle Armstrong, and their helper parent, Ms Lilly Cripps. They're sitting in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 30 bright students from Lee Ridge elementary school in Edmonton-Mill Woods. They're accompanied by parent helpers Ms Janet March and Mrs. Noreen Megyesi and by their teacher, Dr. Wade Pike, who

is a most excellent teacher, as he was a most excellent student. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly guests who are here today to witness the introduction of Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act. Seated in the members' gallery are Dean Lien, Farmers' Advocate; Dennis Budney, inspector, Farm Implement Act; Carolyn Makowecki, assistant to the Farmers' Advocate; John Schmeiser, executive vice-president of Canada West Equipment Dealers Association; James Kryskow, who is first vice-president of the Canada West Equipment Dealers Association and general manager of K & M Farm Equipment Ltd.; and Don Redford, member of the Farm Implement Board and service manager for Buhler Manufacturing. I ask that they rise to receive the usual warm welcome from this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has announced that the Minister of Government Services will undertake a review of the need for legislation pertaining to registration for paid lobbyists in the province. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to include in this review the need for open disclosure on when and where lobbyists are meeting with the government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not about to give any undertakings at this particular time. Basically, the Conflicts of Interest Act requires a five-year review of all the legislative components and the regulations associated with that act. We'll take the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition's suggestion under advisement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also commit to looking at the rules defining what type and form of lobbying is appropriate to determine the Conflicts of Interest Act's adequacy when it covers issues of the relationship between lobbyists and government officials? [interjection]

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Minister of Energy put it right: it's lobbying if it works, and it's not lobbying if it doesn't work, I guess.

Mr. Speaker, again these are matters that could be taken under consideration as the review unfolds, and I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General has heard the hon. member's suggestion and will take it under advisement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also commit that this review will include lobbying of nonelected officials such as officials associated with boards and agencies of the government?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Justice minister heard the question, and as the review unfolds, he may or may not take that suggestion into consideration.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Electric Power Generation

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board announced approval for location credits to be provided to electricity generators to encourage electricity generation in specific locations. My questions are to the Premier. Rather than a subsidy for locating generators, why not let the market work by having transmission differentials when there are shortages in power in certain locations in the province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I know of no instance where direct subsidies are being given. Relative to the specifics of the question, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Location-based offset credits were determined in an auction format in a marketplace manner that would determine where is the best place to site generation, how it would benefit all of the users. The process took place accordingly, and a press release was issued by the transmission administrator.

DR. NICOL: So they are subsidized.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: if the in-province transmission grid is full and cannot move electricity to the locations where it's needed, why do generators need incentives to locate where shortage can be served by their production? Why not let the market work?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the intention is to let the market work. Relative to the details, again I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond.

MR. SMITH: It saves all the electricity users money, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question again to the Premier: does it save everybody money when, using this method of incentives – are businesses in areas of shortage not being subsidized by businesses in other areas when they have to pay the added transmission charge or a service charge or an administrative charge that's applied to that?

MR. KLEIN: Does it save everyone money, Mr. Speaker? I really don't know. Relative to the specifics, again I'll have the hon. minister respond.

1:50

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of ways that you can deliver electricity through transmission. One is to have the power close to where the power is being used. That, in fact, drops the power losses and results in more electricity being delivered to the user. On the other hand, you have areas where there are long distances to cover. For example, with the tremendous growth in the oil sands we're also creating new opportunities for cogeneration. In fact, for the steam generated, there's 60 percent electricity available on that system to move off. Now, we have to find a way to get that electricity moved to where the people are who use that.

There are two options: to build transmission lines and charge that to the rate base – and the transmission site is still regulated – or to

find ways where people can use entrepreneurial spirit and the marketplace dictates and find ways to put that power right where the source is, thereby saving the transmission administrator and all ratepayers money.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question will be to the Premier. The first chairman of the Calgary regional health authority was appointed in June 1994 and remained in that position for over four years. This individual was also deeply tied to Bovar as an important investor and corporate director. During the period in which this individual served as chairman of the CRHA, one of Bovar's companies had valuable contracts with the CRHA. To the Premier: can he explain the government's position on conflict of interest as it relates to the first chairman of the CRHA and the CRHA's contracts with Bovar?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if I recall, those allegations were raised in this Legislative Assembly approximately four or five or perhaps six years ago, and as far as I know, there was no foundation to any allegations of conflict of interest. I recall in the Legislature – and I'm paraphrasing right now – the comments that I gave at that particular time and how reprehensible I thought it was for the Liberal opposition to try to undermine the good thoughts and the good work of a well-thinking and a well-meaning Albertan. I said that, and I repeat that again here today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Premier undertake to release all documents relating to relations between Bovar or its subsidiaries and holdings and the Calgary regional health authority?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again that goes back years and years and was responded to, all those allegations and all of that nonsense that was raised by the Liberal opposition at that particular time. I don't know what was tabled in this Legislature at that time and what wasn't tabled, but I don't believe that as the result of the allegations that were raised some years ago, there was anything to be tabled that demonstrated or indicated any conflict whatsoever.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: did conflict of interest concerns have any bearing on this individual's departure as chairman of the CRHA?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, I can absolutely recall no incidents and no evidence and no proof whatsoever. I can recall innuendo, vicious innuendo, from the Liberal opposition but no evidence whatsoever. So, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the question, since there was no conflict and no evidence of conflict, it can naturally be assumed that that had absolutely nothing to do with his departure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Conflict of Interest Court Case

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many questions remain unanswered in the influence peddling case concluded last Friday.

Foremost among them is the \$20,000 in secret payments made to the former executive director of the Premier's office of the time. These payments were made from the bank account into which \$200,000 was paid by an Edmonton developer for the purpose of influence peddling. My questions are to the Premier. Is the Premier satisfied that the whole truth about the \$20,000 payment to the former high-ranking Tory official came out as a result of how this case was handled?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what I will say about this particular incident – and it occurred before I was the Premier. As I understand the way this all unfolded, this evidence of the payment was made at a preliminary hearing and became part of the public court records. I would assume – and I'm only assuming – that if the police, on the basis of that evidence presented, thought there was any wrongdoing, they would have investigated. Now, I don't know if they are, and I don't know if they aren't, because we don't tell the police what to do. If the police know or have suspicion that there's criminal activity, they will conduct an investigation. So my answer to the question is that I leave it in the hands of the police, the proper authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there's no paper trail to substantiate that a loan of this magnitude was ever made in the first place, would the Premier tell the House if the government has any evidence in its hands to give it the confidence that this matter doesn't need any further investigation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if we have any evidence of wrongdoing relative to any incident, whether it involves this government or the Liberal opposition or the ND third party, we would hand it over to the proper authorities. If the hon. leader of the third party has any evidence or wants to go outside this Chamber and make any allegations and he feels comfortable making those allegations on the basis of some evidence that he might have, then I would strongly suggest that he turn that evidence over to the police.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only evidence I have is that made public up to this point.

My final question to the Premier: will the Premier commit to this Assembly that he will call an inquiry to ensure that every single question raised in this matter is addressed?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. I will not commit to the expenditure of at least \$250,000, probably a half million dollars, maybe a million, and depending on how deeply the NDs and the Liberals want to get involved, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10 million dollars. No, I won't commit to that kind of a fishing trip – believe me, a fishing trip – when there are authorities in place, when there are highly competent police agencies in place to investigate any allegations that either the Liberal opposition or the NDs want to make.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Water Quality Testing

MR. GRAYDON: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of

Environment. Many of us are closely following the water quality issue in the community of North Battleford in our neighbouring province and wondering if this is something that could happen here in Alberta. Can the minister tell us what is being done in this province to protect our drinking water from parasites such as cryptosporidium, the same bug believed to have killed three people in North Battleford?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I want to assure Albertans and my colleague opposite and all the colleagues in this House that we have the most stringent drinking water standards in Canada. In fact, in 1997 we adopted the Canadian drinking water quality standards. We are only one of two provinces to have adopted those standards. The other province is Quebec.

What makes it possible for us to adopt those standards so quickly is something called a multibarrier system. We in Alberta have a multibarrier system of water treatment. That will take out over 99 percent of the parasites in water, and that includes the cryptosporidium and includes giardia and so on. So with that multibarrier system we protect Albertans, and it will prevent any widespread illnesses that you see such as in North Battleford.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:00

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Why does Alberta Environment not require mandatory testing for cryptosporidium in its water treatment facilities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the first thing we have to realize with crypto and giardia is that it already is in the water systems. It's already in our lakes. It's already in our theoretically pure mountain streams. So, in fact, if you go swimming in a lake this summer in Alberta or anyplace else, you will actually swallow water and you will swallow some crypto probably. So that's the first thing. It's there.

In regards to the specific question about testing, right now the technology for the testing is not that accurate. We need to develop better technology and better testing procedures, and that's not just here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. That's a worldwide issue when it comes to, in particular, crypto.

Now, what's happening, Mr. Speaker, is we are working with EPCOR and the University of Alberta to develop better testing techniques, and that's ongoing right now. The issue is: we know it's there, so we're probably better to concentrate our efforts on getting rid of the parasites in the water. That's where we're going, and once again we're working with EPCOR and the University of Alberta to develop technologies to rid the water of these nasty little bugs. We're working with ultraviolet light right now with EPCOR, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency is also working with ultraviolet light as it relates to getting rid of parasites in the water. We expect to have some results later on in the fall as to how effective ultraviolet light is in getting rid of parasites.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. The recent incidents in both Walkerton, Ontario,

and North Battleford have raised a question about implementing national standards for drinking water quality. What is Alberta doing with the other provinces and the federal government in this regard to national standards?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. Well, remember, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, we are one of two that have adopted the national standards, so we are seen as leaders in the country. A week ago today, actually, I was in environmental ministers' meetings with the provinces and the federals, and one of the major issues that was discussed was the water quality and what we are doing with national standards. We have agreed as a group of ministers to go forward to developing and working with the other provinces on establishing national drinking water quality standards.

For instance, as a particular example and as it relates to turbidity, which is the amount of particulate matter in the water, we have the lowest standard in the country. Our standard is 50 percent lower than any other province; that is, we allow 50 percent less particulates in our water than any other province. The federal government has asked one of our experts now to look at our standards and adopt them as a national standard. I would expect that the federal government and other ministers will be using Alberta's water quality standards as models for the rest of the country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Swan Hills Waste Treatment Facility

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Premier, and they're regarding the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. Mr. Premier, can you tell us what the status of the request for proposals is on this plant?

MR. KLEIN: Yes, I can. I can because I was just briefed on this particular matter. The status is that it's a work in progress, but for more details I'll have the hon. Minister of Infrastructure respond, Mr. Speaker, because relative to the asset it is his responsibility. Relative to the environmental concerns it is the responsibility of the Minister of Environment. It concerns the disposal, so I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we're working with a number of companies to really determine the parameters that are necessary to go out for calls for proposals. The work is progressing very well, and those calls for proposals will be going out very shortly.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, then will the Minister of Infrastructure table copies of the requests for proposals when they're finished?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, these sorts of things are out in the public when they're called, so we certainly will be working with that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier now make public the documents, as he said he would, concerning the reacquisition of the plant when I asked for this information on April 26?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we'd be happy to table whatever we can

without violating any proprietary rights or information under the rules of FOIP without having the hon. member go through the whole exercise of FOIP. If I could suggest that she ask for the information she requires by way of a written question, we'll be glad to respond as appropriately as we possibly can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Provincial Parks Supervision

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many years Cypress Hills provincial park has been the destination of choice for pregraduation celebrations for hundreds of students during the May long weekend. Over time this tradition has grown to the point where over 1,500 young people, many of whom are under the age of 18, gather in the park each year. Recent years have given rise to serious concerns including vandalism, liquor-related offences, weapon seizures, impaired driving as well as hypothermia, missing persons, drug overdoses, and alcohol-related injuries. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for provincial parks. Given that many parents who allow their children to attend these activities seem to be under the impression that park staff are available to supervise the participants, can the minister advise of the degree to which such supervision exists?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cypress Hills provincial park is indeed one of the most beautiful parts of our province. I've had the pleasure of being there. I would say that, yes, there are conservation officers who frequent the park, who work there and staff it, and there are other members of our parks system who are there as well, but their primary role is really to ensure the effective management of that provincial resource as well as ensuring the public safety whenever the public is frequenting the park. There is an additional role of education and so on that occurs within those confines, but I think the issue of supervision is not something that the parks officials or the parks staff undertake for any single particular group. They're involved in the overarching protection of safety.

I would suggest to the hon. member that the issue of supervision, particularly where minors are involved, is much more in the hands of the parents. Perhaps if it's a school-sponsored event, the teachers may have a role to play and/or other chaperones.

So, yes, we do have conservation people there, Mr. Speaker, who are concerned with the overarching issue, but specific, direct supervision of one particular group is not within their particular purview.

MR. RENNER: Well, I can guarantee the minister this is not a school-sponsored event.

Why does it appear that there has been limited ability for park officials to enforce provincial laws as well as park policy in recent years?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the parks officials do a pretty good job, but when you get as many as 1,500 users over a weekend, they can become stretched pretty thin. Nonetheless, the wardens in the area, the conservation officers, do have the ability to issue tickets for a variety of possible breaches. That includes everything from disorderly conduct to issues of alcohol abuse or violation to speeding to potential vandalism and so on.

In this particular year the hon. member would be pleased to know, as I think he probably does, Mr. Speaker, that there is a pilot project under way which calls for a zero tolerance policy with respect to any possible abuses of park privileges in the Cypress provincial park area. That zero tolerance approach has been crafted by our parks people in conjunction with the local police out of Medicine Hat, and I think we'll expect some very positive results in turn.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. Well, given that park officials have indicated to me their intention to enforce zero tolerance this year, will the minister advise how it is they will carry out such a policy when attempts in previous years have been hampered by limited resources in both manpower and equipment?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, one of the unique parts of this particular pilot project this year is that we will be circulating a lot of information in the area through the Medicine Hat and local newspapers enforcing the message of zero tolerance for that particular weekend at that particular park. We'll also be sending out a newsletter to the schools whose students may have occasion to use that park. We'll also be increasing the number of conservation officers and parks management staff who will be on hand to enforce further our zero tolerance policy. We will also be increasing the connections with the local police, and because of the remote distance of the park from a main centre we'll also have provisions for ambulance backup in the case of any unfortunate circumstances. So the safety of the park as well as the users I hope will be well preserved through this pilot project, and we'll evaluate it thereafter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

2:10

Government Restructuring

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past nine years this government has gone from a cabinet of 26 ministries to 17, then to 19, and now back up to 24. During this time they also amalgamated departments, restructured others, and created new ones. My questions are to the Premier. Has the government completed any reports on how much it will cost Alberta taxpayers for this government's current postelection restructuring scheme?

MR. KLEIN: No, I don't think that we have done any cost assessments, but I would imagine that the costs are pretty much the same as they were before. Basically, Mr. Speaker, we have identified Albertans' priorities. Certainly those priority areas were identified, the areas where we needed more work, and where there needed to be more significant political involvement was in the area of aboriginal affairs, in the area of safe streets and safe communities, in the area of seniors, and in the area of children. Basically, we have reorganized departments to reflect the priorities of Albertans. I suspect that there have been no significant, if any, additional costs associated with the actual administration of government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More work for government MLAs.

Again to the Premier: can the Premier explain why the government combined public works and transportation into the superministry of infrastructure only to break it up just two years later?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, had the Liberals elected more members, there would have been less work for government MLAs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how can Albertans trust this government has a plan when this government has structured, restructured, and re-structured government services in the past nine years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, Albertans can be assured that the government has a plan or plans because it is the policy of this government that all departments, all ministries, prepare three-year business plans which are tabled and are made public. Further to that, it is also the policy of this government that we update Albertans on our progress relative to those plans every three months. I can't think of any other political jurisdiction in this country that has that kind of system in place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Pine Shakes Court Case

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask my question today with due consideration for this Assembly's rules regarding sub judice. Some of my constituents are concerned about the time that the court proceedings are taking with respect to the pine shake case. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister provide an update on the status of the pine shake litigation case?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that this is a concern to the hon. member as well as to other members in this Assembly who are impacted by their constituents' concerns. I want to assure the House that it is in front of the court as we speak. Representatives from both sides are looking at sample cases, which I understand they're proceeding with in an orderly and responsible fashion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. O'NEILL: No, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

School Fees

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the minister of education agreed that fees should not be charged for core educational materials. My questions are to the Minister of Learning: why, then, are math students required to pay over a hundred dollars for a graphing calculator?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Included in the mathematics curriculum is the need for a graphing calculator. I talked to my math specialist, and I talked to the high school principals. Quite frankly, there was a choice, and that choice was that the student could write out the graphing equation by hand, in which case

he would do probably one problem per 80-minute period, or he could use a graphing calculator, in which case he would be able to do five or six different problems during that period. We felt that the education experience that these students gained was much more if they could do five or six different problems during that period.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to graphing calculators, the prices are coming down. You can now buy a graphing calculator in roughly the \$80 to \$100 range. For those students who cannot afford the \$80 to \$100, every school board in the province makes do for students who can't and will ensure that those students can get the graphing calculator either by renting, by sharing, having it checked out, things such as this. There is no one in Alberta who does not get the graphing calculator.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how can the minister claim that schools and school programs are accessible when high school students are now avoiding courses like the math course based on their cost?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I've talked to a lot of students over the last year, I've talked to a lot of teachers, and I've talked to a lot of school boards. There is no one nor should there be anyone who is deciding what mathematics course to take based on the price of a graphing calculator. As I already said, if that cost is prohibitive to the student, the school boards will allow these students to rent one or provide them the money to purchase it. I have not heard of any students who have not gone into the mathematics course of their choice because of the cost of a graphing calculator.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what information does the minister have concerning the impact of fees on student course selection?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I'm not the new minister, that I have been minister for roughly two years, two and a half years, and I am the longest serving minister of education or Minister of Learning in the country. So I'm not really a new minister.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good issue. The whole issue of graphing calculators is something we have looked into to a very significant degree. It is something that we feel is important for the students to learn how to use. It is very important for the students to have more exposure, roughly five or six times the different problems, that a graphing calculator would enable them to do. So the school boards make those calculators available to those kids that can't afford them. I believe that this is the right direction to go.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Premier's analogy of our call for a public inquiry on the recent influence peddling case as a fishing expedition, because this smells like a fish plant in a heat wave. Given that this case involves murky issues of money, lobbying, influence, and government officials, it is vital that the public know everything that went on. My question is to the

Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the Minister of Justice and Attorney General assure Albertans that no government officials were influenced by Mr. Jaber, given that Mr. Jaber received \$200,000 for the express purpose of having a specific lease approved?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is asking a very silly question: can I assure him that no one has ever been influenced by someone? There are a lot of people that have been in this government, and I don't know all of them even personally, much less know who's talked to them from time to time. This is, again, a fishing inquisition actually, not an expedition, and it's totally inappropriate to even ask a question of that nature. That falls into the category of the question: have you stopped beating your wife? There is no good answer to that question.*

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Justice assure Albertans that government officials were not lobbied by Mr. Jaber, given that a contract he signed stipulated he would be paid only when the relevant lease reached certain stages of the approval process and the payments in fact corresponded to those approvals?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, the case that the hon. member is asking about is still before the courts. Sentencing happened on Friday, but there is an appeal period of 30 days, and it would be inappropriate for us to raise or answer any questions relative to a specific case. I'd be more than happy to answer those questions, but it would be inappropriate to deal with a case which is still before the courts. There's an appeal period outstanding, and there still could be a question which is raised in the course of that appeal.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the hon. member read the transcripts of the preliminary inquiry, which are now available as of Friday. Obviously certain newspapers in the province have had access to them. He could certainly have access to them, and I think if he read those transcripts, he would have some answers as to what evidence was given under oath in the case.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, can the minister assure the House that in fact he's satisfied that a \$200,000 payment was made to secure the approval of a small liquor store in a small strip mall? Does that sound reasonable to the minister?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP have been investigating this particular case. They raised a brief, which they turned over to the prosecutors' office. The prosecutors, in analyzing the brief, determined that there was enough information, enough facts which, if proved, would cause a conviction, which is the test that they use in determining whether to proceed with charges. I presume that if there are any other issues coming out of that case, the relevant authorities would continue to investigate.

It's not our place nor is it a good idea to ask for the political head of the department, the Attorney General, to direct the police with respect to continuing prosecutions or as to what they should investigate or what they shouldn't investigate. However, the information which he's asking for, all of that evidence was put forward in the preliminary inquiry, as I understand it, and if there are other issues that come out of the evidence that was put forward, I presume the appropriate authorities would continue to investigate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Special-needs Review Report

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many special-needs students even with additional help find it very difficult to keep up through the year and indeed lose ground during the summer only to be further behind at the start of the new year. During the campaign and in my constituency office I hear from many parents and school boards who bring up the special-needs review report and the need to address the whole issue of special needs. In addition, funding continues to be an issue. My question is to the hon. Minister of Learning. Given that current funding levels for a special-needs student amount to approximately \$13,000 per student and the cost of a full-time teacher's aide is approximately \$27,000, is it the minister's intention to increase funding to the schools for the special-needs students?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must correct one of the points that the hon. member said. The funding presently is roughly \$16,000, not \$13,000. It's \$12,000 per student plus the \$4,000 basic grant.

Mr. Speaker, the funding for special-needs education in Alberta has risen from roughly \$158 million in 1995-96 to \$298 million this year, so that has actually doubled during that time frame. The other thing, as I'm sure the hon. member knows, is that in Budget 2001 we have increased by \$7 million the category of severe behavioural special-needs children so that indeed within three years they will be up to the same level as the severe special-needs children. That's an increase of roughly 20 percent for these kids, or \$16 million.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. The special-needs review has been completed, and it is my understanding that the recommendations have been accepted by the minister. Could the minister please update the House on the status of those recommendations?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker. As I've said in this House a couple of times before, we recently did the special-needs report, in which there were 66 recommendations that were put forward by a group of people who were very interested in the special-needs area. Those people came together and gave me a unanimous report. As of this date, today, there are 18 of those recommendations that have been implemented. We expect that roughly another third will be implemented in September of this year and that over the next two to three years there will be a further third. So I have accepted all 66 recommendations and hope to put them in absolutely as soon as we can because they were excellent recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the same minister. Given that special-needs students take more time to catch up after the summer recess, would the minister consider

*See page 423, right col., para. 7

some form of summer school, funded by the province, to give these kids a leg up when they start the new year?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I have had this discussion on several different occasions, and I certainly see the validity of what the hon. member is saying. What he's saying is that the special-needs kids fall further behind than the average student in the two months that they have off. I will sit down and continue to work with the hon. member. I believe we can come up with a solution. Yes, it may well be that we do something with those kids over the summer. I think the hon. member has an excellent point, and I will work with him to come up with a solution for this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Underground Tank Remediation

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is the \$70 million budgeted for underground tank remediation all being spent in this year, or is it being spent over a number of years?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way raises an important point. The underground petroleum storage tank program, of course, which this government committed \$80 million to – we've had a very good response. It's been spread over the next couple of years. We're dealing right now, though, on a priority basis with those that can help mitigate environmental concerns, that have been raised by many members in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what studies has the department done about the effects of the estimated 5,200 leaking tanks on Alberta's drinking water supplies?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say that first and foremost the environmental issue pertaining to leakage is the top priority, and that's why we committed \$80 million for remediation action.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister: how does the department notify Albertans about the potential health effects if they are living near a leaking tank?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member again raises an important point. We're working in collaboration with the local municipalities and those affected owners. We're working with them right now. I understand that we're dealing with them on a priority basis and that the remediation is taking place as we speak.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Minister of Learning hosted the excellence in teaching awards, honouring some of Alberta's outstanding teachers. In speaking with the nominees and past recipients of these awards, I understand the general consensus to be that these teachers are extremely happy to have their talents and dedication recognized, even though some fear repercussions from the union and other members. It is obvious that they value the program. Unfortunately, while clearly Alberta's communities enjoy this opportunity to salute their teachers in schools, I am also hearing concern expressed about the future of the excellence in teaching awards program. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Can the minister confirm that the Alberta Teachers' Association is considering withdrawing from this valuable community event?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, in September of last year I received a letter from the president of the ATA stating that they were in fact considering pulling out of the excellence in teaching awards. They were involved in the awards on Saturday night, and I must echo the hon. member's issue that it was an excellent evening. There were 22 teachers that were given awards, and they were extremely happy. Overall it was a fabulous evening.

MR. HLADY: Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Minister of Learning. Can the minister explain why the Alberta Teachers' Association, which exists to represent Alberta's teachers, has said that it intends to turn its back on a program that honours the very people it represents? What reason has the ATA given to you?

DR. OBERG: In all fairness, Mr. Speaker, the ATA has given me two different types of reasons. The first one obviously is an operational issue. Prior to these particular excellence in teaching awards we were requiring that a teacher would have to take about five days off in order to sit on the judging committee. We have changed that slightly so that it can only be two days this time, but there are some operational issues. There are some philosophical issues that the ATA has with giving one particular teacher an award when they feel that all teachers are excellent teachers.

2:30

MR. HLADY: My final question to the same minister. If the ATA's withdrawal goes ahead as planned, what will the government do to ensure that all Albertans have opportunity as a collective community to publicly salute the good work that takes place in our classrooms and schools and combat the extremely negative attitude towards excellence in teaching pervading the Alberta Teachers' Association?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would not jump to the issue and say that the Alberta Teachers' Association is negative against excellent teachers. I think the Alberta Teachers' Association wants to put forward excellence in teaching as much as the next person.

Mr. Speaker, we are presently working with the ATA to find perhaps a middle ground that we can look at with these awards. It's my hope that even if the ATA does withdraw, we continue to have these awards, because they are an extremely positive evening for the general public as well as the teachers themselves. We heard different ways that teachers were putting across their views to the classroom, different ways that they were allowing the students to learn, and it was truly gratifying listening to some of these. Indeed, for example,

two of the teachers who received excellence in teaching awards were actually in colony schools. These teachers had responsibilities for grades 1 to 9 and indeed were the principal as well as the teacher as well as the administrator within those schools. Some of the work that they have done is truly exemplary, and I think we need to continue it.

Mr. Speaker, I can only say to the hon. member that it would be a much better award ceremony, that it would be a much more worthwhile award if the ATA was part of it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Teachers' Salaries

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are to the Minister of Learning. As a principal a lot of teachers are reminding me that they took a voluntary 5 percent salary rollback when they were asked to help this government eliminate the deficit. They've also reminded me that other publicly funded groups had the 5 percent returned to them coupled with negotiated salary increases. To the minister: would you please tell me how to respond to these teachers who say that the 5 percent was not returned and, further, who say that a 6 percent increase is not enough?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, what I will say is that I will reiterate the answer I've given a couple of times in this Legislature already, and that is that since 1992-93 teachers have gained on average a 17 percent increase. When you take away the 5 percent decrease that they had in '94-95, it shows a net 12 percent increase, and that indeed is what teachers have enjoyed over the past six or seven years.

Mr. Speaker, I will say the same answer that I've given at least three or four times in this Legislature about the 6 percent increase. During the election campaign you heard, I heard, everyone in this Assembly heard issues about class size. We heard issues that involved the classroom. We heard issues about technology. The attempt was to be able to give the teachers a raise of 6 percent, which would make them the highest paid in Canada, as well as having a pot of money, in this case \$115 million, set aside that school boards could spend on what they deemed to be the most important issues in their jurisdiction, whether it be class size, whether it be teachers' salaries, whether it be teacher instruction, whether it be technology. These are the abilities that school boards now have it in order to do. The 6 percent was to ensure that the teachers actually did get a raise and became the highest paid in Canada.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister. For those more senior teachers the amount of past increases really barely keeps pace with inflation. Why aren't you giving these teachers a bigger boost?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I don't want to get involved in the bargaining on the grid. As the hon. member knows, there is an 11-stage grid which is negotiated with the local school board. I don't feel that I have the right to go in there and say that this money must be given to starting teachers or it must be given to older teachers. I just don't feel that that's right.

With regards to inflation, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest, as the hon. member may or may not know, that last year the average weekly wage increased 1.13 percent, which is the same increase that all the

Members of the Legislative Assembly got, which was below the rate of inflation at that time. This year it's roughly 3.3 percent. So I feel it is more accurate to actually talk about the amount of increase. How many people do you talk to say, "Well, I only got 1 percent because 3 percent was related to the cost of living increase"? For that reason it is much easier to talk about the actual increase that the teachers received.

MR. MASKELL: Finally, Mr. Speaker, what steps will the minister take if the ATA membership decides to strike across the province?

THE SPEAKER: That's pretty speculative, but go on.

DR. OBERG: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I will say that that question is purely hypothetical, and I would indulge the hon. Speaker on that one. I would encourage the teachers and the Teachers' Association that it would be extremely negative to the students of Alberta for the teachers to go on strike. This education system, this learning system, is about students. It's about students learning. If the teachers aren't in the classroom, students aren't going to learn.

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the time for question period has now left us today, but I think it's important to have several comments made with respect to the sub judice rule as a result of questions that arose today. The chair indicated last week that the sub judice rule is set out in Standing Order 23(g) of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly. Under that standing order questions cannot be asked with respect to a criminal matter "from the time charges [are] laid until passing of sentence" or from "the filing of a notice of appeal until the date of a decision by an appellate court." It is the chair's understanding that sentence has been passed in the case in question, but the chair does not know if a notice of appeal has been filed.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General may advise the Assembly if the matter has in fact been appealed. If there is no appeal, then the sub judice rule would not apply, so questions and answers would not be ruled out of order on that basis. If the minister is considering appealing the case, then he may rise and indicate to the House that in his view it is inappropriate to comment until the appeal period has in fact expired. He may be in a position to honestly say that he chooses not to answer these questions, and that would meet with the rules of the Assembly. From this perspective the minister, in fact, is in a better position than any member of the House to determine the application of sub judice with respect to that.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: The chair would also like to indicate to all hon. members that the chair has absolutely no idea beforehand as to the content of a member's question but would, however, caution members about making statements about members of the public. I would refer members to page 524 of the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, under the heading Reference by Name to Members of the Public, where it states in part:

The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander but from any slur directly or indirectly implied, and has stressed that Members should avoid as much as possible mentioning by name [persons] from outside the House who are unable to reply and defend themselves against innuendo.

The chair would also like to remind members that any and all attacks on judges or the courts are unparliamentary.

Finally, the chair refers to page 427 of the *House of Commons*

book and notes that it is improper to “address a Minister’s former portfolio or any other presumed functions, such as party or regional political responsibilities.”

Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I’ll call upon the first of seven members.

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

2:40

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today to introduce Mr. Wally Mulder, who is the chief executive officer and executive director of Rehoboth Christian Ministries, which is an organization that has a 25-year history in this province of helping people living with mental disabilities. I believe Mr. Mulder is seated in the members’ gallery. I’d ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: Well, then, hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, why don’t we call on you first.

Rehoboth Christian Ministries

MR. MARZ: Thanks very much. I was hoping that you would say that, Mr. Speaker.

This past Saturday marked the fifth anniversary of Rehoboth Christian Ministries in the Three Hills community and the 25th anniversary of Rehoboth Ministries in Alberta. Rehoboth Ministries operates in communities throughout Alberta by providing work placement and experience to mentally challenged individuals through relationships with placements in the community. Some of the current projects in the Three Hills community include Care-a-Lot Day Care, the Three Hills petting zoo, the recycling centre, and recycling of computer components. Rehoboth provides opportunities for their clients to reach their greatest potential and live as independently as possible within the community.

I would like to congratulate Rehoboth on their 25 years of success throughout this province. The benefits provided to the various communities are very much appreciated, and I wish them continued success in the future.

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

Highway Cleanup Program

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much. I rise today to bring attention to and recognize a wonderful and enterprising youth initiative that took place this last weekend in Alberta. About 11,000 members of over 400 different 4-H clubs, junior forest wardens, Scouts Canada, and other volunteer groups in the province took part in the 25th annual 4-H highway cleanup. Figures aren’t in for this year. However, last year these community service groups cleaned the ditches and adjacent land along over 6,000 kilometres of highway in this province. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but they filled 47,000 bags of garbage.

I would like to acknowledge these young Albertans’ efforts under Saturday’s extreme weather conditions as they endeavoured to clean and beautify our great province. Great job.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

VE Day

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 8, 2001, marks the 56th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, or VE Day. Anniversaries remind us of the passage of time and provide those of us not familiar with the event an opportunity to learn about those who participated and reflect on the sacrifices they made. Just imagining a world 56 years after a war that the Allied forces did not win is enough to elicit feelings of gratitude and joy even from those not familiar with the experience of war. We are forever indebted to the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice to secure our present and our future.

The anniversary of VE Day also provides an opportunity for us to recognize the veterans who live amongst us today. All Albertans, indeed all Canadians who care about freedom owe a great debt to the men and women who gave their lives and/or served their country in our defence. Tomorrow is a day to remember and honour these individuals and ensure that their spirit lives on. All of us here today continue to benefit from the heroic and selfless actions of those who participated in World War II. Lest we forget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Salvation Army

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased today to mark the good work performed by the Salvation Army and to draw the Assembly’s attention to this group’s current Red Shield Appeal fund-raising campaign. The Salvation Army is well known for its dedicated commitment to ensuring that the basic food and shelter requirements of people in need are met. Among other things, the Salvation Army organizes food and clothing drives, operates homeless shelters, and generally fills in where other social services all too often leave off.

The Salvation Army helps Albertans every day. The community is getting involved in this year’s Red Shield Appeal. Some restaurants have agreed to donate a percentage of the cost of each meal they serve to the Red Shield Appeal campaign. These restaurants deserve our recognition, and the patrons who choose to dine at these restaurants should be recognized as well. We can choose to go out to eat anywhere this month; Red Shield Appeal makes that choice more meaningful.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Garnet Page

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of myself and the MLA for Calgary-Foothills I ask all members of this Legislature to join with me in recognizing Mr. Garnet Page, QC, who passed away last week.

Mr. Page had an incredibly productive life, with much of it in service to others. His career highlights included being the founder and general manager of the Chemical Institute of Canada, general secretary of the Engineering Institute of Canada, founding president of the Coal Association of Canada, and the president of his own consulting firm.

His community service highlights were even more impressive. Mr. Page chaired several national advisory councils for the federal government, worked for UNESCO and the OECD, was a member of the council of trustees of the Institute for Research on Public Policy,

and was an honorary life member of the International Committee for Coal Research. As part of his work with UNESCO Mr. Page was instrumental in forming a group that helped the more than 13 million orphans left in Europe after the Second World War. He was also an officer of the Order of Canada. As a department spokesman said: "We know him as the department's coal adviser, a small, gregarious gentleman with old-school habits who walks with a cane and always seems to be having a good time. Talk to him. You will discover someone who has a wealth of experience as a soldier, civil servant, public administrator, community volunteer, and foreign aid worker."

In recognition of Mr. Page's long and distinguished association with the Alberta government I'd ask this House to recognize him for his contribution to the province, the country, and the international community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

National Forest Week

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. National Forest Week has been celebrated annually in Canada since 1926, when it was known as Forest Fire Prevention Week. Its main purpose is to help increase public awareness of the importance of Canada's forests and the need to carefully manage them for present and future needs.

Today I would like to recognize the impressive work done by the Alberta Environmental Network on promoting community-level knowledge about industrial development and the health of our forests. The AEN is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, apolitical, grassroots, umbrella organization, dedicated to helping Albertans achieve and maintain a healthy environment. Through action alert bulletins they let interested parties know about emerging environmental issues that need public attention. Barry Breau is the managing director of the AEN, and I would like to recognize the excellent work done by his group on keeping Albertans informed about the state of our forests.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Excellence in Teaching Awards

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to provide recognition in consideration that last week was Education Week in Alberta and several constituents of Edmonton-Calder were recognized at Saturday's excellence in teaching awards celebration held in Calgary.

Today I would like to congratulate three of Edmonton-Calder's finest teachers. Leona Gordey of Calder school was nominated by her colleagues for implementation of a behaviour assistance program for those students with behavioural issues. Sunita Sahasrabudde of McArthur elementary school was nominated for her development of learning strategies tailored to meet the individual needs of every student in her classroom, and, finally, Linda Steinke of Coralwood Adventist Academy was nominated for her implementation of the SQUIRT program, a silent, quiet, uninterrupted, reading time for individual students. I'm proud to have these excellent teachers enhancing the lives and the education of the children in the Calder constituency.

Speaker's Ruling Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, Recognitions is one of those very positive aspects of our daily Routine, and the rule says: "7(6) . . . up to seven members. . . may make a one-minute statement of congratulations or recognition."

The chair has always steadfastly refused to intervene or interfere but would hope that one day if an hon. member does violate the one-minute rule on a Monday or a Wednesday or the two-minute rule on a Tuesday or Thursday, the opportunity will be there for an hon. member to rise on a point of order and then interfere with the flow. So the best way of avoiding all of this is staying within 60 seconds on Monday and Wednesday and 120 seconds on Tuesday and Thursday.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 9

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak in support of Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of my first initiatives since being given the honour of serving Albertans as Solicitor General. The proposed legislation we're discussing here today is a good example of how we're going to approach challenges in the future. This bill, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, will streamline award processes and focus resources on innocent victims of crime in Alberta. Today I will outline for the members of this Assembly how the proposed amendments will improve the way we assist victims.

2:50

The Victims of Crime Act was passed in the Legislature in 1996 and proclaimed in 1997. One aspect of that legislation was the establishment of the victims of crime fund. This fund was implemented to support and assist victims of crime. Direct assistance for victims is provided through the financial benefits program. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to say this program has helped victims. The financial benefits program is a significant improvement over the board it replaced, the Crimes Compensation Board, in providing direct help to victims. Last year the program assisted 967 victims by granting awards worth more than \$6.7 million, triple the number of people assisted and about four times the total awards by the former program.

The amendments we are proposing today change the way this program operates. They streamline the process by extending the time limit for applicants from one to two years. The amendments also give the program the authority to dismiss applicants who are injured as a result of their own behaviour. In addition, the amendment stipulates that a victim must co-operate with police during the investigation in order to qualify for financial awards. As I outline for this Assembly today, these changes will enhance the program and improve services to victims of violent crime in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the program grew out of recognition of the need to assist victims of violent crimes. Society can and should help those who have suffered simply because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. There are few things more traumatic than being a victim of a crime, whether it's a physical injury or losing a loved one as a result of a violent crime. We can't forget about the families of victims. If a victim dies as a result of his or her injuries, family members can apply and receive a benefit from the program. Benefits paid to victims or their survivors carry no strings or conditions. They are free to determine their own course of treatment for injuries or may use the funds for any priority in their lives.

The application process is simple. Victims or family members fill

out a three-page form and submit it to the program. The program director obtains all necessary police and medical information on behalf of the victim to make a decision on the application. The victim is not put through the additional stress of having to prove the application. If the director determines the application is eligible, a financial award is granted based on the severity of the injury. Put simply, the financial benefit program lends a hand to those in need.

A tremendous challenge to the program is assigning a value to the injuries resulting from a violent crime. How can we assign a dollar figure to a broken arm, a disfigured face, severe burns, loss of a loved one? You can't, and it isn't the aim of the program. The financial benefit program is not intended to compensate victims for their injuries or loss. The program is simply intended to give victims a financial leg up. It's hoped that rewards will help the victims deal with some of the side effects of being victimized. The good news for taxpayers is that the funding for this program is fully funded from surcharges collected on federal and provincial fines.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to explain to the members exactly how the bill will enhance the financial benefits program. One of the ways the bill does this is by extending the time limit for applicants from one to two years. This change is one that will certainly be of benefit to victims. It's often the case that victims are still involved with the criminal justice process after one year. Applying for a financial benefit from the program is probably not on the top of the mind for people going through that emotional and stressful process. Extending the time limit gives people the time they need to recover from the initial trauma and begin to put their personal affairs in order.

The proposed amendments also seek to address a concern that has arisen over the last several years. We all know that a great deal of crime in our society doesn't always involve a purely innocent person and an unprovoked perpetrator. A criminal lifestyle is a dangerous one. It is often the case that criminals are victimized as a direct result of their own bad judgment.

Mr. Speaker, the victims of crime fund was not intended to grant awards to individuals injured as a result of a butchered or botched drug deal, nor was it intended to assist those who continue to pursue violent confrontations despite the threat of serious injuries. The financial benefits program is not a source of income for chronic offenders. Program officials within the department have observed that instances such as this, although rare, have indeed taken place. We're amending the act to allow the program to dismiss applicants who are injured as a result of their own behaviour.

An essential component of policing our communities is a co-operation of victims with police. As a result, we are also amending the act to require that applicants seeking a financial award for their injury must co-operate with police during the investigation. This change is required for a couple of reasons. First, if a victim is truly innocent of wrongdoing and suffered injuries as a result of a crime, he or she should have no problem co-operating with the police. Second, making co-operation mandatory will help further reduce incidents where victims are injured as a result of their own behaviour or lifestyles yet still seek compensation for their injury.

It is important to note, however, that there are special cases when a victim fears for his or her life and therefore is reluctant to co-operate with police. We are mindful with this act that victims of domestic abuse may not be willing to co-operate with police for fear of disrupting and harming the lives of their family. There are also situations that arise when victims fear for their safety and feel they can't approach the police.

In administering this program, we must not forget the special circumstances a victim must face, and we must not refuse them assistance without knowing the truth. These proposed amendments still provide room for those tough decisions. All special circum-

stances will still be considered, and an enhanced review process will remain in place.

Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to bring forward these amendments and debate them in the House. The financial benefits program has proven that it helps Albertans who need it most. The amendments proposed in this bill will help streamline the process and ensure those truly in need receive assistance. By receiving applicants' co-operation with police, it will help weed out frivolous applications and help police do their jobs. Lengthening the amount of time allowed for a victim to apply for an award from one to two years will give victims the time they need to heal and work through the criminal justice process. Considering the victims' own behaviour as a casual link to the crime will help ensure criminals don't profit from their reckless and thoughtless lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today and speak on behalf of this bill. Through you I urge all members of the Assembly to support this initiative as it will go a long way towards helping victims of crime in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Before calling on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, could I have the co-operation of the House to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and the House for your indulgence in allowing us this introduction. I have the honour today of having a group of some 55 students visiting from St. Anthony's school in Drumheller. They're here to tour the Legislature. They're in here to hear some of the activities of the House, and I'm sure they were interested to listen to the Solicitor General make her comments about the bill. They are accompanied by their teachers Ms Lisa Ferguson, Paul Byrne, who is the principal, Celeste Timmons, and Laura Redl. They have parent helpers with them as well. I want to ask them to rise and all members to welcome them to our Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to be able to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three guests who are in the members' gallery, one of them being a colleague of mine when we were on the University of Calgary senate together: Lois Burke-Gaffney, president of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association. With her are John Krol, vice-president; and Stefan Michniewski, executive director. Thank you for rising, and we'll all greet you as we should.

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 9 **Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001** (*continued*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise and speak in second reading to Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001, put forward by the Solicitor General.

This is a good-news bill for the most part, and certainly I'm willing to support it and will be urging my colleagues in the Official Opposition to support it as well.

There are just a couple of issues that are raised with the amendments that have been brought forward that I'd like to go over. The proposing member did talk somewhat of what the changes were going to be, but I'll go over them in a bit more detail, if that's possible.

Right now the applications for benefits are assessed by the director's office, information is collected, and then the decision is made definitely on the merits of the case. Under the Victims of Crime Act the director advises all applicants of their option for review by the Criminal Injuries Appeal Board if they're unsatisfied with a decision.

3:00

The amendments that are being proposed here are saying that the board must consider all requests for review, but it removes the requirement that all of them have, in fact, a hearing. If we can look at the process that is set up to ensure that there is a reasonable amount of consideration given to any request, then it's probably quite reasonable that the board is not required to hold a hearing on each and every one of them. You find in these sorts of things that although every case is different, they do start to cluster into certain categories, and I'm sure the panel members have seen similar situations many times before. There does come to be an understanding and an expertise from the members of the panel as to what the guidelines are and how well any given application is falling into that. This amendment would in fact allow the board to dismiss a frivolous request at the outset, if I'm reading all of this correctly, and that's probably appropriate as well.

We're always making sure there's no possibility that someone's bringing forward a case that's a little unusual and that as a result of that it gets punted out of the lineup because it doesn't look like all the rest of them that they usually have. As long as we're satisfied that there is a good process to review the application, that in fact panel members do have a look at it, which they do here because they are required to consider all requests – but they don't necessarily have to go through the full hearing for all of them. As such I don't have a problem with that.

These amendments are also talking about disqualifying applicants who do not co-operate with police during the course of the investigation or if for some reason the victim's conduct is seen as contributing to their own injury. Again, as long as we are confident that all sides have been heard and that it just isn't an unusual case that isn't getting the hearing it needs, I don't have a problem with this. I mean, certainly there's a lot of misunderstanding out there about what acts like this one are to offer to citizens.

It's quite clear; in one of the places I read exactly what the criteria were. They have to be in Alberta. The accident has to have happened in Alberta. It can't have to do with a property crime or a motor vehicle accident. I mean, all of that's pretty clear, and I think for anybody that's not understanding those fairly simple and straightforward requirements, then, yes, it probably shouldn't be taken under investigation. I suspect that the Solicitor General is correct when she surmises that an applicant who doesn't co-operate with police raises great suspicions about what their participation in the actual crime might have been.

Of course, always one has to understand those people in our communities who are subject to battery of a kind that may take away their ability to appear as many others do. I'm speaking specifically of violence against women and their children. That can certainly cause someone to act in a manner that isn't what you expect, but we

know that now, and we've worked very hard to understand how cases like that might be presenting themselves. Where someone can make it clear that they are choosing an unusual route because they need to protect their family, they need to protect themselves and their children, I'm hoping that this province has grown up enough that we can understand that and make the exceptions for them. Certainly we have enough legislation around that here in Alberta that I would hope that this would not be a problem.

Now, one of the things that I was pleased to see was the increase in the amount of time that's allowed, from one year to two years. That's really bringing it into line with a number of other statutes that allow people up to two years to bring forward their case as such, and that's certainly the case with what Alberta has already done around sexual assault victims, bringing forward their cases after the fact. Although at the time we were debating that, my point was that in the community it's more accepted that the clock starts ticking once the victim has come to a realization of what has happened to them. Certainly with victims of sexual assault or childhood sexual assault, that may not be within a time line that's at all close to the actual incident. But what was being proposed to me from the community was that once the applicant realized what had happened, the clock started ticking for the two years from that point on. In fact, that was not what was allowed in the particular case we were debating, but I am glad to see that we've got a two-year window here.

I understand that this has been viewed by some as a lengthy process. As a result of that, some people felt they had missed the deadline as such or lost their opportunity because the whole process wasn't moving along fast enough and they went past that one year. So having it at two years I think is certainly reasonable, given how long cases are taking to investigate and to get before the courts and to proceed through the courts. Maybe if we have concerns on that matter, we should be directing those towards the Justice minister and Attorney General.

The other issue that's being proposed here – there are two parts to it – is that the panel be expanded by an additional three members, I believe, once again all appointed by the government. I think we've had a number of things come up in the last few weeks that underline for us the importance of the people from the community that volunteer on panels and boards and reviews and agencies, but it also does underline the need for very clear conflict of interest regulations, which I will continue to press for. I think it's not onerous to do this, and it's very advantageous for everyone to know where they stand and what the expectations are and also what the prohibitions are.

So we're adding three people to the review committee, I guess is what it's called, again government appointed. I urge the Solicitor General to look at the recommendations brought forward by the Auditor General when he was referring to a personnel administration office directive, I think brought forward by the Premier, making sure that people who were appointed to various agencies, boards, and commissions in fact had been vetted through the PAO to make sure that they were qualified to be sitting on that particular board. In my questioning of the Auditor General, the department that he pointed out as being the most efficient at this point was Community Development. So that is an area that I would like the Solicitor General to look to and to consider adopting that personnel directive to make sure that those who are being appointed to this review committee in fact have a background and some experience in this particular area.

The next issue. Perhaps the minister can reply or have someone else reply to this. There's a section in here that's really causing me some trouble, and that is the one about being able to request or receive personal information from a number of sources and give that personal information out to a number of sources. I would hope that increasingly we'd come to understand in this province how easy it

is to abuse that, how easy it is that if one's personal information gets onto one system, it can get onto other systems. People have not grasped the importance of not relaying that information through other means or allowing others, innocently or not, access to that information so that they can walk away with it or transfer it electronically another way.

3:10

I'd like to hear more on why this choice was made about being able to request the information from so many different sources. We have here "a law enforcement agency" – so that's all kinds of information from police files; one presumes court files maybe – and "a person who provided diagnostic, treatment or care or other similar medical services to the victim." I mean, is this including like a home care nurse? How wide is the net being cast here? This always causes me great concern, because we have not proven in the past to be the model that we should be when we are dealing with people's personal information. Especially once you start attaching details like names, home phone numbers, social security numbers, and even hospital record numbers to people, the potential for abuse of that individual is increased exponentially, and I think this is a real concern we always have to be on guard about. So I am going to push the Solicitor General on this one because I think it's a really important one.

The third area that's mentioned under this is

a public body as defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to determine or verify whether a person is eligible for financial benefits under this Act or to determine the amounts of those financial benefits.

So always I can see where the minister is coming from in trying to delve into the information and get the background information, but I'm questioning about whether she's looked at what the potential repercussions are as far as a person's privacy is involved. Is there any way that something is being flagged, that, you know, a red flag is going up if an inquiry is made to any of these agencies or medical treatment personnel or law enforcement agencies that the government is asking for information on them? What's that telling someone? Where can they take it and what can they do with it and what kind of a negative repercussion could that have on the individual? We are just not good at this yet, especially with how quickly information can be transferred on electronic databases now. It's truly chilling.

Then it goes on that the information can be disclosed, including personal information,

to any person for the purpose of determining whether a person is eligible for financial benefits . . . or determining the amounts of those financial benefits.

Any person? Boy, that's pretty wide open. I understand that it's to be read in the context of everything else, but frankly those of us that get to hear this debate in the Assembly are not the people that end up administering it, and if it is taken out of context, we're in trouble here.

The second category is

to a parent, spouse, child or other family member of an applicant or victim or to a recognized victim services agency for . . .

- (i) confirming the existence or status of an application . . . or
- (ii) disclosing the amount of any award.

So I think there are some real concerns there about that that I would like to see the Solicitor General look to and perhaps be able to come back to the Assembly and comment on.

Now, the other part that seems to be a major rationale for bringing the bill forward is the ability to appeal. One may not necessarily have an appeal heard if it's designated that it's in some way frivolous or vexatious.

Am I willing to trust that everything is being looked at fairly and everything is being taken into consideration here? Well, you know, I'm a reasonable person. I'm pretty much always willing to be open to that, but I want to know what safeguards are in place. What are the regulations that are supporting this? Remember that legislation is the what and the regulations are the how. That's the real detail, the real nitty-gritty, particularly with this government, that likes to do sort of shell legislation that refers everything to the minister and leaves everything up to regulation. At least this bill is detailing some of it up front, but I am looking for what the minister expects as the regulations that are the detail that holds this up and how we can be reassured that this is, in fact, a fair process.

I understand the need to be able to dismiss frivolous cases. I'm sure that some of us in our constituency offices have people come back over and over and over again, not because there's anything further that we can do for them but because they don't like the answer, and there we are in the position of explaining yet again that that is the program, that's as far as it goes. So I understand the need for this, but I want reassurance that every precaution is being taken to be fair and open to people given the variety of reasons for which people might be appearing before the panel.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I heard the minister talk about shortening the complexity of it so financial awards would be available to people sooner. I'll tell you that I once dealt with a constituent who was dealing with the WCB in British Columbia, and I heard about a program they offer that I was quite intrigued by where family members could apply for funding to travel to a funeral or a memorial service of a victim of crime. I investigated, and we didn't have anything like that in Alberta. At the time I thought: you know, that's probably a really useful thing to be offering for people. Often you don't have that kind of money, and travel can rack you up \$1,000 or more just to get to the provinces on either side of us and stay for a couple of nights. I don't know if it's possible to shorten this waiting list enough so that it's useful for that kind of application, but I certainly was impressed by that service and what it really was offering to a victim of a crime there.

So those are the points that I wanted to raise. I'm certainly willing to support it. I have expressed the concerns that I have with it, particularly around the patronage appointments and the collection of personal information and the distribution of personal information. I'm very glad to see the extension of the time limit for application to two years. I've expressed my concerns around the fairness for the ability either to not hold the hearing in the first place or to not allow an appeal hearing.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak at second reading of this bill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak at second reading of Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001. I support the general principles contained in this bill during second reading. This proposed legislation helps streamline the financial benefits program, ensuring that financial awards get to real victims of violent crime in Alberta. Across the province and, indeed, across the nation people are saying loud and clear that they feel victims should be better represented within our justice system.

As I traveled through my constituency during the recent election some justice issues were definitely raised. There's a perception that

often violent crime is a big city problem. This is just not so. Violent crime is a problem in all communities across the province regardless of size, big and small. A common theme that arose at the doorsteps in my constituency is that the needs and rights of victims do not receive the appropriate amount of emphasis in our justice system.

3:20

Of course, in our society issues are media driven. Stories of tragedy and bloodshed lead the newscasts and help create a skewed perception of our justice system. How many times have we questioned some of the very gruesome lead photos: front-page photos of murders, accidents, bodily abuse, et cetera, most graphic, most disturbing, and very, very difficult for family members involved? Seldom do we hear the triumphant stories of successful rehabilitation and the tremendous amount of hard work required by government and nongovernment organizations to make those positive outcomes a reality. Seldom do Albertans hear of the very progressive programs currently being operated that are aimed at helping victims and preventing crime.

The most common perception is that victims are left on their own to deal with the initial trauma of violent crime. Mr. Speaker, this is not the reality in this province. The financial benefits program is a perfect example of our society lending a helping hand to victims in need. As the hon. Solicitor General indicated earlier, the financial benefits program awarded financial assistance to 967 victims of crime last year. This is a very impressive fact, one that I know many Albertans are not aware of.

I support the proposed amendments because I believe they will help innocent victims get the assistance they need, but there are also other significant benefits. The proposed amendments provide a requirement that victims applying for an award from the fund must co-operate with police during the investigation of the crime. To me the benefit here is obvious. These changes encourage victims to go beyond their distrust of law enforcement and work with police towards the successful resolution of the matter.

Mr. Speaker, I think the amendments provide clear authority to target possible abusers of the program. While the program currently reduces awards in cases where applicants are involved in criminal activity, the amendments will allow for full denial of benefits. Requiring applicants to co-operate with police helps the program identify those applicants involved with criminal activity.

The amendments will also cut down on applicants who derive their injuries from ongoing acts of retaliation. This money is intended to help innocent victims. It isn't fair, Mr. Speaker, that people whose actions contribute to their own injuries could receive the same benefit from the program. I think these amendments address that potential problem.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to rise and speak in favour of these amendments. As I mentioned earlier, the financial benefits program is an excellent way to offer support to victims of crime in this province. Amending the Victims of Crime Act will help get financial support to the people who need it most. In doing so, these changes will help the police enforce our laws.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge all members of this Assembly to support the amendments as proposed by the hon. Solicitor General.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few comments on Bill 9, some questions that I would like to have answered prior to this coming back in committee. One is the additional patronage appointments. We're always concerned about

patronage appointments and concerned about how people get chosen and who qualifies, and if we could get some information on that, I'd appreciate it.

I also see that it says that one of the members "must be a physician" and then states later on that the chair can "designate any 3 members . . . to sit as a panel." If that's the case, Mr. Speaker, then my question is: why wouldn't the requirement be two physicians on the board? I think that's a good idea, that a physician be involved in the decision-making, and seeing as these members can sit in different areas of the province – there only has to be three on a particular committee – I'm wondering why only one of them has to be a physician. I think that kind of joint decision-making is a good idea, and it's a great step forward here.

Also a little concerned that if one of the members does not attend a day or a part of a day, then the two remaining members have the power to finish the duties of the panel with respect to the hearing. It seems to me that it would be very important to have three people there at all times, so I'm wondering if the minister can talk about that a little bit.

Also, I have some concerns, as my colleague from Edmonton-Centre did, in terms of the disclosure of the information to the people that are outlined in sections (4)(a) and (b)(i) and (ii). I'm hoping it isn't quite as broad a scope as what it looks like, and if we could get some explanation on that when we get to committee, I would also appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

Those are my comments with regard to this bill, and I look forward the question being called.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to the Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001. I'd like to begin by commending the Solicitor General for bringing this legislation forward. As the hon. Solicitor General and the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler have said in the House this afternoon, these amendments are positive changes to a very significant program for victims in Alberta.

The changes we're discussing are to the financial benefits program, which was established by the Victims of Crime Act of 1996. I believe this program, Mr. Speaker, speaks to the better side of human nature. The program recognizes the pain and trauma suffered by victims of violent crime and offers them support in their time of need. I feel it is our responsibility to help those who need it most, and that's why I support the financial benefits program and the amendments today.

One change that I feel is particularly worthy of our consideration is the extension of the length of time allowed for victims to apply for an award. Under the proposed amendments victims are given up to two years to apply. I'm also very supportive of the changes that grant additional discretion to the criminal injuries review board, allowing them to dismiss frivolous requests for review. Today I'd like to address these two particular amendments and express my support for the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I think every member of the Assembly knows or has known a victim of crime. We all know the horrific ordeals victims suffer through. It's only fair to give people the time they need for wounds to heal or to mourn the loss of loved ones before having to deal with the particulars of applying for an award through the financial benefits program. This extension gives victims the opportunity to go through the criminal justice process. This process, however, can take time. I think this is a reasonable change, a change that is intended to address the needs of victims.

As I mentioned earlier, I also support the move to grant additional

discretion to the review board to dismiss frivolous requests for review. For those not familiar with the program, the financial benefits program has a built-in review process. If an applicant disagrees with the amount of the reward, he or she can submit the application to a review board that has the mandate to overturn the initial decision. Likewise, Mr. Speaker, the review board can overturn a decision by the program to deny a reward to a particular applicant.

The review board is an important part of the financial benefits program. The problem that program officials have encountered is that there are frivolous requests for review. Under the current legislation the review board must automatically grant a review.

It's unfortunate, but there are situations where applicants may not be sincere in their request for a financial reward. In addition, there are times when the application is completely outside the jurisdiction of legislation. For example, there have been applicants who applied for an award for an injury that happened outside this province or where no injury can be documented. The amendments give the review board the authority to dismiss these requests at the outset and move on to applications that really need further consideration.

One further amendment ensures that authority for the program and decisions made by the board rest ultimately with the Solicitor General. Accountability rests here where it should, with the elected government of Alberta.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I think the amendments in this bill make this a better program. I urge all members of this Assembly to support this bill, and I'd like to thank the hon. Solicitor General for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

3:30

Bill 10

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to move second reading of Bill 10 and provide some comments with respect to Bill 10, being the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001. These amendments will fine-tune the Traffic Safety Act to allow for more effective implementation of programs under this unique and important piece of legislation. With the passing of the Traffic Safety Act in 1999, Alberta became the first province to combine four acts into one which addresses all matters concerning drivers, vehicles, commercial carriers, and road safety.

The Traffic Safety Act incorporates recommendations from a broad base of stakeholders to make driving safer, to keep impaired and careless drivers off the roads, and to provide more effective management of drivers and commercial truck and bus traffic. Since the Traffic Safety Act was originally passed, we have continued working with these stakeholders and other jurisdictions across Canada to ensure that our legislation meets the needs and expectations of Albertans. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, we are adding tougher provisions against people who continue to drive while their operator's licence is suspended and also those who drink and drive.

The four key areas we are amending are vehicle seizures, administrative licence suspensions, graduated driver licensing, and carrier profiles. The first amendment I'd like to speak to pertains to vehicle seizures. Drivers charged with driving while suspended for the second time in a three-year period will have the vehicle they are driving seized for 60 days if the registered owner of the vehicle is the same as in the first offence. This change takes the suspended driver

off the road immediately rather than waiting for him or her to be convicted through the courts, which could take as long as two years. The amendment addresses a chronic problem of some drivers continuing to drive after they have been suspended. The vehicle seizure period for a first offence will remain at 30 days.

The second amendment relates to the Alberta administrative licence suspension. We are proposing an immediate 24-hour suspension for anyone charged with impaired driving. The 21-day temporary permit would then apply, followed by a three-month Alberta administrative licence suspension. Currently a driver charged with impaired driving is legally able to use the temporary permit to walk out of the police station and drive away, even if they are still impaired.

The third change of note that we are making to the Traffic Safety Act deals with carrier profiles for commercial vehicles. We are proposing to allow the exchange of commercial carrier and commercial drivers' records relating to their convictions, reportable accidents, and on-road vehicle inspections with the jurisdiction where the driver is licensed and/or where the vehicle was registered for the purpose of that jurisdiction's carrier and driver profile system. The types of offences would include all types of violations under the Traffic Safety Act and its regulations, including moving violations such as speeding or failing to stop at a red light; equipment violations – for example, burned-out headlamps or taillamps or improper securement of loads – commercial vehicle safety requirements like contravention of special permit requirements, lack of safety fitness certificate, altering a certificate or permit, driver's hours of service violations, or altering weight in transit; and, finally, any Criminal Code convictions like dangerous driving or impaired driving.

The fourth key amendment we bring forward today has to do with the graduated driver licensing. The Traffic Safety Act established a graduated driver licensing program. One of the legislated provisions is a zero blood alcohol provision. Under the current provision of the Traffic Safety Act, if a novice driver, which includes both learners and probationary drivers, consumes alcohol, the police would lay a charge and that person would lose their licence for 24 hours. If found guilty, the driver would be given a fine and possibly even a jail term under the Provincial Offences Procedures Act.

The current provisions would require substantial resources from the police and courts to implement, but more importantly the current provisions may not survive a challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Simply put, the current provisions, which have a risk of jail, may be argued to be very harsh in dealing with a novice driver with less than .08 blood alcohol content. Based on these considerations as well as reviewing other jurisdictions' programs, we are now bringing forward a new model for this sanction.

As a result of the success of the Alberta administrative licence suspension program, which came into effect December 1, 1999, we decided to model the zero alcohol provision of the graduated driver licensing program on this other type of administrative licence suspension. I would like to point out that under the AALS program, from the start of the program on December 1, 1999, to March 31 of this year 11,391 people have been suspended for providing a breath sample in excess of .08 or for refusing to provide a breath sample. This indicates the seriousness of the drinking and driving problem in Alberta and why we need to ensure that our new drivers don't develop this deadly driving behaviour. Mr. Speaker, 11,391 people caught drinking and driving in a 15-month period is completely unacceptable. Albertans, whether they are drivers under the graduated driver licensing program or fully licensed drivers, must realize that drinking and driving is not acceptable in Alberta.

Further in 1999, of the 390 drivers involved in fatal accidents, 89 had been drinking, and of the 23,920 drivers involved in nonfatal

injury collisions, 1,440 had been drinking. To address this issue at the earliest possible stage, we are proposing that the zero alcohol tolerance provision of the graduated driver licensing program provide for an immediate 24-hour suspension, followed by a seven-day temporary permit, then a one-month driver's licence suspension. There would also be a provision for the driver to request that the administrative licence suspension be reviewed and set aside by the Transportation Safety Board. Using this approach along with the provision of the Transportation Safety Board appeal will make the provision of this violation of the zero alcohol tolerance provision significant, timely, and less vulnerable to a successful Charter challenge.

In addition to the four key amendments, there are a few other amendments we are proposing to do with approved screening devices, learner drivers and their accompanying driver, suspensions for Criminal Code convictions, and failure to stop at the scene of an accident. In regards to approved screening devices, to ensure consistency and fairness, we have specified that devices used by police to screen for the zero alcohol tolerance can be approved under the Criminal Code as well as this act.

With respect to the learner drivers and their accompanying driver, the Traffic Safety Act currently requires learners to have an accompanying licensed driver 18 years or older on or in the same vehicle. We are proposing that the person supervising the learner cannot be a probationary driver. We are also proposing that the supervising driver for a motorcycle learner can be on an accompanying vehicle or on the vehicle operated by the learner. Further, a learner on a motorcycle cannot have passengers, except when the passenger is supervising the learner.

With respect to suspensions for Criminal Code convictions, the Criminal Code of Canada has recently been amended so that it is an offence to initiate a high-speed police chase. These high-speed chases jeopardize the safety of other road users and innocent pedestrians and have led to a number of tragic deaths and serious injuries across Canada. To reflect the seriousness of this type of offence, we are adding this offence to our list of convictions that will result in the suspension of a person's operator's licence in Alberta. Currently there are approximately 95 people who have been convicted of this offence. However, they were only suspended for the period of the court-imposed prohibition, if one was imposed at all.

The final amendment deals with failing to stop at the scene of an accident. The current disqualification period under the Traffic Safety Act for a conviction of failure to stop at the scene of an accident does not reflect the increase in penalties under the Criminal Code where there is injury or death. It is proposed that the increase in penalties be reflected in the provincial disqualification period. Therefore, we are proposing that the person's operator's licence be suspended for one year where there is no injury or death and five years where there is an injury or death.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we are making some minor technical amendments that clarify certain sections of the act and correct minor inconsistencies we have discovered during consideration of the regulations.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to work with our stakeholders and other jurisdictions across Canada and the United States on the resolution of other traffic safety related issues such as restricting the use of cell phones while driving and mandatory helmets for cyclists. If required, these could be dealt with in detail in regulations under the Traffic Safety Act. The very successful consultation process used during the development of the act is being continued for the drafting of the regulations.

Once this bill is passed and the regulations finalized, we will be

ready to implement this unique and modern legislation that will be second to none in the country and help us to have not only the best but also the safest roads in Canada.

Thank you.

3:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 10, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001. I would like to congratulate the new Member for Calgary-Buffalo for sponsoring this bill. I think it's an excellent bill. It is certainly going to go a long ways in its intent, and that is to make our highways safer. I also have to thank him and the Minister of Transportation for the briefing supplied me last week to highlight the various parts of the bill that are key and will go a long ways to serving their intent.

When I look at this particular bill, there are a few areas that I must comment on. Of course, the first thing we have to look at is the Traffic Safety Act, which was passed in this Legislature in 1999 but still has not been proclaimed. These amendments that are proposed in Bill 10 will make the necessary changes to the existing act so that it is ready for implementation in the year 2002. Certainly we would support any legislation that will make our highways safer, particularly in these periods of growth, Mr. Speaker, when our infrastructure just can't begin to keep up with the huge number of increases in traffic on our highways. So this is good.

I think, you know, when we look at the highlights of the bill – of course, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did go over all the highlights – there are three areas that we must focus on. Certainly one is this graduated driver licensing program. This is a step in the right direction. It is going to bridge, hopefully, that area between the issuing of what we would know as a learner's permit and these people becoming fully licensed drivers. It is in this area of inexperience where there are a tremendous number of accidents.

The next area that I think the bill does a very good job in is under vehicle seizures. Certainly none of us want to see a driver who is suspended get behind the wheel and continue driving. I think this has been highlighted particularly when we look at the situation that occurs in some of the states in the United States where insurance has gone out of sight. People can't afford their insurance, and they choose to drive without insurance and certainly put all people on the road at risk at that particular time.

The third area that the hon. member spoke about and I think as well is a key point to this bill is the Alberta administrative licensing suspension. This is a new 24-hour suspension for anyone providing a breath sample of over .08. Again, it is definitely a positive step in our Traffic Safety Act.

Now, in the 24th Alberta Legislature we had serving members here from Edmonton-Norwood and Calgary-Buffalo who certainly brought forward the idea that this 24-hour suspension for refusing to provide a breath sample should be dealt with in court.

MS BLAKEMAN: They felt strongly about it.

MR. BONNER: They felt very, very strongly about it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think this certainly emphasizes one of the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo's quotes. I heard him say many times that history should be the torch that illuminates the future. If this truly is the case, then this would be an example of where we rushed through legislation. We pushed the Traffic Safety Act through. Unfortunately there were flaws in the original bill, and that is why we're here today with Bill 10.

What I think we have to do from here is take a lesson, that

legislation that is pushed through this House and pushed through too rapidly certainly doesn't serve the interests of the Assembly, of the members here, because we go back and we redo the work that should have been done once. As another hon. member in the House has often said: plan your work and work your plan. So I think a thorough plan in this particular case and a timely introduction of it into the House and where we don't speed through it is certainly good advice for all of us.

MS BLAKEMAN: Do it right the first time.

MR. BONNER: That's right. Do it right the first time, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has said.

Now, then, Bill 24 was supposed to be about streamlining and regulatory reform. Bill 10 amends a bill that has not come into force, and it shows the danger again, Mr. Speaker, of us rushing through legislation. Many of the changes that we see in Bill 10 are administrative, and they clean up the original bill in nature. It is certainly a sign that things were not done right the first time around, but it certainly does appear that the work done on Bill 10 will correct those issues.

In looking at the bill and some of the highlights, I think that one of the highlights is the vehicle seizure provisions that the hon. member spoke about. Certainly, I think, a positive change with this particular section of the act is the fact that in order to seize a vehicle, the person does not have to be convicted, that as soon as they are charged with driving while suspended, we will have that vehicle. If it does belong to the same driver and registered owner, it can be removed from the road. This puts the responsibility on the shoulders of the driver. If, indeed, they do not accept that responsibility, if they go ahead and drive while under suspension, then certainly access to their vehicle should be denied. So I think this is one of the sections in this act that makes it much stronger and certainly goes a long way in making our highways and roadways much safer. I also notice that this amendment is similar to both Manitoba's and Ontario's, where there isn't a conviction required for the second vehicle seizure to be for a longer period of time.

The second area that Bill 10 deals with is the Alberta administrative licence suspension provision. What happens here is that we were trying to deal with this whole 24-hour suspension, and the proposal in this bill is that there would be an immediate 24-hour suspension for anyone charged with impaired driving.

Now, again what I think also is a good feature in this bill is that families are not impacted by someone in their family that is responsible for driving and is required to drive. It gives them a 21-day permit period, which would allow them to get their things in order so that they could begin to serve their three-month suspension.

3:50

As well, another area in this particular bill that I think helps strengthen the safety on our highways is when we look at the carrier profiles. What this will allow us to do is we will be able to forward records relating to convictions, reportable accidents, and on-road inspections relating to commercial vehicles to the jurisdiction where the driver was licensed and/or where the vehicle was registered for the purpose of that jurisdiction's carrier and driver profile system. So what we're doing in this particular instance is we are weighing the safety on our highways and freedom of information, and I do think that again it is an excellent recommendation in that we are notifying other jurisdictions of drivers who have violated the law in this particular province.

Now, then, a third area that we look at here is graduated licensing, and I did talk on that earlier. In looking at our graduated licences,

certainly this is going to impact our young people more than anyone else, and any new drivers that we do have on the road who are over the age of 25 will also be impacted by this legislation, but again it's legislation which will certainly help bridge that essential area where people get their novice licence and move on to full certification.

I think it's wise, because when we do look at the statistics, young drivers under the age of 25 are involved in a greater number of injuries and fatalities on our roads. The relative risk for this age group is somewhere in the neighbourhood of 2.5 to three times higher. When we look at a comparison in the province of Alberta of third-party liability, if we look at the age group of 16 to 20 year olds, in 1999 we had a little over 48,000 drivers that fell into this category. They were involved in over 5,000 claims. The total amount of those claims was in the neighbourhood of \$69 million, and this represented, you know, about 10.6 percent of those drivers.

Again, the graduated licence is an excellent provision because it does certainly try to address the problem of inexperience and also addresses the idea that these people are not being responsible. If they do have alcohol on their breath, this immediate 24-hour suspension is again one of those issues where we do teach people responsibility. They are given the opportunity, and certainly if they abuse that opportunity, then I see that there are consequences, and these are good. The whole idea of there being zero tolerance on this issue is one that many, many people in this province would agree with. So in the province of Alberta the immediate 24-hour suspension, followed by a seven-day temporary permit, followed by a one-month suspension is certainly a very, very good point.

Now, we also have approved screening devices, and the proposal in the bill is that the referral to approved screening devices be under the Criminal Code as well as the Traffic Safety Act. Certainly this will harmonize this issue between both the Traffic Safety Act and the Criminal Code.

When we look at the Traffic Safety Act and the proposal that the supervisor of the learner – and here we're looking at people that have a class 5. They must have a class 5 that is current. That is also a good addition to this bill and the requirement that a supervisor driver for a motorcycle learner would be on an accompanying vehicle or on the vehicle operated by the learner. Certainly the other provision in this particular amendment would be that the person who is supervising would have to have a valid class 6 licence.

So, Mr. Speaker, in looking at all of the amendments to this particular bill, Bill 10, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, I think this is a piece of legislation that is going to be well accepted by Albertans. It is a good piece of legislation. It is certainly going to fit the bill as far as making our highways safer, and I would encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. There's one point I'd like to raise around this bill. I understand that it is doing some administrative cleanup, sort of, with the fallout from Bill 24 that was passed in 1999, but some odd things are happening. I'm getting a number of e-mails from people lobbying both for and against bicycle helmet laws.

Now, that was decided in our debate of Bill 24 in that it was referred to the municipalities, but I'm wondering if the minister has also been receiving e-mails. Obviously, people really want the government to make this decision. Is there any possibility that this is going to be included in this act or that it's going to be dealt with in some way?

I feel an obligation to raise this before the sponsoring member,

although strictly speaking, I'm a little out of my way here on second reading, but it's not covered in what's being proposed here. Obviously, there's some agitation in the community to have this matter of bicycle helmets dealt with and dealt with provincially rather than through the municipalities, which is the way it sits now.

I will raise that to the member and ask that he respond. Perhaps he could respond in writing to me, and I am able to then pass that on to the people who have contacted me. I know that there are others that have received similar or perhaps even the same e-mail. So if I could pass that on.

Thank you very much.

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, in closing, I'd just like to say that this unique and modern legislation will be second to none in the country. I urge all members of the Assembly to vote in favour of it, and as I mentioned earlier, it will help us to not only have the best but also the safest roads in Canada.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a second time]

4:00

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: This afternoon before we commence Committee of the Whole deliberations on Bill 1, the chair would like to remind all hon. members that at this juncture of a bill, when you go into Committee of the Whole, it is not an invitation to carry on your speech from second reading. It is intended to be more clause by clause.

If you refer to *Beauchesne's* 688 and 689, I think that would be clear there. If you go to Standing Orders 77(1), (2), and (3), you can get part of it there. If you go to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Marleau and Montpetit, you will find it there on page 532, where they say, "The referral of a bill to a committee opens the way for close examination of its contents, clause by clause," and it then goes on later, "Speeches made in Committee of the Whole must be strictly relevant to the item or clause" when you are going to that. There are some exceptions. Finally, *Erskine May* – of course, this is another House, the House of Commons of the United Kingdom – deals with that on page 519 of the current edition.

Just a reminder that that's where we should be as opposed to a wide-ranging debate again on a second reading kind of thing. The Assembly has already made its decision on the principles of the bill. Now we go to the details and agree with them or disagree with them and make amendments thereto.

Bill 1
Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE CHAIRMAN: We have a number of people on this. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you so much, and thank you for the wise words. I will do my very best to keep on track. In Committee of the Whole I can go clause by clause, word by word, sentence by sentence in examination; can I not?

THE CHAIRMAN: You can go clause by clause, yes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Good. Excellent.

The issues that I wanted to raise in Committee of the Whole which I spoke globally about in second reading and I want to go into a bit more detail on in Committee of the Whole, where I can go clause by clause, sentence by sentence, word by word are around my concerns of this being shell legislation, which we continue to see from this government. When I'm looking for what is the theory behind this and the implementation behind this bill, it's very difficult to see what it is because everything is referred to regulation.

For example, in section 3(1) we have, "A rebate under this Act may be made directly to eligible consumers or to a vendor for the benefit of eligible consumers." Well, my concern around that is that there's nothing further around monitoring and enforcement, especially as it pertains to those living in high-rise apartments and condominiums, which is of great concern to my constituents in Edmonton-Centre. I know that this is also affecting a number of other members in this Assembly. Anybody that's got a high-rise apartment essentially or a high-rise condominium that has a single meter is affected by what is happening here.

In particular, I look at section 3(2): "If a rebate is made to a vendor under subsection (1) for the benefit of eligible consumers, the benefit of the rebate must be passed on to the eligible consumers." Well, we've already raised a number of questions in this House which haven't been able to be answered about monitoring and enforcement of these rebates being passed on, and I don't see the real commitment to that here. On behalf of my constituents this is a huge issue. I have a number of documents that have been sent to me from people showing the increase in their rent as a result of higher utility prices. This, of course, is of most concern to those on a fixed income.

I have one senior couple saying: what are we supposed to do? Their rent is going from \$600 to \$755. That's a fairly large chunk to swallow when you're on a fixed income and nobody is going to give you any more money to cover that. I have another constituent who is on AISH due to a severe health disability. They've been notified that their rent is going from \$695 to \$900. Again, that's a huge leap. They're being told this is why. They come to me and say: well, how do we know that these rebates got passed on? I say: well, gee, you know, in Bill 1 it's under section 3(1) and (2). But it's not happening, not that they can see, and they don't understand why.

I also raise the concern of the discrimination that's happening – particularly high-rise condominium owners are feeling this – with a difference in the price that they're paying for the utility and a difference in the rebate that they're receiving in the utility. I don't see that being addressed in this bill, and I've gone through every section in it. So I'm still looking to the government to fix the discrimination that is inherent in the way they've been handling this up to now and that remains systemic in this bill. Perhaps the government will be bringing forward amendments on that.

Again, with condominiums you've got people that maybe sold their little house in the suburbs, and they've moved into a condominium, which was fine for a couple of years. Now I've got some condominiums where their fees have gone from \$500 to over \$1,000. People just cannot bear that kind of increase in their payments every month. At this point all I've been able to say is: well, I'm told that your banker doesn't really want to own your condo, so go and talk to your banker to see if they can give you an extension somehow to keep going through this. But that's not helping anybody. They're just incurring more debt here. So there continue to be huge issues around here that have not been dealt with in this bill.

Now, there was one more thing around those condo owners and condominium boards attempting to negotiate a better rate for themselves. When it's said that there's lots of competition out there,

I'm being told: not so. There are the sort of standard two or three suppliers, and that's it. When you're in the cities of Edmonton or Calgary, the idea that there's huge competition out there and that these small consumers like high-rise apartments or high-rise condominiums have the ability to negotiate with dozens and dozens of suppliers just is not happening. So we now have them locked in to essentially a monopoly situation, and the same thing is happening in electricity.

Let me go back to my primary concern here, which is the shell legislation and the number of decisions that are going to be made that are laid out to be made by regulation. In support of that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to move an amendment to Bill 1, and I will send the amendment package with the appropriate number of copies to the table, and I'll keep talking while it's distributed.

My concern is that there is a real need to have bills like this that are shell legislation bills forwarded to the Law and Regulations Committee, which can examine the regulations that are being brought forward in support of these different clauses. When I look at this bill, it's astounding the amount that is to be decided. Basically once you're past the first section, which is the definitions, and you're into section 2, you start to get into how many things are going to be decided by regulation, which is beyond what this Assembly is able to scrutinize and comment on.

We don't see the regulations come through this Assembly. We don't know what's going to happen to them. I've spoken many times before on how difficult it is to chase down regulations as a member of the public and even as an MLA sometimes. We don't necessarily know when they're being released. We don't know where they are housed. They're much more difficult to find on-line. Whereas the legislation is very easy to find on-line through www.assembly.ab.ca, the regulations can be a real hunt, and sometimes you're not successful in finding them.

4:10

I somewhat mockingly said in second reading that I would be looking to bring forward the Dickson memorial amendment, which caused some amusement in this Assembly, but indeed that is exactly what I have done. My colleague who was the previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo often brought this amendment forward because he was detecting fairly early on this government's move in the direction of this shell legislation, where it gives you no details, where everything is referred to regulations. Therefore, I follow his wise advice and understand the increasing need to have the regulations that would be under this act brought forward and scrutinized by the Law and Regulations Committee.

Now, I just went and asked for the membership of the Assembly's select standing committees. In fact, yes indeed, there is the Law and Regulations one, and it has 21 members appointed to it, including among others many people who would be able to assist in scrutinizing and discussing regulations that would be brought in. I mean, the Member for Peace River is the chairperson. The Member for Calgary-Egmont is the deputy chairperson. We have new members like the Member for Calgary-Shaw. We have members of the opposition like the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. There's quite a good variation of experience and new thought that's on this committee. The committee never gets to meet because the government never calls it, and I think that time needs to come to an end.

I've even heard through the grapevine that the Justice minister and Attorney General may be more open to passing an amendment such as I have put forward here and which, I guess, becomes amendment A1. So I will hope that he will follow through on that.

Let's look at the number of things that would be decided by

regulation under this act and that underline the need to have the Law and Regulations Committee called in order to deal with regulations that would come forward. All of section 2, basically whether there are going to be rebates or not, will be decided and put forward under regulation.

We look at section 5.

The Minister of Energy may, with respect to delivered marketable gas, publish from time to time a national residential gas reference price, based on such factors as the Minister considers appropriate.

That will come out through regulations.

Then we get to section 7(1), which is unbelievable. The Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is, of course, cabinet, may make regulations – and here we go.

(a) defining for the purposes of this Act . . . any terms that aren't already in here.

(b) respecting the determination of the Alberta price and the amount to be prescribed by regulation;

(c) authorizing rebates for the purpose of section 2, which is whether or not we're going to have rebates at all,

(d) respecting the circumstances in which a person is considered not to be an eligible consumer;

(e) respecting applications for rebates;

(f) respecting the conditions on which rebates may be made;

(g) respecting the basis on which or methods by which rebates are to be calculated.

You're starting to catch on here. Everything this bill is about is going to be decided somewhere else which is not subject to any input from our constituents through MLAs or public scrutiny.

Let me continue.

(h) respecting the manner in which and the frequency with which rebates may be made;

(i) respecting the maximum amount . . . that may be made to an eligible consumer for marketable gas . . . used in Alberta for industrial purposes;

(j) requiring a vendor to include information . . . relating to the cost of marketable gas.

I'm still going down this list. All of this is going to be decided by regulations and not decided in this Assembly. This is a good half of the bill that has been brought forward for us which is not going to be discussed by us because it's not determined yet. It's all going to come later in some kind of regulation.

I'm continuing.

(k) respecting the administration of the rebates paid to vendors.

And I love this one.

(l) generally, governing any matter incidental to the administration of this Act or the regulations.

Gotta love that one. That's the sort of just in case we forgot something, let's throw it in there.

Section 7(2): "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations," and then we go into another series of what will be decided by regulations: "rebates to be made in respect of other substances," defining "eligible consumer" in respect of other substances, "specifying other substances," "providing for any matter in connection with rebates" for these other substances. The other substances that are being covered here are propane, heating oil, and other heating substances.

So more than half of this bill is coming forward under regulations which are not debated in this House, which are not scrutinized in this House, which the public through their elected representative gets no opportunity to give input on because none of us know that it's happening, and it's not discussed here.

There's a well-known saying that there should be no taxation without representation. Mr. Chairman, I make the case to you that there should be no regulations without representation. That is what that Law and Regulations Committee is for, so that we can bring that

expertise together. The regulations can be gone over, can be scrutinized, can be debated. This is a committee of the Assembly, so the proceedings would be in *Hansard* and would be available for people to read and to comment back to members of the committee or to their own MLA, who could make representations to the committee. So this is around the enormity of the decisions that are being made in this act.

We can't even tell from this act if there are going to be rebates because it's all decided later behind closed doors by some group of people, the cabinet, without any further consultation. I think either the government has got to start putting the meat back into the bills that are brought forward, or they're going to have to start calling this Law and Regulations Committee so that there can be scrutiny. This is a scary, scary thing. It's a frightening proposition that a government, even if you are 74 seats, even if you do represent 30 percent of the people in Alberta . . .

MR. BONNER: Only.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, it's only 30 percent frankly, because the rest didn't vote for them. But that is a scary thought. How much legislation is being done through regulation, which is not being brought into this Assembly?

Well, I'm sure I'll have other opportunities to hammer away on how important this amendment is, but perhaps there are others who wish to speak to it. Certainly I cannot underline enough how important this amendment is, and I urge everyone in this Assembly to support it. We need to be the best legislators possible on behalf of Albertans, and we are shirking that responsibility at this point. I urge everyone to support this amendment.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak to the amendment put forward by the hon. member. [interjection] I may well speak in favour of it, hon. member, as well. I just wanted to indicate that on my reading of this bill, and I'm relatively new at the function of a legislator . . .

4:20

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair apologizes. I perhaps should have mentioned this earlier. When we're into amendments, we want to have the specific one. Of course, this one that has been moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is amendment A1. So in order to refer to it, we're going to call it that.

MR. MASON: A1?

THE CHAIRMAN: A1; right.

MR. MASON: A-okay with me, Mr. Chairman.

So A1 – I'm just going to write that in big letters on my thing here so I don't forget – is an interesting amendment. As I was saying, as a relatively new person to legislation, I guess I was expecting to actually deal with legislation. I look at this act, and as I indicated when we debated it at second reading, it's really not a piece of legislation at all, Mr. Chairman, but rather a framework for regulation. It's nothing more than a framework that puts in place the ability for the cabinet to do all of the things that are envisioned in the bill and do it without any reference to public debate. That is a great concern.

I went through the act, and in the definitions it is mentioned four

times. The Alberta price is going to be defined by the regulations. The eligible consumer will be defined by the regulations, and a consumer of other substances is defined in the regulations, as are other substances. So right away all of the key definitions contained in the bill will be set by the cabinet and not by the Legislative Assembly. In that respect, Mr. Chairman, it's a significant step backwards from the bill which it replaces. In the Natural Gas Rebates Act, which I have here, there are three pages of definitions contained in the act. I haven't added them all up, and I won't go through them, but it's clear that the first act is consistently defined. This particular one devotes about four clauses to the definitions, and in each of those clauses it leaves the real definition up to the government. That is a real difficulty as far as I'm concerned.

You know, if you want to look at the question of consumers, I think that's a very dangerous thing to not have in the act. I think we ought to be talking about specifically who is eligible, and it ought to be defined on the basis of need. I come to the question of price. We ought to be talking about what price is too high, instead of just leaving it to the government.

What I'm concerned about – and I indicated that in my other speeches – is that this becomes a very, very powerful political tool in the arsenal of the government. We've seen the impact of nicely timed rebates on the electorate. It is of undoubted concern to the opposition parties going into the future, Mr. Chairman, that the government ought to reserve its powers to issue rebates to situations based on need and not based on the need of the government to get re-elected. That is a concern that we have and I think which all right-thinking Albertans ought to have. So those are real concerns.

You come to "other substances," and there is a bit of a definition here. There is a bit of one. It says, "Propane, heating oil and any other substance used for heating purposes as specified in the regulations." At least, Mr. Chairman, they define it as being used for heating purposes, but they don't say heating of what. They don't say heating of homes for people or heating of barns on a farm or heating of schools or hospitals. It could be anything from heating cement to heating petrochemicals in a refinery. It could be used for any industrial purpose whatsoever.

So a question I would have – and hopefully somebody will be able to respond to this – is: are we going to be allowing the government to subsidize a company's heating of hot water in order to generate electricity in a coal-fired power plant to be considered as a rebate? If that's the case, I don't think that's the intention that I heard when this bill was introduced by the government, but it shows you how lax the bill is, how lacking in any real content it actually is. As I say, it's just a framework for the government to regulate on this issue and make the decisions based on whatever considerations they might want.

If we go on to price protection in section 2, again the word "regulations" appears twice:

Where, in the opinion of the Minister of Energy, the Alberta price is or is likely to be greater than the amount prescribed in the regulations, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize a rebate to eligible consumers in Alberta under the regulations to assist eligible consumers in the cost of [natural] gas.

So the Minister of Energy can trigger it based on a price that is determined by the government and based on consumers who are determined by the government. None of those things are defined in the act. So there's another couple of cases.

Chairman's Ruling Relevance

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we are on amendment A1, and you're talking about the regulations. Once the amendment is over,

then you can do that, but you have to apply it to amendment A1. I mean, it's okay to go through them, but then bring it back to the amendment, please.

MR. MASON: I was going to do that, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to deal with the amendment to take these regulations to the standing committee, and it's just that I've underlined everywhere in this act where it says the word "regulations." I just was trying to give an impression of the scope of regulation that exists, but I'll try to be a little more general and a little quicker on this point, because I do want to come to the amendment, and I do want to come to the committee that never meets.

Debate Continued

MR. MASON: I'll just move ahead to the actual section in this act called regulations for the regulation of rebates. It's 7(1), and here you have 16 things that can be regulated, 16 of them, and that's a lot. I think that's really a lot. It talks about applications for rebates, the conditions on which they can be made, and so on and so on. It talks about controlling the vendors and then 7(1), which the hon. member mentioned, "Generally, governing any matter incidental to the administration of this Act or the regulations." Then on the next page we have section (2), and there are four more things that can be regulated. So I count, Mr. Chairman, 16 items that can be regulated by the government under this act without debate in the Legislative Assembly, without public discussion, and the decisions are simply published for the rest of us in the Assembly who are not in the cabinet and the public.

That brings me to the point of amendment A1, which is to refer this bill to that committee which never meets. So I guess I think it's a good idea. If we're going to have an act that's not really an act but is just a framework to allow the government to make regulations, then I think it's incumbent on the committee of this Assembly to actually sit down and discuss that and talk about the regulations and which things are appropriate for regulation and which things are not appropriate for regulation.

4:30

I think, Mr. Chairman, that in the long history of the British parliamentary system it was not envisaged that the legislative function should be usurped by the use of orders in council. That's been a general trend, I think, right across the country. It's not just limited to this Assembly, but this government has taken it to an extreme, and this bill is the ultimate expression of that tendency to avoid democratic debate by the elected people and to place those decisions in the hands of the cabinet.

The principle is particularly strong when it comes to the question of money, that the people's elected representatives should have scrutiny and control of the finances of the province. That's why we heard all of that fancy language when the Provincial Treasurer introduced her budget: we pray that we'll be needing certain sums and so on. The tradition around expenditures, taxation, and so on is particularly strong in our system. This bill is about nothing more than expenditures. It's about the government spending money to compensate for some of the misguided policies and some of the other things that have occurred beyond the government's control that have driven the cost of our natural gas and other energy sources through the roof. So we're talking about this.

Now, in terms of the amount, I note that the government spent before this last election approximately \$4 billion in total for all of the rebate programs, and I don't mean to imply that it was just for natural gas. It was for all of the expenditures for power because of the haywire deregulation regime that we've got in this province

pushing up power prices. But \$4 billion is a lot of money, Mr. Chairman. You could run a small country for that, and this was all done by the government and not debated properly by the Legislative Assembly. Now we're going to set in place a framework that's going to allow that kind of thing to go on and on and on. I realize we're not going to be spending \$4 billion in the next three years, but in the fourth year after that, we might again see very, very large expenditures made under these regulations.

I do believe that the amendment is a good one because it would allow the Assembly to sit and talk in committee about the things that are going to be regulated under this act and would allow some all-party scrutiny of those things, and that makes a great deal of sense to me.

The question comes up: why doesn't the committee meet? I would hope that the government would address that in some of its discussion about this bill. When I was first elected, I sat down with my other colleague and we had to divide up the functions of the opposition between just two of us. There were long lists of things we had to do, but then we came to splitting up the committees and who was going to take what. You know, I said: "Well, this looks like an interesting one. I'd like to be on that." He said: "Well, you can have it. It doesn't ever meet." I said: "Well, why do we have a committee that doesn't ever meet?" The suggestion was that the government never calls it, and apparently there are more committees. I was completely shocked to find that there's not just this Committee on Law and Regulations that doesn't meet, but there are others. They've been established by this Legislature, and it amazes me that the government won't allow these committees to meet.

MS BLAKEMAN: What are they afraid of?

MR. MASON: I don't know what it is. I don't know, hon. member, if they're afraid of something or what.

It really strikes me that we ought to be dealing with standing committees. We ought not to have the government refusing to call committees that have been set up for specific purposes by the Legislative Assembly. I don't think it shows respect for the will of the Legislative Assembly, and I would urge the government to actually call this.

First of all, we ought to be passing this amendment so that this framework for regulation called Bill 1 can be discussed in the committee, and then the government ought to call the committee. I think one of the best ways to get the government to call that committee so that we can help earn our pay instead of just listening to long speeches all the time is to actually get some of these committees going. I think we should. I think if we had more committees, the speeches on the opposition side would be considerably shorter, Mr. Chairman. In fact, I would give that undertaking. If we have more all-party committees that meet in this House and actually do real work and put us to some practical work so that we don't just have to be hecklers against the government and put these vast backbenches to work too so they don't have to sit and listen to us, then I think we could work something out. I really do. I would make that as an offer to the Government House Leader over there.

I think we could spend our time better in this Assembly actually doing real work in a less partisan format and actually kind of work through the bills. I think that it would be more interesting for some of the people in the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth rows. I would recommend it to members of this House.

So I suggest, Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, that we ought to pass this amendment. I think it makes a great deal of sense, given the fact that the bill gives a free hand to the government to make regulations on anything they want as long as it's vaguely related to heating or

energy and hand out any kind of money whenever they want and have complete control of that process and take it out of the hands of the elected people in this Assembly. I think that it is prudent and makes sense, and we might, if we pass this, actually get the committee going. I think that might be useful and interesting for members, and I think it might help us fulfill our duty to the public or certainly improve our ability to act on behalf of the people who have put us here through their votes.

So, Mr. Chairman, that will conclude my comments this afternoon, and I would certainly urge all members to vote in favour of this most excellent amendment.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to stand in support of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre's amendment, amendment A1, that would ask the Legislature to refer the regulations sections of this bill to the Standing Committee of the Legislative Assembly on Law and Regulations.

Mr. Chairman, it was quite interesting to hear the Member for Edmonton-Highlands add his comments as a new member in this Assembly in terms of what his expectations were of the Assembly and the kinds of choices we have before us when we see this kind of blank-cheque legislation such as the bill that we're trying to amend at this time, Bill 1.

It was quite interesting to then hear the government's reactions to his comments. It's interesting that when he talked about this particular bill being a framework for legislation, the Government House Leader said that that's exactly what good legislation should be. That's an interesting comment to make, I think, and certainly a good inside look at how this government feels it should govern and the rights that it feels it has in terms of putting forward that governance.

It's a philosophical decision, Mr. Chairman, to decide that legislation that comes before this Assembly should be nothing more than a framework and that the key decision should be made by regulation behind closed doors. I'm not sure that's a philosophical decision that Albertans would support if they knew, in fact, that's how legislation was being decided. There are other options to deciding things behind closed doors, and there are good reasons for having those other options.

4:40

Mr. Chairman, we have seen some legislation come forward in this Assembly that has been very flawed. I would take the notwithstanding clause that was brought forward in this Assembly as a very good example. When the notwithstanding clause was first being brought forward in here, the entire front bench of this government defended that action and talked about how great it was and how it wouldn't really hurt anybody. Well, you know, if you surround yourself with people who always think like you do and scrutinize things in the same way, then you may think sometimes that very flawed ideas are good ideas. What's always needed to come to the best possible decision for people is different kinds of opinions, not just those who think like you and act like you but those from other sources, from sources that may be dissenting from what you believe to be true. It's that kind of a scrutiny that brings forward the best possible decisions, and that goes for legislation too.

If we could have the Committee on Law and Regulations meet, being an all-party committee, then there would be an opportunity for some very good input from opposition members in this Legislature, that I believe would strengthen any kind of legislation being brought

forward. It hasn't been the case for as long as the time I've been in this Assembly. I'm hoping that at some point before this term is ended, we're going to see something. Just try it out. Just give it a try. What have you got to be afraid of? There is nothing wrong with a good second look at regulations before they are put in place.

If the government isn't prepared to do it in terms of standing policy and committees, then they should be willing to put them out in a proposed format to the general public for some review and disclosure at that level. Certainly we cannot be having a continuation of decisions being made behind closed doors that have significant impact on people and on the ability of this government to move forward without having some scrutiny of them. What you get with government members and government backbenchers are decisions that don't allow for dissenting views and don't allow for sober second thought, an outlook on the regulation where you take the potential downsides into account. We don't see that happening, and as a result we get some regulations put forward by this government that I don't believe are in the best interests of the people.

This amendment that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has brought forward is an amendment that would try to strengthen a bill that is really nothing more than a blank cheque for the government to write rules on right now. We find that to be quite offensive. We find that it doesn't meet the mandate of this government and that at least supporting this particular amendment would go some distance to solving those kinds of issues that we have with the legislation. So I would urge all members of the Assembly to support this particular amendment, and if they are not prepared to support it, Mr. Chairman, then I'd like to hear from them. I would challenge anyone from the government side or sitting on the backbenches there to tell us, share with us the reasons why they do not think supporting this amendment is a good idea.

So with that, I will take my seat and look forward to the input.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. Unfortunately, that amendment didn't pass. That isn't the only amendment that we need to be bringing forward on this particular legislation. We find that many particular sections of this legislation are flawed, not in terms of the writing skill of the drafters of the bill but in terms of the lack of depth that is pursued in this particular legislation. Particularly, I am interested at this time in bringing forward an amendment that will address some of those concerns. So, Mr. Chairman, with your permission I will move I believe it will be amendment A2 on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. House leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak now to amendment A2, I believe this one will be called, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar. This is an amendment that will be specifically amending section 5. If you take a look at that, section 5 on page 2 of the bill, what it talks about there is the "national residential gas reference price." That seems to be the most appropriate place for us to go to this particular issue, which is an auditing issue.

We find that in this bill there are going to be a great many groups and organizations, people and companies that are affected by this bill. What we specifically would like some scrutiny on, Mr. Chairman, are auditing functions for intermediate purchasers or intermediate suppliers or vendors who will in fact be receiving

rebates as a part of this bill either directly or indirectly. We want them to be providing audited financial statements to the Minister of Energy on a quarterly basis. This is a checks and balances kind of system that is important to put in place whenever you're talking about large amounts of money or intermediate steps and companies and organizations that are dealing with the government.

We've just seen over the past couple of weeks through the newspapers an interesting unfolding in the court system of a conflict of interest situation. What we need above and beyond anything else in this Legislature is to ensure that the people of the province don't have to worry that organizations dealing with the government or dealing with rebates, dollars, cash back to them are going to be involved in anything that might not pass the smell test, Mr. Chairman. So anything that could potentially cause conflicts of interest, could potentially be deemed to put people or organizations in a position of conflict with the government, where they might be in a position where they can lobby or otherwise directly or indirectly influence government, that's the kind of thing we don't want happening in the Legislature. I think that's a very important function, and that's part of what this particular amendment deals with.

We know that politicians already are not widely regarded by the general public. They're very low . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Only the opposition ones.

MS CARLSON: No, no. Not only opposition ones. We all know and we've all heard comments from people, from the general public, that they don't trust politicians, that they think they're all involved in a conflict of interest. So we need to ensure that to the best extent possible we do everything to encourage people to support our actions and what we do and to believe that we are operating in their best interests. The best way to do that, Mr. Chairman, is to operate in their best interests and to ensure that we have the kinds of checks and balances in the system that will make the operations of government and those directly or indirectly associated with government crystal clear and that they are above and beyond reproach.

One of the best ways of doing this when you are talking about money, Mr. Chairman, is to institute auditing policies for people who are involved in that process, and that's what this amendment does.

Section 5.1(2) of this amendment says that "for the purposes of this section, audited financial statements must include reconciliations that verify the receipt and distribution of rebates." So not only who they got the rebates from, Mr. Chairman, but how they are subsequently distributed. Very good information to have available to the public. If audited statements are available to the public, this takes away any kind of concern that there may be under-the-table dealings or any other kinds of conflicts. It eliminates, too, any reason for us to ask questions in the Assembly on these kinds of issues. It's only when there is the appearance of a cover-up or information that isn't fully disclosed that people come to us and ask us to ask questions of the government on their actions. If everything is out in the open, if everything is available for us to take a look at and to scrutinize and for the general public to make their comments on . . .

4:50

AN HON. MEMBER: And what would you criticize?

MS CARLSON: Well, don't worry. We'd find lots to do. It would be nice to have a session here . . . I see that there are some colleagues who want to enter into debate, Mr. Chairman, and I'm looking forward to them defending . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll put them on the list. Those that want to enter debate, we only have one person talking at a time. Thank you.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. Although knowing that generally they don't like to enter into debate, Mr. Chairman, it's nice to get their comments on the record so that we can respond to them, at least from this side of the House.

AN HON. MEMBER: Shorten your debates too?

MS CARLSON: You know what? If we had really good scrutiny of the operations of the government and those directly and indirectly associated with them, then, as the hon. member says, we could shorten debates, Mr. Chairman. I know that earlier the Government House Leader was talking about that too.

Well, let's put all those negotiations on the table for discussion. How would we be happy to have shorter debates? If we could have amendments like this passed, Mr. Chairman, because then what we'd have is an open and accountable process. We'd have fewer question periods. Why? Because there are less questions to ask of the government. As it stands right now, we could go 365 days of the year and not get through all of the questions.

MR. HANCOCK: Do you have any good questions?

MS CARLSON: They're always good questions. They just might not look like that from your side, hon. Government House Leader.

MS BLAKEMAN: It makes them uncomfortable. It gives them indigestion.

MS CARLSON: Well, that's true, and sometimes we're happy to make them uncomfortable, Mr. Chairman, when it's necessary to do so. When we don't have access to things like this amendment asks for – and those are audited financial statements with excellent reconciliations of moneys going in and moneys going out – then we do have questions, so then we are required to be in the Legislature. It would be a great day if I could sit here as a part of the Official Opposition and not have a question because I was very happy with the operations of the government, because everything was fully disclosed and all the actions they took in terms of regulations and laws were made on the basis of all-party committees where we came to a consensus kind of agreement. I don't think that kind of utopia is ever going to happen in this province, but it's a goal. It's something that we can start to work towards, and this amendment certainly speaks to that.

Section 5.1(3) of this amendment states:

Audited financial statements provided to the Minister under subsection (1) must be

- (a) tabled in the Legislative Assembly, if it is then sitting, within one week of being received by the Minister, or if the Assembly is not sitting, within one week of the commencement of the next sitting.

That's really just in accordance with the kind of protocol that we see happening in this Assembly now, Mr. Chairman. There's no doubt that these kinds of statements do get tabled and I believe for the most part in a timely fashion. We're asking that this would then also comply within that kind of a framework because I think for the most part it's a system that has worked pretty well. The information gets tabled, usually in a timely fashion. It's available for public scrutiny, not just by us as opposition members but by the general public, and then any appropriate questions can be asked on it or in some cases, as is reasonable, the government can be complimented on good decisions or choices that they've made.

Section 5.1(3)(b) of this particular amendment states that then

those audited financial statements should also be “published in the next edition of *The Alberta Gazette* after being received by the Minister.” Also, Mr. Chairman, once again a formality. We just want these statements to be handled in accordance with the generally accepted principles that other statements are handled with.

I’d be very interested to get the feedback from the Auditor General on this particular amendment. I think, knowing the kind of integrity he brings to his office and the scrutiny he likes to have in various functions, that he would support this amendment. I can’t speak for him. It would be nice if we could have some feedback on this, but it seems like a reasonable expectation. We have seen him over the years, in fact every year that he’s been the Auditor General, put some comments in the AG’s report about the lack of control on reporting procedures in reporting back to the government that there are for some of these organizations that operate at what I would call quasi arm’s length.

The delegated authorities are a good example of that and some of the other associations that are indirectly related to government operations. We often see recommendations coming forward from him that ask for more information or more auditing requirements or more detail being provided in terms of how the dollars are receipted and disbursed. So I’m pretty sure, in taking a look at this amendment, that the AG would also support this kind of scrutiny happening.

It could be, too, that there are other organizations that we should be asking for this on, Mr. Chairman, at this time, but it’s a little tough to make those decisions now, when what we see here is basically a framework of a bill and no detail. Once the regulations are established and made public, which is going to be way after the fact of them happening and before we get to know about them, it could be that there are other sections here that also should be subjected to an auditing requirement. If that’s the case, then we’ll have to deal with those issues in other sittings of this Legislature and through other formats, because we won’t have the ability to scrutinize the details of this particular bill because it will have been decided by regulation long after the bill itself has been passed. That itself is an issue for us and something that we’re not very happy with.

It would be nice just once in this Legislature to see a substantive bill come in that has the detail in it in terms of exactly what the government wants to do and where it expects to go. But it isn’t going to happen with this bill, Mr. Chairman, and ever more so the reason for people in this Legislature to support this particular amendment, A2, that adds an auditing function into Bill 1 for intermediate purchasers, suppliers, and vendors.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on amendment A2.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I’m really thrilled to see this amendment being brought forward because it goes part of the way to addressing the concern that I have raised repeatedly around these rebates. I have a lot of apartments in Edmonton-Centre, but many of the members do. I’m sure we’ve all heard from constituents who are very concerned and also very confused because they hear that there are rebates out there, they know that their friends and relatives who are living in single-family dwellings are receiving rebates, I think in all cases better rebates than they in fact are getting in the apartments, but they really don’t have any way of sort of proving that. They want to be able to see the flow-through, and this amendment would be giving them something that they could access. It’s suggesting that the audits for the flow-throughs be tabled in the

Legislature. They could get them through the sessional papers. When that happens, they could maybe even access them on-line to be able to see how much their particular apartment complex property managers received in rebate and how much went flowing through to the members.

5:00

You know, I don’t know how to answer these people, particularly those in a vulnerable position like seniors or people that are on supports for independence or on AISH or on a disability pension. How do I answer the questions they bring me: “I thought there was going to be a rebate. Show me where the rebate is. Why am I not getting my rebate?” I’m trying to explain to them: “Well, you’re not getting it directly because you live in an apartment building that is single metered and large enough to be consuming more than the base rate of energy. It’s going through to whoever is receiving the bill. That’s who receives the rebate.” You sort of walk through it with them, and you say: “Well, are you receiving a bill?” “No, we’re not.” “Well, then you don’t get the rebate. It’s going through to the property management company or the building owner or whoever is getting the bill.” They just don’t understand where the money went, especially when they’re looking at their rent going up.

Now, some responsible building owners and managers have made a point of giving a reckoning of how their expenses have gone up in a number of areas, and therefore even though they have given consideration for an energy rebate, there are still additional costs and the rents are going up. But right now in many of our areas there are all kinds of reasons why rent is going up, and they can’t distinguish amongst those where the energy rebates are. I’ve got a number of apartments where they had a very high vacancy rate for a number of years, so the owners didn’t do much to fix the place up. Then the vacancy rates started to drop, and all of a sudden there was great interest in putting some money in and spiffing the place up a bit and maybe encouraging some of the longer standing renters to move out. Then they could rent the place for a much higher price rather than sort of incrementally raising it with an existing tenant.

There’s that reason for it. There are costs in all kinds of other areas that are going up. But they don’t get this kind of reckoning from people, and they don’t understand why they’re not actually seeing their rent go down. In the debate on amendment A1, which was asking that regulations be referred to the Law and Regulations Committee, I talked about the need for something like this, for some kind of explanation of how this money was supposed to be flowing through to people. I talked about those tenants that are receiving substantial increases in their monthly rent, and they are saying: “Well, how is this balanced against this rebate?” It’s supposed to be a \$150 gas rebate a month, but in fact it isn’t because they’re in an apartment building, so they’re going by \$6 a gigajoule and people are not seeing their rents going down; they’re seeing them go up substantially.

I really like the idea that the purchasers, suppliers, or vendors who receive rebates directly or indirectly would provide these audited statements to the minister on a quarterly basis, and those would then be including reconciliations that verify the receipt and distribution of the rebates. That’s exactly what we’re looking for. This would really help. Then the minister would be obliged to table them in the Assembly at the first possible opportunity. That would allow me, even, on behalf of my constituents to get the audit for that particular time period and go back to the constituent or to the building and say, “See here, they did pass this on to you,” or perhaps in a worst case scenario, which I hope would never happen, that there’s some question about whether in fact they did pass them on.

Right now property managers and apartment building owners are

under no obligation to give any kind of reckoning. They have to abide by existing legislation like the Residential Tenancies Act and the Housing Act and just give people the three months' notice to increase their rent, and that's it. They don't have to give any other verification of anything, just the three months' notice.

You know, we already have a problem with affordable housing not only in this city but across the province. We continue to have a market that is pushing people out of affordable living circumstances, yet we have nothing else that they can move into that is as safe or in a safe neighbourhood or has the amenities in the apartment that they need. When I say "amenities," I'm not talking about swimming pools and Jacuzzis and things. For a lot of these folks the amenities are an elevator rather than having to walk up five floors.

MR. MASON: A security system.

MS BLAKEMAN: Or a security system, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands is suggesting. Absolutely. Perhaps even good lighting or a bannister in the hallways. Those kinds of things become really important to people.

There's a great frustration out there and increasingly a great distrust. You're often going to have a group of people who are struggling, who are looking around and saying: "Who's benefiting here? Who's getting something that I'm not getting, and why is it happening?" When they look at owners that appear to be making lots of money, they don't understand why they're then making even more money on the backs of the renters. This allows the building owners and managers to also be able to defend themselves, to be able to give this accounting and say: "You know, I am a good owner. I am a good manager. We are doing everything that we can for you as a renter."

I'm just seeing a situation where a lot of people are getting pushed out of reasonable – well, pushed out. I mean, that's strong wording. They feel that they're in a position where they're going to have to make a choice to change their housing arrangements, and they don't feel that they have any other choice to make. So, yes, there's no question they feel that they've been pushed out or forced to look for accommodation that is less expensive and therefore in many ways less safe, more troublesome, not as accessible for them, further off the bus route or the LRT line, maybe not in a neighbourhood that's as close to parks or playgrounds or grocery stores or whatever. It's very real for a lot of people.

I think in this Assembly every April, based on whatever the weekly wage index is, everybody in here gets a raise, but that isn't happening out there. There's a disconnect between the people that are sitting in here and many of the people we're representing. I understand that I may well be representing a community whose household income is below, and sometimes substantially below, other members' in here, but they're still Albertans. I think they still deserve respect. Certainly it costs all of us if we end up with that kind of domino effect where everybody's getting pushed into lower quality accommodation. You're pushing some people out the other end.

So I'm really pleased to see an amendment like this brought in. It's very simple. It's very straightforward. It's allowing for accountability. This government loves to stand up and say that it's open and accountable, but almost every day I'm in here, there are examples of how it isn't open and accountable. The opposition and the third party are constantly bringing forward suggestions about how the government could actually be open and accountable.

We have a strange sort of Orwellian twist with language in this Assembly. I'm expecting any day now to have a new ministry established and a minister appointed as the minister of truth because of the way we skew language here. It is a bizarre situation here.

There is a disconnect between the people that are sitting in here making decisions and the lives that people are really living.

When we look at issues like accountability and transparency, that's exactly what this amendment, A2, is trying to get at. It is trying to set it up so that there is accountability, and it's requiring the vendors and the suppliers who are receiving rebates to provide audited statements to the Minister of Energy and that the audited statements are very clear and include verification of reconciliations that verify the receipt and distribution of rebates. Then they're tabled in the House so that everybody can have a look at them, so that we can do our jobs as MLAs and representatives and take that information back to them and say: "You see, there was a rebate that came through to this apartment building. It was X amount. It was passed through to you."

5:10

In some cases, you know, we may well be saying: "Your rent would have been that much higher. Your rental increase would have been much larger if this rebate wasn't in place." But, frankly, right now I can't say that to them because I have no idea what the deal was. I have no idea of what the rebate was that the management company or the owner received as a rebate on behalf of a given building. They are not required at this point to pass that information on in any kind of written form. A number of times we've asked the question in this Assembly – I've personally gotten up and asked it a number of times – and the response back from the minister or from the Premier is always: well, we hope they're going to do that; well, we trust that they're going to do that. It would be really nice if they would let people know. Hope, trust, and niceness doesn't necessarily exist outside of this Assembly, and I'm looking for something that's a bit more concrete that can be tabled in here.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I wonder if you would help us out. In a few moments we are going to have a required vote that has to be in Assembly, so that means we have to have the motion to rise and report progress. We have to have a vote on that. Then we have to have the report given in the House, and then we might carry on. So if you'd oblige.

MS BLAKEMAN: I'm assuming that you would like me to oblige by adjourning debate on this amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Rise and report progress. Yes.

MS BLAKEMAN: Rise and report progress. Thank you. I'm happy to do that.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 1.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 19(1)(c) I must now put the question on the following motion for consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane and seconded by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Motions**

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

17. Mr. Hancock moved on behalf of Mr. Klein:

Be it resolved that the address in reply to the Speech from the

Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the last motion and my alacrity with that, I think I should move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we can return in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly be now adjourned until 8 p.m. and when we meet at 8 p.m., it will be in Committee of Supply. All those in favour of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Motion is carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 7, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/07

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

Gaming

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you. Good evening, Mr. Chairman and hon. members. I'm pleased to begin my opening remarks this evening by introducing three officials who are part of Alberta Gaming and who are seated in the members' gallery. These gentlemen are part of the dedicated and talented team of individuals who work very diligently on behalf of Albertans: first of all, Norm Peterson, deputy minister; Gerry Brygidyr, director of business management and policy gaming; and Ron Crosby, executive director of finance for the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. I'd also like to introduce my EA, Jeremy Chorney.

The Ministry of Gaming includes the Department of Gaming; the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, otherwise known as AGLC; and the Alberta Gaming Research Council. The ministry is also responsible for the Racing Corporation Act. The Department of Gaming includes business management and policy, communications, lottery funding programs including the community lottery board grant program and the community facility enhancement program. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission licenses, regulates, and monitors gaming and liquor activities in Alberta. The Alberta Gaming Research Council is a broad-based advisory group that directs the research activities of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute.

There have been many highlights and achievements for the ministry over the past year. Possibly the most significant has been the development of the First Nations gaming policy. This policy is in keeping with Alberta's unique charitable gaming model and is the result of discussion and dialogue between the government and Alberta First Nations. It's also an important part of the gaming licensing policy review. The AGLC is reviewing gaming licensing policies and processes to better address future changes and possible growth in Alberta's gaming industry. This process has involved the participation of stakeholders, including the gaming industry, municipalities, First Nations, and charitable organizations. Completion of the licensing policy review is expected later this summer, with the existing freeze on gaming expansion remaining in place until that time.

At Alberta Gaming our vision is "to balance choice and responsibility in [Alberta's] gaming and liquor industries," use revenues from these activities to benefit Albertans, and provide "opportunity for competition and enhanced services in [the] liquor and gaming industries." Our mission statement is

to ensure integrity, transparency, disclosure, public consultation and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries to achieve the maximum benefit for Albertans.

The Ministry of Gaming has identified three core businesses in its 2001-2004 business plan:

1. Develop provincial gaming and liquor legislation and policy, and regulate the gaming and liquor industries in accordance with legislation and policy;

2. Manage the Alberta Lottery Fund and administer designated lottery-funded programs to support Alberta communities; and
3. Support leading-edge research on gaming and liquor issues in Alberta.

We've crafted the following key goals, strategies, and measures to assist us in fulfilling our commitment to Albertans. Goal 1: Alberta Gaming is committed to ensuring that gaming and liquor policies in this province strike "a balance between social responsibility and economic benefit to Albertans." Key strategies to achieve this are monitoring emerging issues and trends, looking to policies and regulations of other jurisdictions, and ensuring Albertans and stakeholders are not only aware of but supportive of our gaming and liquor policies.

Goal 2: Alberta Gaming is also committed to continuing to use 100 percent of lottery revenues to support charitable, not-for-profit, and community-based initiatives through the Alberta lottery fund and various grant programs and foundations it supports. Over 8,000 initiatives are funded each year.

Goal 3: the ministry is committed to being a key "partner in leading-edge gaming and liquor research." Through the Gaming Research Council and the institute we will continue to support research into and inform Albertans of the social and economic aspects of gaming. We will also continue our partnership with AADAC and the gaming and liquor industries to develop programs for the prevention and treatment of alcohol abuse and problem gambling.

AADAC, including its problem gambling programs, is funded through the Alberta lottery fund. AADAC funding for the 2001-2002 year is \$45.6 million, which is an increase of \$12.3 million from the previous year. AADAC will receive \$3.7 million in funding in relation to problem gambling programs specifically for this fiscal year.

AGLC consists of a board and a corporation. The corporation acts as the operational arm of the organization and is responsible for the administration and day-to-day operations of AGLC. The board is responsible for policy and regulatory matters. AGLC licenses, regulates, and monitors all gaming and liquor activities in the province and its mission is "to ensure that gaming and liquor activities in Alberta are conducted with integrity and social responsibility and to maximize long term benefits for Albertans."

The AGLC has identified three core businesses in its 2001-2004 business plan:

1. License and regulate liquor activities.
2. License and regulate charitable gaming activities.
3. Conduct and manage provincial gaming activities – video lottery terminals, slot machines and lottery ticket sales.

Again, we have established key goals, strategies, and measures that will help us to fulfill these commitments to Albertans. Among these are: firstly, the AGLC is committed to "develop liquor policy and conduct licensing activities in accordance with the Gaming and Liquor Act and Regulation." The AGLC has set performance measures to help evaluate licensing compliance to policies and regulations as well as licensing satisfaction with the level of service the AGLC provides.

Goal 2. The AGLC is committed to

develop gaming policy and conduct licensing activities under the authority of the Criminal Code of Canada and in accordance with the Gaming and Liquor Act and Regulation.

It's also committed to ensuring that "all gaming activities, use of proceeds and financial reporting are conducted according to legislation and policy." Key strategies to help fulfill these goals include developing and implementing "policy on eligibility criteria and use of proceeds by charitable organizations" as well as implementing "the policy direction arising from the [ongoing] licensing policy review."

Goal 3. The third goal reinforces AGLC's continuing commitment to ensuring the "integrity, security and operational efficiencies" of our video lottery, casino and ticket lottery network. Key strategies in support of this include reviewing "security requirements," establishing "performance standards" for the gaming network, and implementing a "replacement strategy" for aging terminals and the central network monitoring system. The AGLC will also be measuring retailer satisfaction with AGLC services and ensuring that the "Alberta Lottery Fund revenues are collected in a timely and efficient manner . . . in accordance with legislation and Treasury Board directives."

Total revenue from gaming and liquor activities in 2001-2002 is forecast to be approximately \$1.5 billion, an increase of approximately \$70.5 million from last year. Liquor revenues are estimated at \$478 million and gaming revenue is estimated at approximately \$1 billion. All gaming revenue is deposited in the Alberta lottery fund. That revenue goes back to Albertans and our communities. It supports over 8,000 projects and initiatives every year.

Details of the 2001-2002 gaming revenue forecast, which represent an increase of \$62.6 million includes: VLTs, \$547 million; slots, \$308 million; tickets, \$154 million; interest, \$6 million, for a total of \$1 billion. As substantial as these gaming dollar amounts may seem, it's important to keep them in context. Five years ago, in 1995-96, gaming revenue was about 4 percent of total provincial revenue. Today gaming revenue remains approximately 4 percent of total provincial revenue of \$22.7 billion.

Our business plans contain a number of key strategies that reflect our commitment to developing policy that strikes "a balance between choice and responsibility in [Alberta's] gaming and liquor activities." The business plans also reflect our commitment to maintaining the highest quality of integrity, transparency, and openness in gaming and liquor activities.

8:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I regret to interrupt the minister, but the time has run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to be the first to react to the budget for the Department of Gaming that is put before us this evening. I'd like to welcome members of the minister's staff for joining us this evening – I can't see them, but I know they're there – and any other fun seekers that have joined us in the gallery to watch over our proceedings tonight.

For this province of Alberta gaming is big business. Although as the minister points out, it accounts for 4 percent of the revenue that the province brings in, that is still one of the most consistent and one of the largest consistent sectors contributing to the budget. I have often said that this government is addicted to gaming. They certainly need those funds now. They'd have a hard time replacing that 4 percent. In doing so, they've also made the rest of Albertans codependents in this gambling. It's interesting to hear the minister talk about trying to achieve that balance between what is essentially growth in the gaming sector and some sort of justifiable output on the other side.

One of the first things I noticed is that the mission statement has changed slightly between the previous three-year mission statement and the one that the minister read out this evening. In previous years the mission statement was: "To maintain the integrity of gaming and liquor activities . . . and collect revenues." Now the mission is:

To ensure integrity, transparency, disclosure, public consultation and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries to achieve the maximum benefit for Albertans.

I'd be interested in having the minister explain the discussion that led to the change in that mission statement.

Now key initiatives. On page 164 we're talking about considering the recommendations from the gaming licensing policy review to ensure that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place to deal effectively with Alberta's growing and maturing gaming industry.

Yet as part of that I notice that the mission statement, referring back to it, does include "public consultation," but I have seen nothing thus far that was really seeking or making any great effort to include the public in a discussion, in an ongoing consultation about what the gaming industry is going to look like in Alberta for years to come. There certainly was the bingo review, that was chaired, I think, by Judge Lieberman, and the public was able to submit recommendations or discussions to that review, but thus far I am unaware of any initiatives to include the public or, indeed, aside from telling them that the gaming review is going on, to make any kind of effort to have the public join in that discussion.

I'd like to know why the department has decided to proceed this way or why the minister has decided to proceed this way, because I think there needs to be a much wider discussion around gaming in this province. How much of it do we want? What kinds of it do we want? The issue around how widely available access to gaming is. Accountability, which this department has struggled with from time to time and I will discuss a bit later. The whole area around horse racing and what the public wants to happen there. I can see that there are some keen aficionados with us this evening, but it would be nice if others aside from those in the Assembly would be able to participate in that discussion.

The public has not been able to participate in a discussion around VLTs versus slots, and I don't think the public is aware, quite frankly, of how many slot machines are now operating in the province and the fact that the number of machines continues to rise. They may not even be aware that we have slot machines as well as video lottery terminals, commonly known as VLTs. A discussion also around the percentage of gaming proceeds that's going to the charities, and that happens on a number of different levels. The percentage from the casinos that goes to the charities, the percentage from the bingos that goes to the charities, the percentage that comes from the VLTs and the slot machines that are in the casinos and that are in the bars and others that are licensed to hold them.

I think there also needs to be a discussion about the use of lottery funds for government programs, which was something this government started doing. This is the third year they've now done that, where they're paying for entire government programs out of a variety of departments, and 100 percent of the program is paid for out of lottery funds. I think this is a perversion of the original intent, but let's have the discussion. I think there's also been a move away from the charity model, that we need the public to participate in.

So there's quite a bit there, and from the little that I've been able to talk to the public about this, they're interested in having that discussion, not just a reaction to a VLT vote in their municipality or a quick reaction to what's happening in the bingo area. They want to talk about all of this, and the government thus far hasn't given them the opportunity. So I encourage the government to certainly take the opportunity that's available to them now, and I would ask the minister exactly what plans have been made to include the public. When are the consultations available to them? What kind of information has gone out encouraging people to appear before a public hearing or to submit?

The minister had walked through all the goals that are set up in the department, and I would like to follow that as well. When we look at the first goal about achieving "a balance between social responsibility and economic benefit," I'm looking at the key strategies, and I have some questions around that. One of them is: "Ensure

Albertans are aware of gaming and liquor policy and are consulted with respect to major policy initiatives." Well, as I've just outlined, they're not being consulted around the gaming review that's happening. So, again, how is the government encouraging or ensuring that Albertans are aware of this and that they're being consulted?

The minister also mentioned, and it is indeed listed as a key strategy: "Ensure First Nations gaming policy is consistent with the government's Aboriginal Policy Framework." What exactly is that policy? I haven't seen it detailed, and I would ask that the minister please supply me with the background and additional deliberations that led up to whatever policy the government has now formed. I understand that the minister is responding in writing to these questions given this evening, so I would ask him to include that background documentation as well.

Now, I've done quite a bit of work on performance measurements, and I'm not very happy with the performance measurements that are being shown in this department. There's a tendency on behalf of this government to have a performance measurement about: are Albertans satisfied with, and then you can fill in the blank for just about any department. I don't find that that is a useful performance measurement. It's very interesting that we can get out there and have surveys, but, you know, frankly I could say that I was satisfied with this government's performance if I was faced with the choice of having to look at some other government that I found even more difficult to deal with. So the whole idea of surveying the public for their satisfaction with a given program or policy or key initiative I don't think is a very good way for the department, in fact, to know how they are doing and, more to the point, to be able to use it as a useful management tool.

8:20

So we have performance measurements here, the "percentage of Albertans surveyed who are satisfied with the conduct of the liquor business in Alberta." Well, what do you mean satisfied? What were the questions that they were asked? In all these cases where there's a survey of satisfaction of Albertans regarding this department, I would like to see the questions that were asked in the survey to get that result. As a second performance measurement, "Percentage of Albertans surveyed who are satisfied with the conduct of legal gaming entertainment in Alberta." Why aren't we looking at something more useful? Not satisfaction but let's say reduction of alcoholism, as relates to the activity of the department, or fetal alcohol syndrome that's reduced. Now, that's a target that could be worked towards, but satisfaction of Albertans with the conduct of liquor business? I mean, how is this giving us anything useful to go with other than the department can walk around and say that people are satisfied with them? It's not a useful management tool, and I think I could venture saying that the Auditor General would probably back me up on this one. He's encouraging departments to move towards more useful tools to use in management and engaging actual key performance indicators.

Now, I look at the goal "lottery funds support charitable, non-profit, public and community-based initiatives," and there's a key strategy of "implement and manage changes to the process for distributing revenues, and ensuring accountability for those revenues distributed to the horse racing industry" and then "based upon the terms of the Racing Industry Renewal Initiative." What exactly does that mean? Can we get all the background to that, please, so that we may be able to judge that as well? I'd like to know exactly what's happening there.

The next key strategy: "Develop a process to measure customer satisfaction." Yet again, when you've got a whole bunch of

Albertans that have been surveyed through some kind of question about how satisfied they are, that really doesn't tell us whether the department is providing a useful service, whether it's providing an efficient service, whether Albertans are getting value for their dollar, whether the department is a good thing or a bad thing. It just tells us whether Albertans are satisfied. Frankly, it's an easy out. It's a cop-out. So in this what are they supposed to be satisfied about?

I look at the performance measurement under this goal: "Percentage of . . . Lottery Fund disbursements committed to supporting charitable, non-profit, public and community-based initiatives." Well, no disrespect intended, but gee-whiz, guys, tough performance measurement. Of course it's a hundred percent across the board. Supposedly it always has been. What are you doing using a performance measurement for something that's that simple? I mean, it's part of the ongoing mandate of this department, and you now make it a performance measurement. Forgive me, but boy, tough target, huh.

Let's look at the next one, "Percentage of administration costs of lottery-funded programs administered by the Department of Gaming." Well, you've got it at "less than 2% of program disbursements." Yeah, that was the budget that was given to do it, so how is this a useful management tool? You say: this is how much money you get to administer these programs, 2 percent of the program. Then you stand back and go: "Wow, are we ever good. Lookit; we've met our key performance indicator." Yeah. So these are not useful. [some applause] Oh, we have many supporters of the Simple Simon school of performance indicators.

Okay; let's look at the performance measurement for the goal about partnering "in leading-edge gaming and liquor research." "Percentage of partners who are satisfied with level of support and cooperation for research, prevention and treatment programs." We've got "establish baseline" for 2001-2002, "increasing over time" for 2002-2003, and a 90 percent target for 2003-2004. Well, what are you actually measuring here? What are you trying to find out? Are you trying to say, "Our research is exemplary"? Then why aren't you looking to see if you're winning awards somewhere or if you're being printed in prestigious magazines? Is your research leading to new initiatives? Can you test yourself against that? But once again we have "percentage of partners who are satisfied with level of support."

Now we move into looking at the revenue from gaming here, and I'm looking at the estimates on page 169. I have a couple of questions here. Under the casino gaming terminal revenue – and I'm assuming those are slots – the comparable '99-2000 actual is \$174.4 million. The budget estimate for 2001-2002 is \$308.9 million, and then it continues to rise: in 2002-03, \$377.7 million, and in 2003-2004, \$416.7 million. On what basis is the government projecting that consistent increase? Are there more slot machines going in, and that is what the government is basing this fairly significant rise on? If we look between '99-2000 at \$174.4 million to 2003-2004 at \$416.7 million, that's more than double in that period of time. What initiatives is the ministry putting in place that would be giving them the thought that that is the correct way to budget that forward?

Now, I look at the ticket lottery revenue, which in '99-2000 was \$157 million and in 2001-2002 it's at \$154 million, but in fact if you look backwards at the comparable preliminary actual for 2000-2001, the ticket revenue had dropped by about \$5 million from the previous year. So what is the ministry doing that it makes it think it's going to get those ticket lottery revenues back up again, essentially by another \$2 million? You're at \$157 million in '99-2000, you dropped to \$152.3 million, and your budgeting for this year is going back up again to \$154 million. Based on what? The ticket lottery revenue has been fairly stagnant, if not dropping

steadily, in the past years. What's making you be so optimistic about that?

The liquor and related income, again there's a \$10 million increase in each of the three years being covered by this business plan: 2001-2002 is \$478 million, then we're looking at 2002-2003, \$487 million, and 2003-2004, \$497 million. What is making this ministry believe that it's going to increase the liquor and related revenue by \$10 million every year?

Now, I'm also interested that under expense we've got gaming research that is fairly stagnant. It's \$1.5 million in '99-2000. The preliminary for 2000-2001 is \$1.6 million, and it just stays on \$1.6 million. It flat lines at \$1.6 million across the rest of the board. So I'm wondering why research is not tied as a percentage of revenue. If you're expecting that revenue in all areas is going to proceed upward and at fairly consistent levels, why are you not tying the research to the problem gambling and problem gaming along with the rise in that revenue? Why are you assuming the revenues will go up but there's not greater need for the research to go up tied to that, or is this a deliberate attempt to just keep it down at that level?

I'm also interested in how many casino gaming terminals, which I would call slot machines, there are. How many were there last year, 2000-2001, and how many are you forecasting to have in operation in 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04? I would also like the same figures with the video lottery terminals, please.

Now, when we look at the business plan on page 170 – and we're talking about the responsibility of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission – I'm wondering why the minister is not a vocal advocate for conflict of interest legislation that's covering all board members. This area in particular causes great, I think, alarm with constituents, and certainly I've heard from enough of them over the weekend, given the outcome of the Jaber trial at the end of last week. There's a real concern in gaming. There's the potential for a lot of money there, and there's the potential for a lot of trouble as a result of there being a lot of money there. We do not have conflict of interest legislation that covers board members. Certainly we know from the trial that one of Mr. Jaber's defenses was: well, he wasn't a government employee in being a part-time member of the then Liquor Control Board. Interesting there that someone that in fact was a political appointment didn't seem to see himself as that or didn't seem to see himself as connected to government.

8:30

I'm wondering why the minister is not a much more vigorous and vocal advocate for conflict of interest. I note that the conflict of interest legislation is up for review in two years. I don't think that given what's happening here, the government can afford to wait two years. Or maybe they don't mind the scandal. I don't know.

When I look at the AGLC vision – I'm aware my time's running out, but I will try to get in some more time later – I'm noticing that it includes: "provides opportunity for competition and enhanced services in its liquor and gaming industries." What competition in gaming is expected here? Is this competition between casino owners or bingo halls? What kind of competition is being encouraged with this?

I haven't heard my time go off yet. I'm going to keep going. [interjection] I take it, then, my 20 minutes for this go-around is up? Okay.

Thank you, and I'll cede the floor to one of my colleagues.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure this evening to rise to speak to the budget estimates for the

Ministry of Gaming. I want to thank the minister and all of his staff for being here this evening. Certainly I have a number of questions that I hope they will answer in written form. I doubt that they'll have time.

In listening to some of the earlier comments made by the minister, one of his first comments was talking about a balanced choice. When I was looking in the Auditor General's report here as well, certainly he outlined the many challenges in a statement when he said:

From a policy perspective, the Ministry has the difficult task of balancing the interests of the government, the public, charitable organizations, and private businesses in decisions about future growth of the gaming and liquor industries. From a regulatory perspective, the Ministry faces the challenges of monitoring compliance with liquor, gaming and tobacco laws and agreements.

Certainly a huge, huge responsibility when we look at this, Mr. Chairman.

Then I go on to look at the mission statement for the ministry, and we see that it is to encourage

integrity, transparency, disclosure, public consultation and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries to achieve the maximum benefit for Albertans.

This, of course, comes out of the business plan on page 165.

Now, then, in looking at all this and the concerns that we have, certainly those are major concerns. We do have an industry here that is huge, and it is growing. As well, we have taking place a review of the licensing policy for gambling here in the province, and this is going to be finished some time this summer. Hopefully that will be released soon after, and we won't have to wait and wait like we have for so many other reports.

In looking at this report that's going to be released and also studying the budget, I think that we are in for another period of rapid growth in the gambling and horse racing businesses, the gaming business. I think that certainly spells good news for some people that are in the business of gaming, but it certainly doesn't bode well for the average Albertan that probably is leaving too many of their dollars in there. Even though it is a choice activity, for some people it isn't a choice.

When we are looking at AADAC, for example, we are allowing the problem to escalate in this province. Certainly the resources that AADAC has are not adequate to meet that.

I see that in the gaming industry here in this province we have some other challenges that the department must look at as well. Of course, this year there is the very distinct possibility that casinos will be built on some of the First Nations' reserves. We also have the challenge of existing casinos expanding. We look at the possibility of electronic gambling in bingo halls. As well, in this whole issue we have in this province the possibility that we're going to create new forms of gaming rooms or minicasinos in hotels.

So with all of these indicators that this industry is growing and growing rapidly, I would like to know from the ministry: where is the broad public consultation that would be required in almost any other department before these changes take place? I'd also like to know: where is the public airing of all the issues? What opportunity has the public had to voice their concerns in the form of a debate?

Now, then, I move forward here to the core businesses, goals, key strategies, and measures, and I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre touched on this. Again, I look at performance measures here, and I see percentages. Now, when I only see percentages, I become very concerned, and there are a number of reasons why. First of all, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, we certainly don't know on what basis these percentages were arrived at. In other words, what questions were asked?

When I see only percentages, it doesn't give me any indication of

the size of the sample that was used to arrive at these figures. I don't know if this is a random sample, if it's representative of all parts of this province, if it's a biased sample, and certainly those are key issues that somehow should be pointed out here. As well, I don't see anything in here that indicates what sort of control was used, that the information we gathered here is accurate.

As I mentioned, I am quite concerned from all indicators that I see in this budget about this being an expanding department and one where I think the controls, the doors are going to be cast open and we are going to have a huge increase in the gaming business here in this province. Some of this comes from page 168, core business 3. I look under expenses, and I see under Core Business: develop legislation, regulations, and policy for the gaming and liquor industries. I guess the figures that indicate to me that this is growing are when I look at comparable budget for 2000-2001, \$73,377,000, and then I look for this particular fiscal year at \$89 million. We're growing here by approximately 16 and a half million dollars. Then I see the targeted figure for 2002-2003 at \$101,105,000 and again a target figure for the year 2003-2004 of \$114,468,000.

8:40

We don't get those types of expenses without a huge increase in the gaming industry. So my question to the minister would be: what is proposed? Obviously people have some indication of what is going to happen in the gaming industry for the next few years. That would be my question at this point: what does the minister see for the expansion of gaming in this province even though there is a freeze on at this particular time?

Now, then, in the estimates the 2001-2002 gross operating estimate for the department is \$217.363 million. This is an 18.7 percent, or \$34.322 million, increase over the 2000-2001 preliminary actual budget. The year before, from 1999-2000 to 2000-2001, the department's budget only grew by 2.6 percent, which was an increase of \$4.680 million. Again, everything looks like we are looking at a ministry here that is ever expanding, and certainly rapid expansion leads to its own problems.

So when we look, then, at the gross operating estimates, could the minister please provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expense of \$217.363 million for 2001-2002 by object for the following components? Could he please start that with salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephones and communications, and hosting expenses?

Will the minister provide a separate breakdown dealing specifically with the 18.7 percent, or \$34.322 million, increase in his budget this year over last year? Again, I would surmise that this certainly is another indicator that we are going to have a gambling expansion after the review is completed and the regulations are put in place this summer. I'm wondering if this increase in demand in applications – are these the ones that are being placed in the department of gambling expansion this year?

Now, then, there is currently a freeze on gambling expansion in Alberta, and this is because of a current review within the department on policies and regulations. One of the key initiatives identified under gaming is:

Consider the recommendations from the gaming licensing policy review to ensure that the appropriate policies and procedures are in place to deal effectively with Alberta's growing and maturing gaming industry.

Of course, this is found in the Gaming business plan on page 164.

My questions to the minister. When will the current review of the gaming licences be completed? Could the minister please provide a list of who was consulted for the gaming licensing policy review? Again, as was brought up by the Member for Edmonton-Centre,

certainly we would be most interested in knowing who all was consulted and what will happen in the way of a public airing of all the issues. Also, will public consultation as well as debate in the Legislature be allowed before lifting the freeze on gambling expansion? Will the minister commit to making public a full report including all details and recommendations made during the review before lifting the freeze on gambling expansion? Also, would the minister please provide a breakdown of all costs incurred in conducting the review? Again, what mechanisms has the minister put in place to deal with the recommendations from the gaming licensing policy review? Will it be publicly debated? Has a committee been struck to deal with the recommendations? If the minister could please provide those.

At this time I will cease with my questions and hopefully get an opportunity later to continue, and I will cede the floor to another hon. member.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make a few introductory comments about the Ministry of Gaming estimates, followed by some specific questions for the minister.

This is a government that increasingly relies on gambling as a source of provincial revenue. For the first time this budget year the ministry is estimating that profits from legalized gambling in Alberta flowing into government coffers will exceed \$1 billion. Alberta is more dependant on revenues from legalized gambling than any other province in this country. Our per capita gambling revenues are the highest among Canadian provinces.

In the past decade there's been a 10-fold increase in the profits of the provincial government from legalized gambling. You don't have to look any further than page 211 of the estimates to find out where that money is. The huge expansion in government gambling revenues has resulted from the advent of electronic gaming, notably video lottery terminals located in bars and restaurants, and increasing gaming terminals located in casinos. There is no question that electronic gambling has been a huge cash cow for the provincial government, especially this provincial government. According to the estimates over 85 percent of the gambling profits come from electronic gambling, yet it is a relatively new form of gambling and we're still not clear what the long-term societal effects will be from this most addictive form of gambling.

AN HON. MEMBER: Hell and damnation, brother.

MR. MASON: You better believe it, brother.

One thing we know for sure: the amount of money being wagered on electronic gambling in this province is staggering. The government claims that over 90 percent of the moneys wagered on electronic gambling is paid back to gamblers in the form of winnings. If this is so, what it means is that more than \$9 billion is wagered on electronic gambling in Alberta. So how much is \$9 billion a year? It's more than \$3,000 for every man, woman, or child in this province. In other words, about \$5,000 per adult Albertan is being wagered on electronic gambling alone.

Now, the minister may say that 90 percent or more of this money is recycled back in the form of winnings from VLTs and slot machines. Well, that's fair enough, but let's not forget that when it comes to gambling, the people losing the money may not be the same people as the people winning the money. Secondly, an independent consultant Harold Wynne estimated that about 50 percent of the money wagered on VLTs and slot machines is

wagered by the 6 percent of the population that are pathological or problem gamblers. Given all this, we need to be very cautious about further expanding electronic gaming in this province.

So my questions to the minister. Is the government considering lifting the \$6,000 cap on the number of VLTs in Alberta's bars, restaurants, and hotels? The government is under pressure from the hospitality industry to raise the VLT cap, and I want the minister's assurance that no such decision will be made and certainly not without there being broad public consultation first. Second, what is the status of the proposal from the Alberta Hotel Association to allow so-called gaming rooms or minicasinos to be established in hotels? Again, will the minister assure the House that no such decision will be made without broad public consultation and debate in this Assembly?

My next question deals with slot machines in casinos. In recent years the government has allowed a huge increase in the number of slot machines. The government is under constant pressure to allow new casinos as well as to allow existing casinos to expand and add new slot machines. Is the government going to cave in to these pressures? Of course; there's money at stake. [interjection] Thank you, hon. Treasurer, for being clear about the government's priorities. What are the government's plans when it comes to the casino gambling industry in this province?

8:50

Now, my next question relates to the First Nations' gaming policy mentioned in passing in the ministry's business plan. Could the minister please elaborate on the status of the gaming policy? Most importantly, will First Nations' gaming policy, once implemented, lead to a further expansion of gambling in this province, or will First Nations people be given a piece of the existing gambling pie?

My next questions are related to the so-called racing industry renewal initiative. Page 203 of the estimates indicates that this is a new program under which \$17.9 million will be paid by the ministry for this initiative. Now, this is an interesting point, Mr. Chairman, because the government of course makes a great deal about being out of business, but here is a subsidy, an outright subsidy for a declining industry in this province, being horse racing. Of course, everybody says that, well, it's really important, but you have to ask yourselves why the government is pouring money into supporting this declining industry.

Now, if you recall, in this most recent report the Auditor General rapped the government's knuckles for allowing racetracks in Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge to skim 33 and a third percent of slot machine revenue as retailer commissions rather than the 15 percent they were entitled to under the law. The government is responsible for enforcing the law, and when somebody receives too much money in a social assistance benefit or in a WCB claim, gets more than they're entitled to under the law or the regulations, they're required to pay it back. In fact, yes, the government gets rather heavy with them, and I suppose they should if they're not entitled to it. But when they do it in the horse racing industry, when Edmonton Northlands or the Stampede board or the Racing Corporation engage in a legal activity which entitles them to take millions of dollars that they're not entitled to, what does the government do? Well, so far, at least as far as this member knows, nothing.

I raised this before the election in the committee responsible for looking at the accounts of the government, and nothing was done; my motion was tabled. As far as I know, there are still about \$18 million of illegal payments that have been retained by these organizations, and nothing's been done about it. So I would like to ask the minister: has anything been done to collect these debts? Will anything be done to collect these debts? If not, then I would like the

minister to explain, preferably in the House and as well in writing, why the government doesn't see fit to go after these nonprofit organizations to collect the money that is rightfully the property of the people of this province. I'd like to know if the government is going to be replacing that with the \$17.9 million. Is it the same money that is going into support of the rapidly declining horse racing industry, the same money that was taken illegally in violation of the law by these organizations?

The Auditor General also cited numerous other examples of the lack of accountability by the Racing Corporation, including that "the Alberta Racing Corporation has resisted attempts by the Ministry to direct how it should spend the resources provided to it." That's on page 116. The Auditor General then went on to give numerous examples of this lack of accountability. My question is: what is the government doing to make sure that the Racing Corporation is going to be more accountable? I would like that to be as specific as possible. I wouldn't be satisfied with just vague assurances that they're going to make the Racing Corporation accountable. So far the government has shown no desire to crack down on organizations who have taken more than their share from gaming revenues in this province in clear violation of the law. If they have to take it back, then the question is: are they just going to put it into a pot and then give it back to the industry in the form of a subsidy?

I would like to reiterate the question, Mr. Chairman: why has the government picked this particular industry to provide a direct subsidy of taxpayers' money to? Why hasn't it taken, for example, the taxi industry and done that? Why hasn't it taken the dairy industry? Maybe it has taken the dairy industry. I haven't been around long enough to find out.

I know that the government is ideologically opposed to government subsidies for inefficient and declining industries. They say so all the time, but here we have an example of millions and millions of dollars being poured into this industry, which really makes it the Swan Hills of gambling.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and let another member speak.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of questions, and I'll make it brief.

I would like to ask some questions about the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission itself, and I guess my first question is: how are the members for the commission selected? What are the criteria used in selecting members for the commission? What measures are in place to ensure that those members are not unfairly influenced by outside forces?

My further question is: are they required to report to the Ethics Commissioner on their financial activities? And I would ask if there is a restriction on their activities similar to the one that they impose on licensees. I quote from the act:

No liquor licensee or employee or agent of the licensee may

- (a) directly or indirectly borrow or receive as a gift from any liquor supplier or liquor agency money, an advance of money or anything of value [and]
- (b) request or accept a rebate or concession from a liquor supplier or liquor agency.

They impose that restriction on licensees, and I wonder if they operate under the same kind of restriction, Mr. Chairman.

I have some questions about the fines that are levied by the commission on licensees, and they're rather extensive. There was a recent fine of a vendor where the penalty was \$10,000, and that

was concerning a violation of the regulations where evidently there had been a supplier of liquor who had made an agreement with the vendor to sell the liquor of the supplier. I'm not sure if it was exclusively, but there was an agreement, and they came down very heavily on that and fined him \$10,000.

There are some other fines. There are a number of them related to minors on licensed premises, and there seem to be an awful lot of them. I'd ask what's being done to address the problem. There seems to be sort of a scale. They start with a warning, then there's a \$250 fine, and then it seems to escalate. So I wondered what's being done in terms of that problem.

I had another example. The second example that I wanted to look at was a penalty of \$1,500 for the licensee Molson Canada. Again the misdemeanor, according to this, was trying to

directly or indirectly sell, give, rent or lend any furniture, furnishings, refrigeration equipment, dispensing equipment, fixtures, decorations, paintings, signs, supplies or other equipment to a liquor licensee.

So there's an attempt to regulate that kind of activity, and I'd be interested in knowing if it applies equally to the members of the commission.

9:00

A number of questions about the social responsibility, and I really do have some concerns. The money in this budget from the lottery funds is rather extensive. There's \$150 million for school facilities, \$60 million for postsecondary facilities, a million dollars for school support, and transportation subsidies are \$40 million: a lot of money going into education. There are citizens in the province who think it makes a difference where the money comes from. I refer to the bishop of Calgary, who has indicated that the Roman Catholic schools in that city are to look very carefully at where the money contributing to education comes from and specifically objected to the proceeds from gambling activities being funneled into schools. So in terms of social responsibility it's a good statement, but I'd like to know who makes that judgment. Who is responsible for that social responsibility judgment? Is there a performance measure? Is the public consulted and asked if they're happy with this state of affairs?

I think with those few brief comments I'll conclude. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I know I've got a little under eight minutes to try and cover everything that the other hon. members haven't already covered, so I will clip along here.

It is interesting for me to note – and I will preface this comment by saying that I understand that there's been a House leaders' agreement on this and that all parties have agreed – that in the last six years we've gone from three hours of debate on a given ministry to two hours of debate on a given ministry, and now we've got one hour of debate on a given ministry. As these ministries get larger and larger budgets and more and more complex, I just find it really interesting how this government moves to have less and less debate on the various budgets.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order False Allegations

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under Standing Order

23(h),(i), and (j) it's totally inappropriate for this member to suggest that the government is cutting down the amount of debate on budget when it was subject to a unanimous House leaders' agreement with respect to how budget and Committee of Supply would be handled and was approved unanimously by this House. That was an agreement that was brought together by virtue of the fact that the opposition members wanted all of budget estimates to be dealt with in the House, and we strived to find a process which would accommodate that. For this hon. member to suggest that somehow the government is trying to cut down debate is absolutely inappropriate and casts aspersion on the character of the House leaders who made that agreement, including her own House leader.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the point of order.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. If the minister had been listening carefully, he would have heard me preface the comments with my understanding that in fact it was covered under the House leaders' agreement.

I just wanted to raise the interesting comment that that's where we have come with the debates. So if the minister seems particularly touchy about it, well, I do apologize for that.

MR. MASON: On the point of order, Mr. Chairman, I see what the House leader is getting at. It certainly is correct that it was the subject of a unanimous agreement between the House leaders, and he may well have an excellent debating point, but I fail to see how it is a violation of the rules of the House or of any other member to simply try and blame the government for something they may or may not have done.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has apologized for making those remarks, and I believe we can proceed with debate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I hope that was an interesting diversion for everyone.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Now, the questions. I'm back under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission business plan, and under the AGLC values it says, "is committed to operating according," and then it names a number of points. "Act with integrity and in a fair and impartial manner." Now, I'm wondering: what is the performance measurement for that? How in fact do we know that everything happened in a fair and impartial manner, or is this to indicate that they want to act in a fair and impartial manner? I'll leave it to the minister to explain that.

Another question. Since allowing the casinos to provide in-house cash and count room advisors, has there been any change in the number of discrepancies that are reported? Since the government is so keen on assessing satisfaction, has there been decreased satisfaction from the charities with having to deal with in-house cash or cage advisors? Certainly, in the past those independent advisors were really there for the best interests of the clubs, and I venture to say that we're putting the in-house advisors in an odd position in that they're now paid by the very casinos, so I suspect they're looking out more for the interests of the casinos than the clubs.

Under AGLC core businesses is listed "license and regulate charitable gaming activities." I notice that there's been some investigation by the department into charities which are providing

recreational opportunities for adults. It was brought to my attention by the Edmonton Sport Council that a number of their member organizations had been investigated. I don't have the documents, so I can't quote specifically. Certainly, it had been indicated to them that there was some concern and that perhaps in fact these organizations should not even be eligible to hold raffles or casinos, bingos, or pull-ticket sort of activities. Could the minister please comment on whether that's going to change or what's going on there? Why are these various agencies being investigated?

When I look at the performance measurements under core business 2, "gaming activities are conducted in accordance with legislation, regulations and policy." Now, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods had already gone through a number of those that were fine for various reasons. I'm noticing that in the performance measurements we're looking for compliance rates of 90 percent for bingos and casinos, 80 percent for pull tickets and raffles, and that compliance rate goes up slightly as we look at 2002-03 and 2003-04. What exactly is the breakdown of reasons for noncompliance, please, if those could be supplied?

A final question. I'm wondering if we could just get a refresher on where the government is with removing the VLTs from those municipalities that asked that they be removed. I know there was a court challenge about that, and I'm wondering where we are in that process and whether the minister has any idea about when these municipalities that voted the VLTs out – and that's got to be two years ago now – will actually get them out of their communities, although I note that the ministry continues to make money from their share of the proceeds of these while they remain operating.

I'm wondering if there's been any move or offer from the government to negotiate or mediate an end to this court challenge that's been put forward by the gaming casino owners. What exactly is being done around Internet gaming? What are the investigations there? What's the policy development that's happening? What studies have been done by this ministry? What does the literature review say on what other ministries have done? Can we please get the breakdown – and I'll echo some of my colleagues – on what exactly is coming forth for ventures with aboriginal-run casinos?

A couple of specific questions. In program 3, lottery funded programs, I'm noticing the Edmonton Northlands and Calgary Exhibition and Stampede are consistent in there at \$7.1 million. Are these organizations grandfathered? They seem to get fairly consistent funding.

9:10

Just to close off in the last few minutes that I have here, I note that when we first started accounting for the lottery funding, 80 percent of the funds went to the quality of life initiatives that are essentially found under the community development section of the lottery fund summary of payments, and perhaps one could also add in what's found under the gaming component with the community lottery boards grants, major fairs and exhibitions, and some of those. Now when I look at the total amount of disbursements from the lottery fund, in fact those organizations have dropped, I think according to a pie chart I saw in here, to 8 percent.

Certainly a number of these other programs from different departments are now funded completely out of the lottery funds. I've always objected to this. The lottery funds were to be for enhancement of quality of life, and we're now paying for everything. Usually they're called one-time only grants, although I do notice that they're continuing to show up year after year.

In particular in the summary on page 206, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, agricultural initiatives, nothing is listed, yet there's a total on the page for \$11.620 million. What is that? I'm

also noticing that the funding for the Trans Canada Trail has been dropped, and I'm wondering why. Under Gaming, other initiatives, \$11.102 million: exactly what are these other initiatives? Could I have them detailed, please?

I'll note that if we combine all of the original recipients of dollars from the lottery funds, we have \$108.5 million. If we add in the new ones the government has come up with under Gaming, that's another \$196.4, but the remaining \$711 million is going to all of these other initiatives, including Children's Services, Health and Wellness, Infrastructure.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allocated for the consideration of estimates has now come to an end. We have five minutes set aside for the hon. Minister of Gaming to conclude debate.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the hon. members opposite for their keen interest in the estimates of the Ministry of Gaming, and I'd be pleased to follow up on any outstanding questions resulting from this evening that are germane to the review of the estimates of this ministry.

There are a few comments I'd like to make based on the questions that were raised. The first would be with respect to the gaming licence policy review. It was in December of 1999, I believe, that the then minister indicated that there would be a review, and it was in February of 2000 that the AGLC began the review of a provincial gaming licence policy. While that licensing policy review is under way, the AGLC has suspended consideration of requests to license or approve new casinos, casino expansions, casino relocations, new games, and new gaming environments except for some commitments that had been made prior to December 1999. It's currently estimated that that review will be completed sometime this summer.

I noted that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands made some comments with respect to problem gambling. The most recent information with respect to that issue in Alberta is as a result of an AADAC report entitled Adult Gambling and Problem Gambling in Alberta, 1998, which compares findings from its 1994 study. That particular report indicated at that time a significant decline in problem gambling rates. In 1998 4.8 percent of gamblers were problem gamblers and pathological gamblers, and that was down from 5.4 percent in 1994. So that is the best information relative to the Alberta situation and shows a downtrending situation.

I found it interesting that the members opposite were unaware of the detail of the First Nations gaming policy. It was the subject of a news release on January 19, 2001. The particulars can be found at the Gaming web site, which, of course, is www.gaming.gov.ab.ca, and I would encourage the hon. members to review that. It did make the press at the time and was the subject of some considerable comment, and as I recall it, it was a favourable comment from those reports that I did read.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked why I am not a vigorous and vocal supporter of legislation with respect to conflict of interest. That may have something to do with the fact that there is a code of conduct and ethics, including a portion relative to conflict of interest, that the AGLC has in place. They've had that in place for some time. The latest iteration is from 1998. It is extensive, and in particular it works well. This all is in aid of the ministry's goal that its business and operation be conducted with integrity, trust, impartiality, and in accordance with generally accepted standards of behaviour.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan

and proposed estimates for the Department of Gaming, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$217,363,000
Lottery Fund Payments	\$1,015,949,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you opposed? Carried.

Justice and Attorney General

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to open debate.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased tonight to present Alberta Justice's proposed business plan for 2001 to 2004 with the commensurate estimates. I'd indicate to the House that with me tonight in the members' gallery, of course, is the Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General, Mr. Paul Bourque; as well as Dan Mercer, the assistant deputy minister of strategic services; Shawkat Sabur, the executive director of financial services; Stephen Gauk, the senior manager of planning services in strategic management services; and, I believe, Betty Ann Hicks, my executive assistant in the minister's office.

I'd like to take just a few minutes now, and then at the end of the first hour I'll respond to questions to the extent possible but would be happy to provide written responses to any questions that can't be dealt with in the time frame provided. The business plan, of course, Mr. Chairman, reflects the new government organization responsibilities assigned to Justice and Attorney General. There were a number of changes to our goals and performance measures as a result of the creation of the Alberta Solicitor General. We'll continue to work in partnership with the Solicitor General to keep Albertans safe.

This, of course, is the second business plan since the Alberta summit on justice in January 1999. The summit brought together a broad cross section of Albertans and justice stakeholders to discuss a wide range of issues and concerns. Last year we implemented a number of key strategies that arose from the summit, and the focus of our business plan 2001 to 2004 is of course continued action in response to those recommendations. I might indicate, Mr. Chairman, that we asked the steering committee for that justice summit to continue on as the Justice Policy Advisory Committee in the sure and certain knowledge that implementation of the recommendations from the justice summit and providing access to justice to Albertans is an issue that is far broader than simply the Department of Justice and Attorney General itself.

9:20

In the business plan we've highlighted the many issues that impact the administration of justice, including public concern over perceived increases in crime and the complexity of our court system, and we'll continue to work to address the root causes of crime and address the challenge of delivering services that respond to cultural diversity.

Through our programs and services Alberta Justice is committed to the vision of a democratic and prosperous Alberta based on respect for the law, a province where all Albertans are safe in their homes and communities and have confidence in their justice system,

and a province where disputes are resolved fairly and effectively. Our mission is to serve Albertans by promoting safe communities, by ensuring access to the courts and other methods of dispute resolution, by providing legal and related strategic services to the government of Alberta, and by communicating with Albertans about the administration of justice.

This year we've added core business information to our business plan to provide clarification for the public and our stakeholders, and I'd like to briefly outline the core businesses that make up our ministry's \$220 million budget. Providing Albertans with access to the courts and other forms for resolving disputes is about 40.5 percent of our budget, or \$89.3 million. About \$30 million, or one-third of this amount, is required to pay judicial salaries. Providing legal services for vulnerable Albertans is \$81.7 million, or 37.1 percent of our budget. These services consist of support for Legal Aid, the Public Trustee, maintenance enforcement, the medical examiner, and child-centered family justice. Prosecuting criminal and other offences with a continued priority on serious and violent crime and organized crime is 13.2 percent of our budget, or \$29.1 million. Providing high-quality advice and legal services to government is \$20.2 million, or 9.2 percent of the budget, and this consists of programs in civil law, Legislative Counsel, and law reform.

I know you've had an opportunity to review the five key goals in the business plan, so I won't go into them in detail. But I do want to mention a few highlights, Mr. Chairman, and talk about significant changes from previous years.

The government of Alberta business plan states that "Alberta will be a safe place to live and raise families," and promoting safe communities continues to be a goal for Alberta Justice. Achieving this goal is a shared responsibility, and we recognize the importance of building strong partnerships with the judiciary, the legal community, aboriginal communities, and our stakeholders in policing, community organizations, and local government. Alberta Justice has made a commitment to develop a new key performance measure for this important goal. Former measures such as crime rate are under a similar goal in the Alberta Solicitor General business plan.

Recognizing the needs of the victim in the criminal justice system helps to restore the balance of society in a humane and fair way and is an important goal of our justice system. Alberta Justice has made a commitment to develop a new key performance measure for this important goal. This performance measure will relate to victim satisfaction with the justice system and the success of prosecution service in vindicating the public interest through the prosecution of crime. Former performance measures related to this goal are in the Alberta Solicitor General business plan. While victim services are mainly the responsibility of the Alberta Solicitor General, Alberta Justice also supports victims in the criminal trial process through the work of Crown prosecutor public assistance units.

Alberta Justice will continue to focus on providing access to justice services for Albertans in need, improving access to civil and criminal justice, and providing effective legal services to the government of Alberta. Our performance measures for these goals remain unchanged from last year. The goal related to facilitating the rehabilitation of offenders and its accompanying performance measures is in the business plan for the Alberta Solicitor General, the ministry responsible for provincial corrections services.

The financial content of our business plan reflects Treasury Board approvals over the past year, federally funded programs, and funds for continuing initiatives. The spending profile on the last page of the business plan shows our spending targets of \$220 million, \$223 million, and \$228 million over the next three years. This represents an overall decrease of \$8.9 million, or 3.9 percent, for 2001-2002.

The primary reason for this decrease is the removal from our budget of \$17.2 million in onetime funding relating to the Judicial Compensation Commission. The government agreed to implement the recommendations of this independent commission and fund its costs. Justice will continue to cover ongoing costs for judicial compensation, but onetime costs for the commission and for judicial pensions have now been removed from the budget.

Increases to the Justice budget have been minimal. We do however plan to continue our progress on justice summit initiatives and other priorities by carefully managing within our base funding. The strategic initiatives described in our business plan are primarily funded within our base. The only major increase to our budget is a much-needed increase of \$4.7 million for Legal Aid. For 2001-2002 the grant paid to Legal Aid will increase by 20.8 percent, from \$22.5 million to \$27.2 million. These funds will be used by Legal Aid to expand its financial eligibility guidelines by 5 percent so that more low-income Albertans will be eligible for Legal Aid assistance.

In addition, compensation paid to private bar lawyers doing Legal Aid work will increase from \$61 per hour to \$70 per hour. The \$61 per hour rate has been in place since 1991. It will also provide for a notional increase of \$2 per hour until the rate reaches \$80 per hour in 2005. Legal Aid will also be establishing a family law staff counsel pilot project in Edmonton and Calgary to ensure that there are lawyers available to help low-income families who need family law assistance.

Delegates at the justice summit identified access to justice and the cost of administering justice as major concerns. In response we've identified several strategies to address these concerns. Early case resolution is an initiative to reduce unnecessary court attendance by victims and witnesses as well as reduce the time to trial. It also identifies at the earliest possible time whether a restorative alternative, such as alternative measures or an early guilty plea, is appropriate.

We will continue to explore communication opportunities with Albertans to improve public understanding of the justice system. Through our education co-ordinator strategy we'll identify gaps in current programs and resources aimed at helping Albertans understand the judicial system and develop and implement strategies to address these needs in partnership with justice stakeholders.

Improving support for Alberta families through family law reform continues to be a key initiative for the ministry. Our planned reform of family law is an ambitious undertaking that will require great sensitivity and effort. Consultation with the legal community, the judiciary, the Law Reform Institute, and public and other stakeholders will be a key part of this process. After its own extensive consultation with Albertans the United Family Court Task Force has made recommendations on how access to the courts can be improved for those involved in family law disputes.

In 1998 the MLA review on the maintenance enforcement program recommended significant improvements to communications with clients and an increased collection capacity. To address these recommendations, \$1.4 million has been committed to develop a client services strategy, fully staff needed areas, and deal with classification adjustments.

The MLA review also recommended significant improvements to maintenance enforcement's information system and technology, and for 2001-2002 \$1.2 million has been allocated to design a new management information system intended to improve service and reporting ability.

Initiatives to improve the justice system's support to families are also being planned using \$2.7 million in federal funding for families in need that will be received over the next two years. We're working with child and family services authorities to expand our

child welfare mediation program across the province. Right now it's only available in Edmonton and Calgary.

That will conclude my opening remarks. I'd be happy to take any questions that members might have and, as I indicated earlier, would be happy to respond in writing to those that can't be responded to tonight.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister for his overview. He's already provided some information that I was looking for. I'm assuming that we're joined by staff from the Justice ministry in the members' gallery, and I welcome them. I see we also have some other observers joining us tonight, and I welcome you.

Now, the minister has already gone over the four core businesses of the Justice department, but I'm noticing that when I look at the government business plan on page 28, the only key strategy in the government business plan for this three-year period from 2000 to 2004 that's specific to the Justice department is, as the minister mentioned, to "improve support for families through family law reform." I'm wondering why issues like access to justice and maintenance enforcement, for example, don't rate mention, that the only one mentioned is the improved support for families.

Now, when I look at the core businesses of the Justice business plan for 2001 to 2004, obviously one of the directions that the ministry is going in under prosecutions is early case resolution, and the program that they have in place for that – I suppose others would know that as plea bargaining. Specific to pages 259 to 260 I have the following questions. What are the anticipated savings of the early case resolution program? Has the minister considered the possible impacts on community safety of this program of restorative diversion, alternative measures, stepped-up plea bargaining, and the dropping of prosecutions? What has been the analysis around possible impacts on that?

9:30

One of the components of early case resolution is "the reduction of unnecessary witness attendance through discussions with defense counsel." I'm wondering if the recent Jaber influence peddling case, where there was just an agreed-upon statement of facts and no witnesses were called at all, is an example of this reduction of unnecessary witness attendance through the early case resolution program. I myself was in the courtroom for the sentencing and noted, again, that the judge indicated a concern about the lack of any witnesses. I'm wondering if the minister has had any other feedback on other cases from the judiciary or other concerned parties about this method employed to achieve early case resolution.

Under the courts and access to justice, which is a very keen interest of mine, and particularly access to justice for women. There have been a number of reports and documents produced over the last 10 years documenting the difficulties that women have in accessing the justice system. I'm wondering if the minister or any of his staff are aware of the project being done out of Calgary by Women Looking Forward, which is exactly on women's access to justice, and if they've had an opportunity to review this. I think at one point I did in fact table in the House an early outline of what that program was going to be. What specifically is around this? What measures are in place in this budget to improve access to justice for women in this province?

It continues to be an issue, I know, for many of us that are dealing with constituent concerns, and of course I end up hearing a lot of

maintenance enforcement cases in my office. It certainly appears to me that women just get beaten down by the system. They just get hauled back in there so many times. You know, they're working on minimum wage jobs. They're losing money when they're not at work. They're paying for parking and baby-sitters. They just can't afford it, and they give up. In doing so, they are giving up their opportunity to achieve justice for themselves. The system is just stacked against them. It's still very much a culture of men, where things like parking and baby-sitters just aren't an issue. What work has been done there?

Still on access to justice. Given that the access to courts and other dispute resolution processes is now one of the only four core businesses left after splitting off with the Solicitor General side of the Justice department, could the minister explain why it is that the estimates for court services decreased from the gross comparable 2001 preliminary actual figure of \$100.7 million to \$84 million in this budget 2001-2002? I'm wondering, since the 1999-2000 figure was at \$83 million, why it was not maintained at this higher actual figure that's coming from the 2000-2001 budget year.

Now, looking under goal 4, "improve access to civil and criminal justice," which is found under the key performance measurements on pages 263 and 325, we're talking about median elapsed time from first to last appearance in provincial criminal court. I'm wondering why the target in recent years has been raised to the Canadian median. Why, in a province that prides itself on being first, biggest, best, fastest, and funniest, have we chosen a Canadian median here and not attempted to aim higher? I'm wondering also why this is the only measure of improving access. Is anything being looked at about elapsed time in the Court of Queen's Bench, criminal, or the provincial civil court and Queen's Bench civil matters? What about family court, traffic court, youth court, and the Court of Appeal? What are the measurements for their elapsed times? I'm not seeing anything about that in there, but perhaps the minister can enlighten me.

Certainly in this House we have seen something of the issue of replacing court reporters with tape recorders. I know that we had court reporters in here and were introducing them and questions were asked. I'm wondering how much money has been saved thus far by replacing court reporters with the tape recorders?

MR. BONNER: What's the efficiency of it?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, what's the efficiency of it? Exactly.

With any new system like this, there are bound to be bugs that have to be worked out. What has the minister or the department staff received as feedback from the judiciary, court clerks, litigants, the bar, or anyone else that's involved with this process?

Was there a cost comparison done prior to the move to this? It did seem to be a fairly sudden move to this in the last fiscal year, and I know it caused a great deal of upset. What made the ministry believe that this was a good way to go? What kinds of other programs have they looked at in other jurisdictions that told them this was going to be a good idea? I have found before that this government says it's consulted and looked at other things, and once the program is already implemented and we go back and look and double-check, in fact there was no evaluation done. So we're past the fact now. I'm going back and questioning the minister on exactly what it was they were looking at or consulting with that made them determine that this was a good idea.

Moving on to legal services to government and sticking to the Attorney General functions. This is an area where the Justice department lawyers are acting on behalf of other departments. Under goal 5, providing "effective legal services to the government

of Alberta," a key performance measurement is client ministry satisfaction with legal services. We have a target of 95 percent, but how is this measured? Is this an opinion poll of ministers who've used Justice lawyers? If other ministries are so satisfied, then my question is: why does the use of outside counsel keep expanding at ever increasing costs? If everybody is so satisfied, why aren't we handling more matters in-house? But we're not. We're having more outside legal counsel and more expensive outside legal counsel. So what's with this target of 95 percent? If we're that satisfied, why aren't we using it?

I know that one of the other members is covering the Auditor General's report on Justice, but I just hooked into this one specifically. In the '99-2000 report the Auditor General recommended "that the Department of Justice enhance its systems for managing and reporting on the cost-effectiveness of legal services, including contracted services." The government noted it in its response to the Auditor General's recommendations on fine collections activity, but it's silent on the recommendation of legal services, and I'm wondering why that is. Why the picking and choosing of responses here? If they were willing to comment on the AG's recommendation on fine collections, why is the department silent on the recommendation on legal services?

I'm continuing on in the same area, which is legal services to government. Has the department been taking steps to review the cost-effectiveness of legal services including contracted services? What steps to review cost-effectiveness have been taken in relation to the services provided by in-house Justice lawyers? Has the department concluded its review of the cost of the outside counsel hired in the Stockwell Day defamation suit? We're told by reliable sources that the Justice department officials attended on the offices of this outside counsel to scrutinize matters relating to the Stockwell Day defamation suit. Have any conclusions been reached by the department about the appropriateness of the legal bill in that case? Are there any plans to have the bill of costs in that case taxed by a taxing officer of the court? Could it be said that the lawyers in this case gave good value for money, or how is that being determined? What criteria has the department used to evaluate that?

9:40

Now, in respect to the Legislative Counsel office – and I'm on page 319 here – this being the office in the Justice department that helps draft government bills. In fact, we saw an example of that today where we had Bill 10 coming back in – this was on the Traffic Safety Act – and it was doing cleanup on the amendment act that was passed a year or two ago. At that time it was Bill 24, and it was having to correct a number of inconsistencies and small omissions from that earlier bill.

So when I look at the Legislative Counsel office – and I understand that in this session's miscellaneous statutes amendment bill the government is seeking to correct numerous errors in legislation that has already been given royal assent 18 months ago. Apparently these errors were not picked up until legal counsel for client groups scrutinized the legislation long after it was drafted with the assistance of Legislative Counsel. My question is: does the Legislative Counsel office have sufficient resources to do its job, or does this demonstrate the need for all-party scrutiny of bills in the committee stage, as is done federally and in other provinces?

Certainly this issue contains a number of other issues that I've brought forward before: the need for the Law and Regulations Committee to be meeting, the need for there to be sufficient time from first reading of the bill for opposition members to circulate the bill through stakeholder groups in the community and get feedback from them in time for us to be incorporating that into our presenta-

tions back into the Assembly. You know, you just can't do a 24-hour or a 48-hour turnaround when you're trying to contact nonprofit groups in the community or individuals in the community and get them to give you some feedback. What additional support is being considered here for the Legislative Counsel office? I'll admit that I'm not a lawyer, but it sure seems to me like there's a great deal of pressure being brought to bear here, and additional resources may well be appropriate. What is the government's assessment of that? I'd be interested in hearing.

Now, the maintenance enforcement program is a particular interest of mine. I think I'm now in the 14th year of working on this issue. I'll start on some of my questions with that, but I may well have to return later to complete my questioning.

When we look at the performance measurement, "the amount collected on Maintenance Enforcement Program files," this just drives me wild. For starters, why was the target reduced for 2000-2001? We have a target here of \$3,025 per file. When you divide that by 12 months, we're coming out with about \$252 per month. Now, child maintenance awards have finally come into the real world and are generally much higher than that, more in the \$400 or \$500 range per child. So when we're looking at an average collection of \$252 a month, we're pretty low here. Does the minister consider that this is a low target, or does he feel that this is an appropriate target?

We also have the way the ministry is assessing their success in collecting. We're still not dealing with the fact that a file is considered collected if only a dollar has been recovered into the account in a given month. So we can say that we've got 75 percent of our files having activity in them, which is what tends to be measured here, activity, but that in fact could be a whole bunch of files where there's been a partial payment of a ridiculously small amount. The point of this is that that money is to be going out to the children, and I still feel we're failing the children in our administration of this. I recognize that the minister has come a long way in strengthening what's needed for this program, but it is achingly slow in my opinion.

Now, I went back and pulled the maintenance enforcement MLA review and started going through what had been committed to. I won't go into the legislative side of it, because obviously that was accomplished with the legislation, but there were a number of other issues that I've been bringing forward with the minister over the years through written questions and motions for returns and questions in question period to track what is happening here. I heard the minister say that \$1.2 million had gone into computers. I missed the second figure that he mentioned about the grids, pay scales for the employees. The computers: again, that's something I've been asking about for years. When I asked about it in the last session, in fact it came up that the whole computer database package was going to tender. It hadn't even been bought and put in place and implemented and all of that, and that was some two years after the MLA review had recommended that that happen.

So at this point we've got \$1.2 million in there. Does that mean that the computer system has been purchased and is up and running? Or what exactly is this . . .

MR. HANCOCK: We haven't approved the money for it yet.

MS BLAKEMAN: We haven't approved the money for it yet. That has not stopped this government from going ahead and spending money. Afterwards, I'm pretty sure that we've had an interim supply bill in front of us and also a supplementary supply bill. So that hasn't stopped the government in the past, although I appreciate the minister's own commitment to not doing that.

So I'd like to know where we are in this process. Are we still tendering this thing? If it hasn't been purchased yet because you're waiting for approval of these funds, how long until we actually have this system up and running? We're now three years after we said we would do this, and we've got all these different databases and computers in there of varying ages and capability which for the most part don't talk to one another, which is a staggering state of affairs in the year 2001 given the capabilities of computers.

I understand I've reached the end of my time. Thank you very much. I shall return again later.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few comments that I would like to make this evening on the Justice estimates, and I would like to thank the minister and the members of his staff who are here with us this evening to try and answer our questions.

In looking over the Justice business plans and without trying to repeat what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has said, I want to first look under these business plans at courts and access to justice. I look at two particular groups that in the past session I had the opportunity to work with. One was the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group, and the other was a number of injured workers throughout this province. Both did not have access to the justice system in a manner in which they could afford representation. They certainly didn't have the resources so that they could pursue their action because they were not getting any degree of satisfaction or timely resolution to their issues. So certainly in looking at these situations, access to justice for all Albertans and all Canadians is a vital issue.

I look at two reports that were done, one by an all-MLA government committee in reviewing operations with the WCB and also one by Justice Samuel Friedman, which certainly indicated that the whole system in the WCB is not a level playing field, that it is tilted in favour of the employers in this province, and that the injured worker, again, is one of those people who doesn't have the resources or the skills, in many cases, to represent themselves, so as a result they end up in a long series of frustrating events tied up in the WCB system and certainly with no access to the courts.

9:50

Moving along, then, I had the opportunity last summer to listen to Jesse Jackson. Jesse made a very important point about the poor people in the United States, and I think it's very applicable to what is happening in Canada. He went on to say that in the United States today the poor people aren't our new immigrants who have come to the United States. He went on to say that it is not our seniors who have retired and are living on fixed incomes. The poor in the United States today are mothers with young families. In looking at a number of statements that have been made, certainly this is a group whose incidence in this province is rising and who are having more and more difficulties raising those children.

So in looking at the access to justice, I want to look at what measures are in place in this budget to improve access to justice for women in this situation, for young mothers and their families. As well, what I want to know from the minister when we look at the whole issue of maintenance enforcement – when a mother can pick up a phone, make one phone call and find where her ex is, yet the department that is in charge of maintenance enforcement has not been able to locate this person for four years, then I think we have to have a major review as to the processes that are going on in order

to find these people who are not honouring maintenance enforcement and who certainly are putting demands on this province by not fulfilling their own responsibilities.

Now, then, as I mentioned earlier, other people in this province who don't have access to justice are certainly the injured workers, and not all injured workers. There would be a very, very small percentage of them, but there are very severely injured workers in this province and there are workers in this province who have injuries which have left them in a situation where they will never be able to return to the type of work they did before the injury, yet they are tied up in the system in WCB that keeps them there for quite a while.

Now, I know there is a connection here, and that connection is the fact that in many of these cases their issue is not with their former employer, but their issue is with the WCB, whether it be a medical adviser whose opinion differs widely from any panel of experts they have. These are people who have attended programs sponsored by WCB and been injured at those programs, yet they don't have the opportunity to get outside of WCB, to get into the justice system. They certainly aren't in violation of the Meredith principle, which made this a no-fault insurance. So this is certainly an instance where injured Albertans don't have access to the justice system and have been denied access to it by a cumbersome process, certainly a situation I do hope is addressed in the reports that are presently being prepared on the WCB and our appeal system.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre asked a number of questions, and she was looking here particularly at legal services for vulnerable Albertans. One of the issues she didn't bring up that I would like to touch on is this whole issue of legal aid. The support for legal aid, which is found on page 320, is increasing from \$22,542,000 to \$27,242,000, with the stated goal of (a) making legal aid accessible to more Albertans and (b) establishing a family law staff counsel pilot project in the legal office. So my question to the minister: how much of that increase will be allocated to operating the family law project and how much to the general legal aid fund? As well, what are the expected demands of the family law staff counsel's office, and are there sufficient funds being allocated to that office?

Now, I notice here as well under performance measures the number of eligible Albertans receiving legal aid services. This is from page 263. Why was the 2000-2001 target lower than the 1999-2000 target, and have sufficient funds been allocated to achieve the target of over 10,000 more recipients in 2001-2002? Will the province be participating in the upcoming national review of legal aid?

We also have a strategic objective of "access to justice and cost of administering justice," again very, very key issues. Improving public understanding and knowledge about the justice system is outlined on page 260. What exactly is the education strategy described in the business plan, and when will it be completed? Also, what is the expected cost to the government and to the justice stakeholders? Will this put a strain on the limited resources of the stakeholders?

Now, then, another strategic objective is "support for families." This is found on pages 260 and 261. I do have a few questions here that I would like to ask the minister. My first question is: why is there no performance measure for the family law system? When will the family court initiative pilot project be expanded to other judicial centres in this province? What are the main findings of the Unified Family Court Task Force that has now reported to the minister? Is the minister planning to establish a unified family court in the Court of Queen's Bench or Provincial Court? Isn't it true that the Provincial Court will not be able to handle all aspects of family law, including divorce, making it a less effective forum for a unified family court? If the minister were heading in the direction of a

unified family court in the Court of Queen's Bench, does he have an estimate as to how many more federally appointed judges would have to be allocated to Alberta? Does he have an estimate of how much money would be freed up to allocate to family law services with the appointment of more federal judges?

Finally, just a few more questions here on support for families. What form will consultations with respect to family law reforms take? Will they be public hearings? How will the public be able to make submissions? Will the consultations take place over the summer holidays with very little advance notice to interested stakeholders? Again, this whole issue of public input, public consultation, and the public's ability to address the issues as seen from their eyes is certainly a very, very critical point.

So at this time, Mr. Chairman, I would certainly like to close my comments and leave some time for other hon. members here to address these issues when it comes to dealing with the Department of Justice.

Thank you very much.

10:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. There were a few other questions that I wanted to get in around maintenance enforcement, and I'm aware that the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods also had a series of questions, so I'll try and get in a bit more time now.

The performance measurement for maintenance enforcement was dropped out of the new business plan, and I'm wondering why. There used to be a performance measurement for client satisfaction with the services of the maintenance enforcement program. I've spoken often about using satisfaction surveys as an indicator of performance of the government, and I'm not keen on them. In this case I'm wondering if the reason it was dropped was that the satisfaction level was so low. In '97-98 we were at 54.9 percent; '98-99, 57 percent; and '99-2000, 60 percent. But the entire thing has disappeared now, and I'm wondering why this was changed. In fact, I don't see any performance measurement around maintenance enforcement, but I might have missed it.

I'd like to sort of go through and do an update on the maintenance enforcement program and where it's at today. One of the recommendations was good client relations, and the response from the government or the action that was going to be taken was: customer service strategies being developed. This was in the response in '98 to better respond to clients, and I'm wondering where that customer service strategy is at. I still get very stressed and despondent creditors coming forward who cannot seem to get any response. They're supplying information about where the debtor is working, their licence plate number, their bank account numbers, their tax returns, and still they don't seem to be getting any money or much money coming forward. Where is the department now with that customer service strategy?

The assessment of client satisfaction was to be considered a fundamental measurement to map success, and as I have just pointed out, that performance measurement got dumped. I'm noticing that the response was that feedback mechanisms were to be developed, including an annual client survey and a system to track and analyze complaints. Well, the client survey doesn't seem to be turning up anywhere. If it does exist, could I get a copy of it, please? What is the system that's in place now to track and analyze complaints?

There was a move to better educate people as to what exactly the department did, which I applauded at the time, because I think many people were misled in believing that the primary function of the

department was to secure maintenance enforcement for creditors. In fact, I think the primary function was to secure the subrogated arrears or subrogated amounts owing to the government. That's where it started. That was the function of it at the beginning. In fact, for years we had problems where MEP lawyers wouldn't go to court on behalf of a creditor who did not have any part of their arrears subrogated. The lawyers just wouldn't go to court for them at all, and when they did go to court, then they were only interested in securing the subrogated amounts and would often bargain away . . . I'm sorry.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the noise level is getting pretty high. The chair is unable to hear the speaker. Please tone down. Thank you.

You may proceed.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm delighted that the chairman is so interested in hearing me. I'll try and get a little closer to the microphone to enable him there.

I was talking about the attempts at the beginning to let people know what the department was really capable of doing for people. Certainly for families that are expecting a court-ordered payment of, you know, \$500 a month per child and there are a couple of children involved there and they're not getting any money at all month after month after month, this is a very difficult way to live. There is a large number of people, tens of thousands in this province, who are under the maintenance enforcement program who are in that position. They never know when the money's coming, if it's going to come at all, and they're very frustrated. They certainly look to the department staff to be giving them information. So what is happening with that?

There was to be telephone technology with a voice response system providing 24-hour information. There were periodic updates through newsletters and income statements. How many of these things are implemented at this time? There were to be staff development programs to include procedures, technology, and customer service modules. Did that happen? In fact, did that get implemented? Is it still running? What is the evaluation of the success of that? Is the department looking at making any changes in that area? Certainly I had brought forward to the minister a number of times that the staff – I felt they should have been recruited with a collections background to be able to do the job better. I'm wondering if in fact that was implemented or if we were just moving people around from other government positions in other departments. I understand the need, and it's a noble idea that the government would look after its employees, but this is a very specialized area. Where did we get with that?

What happened with the idea that client status change reports would be sent to creditors when there is a change in the payment amount? I still get calls. I've got a case that I'm working on right now. It came in about three weeks ago: couldn't find out when things were happening, wasn't being informed of this, had all kinds of different dates. The dates she gave me turned out to be dates for different things. So it doesn't sound to me like that client status change report is happening. If it is, how successful is it? I mean, I've just gone through five different recommendations from the MLA review that were undertaken by the government. There are a number of areas there that there could be performance measurements taken on. I'm wondering if any or all of these are being anticipated as a performance measurement. Or is it used as an internal performance measurement in the department?

There were to be new communications procedures to quickly deal with complaints. Did that happen? Are results being monitored to

improve program effectiveness? I have spoken a little bit about the redevelopment of the mainframe technology projected in three years. Well, we're at the end of the three years and we still don't have the computer in place and the mainframe technology. We're now going into our fourth year on this, and the money is in the budget now to actually install the computer. I asked the questions already about when it is going to be installed and what kind of performance measurement is going to be in place around that.

The staffing levels was the other area that the minister talked about and the physical facilities. Now, were the physical facilities enhanced, or were they able to move to a different place? I know that a few years back they were basically working out of the same offices that they'd been in since the establishment of the program. It had been rearranged; they couldn't count the number of times. It was not a working atmosphere that was conducive to lowering stress, which was a real problem amongst the staff at the time. Have they been relocated? Have the premises been renovated? What is happening with their physical facilities, and where are we with the staffing levels?

The minister spoke very briefly – and I haven't had a chance to look at the Blues – about what was happening with the grid payments. At the time we looked at this, reviewed it, there were a number of staff people that were in part-time and wage positions and temporary positions. There was a recommendation that staff get put into – it's actually in here – full-time positions and full-time salaried positions. I believe most of that happened, but I'm checking on that. How many of the staff are salaried full-time? How many are salaried part-time? How many are on a contract or a fee for service, and how many are on wage? I'd also be interested at this point in how many in biquarterly reports for the last fiscal year were off on WCB stress leave and long-term disability. If the minister can report on those as well.

10:10

Now MEP was also to initiate a three-year business plan. We are at the end of that cycle. What does the new business plan look like? I'm not seeing it in these budget books. So if I could have a copy of that business plan, I'd appreciate it. The three-year business plan: we were at the end of the cycle. What's the new cycle? What's the new business plan for maintenance enforcement?

Was the corporate culture of service to clients through training and improved business processes in fact put into place? Oh, yes, there it is. I was looking for the recommendation to convert project and wage positions to permanent positions. That was recommendation 20. It says in my notes here that it was completed on August 15, '98. I'm inquiring on what the current status of that is and whether there's been any slippage backwards.

The special unit. What has been the evaluation of the special unit that was established to handle particularly difficult or chronic cases? I'm wondering if we are deeming that a success. Is it useful? Is it cost-efficient? I had great hopes and expectations around that unit. Have they been met? What is the department's evaluation of that? There was some talk about referring difficult cases to private-sector collection agencies. Is that being done currently? If so, what is the cost to the program of doing that, and how many cases are being referred out to private collection agencies?

I understand and I share concern – I hope I share concern with the minister about this program. It's one that's vital to mostly women and children, but certainly there are some men who are creditors, and anything we can do to improve that program certainly has the support of this member.

I would like to say to the minister and his staff that overall I have found the business plans put forward by this department to be the

clearest that I have read, and I commend the department on that. I think this was certainly the easiest estimates that I read. They were clear and had good explanations of where we were going. The truth is that in many ways this department is going in the direction the Official Opposition would like to see them go in. Many of the concerns that have been raised by my predecessor the Member for Edmonton-Norwood, who was the previous Justice critic – and she certainly pushed hard in a lot of different areas. The ministry has stepped up to the bar on that one. I do want to make that clear to the ministry, that I think they're doing a good job. Of course, I'm always going to ask them to do better. I think for the most part we're dealing with some interesting problems that are difficult to attain. In fact, our crime rates are dropping, but the perception of crime by people continues to rise. So how do we as a government and as legislators deal with that difference in perception?

I'm aware that others are waiting to speak, so I won't go on much longer. The other areas of concern, of course, generally are activity around gang problems and the prosecution. We had that huge gang case that came up and then was withdrawn and then came back again. We built an entire courthouse for it. Just as an individual following this in the paper, it seems to be a huge schemozzle. What has been learned from that? Where can we go in the future to do it better? What kind of money did that entail for the department? Is there additional money in this year's budget to deal with anticipated other cases that are coming forward there?

So my thanks for the opportunity to speak to this budget again. I look forward to the written responses from the minister. I know he's got a good reputation for timely and full responses to questions. I will relinquish the floor to my hon. colleague the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Two things. One, after the complimentary remarks of my predecessor I'm almost afraid to offer any criticism or ask any questions, but I will. The second thing is that I intend to introduce an amendment, and I thought I would do that at the conclusion of my remarks. It's available for distribution.

I would like to ask a few questions, one about performance measures. We've been in the business of formulating business plans for almost 10 years. Given that, I guess my question is: why is there such a paucity of performance measures in the Department of Justice? The number that we have in this business plan is down from what we had previously, and a number have been dropped. I wonder if we could have some explanation.

The public perception of safety as a performance measure has been dropped. That was an important measure except that it was given on a global, provincewide basis, and I think to have meaning to residents, it somehow or other had to be broken down. I say that from experience in my constituency, where the perception is that it has a high crime rate, given some recent gang activity, when in fact the crime rate for the constituency is the second lowest in the southeast part of the city. So the public perception of safety I think is an important measure, and it's one that has to get out to citizens.

I noticed that somewhere at the beginning of the preliminaries of the business plan there was talk about putting material on a comprehensive web site, but I just note that the city of Edmonton police department has a web site with crime rates for different districts in the city. It's obviously not being accessed by a very large number of people, or the perception that stays out there that crime rates are high and rising in a particular constituency and are a matter of concern wouldn't be there.

I wonder about the performance measures. The victimization rate was dropped as a performance measure, and the crime rate was dropped as a performance measure. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre indicated, the client satisfaction with the services of the maintenance enforcement program was dropped from the department. So it's a bit of a concern.

10:20

To go back to the crime in our constituency and the problems we've had, one of the things that struck me – and maybe the minister has some suggestions – was the lack of any one place the community could go to for help. They met with the federal Minister of Justice. I know they contacted the minister's office. The community held town hall meetings. There were a number of efforts. They have met continually with the police department. Yet there didn't seem to be any kind of leadership that came forward from the provincial government that would help them in terms of dealing with the problem within the community, that would point them to some resources and would even provide resources. I wonder if that's being considered by the department as something they might legitimately become involved in?

There are a great number of questions about the performance measures. Some have been indicated already. The Auditor General was a little testy in one of his recommendations. He's indicating that he's been asking for performance measures in a particular area since 1994 and 1995, and those measures still haven't been forthcoming. So those are very brief comments and don't do justice in any way to the ministry and the work that's before us.

There is one line item that I find really very difficult, and it's the one I would like to make an amendment on, Mr. Chairman, if I might. I'd like to propose an amendment to the Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll refer to the amendment as amendment A1.

DR. MASSEY: Has it been distributed, Mr. Chairman?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, it hasn't. Once you move it, it will be distributed.

DR. MASSEY: Okay. I'd like to move:

Be it resolved that the estimates for the standing policy committee on Justice and Government Services under reference 1.0.7 of the 2001-2002 estimates of the Department of Justice be reduced by \$95,000 so that the operating expense and capital investment to be voted is \$193,564,000.

I'll wait a minute while that's being distributed.

Mr. Chairman, that is the amount of money that's in the budget for the standing policy committee, and I think the standing policy committees have caused enough difficulty and should at least be reviewed by the government. First of all, only government members sit on those committees. I've attended a number of the policy committees, and I guess I am appalled at the way some presenters are treated. Some are treated rather shabbily. Some are even treated in a hostile manner by government members. I'm also concerned that it's used as an opportunity by some government members to chastize various interest groups in the province. This is a committee being paid for out of taxpayer money, and I find it inappropriate.

I have long held that feeling, and I know it's been shared by a number of my colleagues over the years. I think it was really reinforced this last July, when the former Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner made some comments in the local press about standing policy committees. That member indicated two things if I

remember correctly, Mr. Chairman. The gist of his remarks was that the standing policy committees are make-work committees for government members. The second thing he said, and I guess more important, was that he indicated that the committees had absolutely no power. I think that coming from a committee member and a government member is very, very telling. That's why I have moved this amendment to have the money for the standing policy committee removed from the budget.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Anybody else on the opposition front who would like to speak to the amendment? Okay. Anybody else who would like to speak on the amendment before we call the vote? Okay.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does anybody else wish to speak further to the estimates before I call upon the hon. minister to close debate? The hon. minister to close debate.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I should have risen to speak to the amendment, I guess, but perhaps you'll allow me the indulgence. I was going to reply to some of the questions that were asked tonight, and I hope to get to a couple of them. We will table responses to the questions in due course. But I couldn't let the amendment go by, because the comments about the efficacy of the standing policy committees are really, really inaccurate and must be corrected on the record.

Standing policy committees provide a very, very important function in this government. For one thing, ministers such as myself have to take a business plan through the standing policy process for critical review and analysis in the drafting and formative stages before they're brought forward to the House, which is a very, very useful process, and have to take our annual reports through the standing policy committees on that basis as well. So those are very, very good opportunities for members of the standing policy committee to address issues.

Quite frankly, Mr. Chairman, it's unique, I think, in the parliamentary system where budgets go through an in-depth review process before the Treasurer is able to table them. That's, in effect, what the business plans are here. The budget is a compilation of all of the business plans of all of the departments, and the estimates are brought forward in those business plans. They're not just something that the Treasurer stands up and delivers in this House. They're something that goes through a significant process before they get to this House and a significant process which could only be done in the context of a standing policy committee made up of government members because of the traditions of the parliamentary process. Nonetheless it is a very effective scrutiny of those estimates, and a lot of work goes into those estimates before they actually get to the House. So a very important role.

The standing policy committees also play a very important role, Mr. Chairman, in terms of development of government policy prior to going through the process of bringing legislation to the House. Legislation doesn't just appear out of thin air. Legislation comes from policies which are scrutinized, developed, brought through the standing policy committee process to cabinet through caucus and then back through the legislative process. Again, most of our members participate vigorously in that process, and I know that I participate vigorously in that process in many areas not in my own department but in other departments of government where I have an interest as an MLA and want to get a hand in on what government policy is. So I couldn't let the comments about the standing policy

committee go by unchallenged. They're a very effective, innovative way for government to develop and deal with policy.

I do appreciate the comments from Edmonton-Centre on the effectiveness of the Department of Justice and the way in which it carries out its business and develops its plan. I appreciate those comments very much.

I'll start off by commenting on the question of performance measures that Edmonton-Mill Woods brought to the table and just would relate to him that we've had a fairly significant change in the department just over the past month, which is to separate out the Solicitor General functions. Many of the performance measures that he's looking for I believe he'll find in the Solicitor General's business plan. We have undertaken to develop more specific performance measures which relate to the Justice role. So I think that would deal with most of the questions.

With respect to the role of the provincial government in terms of the issues that he raised relative to Mill Woods, we're in an interesting position there. Policing and the cost of policing is a municipal issue, and the police response is on a municipal basis. But there is an opportunity for communities. I should really leave this to the Solicitor General to respond to, but the question was raised here, so I can take the opportunity. The Solicitor General has crime prevention grant programs which allow community organizations to come together to promote concepts which are good for their own communities. I really encourage that. I think the Dickinsfield project is an excellent example of what can happen when the community comes together, gets some seed funding where necessary from the Solicitor General's department, and comes together in terms of taking back ownership of their own community. So I just wanted to mention those two things.

10:30

I'll use the rest of my time, Mr. Chairman, to deal with the question of maintenance enforcement, because most of the questions that came forward today dealt with maintenance enforcement.

Perhaps before I get to maintenance enforcement, Edmonton-Centre raised a question about access to justice for women, probably a very important question, but I would suggest that she be much more specific on that. If she would be more specific about the types of issues that she thinks need to be addressed, we'd be able to provide some answers. I think that from a maintenance enforcement perspective there's clearly been a lot of work done in terms of making sure that access is there. The domestic violence court in Calgary is a good example.

All the rest of the good things I had to say will have to wait for another time.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Justice, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$193,659,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Chairman, in light of that, I move that the committee now rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

Gaming: operating expense, \$217,363,000; lottery fund payments, \$1,015,949,000.

Justice: operating expense and capital investment, \$193,659,000.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of Supply on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:35 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 8, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. On this day let us be guided by Your eternal wisdom and confidence that You believe in all of us. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Karl Ohs, Lieutenant Governor of Montana. Accompanying him are Senator E.P. Ekegren, Senator Glenn Roush, Representative Edith Clark, Representative Carol Juneau. Our friends from Montana have come to Edmonton for the annual meeting of the Montana/Alberta Bilateral Advisory Council. Alberta and Montana have a long history of working together in many areas including agriculture, tourism, water management, transportation, and border stations. Our relationship truly stands out as an excellent example of a province/state friendship that has benefited both sides of the border. This morning's meeting was a tremendous opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss many areas where we can expand our relationship with Montana. I would ask that the entire Montana delegation please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is the 50th anniversary year of AADAC. It's my pleasure as the chairman of AADAC to introduce to you and through you the members of AADAC. They're sitting in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. First of all, our vice-chairman is Allen Dietz of Galahad. Other members are Dr. Philip Bryant of Drumheller, Thelma Crowther of Calgary, Ed Knox of Coalhurst, Peter Kossowan of Edmonton, Dan Martel of Edmonton, Paulette Patterson of Grande Prairie, Nev Smith of Leduc, and Lou Zaganelli of Calgary. I ask that the members of this Assembly extend their usual warm welcome.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 31 residents of Claresholm, Stavely, and Nanton and 122 residents of the Edmonton area. The petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to introduce legislation

to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also stand today to present a petition signed by 700 Calgaryans. The petitioners are asking the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the government to introduce legislation to allow Alberta health care professionals to opt out of

medical procedures that are in conflict with their moral conscience, the principles of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1 and 2.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

Thank you, sir.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Bill 11

Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 11, this bill being the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001.

What it does, Mr. Speaker, is put into legislation the regulations agreed to earlier this year regarding maternity and parental leave.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Bill 208

Alberta Official Song Act

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Alberta Official Song Act.

This bill is to establish a nonpartisan Alberta official song committee. The committee's function is to solicit from the Alberta public and review submissions of possible lyrics and music for an official song of Alberta and recommend it to the Alberta Assembly and the government in time for the celebration of 2005.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the appropriate number of copies of the Victims Programs Status Report 1999-2000. The report details the Alberta Solicitor General funding for programs and services that assist victims of crime. Funding increased 35 percent in '99-2000 to almost \$1.3 million. The report details the Alberta government's growing commitment to programs that assist those who fall victim to crime.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of my responses to the additional questions raised in second reading of Bill 3, Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001. The reason there's such a quick response is the reasonable questions asked by the opposition and the hard work by our government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise before you today to table five copies of a magazine entitled *The School Administrator*. This is a magazine that is published out of Virginia and goes to all administrators in North America. For the first time this magazine chose to concentrate on one school jurisdiction. That school jurisdiction was Edmonton public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the Report of the Minister's Committee on Employment Leave for Parents, that was submitted to me in January of this year by Sue Evison, chair of the committee.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table 336 letters addressed to me as the MLA for Calgary-West which were written by constituents residing in the expanding communities of Signal Hill and Richmond Hill. The letters are from parents expressing their support for the construction of a core elementary school at the site of the Battalion Park minischool, which has an actual enrollment projected at 98 percent utilization by September 2001. I am tabling five copies of these letters, as required.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission as a Crown agency of the government of Alberta reporting to the Minister of Health and Wellness contributes in a major way to the health of individuals, families, and communities in the province. Today it's my pleasure to table the 2001 to 2004 business plan of the commission, which lays out the plans of the commission for providing alcohol, other drug, and gambling problem prevention, treatment, and information services to the people of Alberta over the next three years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies of 48 letters dated March 19, 2001, to the chair of the public school board in Calgary. These letters outline the concerns of parents regarding the recommendations to close Glenmeadows elementary school. The closure would effectively eliminate Glenmeadows' before and after school and summer school programs for 75 children.

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a petition to the board of trustees of the Calgary board of education signed by 75 petitioners. It is against the closure of Glenmeadows school and Glenmeadows' before and after school and summer school programs.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a copy of a letter that's addressed to the Minister of Learning by a concerned parent in Medicine Hat, Mrs. Renee Seitz. By way of this letter she is indicating her concern to the minister about her children's school being triple graded next year, in her judgment, because of underfunding of schooling in the area.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly several guests who are with us today. Grant Lakeman, Elizabeth Lakeman, Robert Park, and Marc Lamoureux join us from Montage IT Services Inc. The company, which helps other Alberta companies harness the power of the Internet, was the successful bidder on a silent auction item to have lunch with me. I might add that it wasn't a fancy lunch: plastic cutlery and paper plates. Most importantly, proceeds from the auction support the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, a most worthwhile cause that provides funds for the very best in diabetes research. I am pleased to have these four representatives of Montage and these four supporters of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation in the members' gallery today. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to recognize a former member of this Legislature who served our province well over many years. Sitting in our public gallery, ladies and gentlemen, is Mr. Percy Wickman.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASYK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you 30 grade 6 students from the Delton elementary school and their teachers Mrs. Michelle Korchinski, Mrs. Kathy LeBlanc, and parent Mrs. Grace Fedyszyn. They are sitting in the public gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure also to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of the Assembly 30 students from Hardisty junior high. They are grade 6 students. They are accompanied today by their teachers Mrs. Sharon Loughheed and Mr. David Kehler and also by parents Rev. Sam Drew, Mrs. Pat McPhee, Mrs. Val Dickau, Mrs. Lucille Emo, Mrs. Struck, and Mr. Gordon Daniher. They're in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise. But before that, I'd also like to note that teacher Mrs. Sharon Loughheed is the always gracious spouse of the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Now I would ask them to please rise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing 26 students from the Rosemary school in Rosemary, Alberta. They're accompanied by seven adults: Mr. David Blumell, who is the principal of the school, Fern Nickel,

Kathy Gette, Wanda Doerksen, Marlene Retzlaff, Annette Baerg, and Perry Dixon. They have come all the way from Rosemary to visit us in the Legislature today. They are seated in the public gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission, to you and through you I'd like to introduce two very special visitors in the members' gallery today. One of them is my trusted and very dedicated, hardworking general manager at the constituency office, who's been with me for seven years. Her name is O.J. McLean. Accompanying her today for the first time in the Legislature is our STEP student, Ms Sarvir Hothi. I know that her mom and particularly her dad, Harmej, are very proud of her accomplishments, and so am I. Please rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Conflict of Interest Legislation

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent court case involving a government official found guilty of accepting money to influence government decisions highlights the lack of conflict of interest guidelines in this province. My questions are to the Premier. Why are officials who work with agents of the Crown and deal with public money, such as the Alberta Gaming Commission, not covered by the province's conflict of interest legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the heads of those various boards, authorities, agencies, and commissions, they are subject to the rules of conflict of interest. Relative to the members, in many cases these members are volunteers who receive nothing more than a per diem rate, and it seems to be unreasonable to subject these volunteers to the same rules that govern paid heads of organizations or agencies, boards, commissions, and authorities.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, my question was: officials who work with the heads of these departments. Mr. Premier, why are they not covered by that legislation? They have just as much influence as the people who are appointed as those heads.

MR. KLEIN: The whole issue of conflict of interest guidelines was examined over a period of time. The act was debated at length in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. We have an Ethics Commissioner in place now to adjudicate allegations of conflict. There are rules and guidelines. The rules – and I believe that the Liberals were onside at that particular time when this particular bill was debated – apply to those people who can exercise influence; in other words, who are in a position of leadership, starting with the politicians, going then to the deputy ministers, and, I believe, the ADMs. I don't know how far down the ladder it goes, but it has to stop someplace. Certainly very significant conflict guidelines are enacted into law to prevent those who have the power of influence from using that influence to gain a benefit or an advantage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is this not a good illustration

of why we have to have the implementation of all of the recommendations that are in the Tupper report, so that all of these individuals who have a chance to influence decisions are actually covered by our legislation?

MR. KLEIN: A number of steps have been taken, and I would remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that when the offence took place, there were no conflict of interest guidelines. There was no Ethics Commissioner at that particular time, Mr. Speaker. That all has happened since, and I can take the hon. member through the number of initiatives that have been taken since that particular time.

First of all, to point out that the events in this case occurred in 1992, nine years ago. Since that time the Tupper report – and he alluded to the Tupper report, Mr. Speaker – has been brought forward, with government accepting almost all of the report's recommendations. Of the 27 recommendations in the Tupper report 24 were accepted by government. Two – only two – were not accepted, and one was deferred.

1:50

Further, Mr. Speaker, specifically since 1992 the government has strengthened the Conflicts of Interest Act, introduced a revised code of conduct and ethics for employees and government appointees, required all senior public service employees to provide a full financial statement to the Ethics Commissioner on an annual basis. I would remind and quote from the Ethics Commissioner in commenting on our revised conflicts act. The Ethics Commissioner said in his annual report in 1997: "The new standards [of the act] reflect what the public wants and expects from its elected Members and are an important element in public accountability."

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Conflict of Interest Court Case

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The agreed statement of facts in the Jaber case states quite categorically that Mr. Jaber did not contact or have any discussions with any elected official or any other official or employee with the Government of Alberta or the Alberta Liquor Control Board concerning this issue.

Yet yesterday the Minister of Justice and Attorney General was unwilling or unable to stand behind this statement. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Why will the minister not stand behind that statement that's prepared for the courts?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted that the question has been asked, because I had hoped to rise later in question period and clarify the answer that I gave to that question. I should have at that time indicated that the evidence given in the preliminary inquiry stated clearly that each of the officials that were involved testified under oath and indicated that they had not in any way been influenced. I took the question in a broader scope, and after reading *Hansard* and discovering that it was specifically directed to that, I spoke with you earlier today and indicated that I might wish to clarify that particular statement. The context in which I answered the question was, as I heard it: did the particular individual ever influence any government official? That was the question which I responded to, but I'm pleased to have the opportunity to clarify.*

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of

*See page 382, left col., para. 2

Justice and Attorney General. Yesterday when the minister indicated he could not give assurances that anybody else lobbied with regards to this case, was the minister saying that it's possible that someone else lobbied the government on behalf of Mr. Jaber?

MR. HANCOCK: No, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that at all. What I would say in this case is that the police have had an investigation, with co-operation from the special prosecutions branch of the government, have pursued this case, have put forward a case, have achieved a conviction. It's still before the courts, so we can't discuss the details of it, but if there are any other aspects of the case that continue to need investigation, I'm sure the appropriate authorities will be doing that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: are you not making a good argument for a lobbyist registry when yesterday you said, "There are a lot of people that have been in this government, and I don't know all of them even personally, much less know who's talked to them" or who they're talking to from time to time?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Premier has already indicated that the Minister of Government Services is reviewing what's happened in other jurisdictions with respect to their lobby registries to determine whether or not they have had any effect and whether they're worth the cost of putting them up and the bureaucracy around them. I expect that we'll see the result of that review and will be able to make a determination as to whether in fact a lobby registry would be a useful tool in this particular province.

The bottom line, though, is that Albertans contact this government, both members of the government side and members on the opposition side, on an ongoing basis about issues of concern to them. Some of those are with respect to broad public policy issues, and some of them are with respect to narrow personal interests. That happens whether it's paid lobbyists or unpaid lobbyists. I think we should not from that take any opportunity to cast aspersions on any member of this House in terms of their ability to discern between private interest and public policy.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Establishment of School Districts

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new government policy with respect to the establishment of school districts in the province has raised serious questions. My first question is to the Premier. Why has the government embarked on a divisive policy that potentially puts the two publicly funded school systems at loggerheads?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that that was the intent at all, but to explain the situation as it now stands, I will have the hon. Minister of Learning respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. For those of us who have experienced either as a citizen, as an MLA, or as a constituent the 4 by 4 process for formation of the Catholic school system, everyone here knows how

divisive that whole process can be. I've come from a community that five or six years ago went through that vote and is still suffering the consequences of that vote. I'm not talking about the two school systems. I'm talking about people in the community. Quite literally, in communities like mine you have people that will not darken the door of a certain business because of the way they voted during that vote.

The process that is before you today in Bill 16 was something that was put forward to the Alberta School Boards Association roughly a year ago. At that time they went forward to all of their boards. There was a vote taken by the boards, and the vote was agreed upon by the Alberta School Boards Association. Yes, indeed, Mr. Speaker, the vote actually passed in the Alberta School Boards Association.

The other thing that I will say, Mr. Speaker. I do not have *Hansard* in front of me, but I do believe that the hon. member across from me who just asked me the question actually said in the Legislature that if there is anything that would improve the 4 by 4 situation, he would support it one hundred percent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Learning. Why did the minister change the policy without the agreement of those school boards most affected? That was the agreement I said I'd support.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, as I stated, the Alberta School Boards Association, which is the association made up of 64 school boards, went around to their various school boards around the province. They had meetings about this whole issue, and they came back with a solution. That solution is now in Bill 16.

I must remind the hon. member and I must remind everyone in this Assembly what a 4 by 4 vote does to a community. Perhaps the first part of the answer was not heard. For those of us who have been through it, it is absolutely catastrophic in a community. Mr. Speaker, both the ACSTA and the ASBA are in favour of this proposal that is now before us in the Legislature.

DR. MASSEY: My third question is to the same minister. Will the minister delay the implementation of the new policy until public hearings on the change are held across the province?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there have been public hearings on the school boards for the last year, and I would suggest that the hon. member is listening to one element of the School Boards Association, the element that did not get their way in this vote. Who I'm talking about specifically is the PSBA, who did not get their way and subsequently have moved on to another level of lobbying.

Mr. Speaker, this has been agreed to. This is something that everyone agrees with when it comes to the majority. I would ask the hon. member to contact the ACSTA, because I'm sure they would have some very strong viewpoints to give the hon. member on this.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is stonewalling and refusing to answer many questions surrounding the influence peddling case concluded last Friday. The fact that one of

the most powerful senior officials in the Premier's office in 1992 received a payment under strange circumstances from a most questionable source should have set off alarm bells around the government. My question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the province. When did the Minister of Justice first become aware of the secret payment to the former executive director of the Premier's office from the numbered company controlled by Ziad Jaber's wife?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is necessary to clarify that this was a long time ago, and it was a different Premier and a different Premier's office.

To answer this question specifically, in November of 1999 I was advised by the Deputy Attorney General that charges were to be laid, and I was given information with respect to the circumstances around those charges.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the taint of corruption that such a secret payment strongly implies, has the Ministry of Justice or the Minister of Justice conducted a thorough review of the secret payment received by the former Premier's executive director, and if not, why not?

2:00

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the RCMP were investigating. They had the full co-operation of the special prosecutions branch. The policy manual in special prosecutions and, indeed, for all prosecutors for the last 20 years has indicated that the prosecutions branch should co-operate with and assist the RCMP and the police in terms of investigations to make sure that cases are put together so that they can achieve convictions on charges. We're partners in the process. There was a thorough investigation, as I understand it, with respect to the information surrounding the investigation which eventually resulted in the charges, and I believe that if there is anything further to come out of that investigation, it will come.

The hon. Premier would like to supplement.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make one point. The point is this. On the issue the gentleman alluded to about the \$20,000 and the statement the gentleman alluded to, made, about how he obtained the money and the nature of his loan to Mr. Jaber, I would remind the hon. member that that statement was made under oath, under oath in a court of law. Is this hon. member saying that the person he alludes to committed perjury? If he is suggesting that and if he is saying that, then say it outside the Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister table in the Assembly any reports he has received or that have been done by his ministry looking into the strange circumstances surrounding the payment to the former Premier's executive director, and if not, why not?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe there would be any such reports other than the investigative file of the RCMP and the prosecutor's file, and it would be neither appropriate nor I think possible for me to table that in the House.

Electric Power Supply

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister

of Energy. On May 2 the minister told the House that power producers who fail to deliver committed power must make up the shortage to the Power Pool, are penalized by the lost business opportunity, and must find a way to meet any supply contracts in place from the Power Pool. But what about consumers not protected by a supply contract? My question: is it not reasonable that producers should replace the power not delivered plus pay a penalty equal to the higher consumer prices caused by their failure to deliver in the first place?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member brings up an interesting scenario with respect to the increase in the Power Pool price that would be created by more power being sought for demand, for purchase if a certain amount of power was not being produced by a generator. If this happens and the supplier must seek additional power, there is then a risk premium attached to that power search. Given that risk premium, that would create an additional cost on top of already the first cost that the member has suggested.

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: would it not follow, then, that any additional risk costs should be borne by the shareholders of the company that own the shares in the company that didn't deliver the power in the first place and not the consumer?

MR. SMITH: That's a good point, Mr. Speaker. In fact, how do shareholders maximize profit? By simply passing costs on to their marketplace, which could then be found in the way of increased prices. I think that it's important that we have a market that functions, that we have a market where the generator is obligated to supply power. If they can't supply power because of normal outages, normal reasons that occur in the course of business – these are mechanical machines; they're not a hundred percent foolproof – they would seek to supply and replace that power in the normal market process.

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how can the market benefit from market discipline and consumers at the end receive a better product at a lower price if the producers of the product, this time being electricity, are not affected by normal market discipline?

MR. SMITH: Well, in fact, the supplier, Mr. Speaker, is ruled by market discipline. The issue is that the markets supply the power, and if the power is gone and it can't be sold, there's a punitive effect that will take place there. The member is going right towards where the real issue is, and that is of course to increase generation, the kind of generation that we've been seeing announced over the last two or three months. That's important. I will be pleased to send a copy of *Hansard* to the EUB, who's looking at a market review, and as well to my own department, who's also looking at as part of the seven-point retail transition plan a process on pricing in the Power Pool.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Horse Racing Renewal Program

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent Auditor General's report found that slot machine revenues paid to the Alberta Racing Corporation and the racetrack operators were not in compliance with the governing legislation. This included \$18 million in

revenues that were retained by Edmonton Northlands and Stampede Park. My questions are to the Premier. Given the aggressiveness with which the government pursues recovery of social assistance overpayment, will the government pursue recovery of these funds with the same vigour?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I agree that everything was done in accordance with the agreement reached relative to the horse racing renewal program. I don't know the intricacies of the question that was asked, but I will take the matter under advisement and discuss it with the minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. The Auditor General himself said: Short of getting an annual report back from them, you're getting no accountability, and there's no agreement in place at the moment for you to get any more accountability than that. Frankly, I don't think that's appropriate.

What steps has the government taken to make the commission more accountable?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can't be specific as to the steps that were taken, but I do know through conversations with both the former minister and the current minister that steps have indeed been taken to comply with the recommendations of the Auditor General.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Again to the Premier: will the government undertake a full inquiry into this matter as part of the department's current review of gaming policy and regulations?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said in answer to the previous question, the Auditor General has examined this situation and we have complied, as I understand it, with his recommendations and have taken the measures that are deemed to be corrective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Ranking of Schools

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend the Fraser Institute issued its annual report card on Alberta high schools, ranking schools based on academic performance. My question is to the Minister of Learning. What is the government's position on this report card and the overall ranking of Alberta schools?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I would say that a simple ranking of schools based on diploma exams, on achievement exams is just that: very, very simple. There are a lot of different issues that each and every parent should take a look at when they're deciding where to put their children. To be able to say that one school is better than the other purely because they have a particular cohort of students that happen to do well on achievement tests or on diploma exams is an extremely wrong thing to do. Basically, what you should be doing is taking a look at which school fits your child.

MRS. ADY: My second question is also to the Minister of Learning. I have to confess that as a parent of two high school students in the Calgary public school system I took a peek at the list to see where my high school rated, as I think most parents did. Also, as the member that represents 80,000 constituents without a high school

my parents have to choose. If studies like this shouldn't be used to compare schools, what tools exist to help parents choose the school best suited for their child?

2:10

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, there's one other point that I will add, and this is a question that I get all the time on this particular issue. The question is: well, if you come out against these school rankings, why on earth did you do them? Well, the obvious answer to that is that we didn't do them. The report was commissioned by the *Calgary Herald* and I believe the *Edmonton Sun* and subsequently published in their newspapers. Yes, we did make the information available.

Mr. Speaker, in direct response to the hon. member's question, there are a myriad of different things that you need to look at when you decide on a school. It could be the school environment. It could be the individual's needs. It could be the absolute location of the school, the fit that the school has to your child. You have to remember that each child is individual, each child has different needs, and perhaps there's a different school for each child.

MRS. ADY: My final question is again to the Minister of Learning. Can the minister explain the kinds of measures that are in place to ensure the accountability of our schools and the learning system overall?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question, and realistically I could be here for another two hours to tell you the accountability, but you're shaking your head. We have a considerable amount of accountability mechanisms built into the business plan that is presently before the Legislative Assembly. Each school has to be accountable to me. They have to be accountable through the democratic process to their ratepayers, to their constituents, and, Mr. Speaker, through you to the hon. member, probably the ultimate accountability is that they must get re-elected each time.

School Fees

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, currently many schools across this province levy fees to finance programs and services. These levies place undue financial burden on many families in this province. My question is to the Minister of Learning. When will this government eliminate the need for schools to levy fees to finance programs and services?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the majority of fees that are actually levied at the school level are for things such as basketball programs. They're for special needs that are for each individual class. The other issue and the other place where fees are levied is for rental of textbooks. As I've said in this Legislature before, that has been a practice that has been on for the last 50 or 60 years, where you actually rent or in some cases buy the textbooks. So that is not different.

The issue about fees though – and there is a very significant issue about fees, and that is what some of the parents are being told about fees and fund-raising, that they're having to raise fees, that they're having to fund-raise for things like textbooks. Mr. Speaker, there is plenty of money in each and every school board's budget to provide for the core funding, for textbooks, for all things that are needed for each kid to go to school.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that program and services fees are really a form of taxation, why does this government continue to place more financial burden on families across this province?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I will not agree with the initial assumption that was put forward. It is not a form of taxation. If my child plays basketball, then I have an obligation as a parent that I should pay for my child to play basketball. If my child takes a cooking class, for example, something that not everyone in the school has the ability to take, then I should be paying extra for that. When they're talking about textbooks and that, absolutely not. Textbooks should not have fund-raising or fees. They have the ability to pay for them through the school board. If any member in this Assembly has that concern, I will gladly take it and personally look into it with each and every school board.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what action has the minister taken to eliminate schools from needing to levy fees?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of actions that I've taken, but probably the most significant action that I've taken is called a 9.8 percent increase last year and an 8.4 percent increase this year.

The other thing that I will add is that in September of this year the Alberta School Boards Association came out with a complete guide on fees and fund-raising that was sent out to each and every school board. That guide includes things like not having to raise fees and/or fund-raise for core educational projects. I'm glad to say that that has been accepted by the majority of school boards.

Again I reiterate my offer. If there is anyone in this Legislative Assembly that has concerns about fees and fund-raising for such basic things as textbooks, tell me and I will personally look into it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Gun Registration Legislation

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. The issues surrounding Bill C-68, the federal government's gun registration legislation known as the Firearms Act, just will not go away. The effects of this legislation are felt by nearly every agricultural producer and gun owner in Alberta, and many of them are in the Wainwright constituency. The Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties discussed this subject in detail at their spring conference. Has the Minister of Justice and his department done everything possible to protect Albertans from the costly, destructive effects of Bill C-68?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the Department of Justice and this government have been very vigorous opponents of the gun registry legislation. We believe that the money that's being spent on the gun registry could be much better spent on dealing with criminals with guns.

Mr. Speaker, members will recall that this government led a charge, which eventually, I think, eight different provincial jurisdictions across the country joined with, in taking that legislation to the Supreme Court of Canada. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court found that it was valid criminal legislation. We believe that it was actually property legislation, but the Supreme Court of Canada found it to be criminal legislation, and that ended our ability to challenge the legality of the legislation. All that's left for Albertans and for other Canadians who oppose that legislation and believe that the resources spent on that kind of registry should be better spent chasing criminals is to lobby their federal government and talk to their federal members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AAMDC has asked the government to hold a provincewide referendum asking Albertans whether the government of Alberta should participate or assist in the firearms registration legislation in any way, would the minister support such a referendum?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, while the sentiment of the resolution is certainly appreciated, the fact of the matter is that we have taken the position as the provincial government that we will not participate in the gun registry, nor will we enforce the legislation. We do have an obligation to proceed with charges under the Criminal Code. The provincial government and prosecutors for the provincial government on behalf of Albertans prosecute charges under the Criminal Code. We'll certainly – and we think Albertans would want us to – prosecute any charges that are laid in conjunction with the commission of a criminal offence.

MR. FISCHER: Could the minister explain to my constituents why Alberta will not use the notwithstanding clause in the Constitution to opt out of this ridiculous legislation?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've had this question from many Albertans right across the province. We should be clear where the notwithstanding clause is usable. It's usable when the provincial government wants to bring in legislation and there may be a question as to whether the legislation violates in any way section 15 of the Charter. Then the notwithstanding clause is available to ensure that the legislation is operative notwithstanding the Charter. We cannot use the notwithstanding clause to opt out, in essence, of federal legislation, particularly where the federal legislation has been found by the Supreme Court of Canada to be constitutional.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Electric Power Generation

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier and the Minister of Energy provided some contradictory nonanswers about location-based credits used to pick and choose where new electricity generation will be constructed in the province. My first question is to the Premier. Given that the primary objective stated on the original invitation to bid for location-based credits was to use credits to attract generation units to within 50 miles of Calgary to prevent voltage collapse, why was TransCanada Energy at a site in the Grande Prairie area given credit-rate incentives last week?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have trouble with the preamble to the question, and that is how you can have – what is it? – a contradictory nonanswer. If it's a nonanswer, then it can't be contradictory.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond.

2:20

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the transmission administrator, as the member well knows, is an independent body that makes its decisions accordingly, and he's free to consult with them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy: could the minister explain who will pick up the tab for the estimated \$80 million in supplemental payments for those location-based credits announced last week?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, clearly the policy is a matter of record. He should consult the transmission administrator.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This time to the Premier. We'll see what sort of contradictions come out now. Why are credits being given to TransCanada Energy to build more generation in northern Alberta when that company last year exported electricity to the value of \$3.9 million?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I will defer to the hon. Minister of Energy, who is in a position to provide a more detailed answer.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, as opposed as the Liberal member is to new generation of power in a free marketplace, it is important to note that there is a clearly detailed set of rules and conditions, which the transmission administrator abides by for the purpose of delivering much-needed new power generation into Alberta. I would think that the member, by questioning that, is probably thinking about standing in the way of bringing new power, much-needed power, into the marketplace in Alberta today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Dunvegan.

Access to Court Documents

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Justice several questions, which he dealt with like the Dickens character the Artful Dodger. One of the things he did say, however, was that we ought to obtain a copy of the transcripts of the preliminary inquiry of a court case involving Ziad Jaber. Well, it was a good suggestion, and we decided to follow up on it. Why was a representative of our caucus told by a staff member of the Justice department this morning that a copy of the transcript would cost over \$500 and take up to 10 days to process when previous similar requests had been handled speedily and without cost?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea why an individual might have said that, and I'll certainly be interested in asking that question. What I can tell the hon. member is that court transcripts are produced by independent court transcribers, and they do get paid on the per page basis, so I presume that that's the cost of producing a transcript and paying the court transcriber the fee for her or his work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate whether or not the department has changed any of its policies with respect to MLAs' access to court documents?

MR. HANCOCK: That I can assure you, Mr. Speaker. There has been no change in the policy with respect to access to court documents by any member of the public, including MLAs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to having a copy of the court transcript provided to my office and to any other member who requests it sometime today?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of it right here, and I'd be pleased to make a copy of it and provide it to him as soon as possible, provided that it does not break any of the rules relating to the payment of workers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Summer Natural Gas Rebate Program

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. The government has announced that it is providing a summer natural gas rebate program to specific agricultural natural gas users. Can the minister explain why this program has not been offered to all agricultural users?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. We have announced today a natural gas rebate program to some natural gas users throughout the summer months. I must point out that all natural gas users received a rebate over the period January to April 30. However, there were certain agricultural users that were unable to benefit from that program because their time of high usage is through the summer months. So today, as we had committed to do to those sectors, we've made the details available as to how the program would work for a four-month period for select users in this time.

MR. GOUDREAU: My first supplementary question is to the same minister. How does the minister explain the difference in rebate amounts from what was offered during the winter months, at \$6 per gigajoule, to what is being offered in the summer months, at \$3.75 per gigajoule?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, one thing I should have pointed out earlier is that this applies to greenhouses who did not start up until spring, to irrigators, to alfalfa dehydrators, who operate through the summer months. The choice of \$3.75 a gigajoule was estimated to give those users the same or a similar benefit as what the \$6 a gigajoule gave to the winter users. For example, the average gas cost throughout the winter was from \$9.50 to \$9.75. If you subtract the \$6 a gigajoule, you would get \$3.50 to \$3.75. We will monitor the prices. At this point we expect them to be in the \$7.25 to \$7.75 range, but I heard as late as two hours ago that, indeed, the natural gas price could be lower over the summer months. So we'll continue to watch it and monitor it and make sure that the benefit is comparable to the winter users'.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the same minister. Greenhouse operators who were already eligible for natural gas rebates during the winter months: why do they continue to receive natural gas rebates while other winter users don't?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, greenhouse operators who took advantage of the program through the January to April 30 period will not be eligible for this program. This program is specific to those operators who did not begin their operations until perhaps the 1st of

April or the middle of March, and I should make it very clear that they are eligible for a four-month period only, the same as the ones who would have accessed it had they started growing in January to April.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Tuition Fees

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Budget 2001 the government has again chosen to ignore the issue of high tuition fees in Alberta. While they have provided more money to postsecondary institutions and money for debt relief and loan remission, that is like dealing with the symptoms and not the disease. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why has the government chosen to deal with operating costs and debt relief but not tuition fees?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, very simply, operating costs are what leads to tuition fee increases. It's operating costs at the universities that allow the universities to set the tuition fees. We increased the amount of money going to universities in Budget 2001 by 8 percent. This is on top of roughly a 7 and a half percent increase last year. The most critical thing – and the hon. member brought it up – in the 2001 budget, though, is the amount of relief that has been given to students. We increased the amount of funding to the students through the Students Finance Board, bursaries, student loans, all this by 22 percent. That's on top of the 22 percent last year, 22 percent this year, and a projected 22 percent over the next two years. A huge amount of dollars that are being given to students.

Just as a point of interest, last year the Arts faculty was offered a decrease in tuition fees. Mr. Speaker, do you know what happened? The students from the Arts faculty at the University of Alberta protested because they wanted their tuition to be as high as everyone else's because their degree would not be valued if their tuition went down.

MS CARLSON: That's not what the students in my constituency are saying.

To the same minister: what instructions has the government given postsecondary institutions with regard to possible future tuition fee increases in the coming year?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a little bit of a strange question, as I'm sure the hon. member realizes that the tuition fee increase is an exclusive domain of the board of governors of each institution. I do, however, contact them in an attempt to keep the tuition down. A good example of that was the projected increase which you saw at the University of Alberta. For September of 2001 they were projecting roughly a 5 and a half percent increase. After talking to them, after giving them money, after telling them some of the things that would be included in the budget, this dropped down to a 3.2 percent increase.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot directly set tuition fees. That is not in my realm of responsibility. That is in the realm of responsibility of the board of governors of each individual institution.

2:30

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will this minister review the 30 percent tuition cap and its impact on students, the severe, significant financial impact on students?

DR. OBERG: Well, there are two questions there. First of all, yes, I will review the 30 percent cap. The reason I will review it is

because we have two institutions in Alberta who have already reached the 30 percent tuition cap. Mr. Speaker, the reason they have reached it is because they have dropped their operating expenses. As the member obviously knows, the tuition is related to the operating expenses, and if you drop the operating expenses, the amount of tuition that can be charged also goes down. So, yes, we are looking at that.

The other point that I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that I just released an accessibility study late last week. The interesting component of that accessibility study is that, yes, a lot of the graduates, the people in grade 12, did cite tuition fees as being an item that kept people from the universities, but the interesting point is that they overestimated the price of tuition by close to 50 percent. We have to do a better job of getting our communication out there, but a lot of the issues are actually perceived issues as opposed to real issues.

Supports for Independence

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the provincial government employs social workers, child welfare workers, financial benefit workers, program specialists, and caseload supervisors, all of whom I consider to be valued professionals working on the front lines, giving people across this province a hand up rather than a handout. One of the major challenges experienced by these professionals is helping our supports for independence clients manage their finances in a growing economy in which housing rental costs are skyrocketing and inflation eats away the true value of the dollar. It is extremely difficult for many families to manage when 50, 60, or even 70 percent of their SFI allowance is eaten up by rental costs. To the minister of human resources: will the hon. minister commit to setting up a committee made up of citizens from the business community, social service industry, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and average citizens to review the SFI rates for this province?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have committed in the Speech from the Throne and also, I believe, in the budget document – I'd have to check that – that we will go out and review programs and services that we have for our supports for independence clients here in the province.

The hon. member, though, offered some suggestions as to the makeup of that committee. Certainly I will take that under advisement, but as the minister I will reserve the right to appoint the members to the review committee that I deem necessary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you. To the same minister. Given that the department of education has set aside 6 percent for wage raises for our valued teachers, will this minister also demonstrate his value of these professionals by setting aside a 6 percent minimum wage increase?

MR. DUNFORD: There would be a process problem, Mr. Speaker, with the request or the suggestion that the hon. member is making. Currently we have not done that. We are moving forward with our business plan, and certainly imminently I'll be defending our estimates in this House. But I don't want to be mistaken. Certainly the financial benefit workers that we have within our department are valued members of our staff, but they some time ago decided to bargain collectively through the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and of course we'll be entering into collective bargain-

ing with that group later this fall. Certainly, then, all of our valued Alberta public service will be looked upon at that time within the context of labour relations.

MR. SHARIFF: My final supplemental is to the Minister of Children's Services. Can the child welfare workers also foresee a minimum increase of 6 percent in their wages?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's most appropriate that the Minister of Human Resources and Employment respond because all of the collective bargaining in fact is done through that minister, with our participation elsewhere.

What I can advise the hon. member is that for the past several months a provincial committee with union representation from the provincial employees, representation from social workers looking at pay classification rates for social workers and those frontline workers that the hon. member references, has undertaken a painstaking review of every finite detail. Through that review, Mr. Speaker, in March there was agreement with all parties on that.

I'd like to just also add that we have taken very seriously the issues social workers have with education. Last week with a sponsor from the University of Calgary we held a review of what the needs are in social work education, a very successful seminar and workshop attended by some 200 social workers, which I attended. The issues of pay and recognition and compensation for these workers, valued members of our provincial team, were discussed very thoroughly. I would like to assure the hon. member that I'm very confident that when we get into the round of bargaining, he will be satisfied that we have paid our due diligence to all aspects of the employees' needs and will in fact be able to satisfy the issues that will be at the table.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Victims Programs Status Report

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Solicitor General today tabled the Victims Programs Status Report 1999-2000. That report detailed funding provided for programs and services that assist victims of crime. The funding shows this government's commitment to supporting Albertans who fall victim to crime.

Mr. Speaker, I would hasten to add that the grant program is not – and I repeat: not – supported by law-abiding taxpayers' dollars. Rather, it's funded exclusively by victim surcharges paid by those who are guilty of offences in Alberta. Funding to victims' programs increased 35 percent in 1999-2000 to almost \$1.3 million. Approximately \$1 million was provided to victims' services programs and community-based victims' assistance programs offered by the RCMP and municipal police services. Now there are a total of 106 victims' services units in Alberta. In 1999-2000 they helped more than 38,000 Albertans. More than 1,400 Albertans gave generously of their time last year to help the victims of crime.

Here is the truly startling statistic pointed out by the Victims Programs Status Report 1999-2000: these volunteers donated almost 187,000 hours of their time. That works out to 95 person-years of labour. Mr. Speaker, that is valuable labour, valuable time provided at no cost to Alberta taxpayers. Alberta has a long history of neighbour helping neighbour, and this is truly what these selfless volunteers do in our communities. Victims' programs provide an essential service to Albertans.

Alberta is truly blessed, and crime is down. We have the lowest property and violent crime rates in western Canada. Albertans live,

work, and raise their families in safe communities. However, when someone does become a victim of crime, there is a safety net in place to help them, a safety net of dedicated volunteers and dedicated victims' services police units, all supported by the Alberta government through victims' programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, AADAC, I am pleased to inform the hon. members that the year 2001 marks AADAC's 50th anniversary. The commission's forerunner, the Alcoholism Foundation of Alberta, was created on September 27, 1951.

This milestone is very significant. For the past half century AADAC and its predecessor have positively contributed to the health of Albertans through a provincewide system of high-quality, efficient addictions prevention, treatment, and information services. We've come a long ways in the last 50 years. We opened our first clinic in 1953 with a card table, a chair, and a temporary telephone strung through a window. AADAC now has offices and treatment centres in 38 communities throughout the province. This currently includes 23 area offices in rural communities and 25 community-based funded agencies. Each year AADAC has about 38,000 admissions to treatment, 133,000 admissions to our crisis services, and 180,000 contacts for our prevention and education services.

2:40

Today our prevention programs specifically for youth and families have become a priority. Our ongoing resiliency campaign encourages adults to positively contribute to a child's life by providing guidance and friendship, and our youth-at-risk initiative provides community outreach counseling and other services to high-risk youth. Since its inception AADAC has been dedicated to the ongoing health of Albertans.

I would like to thank the hon. members, past and present, AADAC staff, our many community partners, and other key stakeholders for their support of the commission. By continuing to work together towards an addiction-free future, we can make a difference in people's lives to help ensure the future prosperity of our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Immigrants of Distinction Awards

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, on April 27, 2001, the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society held its fifth annual immigrants of distinction awards. My colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort and I had the privilege of attending this event. Several individuals were recognized for their accomplishments, and today I wish to recognize two recipients of this prestigious award.

Dr. Taj Jadavji received the distinguished professional award. Dr. Jadavji is originally from Tanzania and received his primary and secondary education there before studying medicine at the University of Sind. After graduation in 1976 he served a pediatric internship at the University of Calgary in 1980 and a residency at the Hospital for Sick Children at the University of Toronto in 1981, where he also did postgraduate work and received a fellowship in pediatric infectious diseases.

Dr. Jadavji heads the pediatric infectious diseases department at the Alberta Children's hospital and is the director of the international health program in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Calgary, where he also teaches. He is also head of pediatric infectious diseases at the Calgary regional health authority.

Dr. Jadavji's volunteer commitments include work with Ronald

McDonald House helping children and their parents access services. He has been on the board of the Calgary society for children and has been a representative for the child welfare authority since 1990. On a global level he's actively involved with the Aga Khan Development Network, promoting health and education in the developing world.

Mr Speaker, I also wish to recognize the recipient of the community services award, Dr. Vettivelu Nallainayagam. Dr. Vettivelu Nallainayagam was born in Sri Lanka and educated in Jaffa and at the University of Sri Lanka.

To both these recipients I extend my congratulations and best wishes for their service to the immigrant community and Albertans at large.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Inner-city School Closures

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Edmonton public and separate school boards made painful decisions to close several inner-city schools, including Alex Taylor and Sacred Heart schools in my riding of Edmonton-Highlands. These school closure decisions were made against the backdrop of the government's unfair and rigid school utilization formula. This formula requires schools to be 85 percent utilized before the Ministry of Infrastructure will approve capital funding for badly needed new schools in suburban neighbourhoods. The utilization formula does not sufficiently recognize or encourage multiple uses of school buildings. It pits suburban neighbourhoods against inner-city neighbourhoods. It also pits residents of inner-city neighbourhoods against one another as they fight to save their children's school.

With residential redevelopment in Edmonton's inner city there is an opportunity for rising student enrollment at a number of the inner-city schools slated for closure. Implementing the recommendations of the pilot project on small class sizes, which has shown to have clear benefits especially for disadvantaged children, will also help to improve the utilization of inner-city schools. It is only now, after these painful school closure decisions were made, that the government is proposing changes to its rigid and unfair utilization formula.

I urge the Minister of Learning and the government to reconsider its policy in light of the decision to close these inner-city schools. These schools are the heart of their communities and a key to inner-city revitalization. I urge the government to take action preventing at least some of these closures from going forward.

Thank you.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 205

Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 2: Mr. Marz]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a privilege for me to rise and speak to Bill 205, the Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001. I'm going to speak from the context today of my experience as a municipal councillor, reeve, and rancher on some points that I think are pertinent and relevant to this bill.

First of all, let me say that I would like to commend the hon.

Member for Lacombe-Stettler for her efforts to bring forth this very important legislation and subject to Albertans. Intensive livestock has become a huge problem in Alberta, and I guess most of us are grateful that we have the industry we do that contributes to the base of economic development in Alberta. Although it's not fun to deal with problems, it is a problem that is a result of growth and a result of value added, which we as a people and as a government worked hard to stimulate. From that context, you know, it is something that we need to look at.

I understand the problem that is being faced in many municipalities in Alberta. One of the problems we have, I think, is diversity. To illustrate the point of diversity, may I indulge members in a personal experience? It was my pleasure on several occasions to ride to Edmonton to AAMDC conventions with a municipal councillor from Cardston, a councillor who's no longer with us, having given his life in a serious traffic accident about 10 years ago. Every time we would drive from Cardston, about the time we would get to Red Deer or Olds, somewhere in that area, as he looked out over the fields and saw the deep, black soil of central Alberta and remember all the rocks he had back in Cardston, this councillor would say something like: "I don't know why my great-grandfather stopped in Cardston. Why didn't he move on to central Alberta to farm there?" The point that I think I want to make here is one of diversity. This province is a huge province, has a huge agricultural base, and conditions are very different.

I want to draw on some experiences that I had as a councillor and reeve of Cardston county for 17 years. We do not have in Cardston county the same problems with intensive livestock that Lacombe county has or the county of Lethbridge has or many other counties in Alberta. We do have some intensive livestock development, but it's not to the scale of others. Our county a few years ago adopted the code of practice as advocated by Alberta Agriculture, and I'm going to read some quotes from that code in just a moment. We adopted that code into our land use bylaw, so every time an application for intensive livestock development came before our council, we would ask Alberta Agriculture, Health, and Environment to see that the developer, the applicant, complied with the code. After that was done, we would proceed to hold a public hearing and then at the MPC part of council would proceed with our decision.

2:50

Perhaps I could just digress and quote to you from a couple of sections from the municipal land use bylaw of Cardston county. This would be similar to many land use bylaws in other rural jurisdictions in Alberta.

Section 8(1) under intensive agriculture and livestock confinement, says, and I quote: before approving or refusing an application for a livestock confinement operation or facility, the Municipal Planning Commission may request and consider the following information relating to the application: (a) Please note. A decision report from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, pursuant to the code of practice for responsible livestock development and manure management. Under 8(2)(b), skipping a few paragraphs: there will be adequate provision for waste treatment, temporary waste storage facilities, and arrangements for waste disposal on the operator's own land or any other land in accordance with standards set by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and other approving authorities.

Going to section 8(5)(b). The information contained in a decision report from Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is favourable to said application and other conditions that: (i) the maximum number of animal units per acre may be a condition of a development permit, and (iii) that periodic inspections by the

designated officer may be made to verifying continuing conformity with the development permit.

Before I say some more about that, I would just like to make sure that everyone understands the definition of a code of practice as defined in Cardston county's land use bylaw.

Code of Practice means a document produced by Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development which establishes criteria for the siting, operation and disposal of manures for intensive livestock operations

and also defines numbers of livestock which can be accommodated within the development.

Probably, to be honest, Mr. Speaker, I would say that overall Cardston county has not had a serious problem with siting intensive livestock operations, including dairy and hogs. We do not have a large intensive livestock cattle feeding operation, but we do have many hog, poultry, and dairy operations that are intense. The challenge for us has been to ensure continued compliance with the agreed conditions as specified in our land use bylaw and code of practice as adopted by the county. In other words, enforcement has been the challenge.

The technical standards: we've been able to use the expertise of Alberta Agriculture, Alberta Environment, Alberta Health to ensure that we have the rules necessary to protect people, to protect the environment, to protect health. That's okay, but sometimes we've had a challenge with enforcement. So I think this enforcement aspect has been a frustration to many rural municipalities. I think they would probably agree with me if I said that given that challenge and that problem, they didn't necessarily want to give up all control over intensive livestock development, be it land use or be it even all technical control. So that was one of the problems I have with this bill as being purported: it would take local control away from local municipalities. My experience has been that local municipalities understand local conditions, understand the diversity, the nature, the topography of the region, and their input is invaluable in making decisions on land use.

I would next like to just talk about the situation in the context of a municipal councillor who had the privilege to serve as a director of the Alberta Association of MDs and Counties, and who actually served on the original livestock committee charged by the minister to come up with an acceptable code, an acceptable standard for all intensive livestock in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, that was a very interesting experience. I then became familiar and acquainted with the diversity that exists in this province, inasmuch as there was representation on the committee from all segments of the industry and from all parts of Alberta. There were councillors, livestock people, hog people, chicken people, and technical people there, all together trying to resolve this issue, which has been quite a few years now in trying to get resolved. What that experience taught me was that there definitely is a problem, and there definitely is going to be considerable consensus required to solve the problem.

There seems to be a mistrust by some of the livestock people about the municipalities having the right to make land use decisions. A couple of reasons I think were that individual municipalities didn't have all the same standards. One county might have one set of standards. Another county across the road, which one ratepayer may have land in – both counties would have a different code or a different set of standards that he had to live with.

Some people think that municipalities don't have the technical expertise to deal with all the technicalities that exist with manure disposal and other aspects of intensive livestock, which is definitely a very complex problem. I submit to the members that the solution to that is by the municipalities acknowledging that they don't have the expertise. Therefore they will draw on the experience and

technical knowledge of Alberta Agriculture, Health, and Environment and adopt the appropriate codes into their land use bylaw so that all people in their municipality know that that's the code they will be governed by and will be applied to and they will have to live with.

If I could for a moment, I would just like to refer to a couple more things that talk about this current situation. May I comment on the Municipal Government Act:

To achieve orderly, economical and beneficial development, use of land, patterns of human settlement and quality of physical environment, Alberta's rural municipalities have been responsible for development control of intensive livestock facilities since the 1950s. To develop their own laws regarding subdivision and development, the municipality writes a Municipal Development Plan (required for municipalities with a population of over 3,500) that describes future land uses within the municipality and the manner in which these uses will be reviewed.

We also come under the control of the Public Health Act and the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. Those three acts contain considerable technical requirements for development to meet, and some municipalities would argue that they contain enough standards that we don't need a whole lot more.

Most municipalities do follow the code as advocated and has been amended and updated in 2000 and try really hard to satisfy the intensive livestock development. Most of us who sit on municipal councils want development. We want intensive livestock development. We think it's important. It creates jobs. It creates opportunities for family farms to expand, and we think it's important. One of the challenges that we have as municipalities is that sometimes there are people who don't want to experience any of what's called nuisances of intensive livestock, so they don't want any development, not recognizing that this development is very important. I concede that we have to take steps necessary to protect people's health, but all nuisance aspects probably can't be insured forever.

3:00

I would like to address one more aspect of the application of this bill to municipalities, and I'm going to use my experience to represent the issues of some of the people that I used to represent as a municipal councillor and now represent as their MLA. In Alberta we have another aspect of agriculture which we refer to as extensive agriculture, Mr. Speaker. Extensive agriculture would be where we traditionally run large amounts of livestock – cattle, sheep, buffalo, whatever you want to say – on larger tracts of land and try as much as possible to not allow those animals to contribute to pollution, et cetera. Under some definitions of the code and even under the definition of the proposed code which we are now using, it is possible that some of these extensive operations at certain times of the year could be classed as intensive livestock operations.

To use an extreme example, recently in southwestern Alberta in the month of April in the southwest corner we had upwards of seven feet of snow in about three weeks' time. Needless to say, it was almost impossible to move livestock very far. There are lots of extensive operations that have several hundred or even thousands of cattle. Normally those cattle would be spread over a wide area, but under certain conditions such as the one I just described, conditions which might exist during spring calving, weaning, and other times, these cattle could be collected in a small 10- or 15-acre field, where you might have enough animals that it would actually bring that operation under the strict definition of the code. Then, you know, taking it to the ridiculous, it could require these people to conform to the code and to create water diversions, build holding ponds, do all manner of practices to stop runoff.

I don't know all about all of Alberta, but I know in the southwest

there are hundreds of drainages and they all go into a river or a creek or into a major drainage. My point is that under certain conditions these extensive people could come under the code. They've never been under the code, and 99 percent of the time they don't contribute, in my humble opinion, to pollution, but it could create a hardship on them if they were put under the code.

On their behalf I would say that many of them have a fear of being totally controlled by appointed bureaucrats or technical people who may be charged with enforcing one central code. I think their fear is justified and realistic, although my experience in working with people who work for the department is that most of them are reasonable and exercise common sense most of the time. Most of the people I'm talking about would sooner be judged, if you will, by their peers, for example on a municipal council, such people who are also probably involved in the same type of operation, the same type of agricultural practice. So for them, they would have a fear of being under one provincial code and one set of standards.

Mr. Speaker, although I recognize the need for this legislation and presume that we're going to proceed and get this resolved, I do have a serious problem with Bill 205 inasmuch as it would take all control away from local land use planning authorities, such as MPCs, contained in municipal districts and counties and would put that control in the hands of the provincial government. I think we need to understand that this is a diverse province. Conditions, topography: these things are all extremely different. What may be safe in one part of Alberta may be not so safe in another part of Alberta.

So I'm suggesting that I'm recognizing the need, but what I would really like to see is all municipalities adopt a certain code that would be applicable to their area in their land use bylaws and then have the power to cite land use decisions and even to be involved in the technical aspects and technical application of the code. That may be asking a lot, but I know that would make a lot of the people I represent in the south much more comfortable. The idea has even been suggested in my constituency that if we can't have individual sets of codes and regulations for our municipalities . . . [Mr. Jacobs' speaking time expired]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to put a few comments on record with respect to Bill 205, the Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, for a few reasons, first of all because I do have a significant number of farmers in my area. While none of them are necessarily specifically involved in intensive livestock operations, we have had a few discussions around this issue, and on their behalf I do want to raise a couple of points that they've raised with me.

I think we all understand and recognize how important agriculture is to our province, to our economy, to our employment in this province, and farming as it relates to ILOs in particular is a very hot topic out in rural Alberta. I've just had the pleasure of touring throughout Alberta over this last year and a half doing other work, but certainly the issue of ILOs came up time and time again. As I look at this particular act, the amendment as it's proposed, I understand that the gist and the spirit, the nature, if you will, of the bill is to try and make several improvements toward ensuring good public health practices that surround this industry and that there is indeed a good, sustainable growth plan involved with ILO operations, as well as the environmental concerns and the responsibilities that everyone has, including intensive livestock producers, toward that end.

Therefore, as I sort of read through the implications of what's being proposed here by the hon. member, I was struck by the fact

that, yes, I would support some clear guidelines being put in place to help govern some of the issues I just mentioned, and if some kind of an application or approval process is necessary to do that, then I can begin to understand what those concerns were that I heard about.

On the other hand, I'm also well aware that our colleague from Leduc has done some incredible work in this area and is a farmer himself. He, too, undoubtedly has some concerns that he'll be bringing forward through the Sustainable Management of the Livestock Industry in Alberta Committee, and I'm looking forward to reading through that report as well. Nonetheless, the idea of codes of practice as enunciated in this bill does merit some additional discussion, and I'm really looking forward to what other members will contribute.

One of the issues that I recall being raised, Mr. Speaker, in this regard was with respect to the different roles and responsibilities that, for example, the municipal or local governments might play versus or perhaps in tandem, in conjunction with the provincial roles – roles of enforcement, of jurisdiction, land use bylaws, issues like that that are so important – not to mention of course the whole issue of standards and how those standards are to be developed and implemented and monitored or enforced. I think those are all very important things which this particular bill has the ability to impact.

3:10

In any case, Mr. Speaker, I think in the final analysis what we're all looking for is some meaningful way to assist our ILO operators provincewide without interfering overly but sharing with them some of the concerns that have been expressed. I come by these statements very honestly, having grown up in the '50s and '60s in rural Alberta when we owned a farm. We had 45 head of holstein, and while that would hardly classify as an ILO, nonetheless I am familiar with what some of the challenges are with respect to the ILO operators of today. There are also some community concerns that have been expressed, but perhaps I'll leave that to another time.

So with those few comments on behalf of the individuals who raised them with me, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and allow others to contribute to this important debate. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also my pleasure to speak to Bill 205. I first want to say to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler thank you very much for bringing this issue forward. It is a very sensitive issue, and of course it's very important to everyone.

We have to strike a proper balance to allow agriculture producers to change, to expand, to grow, and to be flexible in order to maintain a viable farming unit, and we still have to guarantee the neighbours and all of the residents outside of the farming area that the air and the soil and the water will be protected. Land use affects everyone, and certainly with the scares like Walkerton and the North Battleford water contamination issue, people should be very interested in what is happening with this.

I had an opportunity to attend an ag conference in Delaware a few years ago. It was the secretary of agriculture for each of the states in the U.S. that met for their annual conference. Alberta fortunately, through a lot of good work from our department, gets invited to that particular conference. It was very interesting, when we got down there, that of the many issues they had, the land use issue was by far the one that took over the agenda. At that time I heard many stories – I want to call them Hatfield and McCoy stories – where the feuds between agriculture producers and the public were very alive and real. Each state had different rules, different regulations, and some of their counties had different regulations, but as it turned out, the

demographics really dictated what the rules were. I don't know whether or not their system the way they put it together, as we followed it through, had really done what needed to be done.

Some of the areas were already maxed out, so there was no more agriculture production, and it was because of all of the bylaws that were put in place. I shudder to think that in this country we have gotten to that state. I know that in Lacombe the council there feel that we are already very close to that state.

We in the Wainwright constituency of course have had some excitement, if you like, with the Taiwanese sugar proposal in that area, and it certainly has brought forward the issues that go along with land use. Those issues in our area really put a lot of pressure on the local council. They go back, as was mentioned, to the code of practice. The code of practice really, I think, was likely a very good code of practice. People didn't trust it, and they say that there are no teeth in that particular law. So not having experienced or seen some of the things shut down through our environment people and through our health people – and I think each one of the MLAs that have been in this Assembly for a while have dealt with some agriculture projects that have been shut down for the very reason that they are contaminating something. However, this could not be trusted. That was the feeling of the people, so they did not want to accept the project going ahead.

Now, when we talk about Bill 205, this bill is to strengthen and allow the agriculture producers the right to farm and the right to expand and to grow. Whether or not we should pass that bill and give an advantage to that side rather than bring our intensive livestock regulation into place and review it far more thoroughly than what has been done so far – and I know that our Member for Leduc's committee has done a lot of work on that. I look forward to that coming into the House, and I think that every one of us in this House should take a very, very careful look at that, because it does impact people in the cities as well as people in rural Alberta. I would like to see us get into that bill and do some strenuous work with that, because it is very difficult for us to say what is fair and balanced, to come and say that this one needs a right over here and we put some more fear into somebody else on the other side of it. I believe we should look at it more carefully.

I do know that it's a commonly held view that larger operations make management decisions with less concern for environmental stewardship within the community. That's a concern that I believe people maybe shouldn't have. It's really not a proven concern, but it's out there. It's perception, and we have to do something about that.

I did have an opportunity to go on a business trip with a friend of mine down to Mexico awhile ago, and when I did that, I went to a dairy farm down there. This dairy farm was about 20 miles from the city. They had 3,400 cows on it. They milked them three times a day. They had their own processing plant on the farm. They had these cows on 20 acres or maybe 30 acres of land. They cleaned the corrals every day. They had a pile of manure at the bottom end of the lot, and that pile was very small. When you go down there, you couldn't smell it.

So right away I said to them: what are you doing with this, and where's the rest of it? The answer was: "We are treating it. We take the smell out of it probably in the first day or so, and we put it on the land within 20 days." I said: "Well, you don't have any environmental laws down here in Mexico that make you do that. Why are you doing it?" They said: we know it's coming, and we want to be perceived as looking after our environment. That was in a country that doesn't have the laws. I think our industry in this country has the responsibility to see to it that we are looking after our environment and that we show people that we are doing a good job.

With that, I'm going to say thank you very much for the opportunity, and I'll sit down.

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to recognize the hon. Minister of Infrastructure, but just prior to doing that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:20

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group of 58 constituents visiting us today from l'école Plamondon school. L'école Plamondon school, located in Plamondon, is a community school with 450 students. It is a unique school in that it offers three individual programs: Russian, French immersion, and English. The school body is very active in sports and most supportive of their teams, the Plamondon Hawks and the Plamondon Doves.

Today we are honoured to have the grade 5/6 English class visit along with their teachers, Gerry Stefanyk and Mrs. Kathy Duncan, and parent volunteers Stephanie Martushev, Rosaire Ulliac, Charlene Gauthier, Marilee Duperron, Angie Sehn, Palmira Alvarez, and Cory Snegirev. I'm sorry for the ones that I have pronounced wrong. They are seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 205
Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection)
Amendment Act, 2001
(continued)**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It certainly gives me a great deal of pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and make a few comments on Bill 205.

Mr. Speaker, as other members have commented, the ability for agriculture to diversify in Alberta is extremely important. One only has to look at some of the results. For example, on more than one occasion the highest price for feed barley has been in Lethbridge. Well, why is that? The reason is, of course, the fact that there is so much livestock in the area that it has created that very strong market.

As well, when one looks at the province and looks at the diversity, as the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner talked about, we have in the province a situation where in southern Alberta, from Calgary south, the opportunity to diversify into specialty crops is much greater than in the area from Calgary north. When you really analyze what can happen in the area from Calgary north, the area is very suited to the production of coarse grains and forages. Well, in order to market those, we need to have the ability to process them in that area. One of the ways of processing them, of course, is with livestock. So it is important that we continue to have that opportunity.

Now, when we look at some of the things, particularly with the monopoly that the Canadian Wheat Board has on our ability to sell grains, and when we look at the transportation costs for moving

grain out of this province, it's going to be even more important that we find ways of processing. As an example, just this fall off our own farm we sold three cars of malt barley. Well, a third of the initial payment went to pay for the freight. You can't afford to grow grain if a third of the initial payment is going to go for freight. Now, of course, if we were rid of the Canadian Wheat Board and had the ability for a dual marketing system, then we could get away from some of that freight.

I think it is really important that we allow farmers to do what they do best, and if you're looking from Calgary north, it certainly is dealing with the production of feed grains and forages. To really process those, you need livestock.

Now, getting to the points in Bill 205, I had the same experience as the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, having served as a municipal councillor, reeve, and on the executive of the AMDs and Cs, so I know that this has been a big issue for some time within the province. The committee the hon. member mentioned that he served on did very good work, and they issued a very good report. However, there were a couple of things that were, I thought, deficient and didn't answer the questions.

The first one was to deal with the existing operations and how you handle those, and the second was the approval process. Quite frankly, I have a lot of difficulty with the current situation. Really what it amounts to is that we are being asked by municipalities – when I say “we,” it's the provincial government – to have the responsibility for these operations, yet we do not have the authority. That doesn't work, Mr. Speaker.

If anybody doubts that, I wish they would have been with me here about a month ago when I was called to the town of Bentley to a public meeting where I sort of got roasted. The fact was that we did not issue the permit. The county of Lacombe are the people that issued the permit, but they are not taking the responsibility. We are looked at by the people in that town as having the responsibility of governing that facility, yet we did not issue the permit. We did not have the authority to handle it. That is a major problem.

Now, I think that there are some things that we can do and should do that would in fact accommodate some of the comments that the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner made about having local authority. I have always agreed that we need to have that local input, and we need to have local authority, but I think some of that has to be done up front.

When we talk about the agricultural opportunities in the province, there's a lot of opportunity being lost today by the loss of agricultural land. That is in the case where towns, cities, highways, and all the rest of it are paving over agricultural land, and it's lost. But there's even a more major loss occurring out there, and that is the fragmentation of agricultural land. There's where we are going to really start running into a lot of trouble as it relates to intensive livestock operations, because in all of the things that I've seen, all of the experience that we've had with this whole issue, odour is the one thing that causes the biggest problem with the neighbours. Can anyone tell me where we have addressed that issue?

We've talked about setback. Setbacks do not work. That is simply a prescriptive issue, and it doesn't work. We have to look at outcome. How do we address the outcome?

Getting back to the land use issue, Mr. Speaker, I think that what we need to do is – and I think we probably have a responsibility as government – have changes in the Municipal Government Act that would require rural municipalities to zone their municipality where agriculture would be paramount. In an area where agriculture would be paramount, that means intensive livestock operations could be established in that area, providing of course that the environment is

protected. By that, I mean the water, the soils, and to the extent possible the air. Certainly some would disagree that the odour is simply a nuisance. I know there are a number that would argue that it is a health problem. Perhaps. I'm not getting into that argument. Currently under any regulation in the health act it's not a health issue. It is a nuisance. How do we address that?

The worry I have is that as we see this fragmentation occurring, we are going to be restricting what can happen in agriculture, not only in the intensive livestock operations but also with other issues that come up in normal agricultural practices; for example, the problem with dust, the problem with noise. Believe me, as a former minister of agriculture I found many times when people were complaining about sprayers . . .

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but the time set aside for this matter in our Routine today has now left us.

3:30

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Agricultural Investment Shares

502. Mr. Fischer moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the possibility of increasing investment dollars in agriculture and the agricultural industry through the use of a tax vehicle in the form of flow-through shares.

[Debate adjourned May 1: Ms Blakeman speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to address the Assembly regarding Motion 502. First I offer my sincere congratulations to the hon. Member for Wainwright for this very innovative approach. This motion urges the government to explore the use of flow-through shares as an investment tool to attract capital investment in the value-added processing and marketing sector of agriculture.

The sponsor of this motion is a rural member who has spent most of his life involved in agriculture. In fact, I believe that today his sons are farming, and I'm sure he talks to them regularly about some of the difficulties that he faces. We all know, too, that this hon. member seems to find his way out and about this province and has probably had the opportunity, albeit in a coffee shop or on a golf course, to talk to other farmers and people involved in agriculture about some of the immense difficulties facing this important sector.

Isn't this the province that has looked for the last few years at doing things differently, finding new and innovative approaches, looking for efficiencies, and giving credence to moving out of the old box? This is what I see in Motion 502. This motion, if passed, would be one more positive aspect relative to the Alberta economy, to the Alberta advantage, industry helping industry with government acting in the capacity of willing facilitator. We would be creating a positive environment where the agriculture sector could invest in agriculture, providing a hand up, not a huge handout.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The intent of this motion is to look at the benefits that could be accrued to the offering of flow-through shares. One only has to look at the exploration activity in the oil and gas sector and mining exploration as well to see the immediate effects of this type of initiative. Relevant to mining exploration these shares became popular in the late 1980s because of increased interest in gold and other precious metals. The economic impact of these shares to these sectors has been enormous. Between 1987 and 1991 flow-through

shares raised over \$2.5 billion for mining exploration. This amount represented 60 percent of all funding raised for mining exploration over this period.

Last week as the introducing sponsor of Bill 205 I mentioned that many, many challenges and issues are facing our community today. Just a few minutes ago we heard other speakers talk about what our farmers are indeed facing. Many Alberta farmers have been hit with a combination of factors over the last several years, factors certainly beyond their immediate control, including low commodity prices, rising input costs, multiple weather-related problems.

We heard just a minute ago about fragmentation of land. In that particular area it is with interest that I point out to the members of the Assembly that I have a gentleman in my constituency that this is probably his number one concern. He was in to see me a couple of weeks ago and told me that the land left available for agriculture purposes in Alberta is 17 percent with soils 1, 2, or 3. To me this is most significant, and it is something that we need to talk about and worry about. This land must be sustainable for the long term, for generations to come. Possibly we should look at land not as a commodity but in fact as a nonrenewable resource. If you think about the urban sprawl and the amount of land that is going for other uses, nonagriculture uses, I think that we need to have a discussion relevant to this.

Farmers are meeting a number of these challenges that they've had to deal with head on. Many, as we've talked about, have diversified, moving away from producing commodities that they cannot sell to producing commodities needed, much sought after in the global marketplace. As such, specialty crops and livestock production have increased dramatically. Our farmers can adapt, and flexible they must be as well, producing those commodities that are marketable and that others deem they will buy.

Many decisions made relative to the farm business's bottom line are no different than those made by the owner of the local hardware store. If the consumer, the people frequenting that particular hardware store, will not buy widgets, why would the owner of the store order widgets, have them on a shelf, and try to sell them? Any business must keep pace with supply and demand. We need to provide our agriculture sector with as many tools as possible so that they, too, can work to becoming self-reliant. I think this is one thing that would be accomplished if we were to vote for and the government were to look at implementing what is in Motion 502.

Motion 502 would attract investment dollars into the industry. Flow-through shares and value-added plants would provide a valid option for farmers and producers and give a much-needed and long-overdue boost to the agriculture sector. The common shares would be purchased pursuant to a flow-through agreement at a premium to the marketplace of a resource company's common shares as compensation for the benefit of tax deductions renounced by resource companies to the investor. That is how it works today, and it would work very much in the same way with the agriculture sector. The benefits of flow-through shares would help many small companies to do with oil and gas and to do with mining exploration, and the same thing would occur with farming. Many of these small businesses without this initiative would never have been able to raise the necessary financing.

The capital raised through the public offering of such common shares in the agriculture sector would be used to finance the construction of value-added production plants around Alberta. It is intended that flow-through shares will attract much-needed investment dollars in Alberta's agriculture sector, offering investor tax incentive opportunities for investment, number 1; assisting with the construction of agriculture value-added processing plants, number 2; and increasing the number of jobs within the agriculture sector.

Many farmers as well as some of the other things I talked about are not making enough today with the uncertain markets to look at replacing machinery. We have heard repeatedly in this House and within the rural areas about the high price of fertilizer as we move into spring seeding. One only has to drive up highway 2 to note the very severe dry conditions of our farmland and the erosion of good soil because of a lot of wind lately. So they do have some difficulty this year meeting many of the demands that will be placed upon them.

I think that offering the agriculture community any type of initiative, any type of incentive, any type of positive ideas as to how they could look at working with themselves and with other sectors within their industry is only good thinking. Again I congratulate the member for spending some time on this particular motion, and I hope that the entire Assembly will look at this. Value-added agriculture is important to Alberta, and the need for processing plants in the various sectors and commodities will only increase over time. We would have such things as processing plants for hogs and chickens. More and more we're getting into food processing as far as potatoes and carrots. So this is something that the farmers themselves could look at, what is needed close to their area, and with these flow-through shares it would be a win/win situation for all involved.

I would ask that others in this Assembly rise and support the hon. Member for Wainwright in this endeavour and that over time the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development might add this to a list of things to look at regarding the agriculture sector that would undoubtedly benefit all.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

3:40

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Motion 502, basically authorizing flow-through shares for the agriculture industry. This is a situation where we have to look seriously at how we go about creating situations to raise money or to allow for capital to flow into an industry. In a lot of ways what we have to do is look at how the market, the structure, the legislation that we put in place affect both the investment dollar and the decisions that surround that investment dollar and how they are put into the different kinds of sectors.

We've all heard about how the idea of flow-through shares have helped in the natural resource area, oil and gas. We've also heard how they're very effective in the high-risk motion picture industry areas as well. We have to look at it from the perspective of what's appropriate and right both in the context of agriculture and in terms of how we deal with defining the relative decisions that are made in the context of creating an environment to direct capital.

When we look at the concept of a flow-through share, basically what we're doing in a lot of cases is allowing the individual who buys those shares to essentially take the write-off of the cost in lieu of the company that they invested in, because that company doesn't have the income to write off the development costs. This basically gives a more rapid deduction against income tax payable, so in effect what we're doing is transferring income tax revenues over on a fractional basis based on the income of the investor. A lot of these investors are in the upper income level, so approximately half of that cost is being underwritten by the taxpayer when we deal with flow-through shares.

What happens then is that as the company starts to achieve some economic viability, you end up in a situation where the increase in

the value of those shares in that company that you invested in gets converted into capital gains, which in our normal process of legislative review right now of our taxation we're basically increasing the exemption from taxation for more and more of capital gain incomes. So what we're going to effectively do is provide an investment in agriculture funded by the taxpayer of Alberta as opposed to the individual who puts up the money.

When we look at where we use flow-through shares right now, we see them being used in industries where the risk is unbelievably unpredictable in the sense: how successful is a motion picture or an oil well or a gas well? I know that in the oil and gas industry with the new methods of seismic activity the predictability of drilling is getting to be much greater, but they're still in high-risk areas, which have a very broad-based economic spinoff either in terms of the economy of Alberta because of our oil and gas industry or because of the magnitude of the potential return that's associated with the motion picture industry and the entertainment industry.

When we look at agriculture and we're going to put flow-through shares into agriculture, this is a whole different group of investors that we're looking at here. These are not the high-speculative, high-risk investors that are being asked to put up money into these agriculture investments. So what we've got to do is look at where the alternatives are that these individuals would invest those dollars in. It's not going to be in these high-risk investments; it's going to be in other comparable investments to agriculture. What we've got to do, then, is decide: if we look at this as a mechanism we want in place for agriculture, where are we going to take those investment dollars from? What sector are they going to come out of? It's going to have to be a sector where there's approximately the same degree of risk and the same degree of knowledge.

Now, if we were to look at these and say that this is going to be constrained somehow to the advancing technologies, you know, the new bioengineered foods or some of these kinds of areas where there is a high risk and a high speculative value, this may be more comparable to where we're already using them in the economy, and we'll be giving the same kind of risk reward or risk recognition to this. You know, to have a flow-through share go out and get involved in investing in, say, an intensive livestock operation or a traditional value-added activity in agriculture like a flour mill or a pasta mill or some of the other value-added components that are quite common out there, effectively what we're going to do is we're going to distort the market in the sense that the people who have already invested in these value-added areas are now going to have to compete with somebody who has a quick write-off through a flow-through share in another area.

So I would suggest that if we want to look at this in agriculture, we should be looking at it with the restriction that it be encouraged in, quote, the high-risk new investments, the frontier areas of value added in agriculture rather than the traditional areas, because we'll end up distorting that market in those traditional areas where people have conventionally invested here and now all of a sudden they're going to have the option for a flow-through share investment over here.

What we're going to see, too, is that in the context of the way it will work, this will probably be much more attractive to the extremely large-scale investors if we're going to talk about the traditional agriculture sector, you know, the very large intensive livestock operations or the very large type of farm intensive, whether it's irrigation, whether it's extensive in the context of grain production. If we want to look at it from that perspective, I would suggest that we shouldn't be putting in place support out of the public system. Mr. Speaker, I consider a forgiveness of taxation to be the

same as a payment of a dollar subsidy. There's no difference in the context of the public's role.

So what we have to look at there is how we're affecting this in the context of the competitive position of respective businesses in our rural communities. I would suggest that unless it's constrained to, as I've said, these frontier types of activities, the frontier type value added, you know, the new bioengineered technologies or these kinds of things, we're going to distort the agriculture market out there both in terms of biasing it toward the extremely large producers and toward the existing producers compared to the new producers.

This to me is not acceptable in the context of what vision I've heard Albertans express in the context of the growth summit on agriculture, where people were talking about the concepts of agriculture and agriculture development that are consistent with the promotion of a community life and a community commitment. What we'll see here is essentially an opportunity for the community to lose its agriculture sector to these very large intensive livestock operations or to other very capital-intensive operations who get their investment through this kind of process.

Mr. Speaker, what you end up with, then, are the kinds of situations where – and it's coming up more and more now with the concept of the intensive livestock. We're creating through this almost a different land use that farmers are now developing into a marketable asset, and that's the asset or the title to dispose of livestock waste. What we end up with is some farmers effectively generating an income flow, even if it's in lieu of an expense, by allowing their land to be held captive by an intensive livestock operation as a waste dump.

3:50

That affects the community in the sense that if that individual at some time wants to sell their property, either the intensive livestock operator has to find a new owner in the area to accept the waste, or if they've got a long-term contract, it has to be passed on to the new buyer. That new buyer, then, doesn't have the option to develop a livestock operation because the land base is already committed for waste disposal to an intensive livestock operation.

You know, these kinds of activities are going to affect our rural communities. I would, I guess, encourage the members here to look at this motion very seriously. If it is supported and passed, what we have to look at is: when it comes time to implement this, let's very seriously look at how we target the identification of the different sectors that this investment-generating activity can be used in. When I talk to people in rural Alberta and when I talk to community members, they don't want to see what in essence would be a biased system generated where the large-scale individuals would have an advantage over the smaller community-based operators. So this is, I guess, where we need to go on this and look at it from the perspective of how it is going to promote the kind of development and the focus of development that we want to see in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, it's really important that we look at how we can develop some kind of capital pool for agriculture, and I think some of the things we might want to look at are maybe some investment types of activities that'll share costs, allow for pooled investment.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

Electricity Deregulation

503. Dr. Nicol moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to prepare annually a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills on all classes of customers in Alberta which must be released to the public.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure this afternoon to stand and move Motion 503. This is one of the issues that comes up quite frequently as we look at the process we use here to make decisions that affect the economic development and the economic well-being of Albertans.

You know, most of the time we should be doing this kind of analysis before we look at activities, before we look at the promotion of a particular initiative in the legislative arena, and what we would've wanted to have seen here is a real look at the kinds of benefits we expect to get out of electricity deregulation. How will it contribute to an advancement in terms of the competitive position of Alberta business, the relative cost and well-being that comes about with respect to individuals in terms of their own residential use of utilities?

Mr. Speaker, the whole area of electricity and our natural gas becomes complicated when we start to talk about them in the context of our business development initiatives and the direction that we take in dealing with the appropriate role of government. This comes down to essentially electricity having a dual market function in the sense that it is an input in a production process and it's also a utility for residences and consumers. So what we need to do is possibly look at how we would implement a cost-benefit analysis and who is going to get the benefits out of this.

Mr. Speaker, when we debated the deregulation act, one of the things I pointed out – and I've talked about it quite frequently since – is that in the context of what we're dealing with here, we are in a position to effectively go back and look at deregulation and determine whether or not it is going to give Alberta any kind of a true benefit that it would not have had with the continuation of the existing electricity marketing structure, or electricity distribution structure I guess says it better. You know, when you talk about marketing, you imply some degree of choice and decision-making associated with a market, but in effect what we had was a distribution system where price was determined by formula.

If we look at trying to put in place the concept of cost-benefit analysis, we want to be looking at this from the point of view of who the recipients are going to be. One of the big things that I heard about before we talked about deregulation was the relative transfer of value that was associated with the existing structure of our electricity distribution system. We used to have different classes of power, yet we talked about a pool pricing system. Well, you know, what we could have done to get rid of that if we truly wanted a pool pricing system was reduce or eliminate the different class rates.

There was no justification for the class rates other than a specific decision to have the industrial and commercial sectors subsidize the residential sectors in their electricity. That should never have happened if we were really dealing with a pooled system. So as we went away from the kind of class identification we had, we created an obvious benefit to the industrial and commercial sectors at the cost to the residential sector by allowing for a common price.

We're probably also going to further influence that in the sense that we allow for large businesses to go out and buy block amounts, with their peak loads bought on a contingency or spot market basis, but individuals that are in the residential market don't have the option the way a large block business or a combination of block businesses has to go out and buy jointly. What we have to do, then, is look at how that is going to effectively work in the sense that it will transfer the buying advantage to the large users at the expense of the small users. You know, this is why we're talking about who are the gainers and the losers from this. That's basically what a cost-

benefit analysis tells you: where do the benefits go and at what cost? In the context of deregulation we have to look at that.

You know, if we look at all the projections that are given to us – and we constantly hear the minister and the Premier talking about our being back down to competitive prices in five years, Mr. Speaker. If we start dealing with net present values on looking at the flow of dollars that is going to occur, in five years the price advantage to introducing a competitive marketing system will have to be unbelievably large to offset the net present value of the five-year interim period where we are so significantly above what would have been the price had we continued with the current market structure and the current market pricing system, even if we took and eliminated that bias that was associated with the user price class system.

4:00

So what we've got to do, then, is try to figure that out. It's almost impossible to imagine the degree to which the benefits would accrue subsequent to the time when the price would drop back down to where it might have been if we stayed with the current system.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at it – and it would be really interesting to do an analysis 10 or 15 years into the future and look back on this when we've actually got a historic price path for us to follow. But, you know, we've got to watch here because what we've done in an industry where we have an increasing cost curve: the concept of moving to marginal-cost pricing always guarantees that the market price would be above the price that was associated with an average-pricing system if you stayed with that. We've moved from an average-cost pricing system to a marginal-cost pricing system, and there is no foreseeable new technology that would give us any kind of an expectation of a reduced marginal cost for new generation in the future.

So, essentially, what we've done is we've asked Albertans on into the future always to pay more than they would have had they stayed with average-cost pricing. If we look at that kind of analysis in the context of our cost benefits, you know, actually changing the pricing mechanism as well as changing the structure, what we'll see is that the costs to Albertans are significantly higher than what they'll be able to see in the context of the benefits. Because until we have a downward-sloping supply curve – and that's only going to come when we have a new technology, a new mechanism to provide us with electricity – we're going to have prices that are above the cost that's associated with the former pricing system.

The reason that we're asking for this to be done on an annual basis is to look at it from the perspective of giving Albertans a chance to basically see how they are essentially approaching, if they ever do, this position where, in a sense, their benefits exceed the costs that they've had to experience because of the deregulation process.

You know, I guess by doing it on a tracked basis, what we're doing is essentially saying that we're giving the government a chance to show Albertans that the net benefit to them would be positive at some point in the future. As my explanation that I've just given in terms of this discussion, I don't think that would happen, but that's a challenge, I guess, that we each have to face in the context of: I take a risk that if this is done, I get proven wrong, but also, if the government does this, there's a chance that in the end Albertans will realize that the net effect and the net benefit of their deregulation system is a long ways in the future, if they receive any benefit from it at all. When you go back, then, on an annual basis, you can compare the numbers and do net present value on them. We can see that as of the time we made the decision, there was no rational basis in terms of cost benefit to actually do it.

Mr. Speaker, we could have given our industrial consumers of electricity, who use electricity as a production input, not as a utility,

an extreme opportunity to have benefits by just collapsing the price class system that we have and not going to a marginal-cost pricing system.

It's really interesting in the sense that a lot of the discussion that we see now in the context of the potential new generation comes with kind of the proviso that there will be an export market opportunity for that generated power, and, Mr. Speaker, this is a normal process in the context of a business decision. You don't want to make the kind of investment that's necessary to generate electricity in a closed market. We could have developed that flexibility and that incentive for our private-sector generators which we had before. We could have provided them with that opportunity in the sense that we could have given them an option to build a generator, commit a certain percentage of it to the Alberta pool, and then allow them to market the rest of it, either for peak load in Alberta or into the export market. We have an opportunity here because of our coal resources to generate power at a profitable level into the western grid.

But I don't see why we necessarily want to have Albertans subject to the marginal-cost pricing situation that is going to exist in the western grid, especially when large consumers like California create such a mess that they've created in the context of an environment where they're short of supply. We're always hearing now about: well, you know, the price of electricity is now down to \$90. This high price that we had before isn't really significant. I think it's now probably around \$110 or \$112 on the daily blend price. But what's it going to be this summer, Mr. Speaker, when California needs more power to deal with the air conditioning demand down there?

How are we going to deal with that as our power gets bid down into the B.C. grid, the tie lines through B.C. to that western grid where they need that air conditioning electricity? We're going to have to compete with all of the individuals in California for their will to be cool. Instead of coming up and visiting us like tourists, like they should do, they're going to want to stay home and be cool. We're going to have to sell them our electricity to do it, and we'll end up paying for our electricity because of that. This is why this kind of a system where we're going to expose ourselves to basically the improper or the not-well-planned decisions of another jurisdiction — do we want that to travel back and impact on our consumers?

Mr. Speaker, this is extremely difficult for individuals on a fixed income when they look at how they have to proportion their fixed income budget and all of a sudden they find a lot of up and down spikes in their utility costs. We saw it last fall in natural gas. We saw it last winter in electricity. We'll probably see it again this summer in electricity as we deal with basically somebody else determining the price of our electricity. Until we get to a point where the generation capacity in Alberta exceeds the needs of Albertans and the capacity to export, we're always going to be subject to the issue of another place setting the price for electricity here, because we're dealing with that marginal-cost pricing system.

I guess in the conclusion of this, Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is look at how this benefits Albertans in the sense that what it'll do is give them a sense of confidence that there is a kind of a trend toward an increased benefit scenario. Even if we do it without looking at the structural change in the pricing system, the average versus marginal cost, if we only do it in the context of how is it coming through, if we take some of the impacts of secondary benefits through a cost-benefit analysis, what we'll see is that because of the lower price in the structure for industrial commercial users, what we'll end up with is individuals in Alberta seeing that there is additional employment, that there is additional economic opportunity created because the activities and the proposals and the hopes that we put forward by promoting this kind of deregulation actually occurred.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I don't see it happening, but I would very much like to stand up in this Legislature five years from now or write you a letter in maybe 10 years from now and say: "I apologize. I was wrong. Deregulation was good." But until we have this kind of data, I guess I won't really have a basis to be able to sit down and say, "Gee, that's how it happened, and that's how we're going to measure it." So, don't hold your breath because you probably won't get the letter because we won't have the data to deal with it, but, Mr. Speaker, I'd really like to be in a position 10 years from now to be able to write that letter. With this kind of information we could, and I'd also like to be able to admit or to apologize to Albertans and say: "I was wrong on that. You ended up better off because of deregulation." But on that basis, again, I don't think I'll be writing the letter either, because I don't think we'll get to a position where this kind of an analysis will show Albertans are better off because we made the shift than what they would have been if we would have just fine-tuned the system that was there.

So on that basis, Mr. Speaker, I think I would ask individuals to make a commitment to Albertans to provide them with the information that they can use to judge how they're going to benefit from the structural change that we've put into our electricity industry through deregulation. I would ask everybody here to give us that chance or to commit our government to provide them with that information so they can feel comfortable knowing that the decision was made and they're going to benefit from it.

So on that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and allow others to make some comments.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate having the opportunity to rise in the Assembly and address Motion 503, and I appreciate very much that the Member for Lethbridge-East is trying to get more information out to the public about the cost of electricity. I'm pretty sure that anybody getting a bill in Alberta in the last six months knows what electricity costs. What they may not realize is why prices have gone up, and I would like to address that while speaking to this motion.

We've all heard the term supply and demand, and we also know that when demand comes close to the supply level or in fact in peak demand times exceeds that supply level, the price is going to go up. That holds true for all goods and services of all kinds from cars to apartment rentals to commodities, and hon. members and Mr. Speaker, electricity is in fact a commodity.

In a report done in December of 2000 for the market surveillance administrative, the MSA determined that a combination of factors had contributed to high market prices. The report listed many contributing factors such as fuel prices, electricity prices specific to opportunity costs and other regional markets, weather and precipitation, hydro generation and its particular characteristics, operating reserves carried on the system, maintenance, supply growth relative to demand, and technical limitations on the interprovincial interconnections.

The reasons for deregulation in the first place were to make it possible for companies other than the monopolies, which were TransAlta, Alberta Power, and ATCO, to generate electricity inside this province and put their surplus power into the grid. The regulatory framework that existed for years did in fact serve Alberta well for a period of time. However, when it takes over 10 years of hearings to allow one of the monopolies to bring a power plant

onstream in Alberta, you can tell that the system is no longer working. In addition to that specific delay, the cost of the last regulated plant in Alberta went up by over \$650 million because of all of those hearings, and by the way, Albertans had to pay that \$650 million as well.

Even as recently as six years ago it was estimated that we had a surplus of power of close to 20 percent, but while that may have been true, the monopolies for the past six years did nothing, and they did not seem to even notice that we were averaging a growth rate of over 4 percent a year. New people were moving in, new investment was coming into the province, and new companies were opening up here. And, yes, the surplus of power was in fact disappearing. The majors did nothing to address this looming shortage. Incidentally, just computer usage alone has increased power consumption by close to 12 percent. But I digress.

Fortunately for us cogeneration came onstream, over 1,400 megawatts in the past four years alone. Another 600 megawatts of new and cogeneration power will come onstream this year. In addition to this, over 4,000 megawatts of power development have been announced in the past six months. One wonders if the cost-benefit analysis the member wants done would take into account what would have happened if deregulation had not come in. What happens in a growing and booming economy when we've run out of power? If you want to talk about high prices, I wonder what it would be today without the cogeneration that is already in our grid system.

I love that the opposition are always looking for a downside on everything, and it has been easy to take shots at deregulation. I mean, talk about bad timing. Who knew that natural gas prices would go from \$2.70 to \$16 in a 90-day period of time? Who knew when the power plants were converting from coal to natural gas in the past five years that it would force the price of power way up in the year 2000 and 2001? How many Albertans know that our transmission grid system cannot really handle much more power on the existing lines? Most of the power in Alberta is produced in the Edmonton area, yet much of the demand is in southern Alberta.

Several new cogeneration and stand-alone power plants are being built or planned for in the constituency that I represent. This has created concerns there, as well, Mr. Speaker. However, the truth is that the transmission system that we currently have will not handle the power if it has to come from long distances. We have to build the plants closer to where the use is. Our interprovincial connections will not handle much more power either, yet the big fear now is that we're going to export power.

Well, one day maybe we'll be in a surplus position again and we could export it. In fact, we do during the night export some to British Columbia but not with the transmission grid system we have today. It has a 950-kilovolt limit on it. Billions have to be spent enhancing the existing lines just to get power around the province. We could be buying power from the Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan, but the lines won't handle any right now.

So we sit here talking about yet more reports on the cost of power when we should be talking about how to fast-track projects. We should be talking about building a bigger and better grid system, and we should be talking about how to promote the safe and environmentally friendly use of coal, which we have in abundance here.

For too long we as Albertans have just taken power for granted. It was just there. You flip a switch and the light goes on. Well, they thought that in California too. Their population doubled in the last 15 years, and no one built any power plants. I mean, why would you? The environmentalists were opposed to them. No one wants to live anywhere near one. And what the heck? You can buy it from somebody else anyway.

Well, California did everything wrong, Mr. Speaker. To make it even worse, they've now reregulated their system and put the taxpayers at even greater risk down there. They have to build plants, and it just gets that simple.

Every 100 megawatts that you need to build will cost approximately \$100 million, and California needs 30,000 megawatts of power. We are not California. We dealt with higher prices through British Columbia in large part because of their sale of power to California.

Several independent auditors have studied our deregulation model. In fact, it's probably not a perfect system, but the auditors all say the same thing. We are on track for a long-term sustainable and affordable electricity industry. Higher prices would have existed with or without deregulation, and to say otherwise is being less than forthright with Albertans. Our problem is caused by high and rapid growth and high natural gas prices. All the cost-benefit analyses in the world won't change that. We need more power, and deregulation will give us that. The creation of a competitive marketing option in energy is a long-term process certain to undergo bumps along the way.

An annual report that does not emphasize this long-term vision, especially one that focuses on the short-term cost/benefits on electricity bills, would be misleading. The department of resource development has already established a transition plan for electricity deregulation, and the department will be pursuing its own targeted reports on the opening up of competitive market options, reports that will be far more valuable to us than what this motion would suggest.

I urge all hon. members to defeat Motion 503.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure at this time to get an opportunity to participate in the debate on Motion 503, a cost-benefit analysis for the electricity deregulation. The only thing I can say at this time, Mr. Speaker, is that certainly it is about time that a cost-benefit analysis would be provided not only to members of this Assembly but to consumers, whether they be residential or industrial consumers of electricity, the ones that are paying for the mismanagement and the mistakes that have been made by the current government in the handling of this issue.

We are talking about having forecasts and a cost-benefit analysis, forecasts for electricity prices well into the future, for another 20 years. Contrary to what the hon. member has just stated, we've got organizations such as Optimum Energy Management. Their analyses are used, and they have a very accurate analysis for forecasting hourly pool prices. For those analyses to be dismissed I think is just simply not right.

4:20

Now, of course, we all heard that electricity deregulation promised to bring lower electricity prices for all Albertans through increased competition, but that certainly has not happened. So far all we've seen are skyrocketing prices due to a number of factors, including a lack of investment in new generation due to the lack of rules for deregulation. The lack of investment is a reflection on the lack of confidence in the current government to administer this deregulation scheme.

Now, if we look back, Mr. Speaker, to the past in this province, we will see that a former government – and I believe it was in 1948; I'm not sure about that date, but I think it was in 1948 – actually held a referendum to bring to the citizens of the province the issue of where the province should go with the distribution and generation

of electricity. There were two options in the referendum. The first was a publicly owned utility, and the second option was a combination of both private generators and a distribution system that would be possibly publicly owned. The citizens of this province in a narrow vote chose the second option. We lived with that for 50 years.

All members of this Assembly talk about parliamentary reform. They talk about free votes, and they talk about referendums, but this is a case of a government actually going to the people in conjunction with a provincial election and being bound by the results.

We had this electrical distribution and generation system that, contrary to what other hon. members may think, actually dealt with the economic expansion of the '70s quite adequately. There was a planned expansion of the electrical grid. There were transmission lines installed. Transmission lines, as I understand it, are about 40 percent of the cost of the entire system. They can be up to 40 percent of the entire cost of the system. The system worked. What did this government do? Well, it simply put blind ideology before common sense. The consumers of electricity, whether they're industrial or residential, are paying the price, and they're going to pay the price well into the future.

Now, many industry experts suggest that electricity prices will come down, Mr. Speaker, from where they are currently but do not necessarily suggest that they will come down to where they once were before deregulation. It is interesting that even the Premier admitted in question period in this session that prices may never come down to where they were before deregulation. So, in other words, once all this settles out, we're still going to have prices that are much higher than our sister provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia.

What sort of economic advantage are we going to have? What sort of advantage, for instance, is Lethbridge Iron Works going to have? Unfortunately, the only advantage it's going to have is that perhaps the moving vans that are deadheading to Winnipeg are going to be empty. If that individual unfortunately has to move his enterprise to Manitoba, where electricity rates are cheaper, the move will be less costly. That's the only advantage that I can see in this, because the electricity costs are not going to go down.

An hon. member over there talked about exports, and I do not want to spend too much time on exports, but at this time we have to be very, very careful about getting fly ash in our face because of electricity exports to America, which is going to be hungry for electricity. What are we going to be left with? The pollution?

No one in this Assembly can tell me that CCTs, as they're called, the clean coal technologies, exist that are economically competitive. If someone on the opposite side of the House has a study that can prove that clean coal technologies exist and are economically competitive, show them, because right now all our coal-fired generators in this province are ironically called PC, pulverized coal, units. The CCTs that are claimed to be the wave of the future are still on the drawing board, and I would encourage that perhaps part of the half a billion dollars that's been set aside for research and development in this province could go to that effort. That would be a real good location for some of that research and development money, and perhaps we can develop our own clean coal technologies, because on the research that I've done, we've still got a lot of work to do, Mr. Speaker.

Now electricity exports. There are permits already available for many different producers of power in this province. They've got two choices here: they can have firm permits or they can be interruptible, but it exists. Now, the line capacity doesn't exist, and who is going to pay the benefit of that? I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen this current government all too often

proceed with things, whether it's health care privatization or electrical system deregulation, without any evidence that it will work, and this is why a cost-benefit analysis would be so beneficial. To do it on an annual basis – I would almost think it should be done quarterly. As I understand, there are quarterly reports presented to the Economic Development minister on any number of issues. So perhaps if it's good enough for the Department of Economic Development, well, it's good enough for the rest of us.

Now, normally, Mr. Speaker, a cost-benefit analysis would be done before proceeding with something like deregulation, but since the current government has chosen to proceed anyway, we can only gauge and measure how we are proceeding. Right now we just have to think of the \$40 a month rebate. That's not a ringing endorsement.

Now, such a cost-benefit analysis needs to look at all classes of Alberta consumers, from the largest of the industrial users to the smallest of the residential users. A cost-benefit analysis would look at the impact deregulation has on all types of consumers, whether it's been positive or negative.

Now, currently the government is taking an ad hoc regulatorylike intervention position in the electricity marketplace. I can't see how the government can talk about free enterprise, because this is certainly not conducive to a free, open, and competitive marketplace. There are still the outstanding questions as to whether electricity is what some economists call a natural monopoly and that's how it should remain.

Furthermore, without a plan for effective assistance for Albertans and without a long-sighted plan for deregulation, everyone in this province is ill served. By developing a long-term plan, one that is well thought out and ready to be executed, all our interests can be served. A cost-benefit analysis helps accomplish . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

4:30

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

Second Reading

Bill 12

Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and move second reading of Bill 12, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, the need to harmonize legislation in the prairie provinces has been recognized for the past two decades. Triprovincial meetings have been held to further this end. It is anticipated the passage of this Bill 12 will help move us further down the road in our efforts to harmonize with the other prairie provinces. In preparing this legislation, considerable input through the Farmers' Advocate office was completed. Stakeholder review included 462 Alberta licensed dealers, the Prairie Implement Manufacturers Association, Canada West Equipment Dealers Association, Canadian Farm & Industrial Equipment Institute, and 10 farm organizations including the Alberta Cattle Commission, Western Stock Growers' Association, and the Alberta barley growers, to name a few.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, addresses three key elements: clarification and simplification of definitions in sales agreements, a change in the notice period for failure to perform, and an amendment of the dealer and distributor obligations at termination. The amendments will

clarify that a purchaser means a farmer using the equipment for farming use, not other off-farm use such as using a tractor for road construction. It will provide regulatory authority to exempt specific implements from the act like a garden tractor for mowing your lawn. It'll clarify the specific references to tractors in the act under section 4(1) to be completely farm implements. Not all tractors have a drawbar or power takeoff, and legislation already requires the equipment to meet manufacturers' specifications. If the unit has a power takeoff or drawbar, then that power would be listed in these specifications.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, will harmonize our act to be in line with what the other prairie provinces are at or going to. Manitoba's legislation currently specifies, on the notice of failure, to perform 50 hours or 10 consecutive days. This act brings us to 50 hours. However, due to a concern that weather conditions may preclude a purchaser from using his implement during a specific 10-day time frame, we've not made that requirement consecutive.

In addition to keeping the harmonization with other prairie provinces, this amendment will increase the amount payable to the dealer for parts returned with new parts from 85 percent to 90 percent and also clarify that at the time of dealer termination the distributor is responsible for storage and transportation on returnable parts and whole goods. The act will also increase the amount to 100 percent of the current net price where the agreement to terminate is at the distributor's request.

Mr. Speaker, harmonization will allow distributors easier access to all three western provinces by providing standard rules of operation. Without harmonization, dealers and ultimately farmers are not given parity throughout the prairies. This bill will enhance interprovincial trade through clarification and simplification.

Having said this, I ask for the support of members of this House for second reading of Bill 12.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today and speak to the Farm Implement Amendment Act. This I guess has been an issue that has been raised on a number of occasions in the last number of years when I've talked to farmers across the province, and they've wanted to have their legislation brought to some degree of consistency with what is in place for other farmers across western Canada. There are a couple of questions that I would like to raise on this. They're specific to some of the sections in it, and I just want clarification as to whether or not they're really the intent of the legislation or not. I think given the discussions we're having about how legislation is going to proceed, I'll talk to those couple of issues right now rather than waiting till committee, when we're supposed to talk about the specific sections in the act.

I guess the issue here is that when we're talking about a purchaser in the definition section, by adding the specific definition to be farming use, it appears here that essentially what we're dealing with is that a purchaser is "a farmer who purchases a farm implement for his own [farming] use." What about farmers who purchase it and use it in a custom operation? Is that a broad interpretation to be included in this? I can see the benefit of distinguishing between a person who purchases and is going to use what is effectively a farm implement for an industrial or construction use. But to essentially put in a definition that limits the use of this to a farmer who purchases it only for their own farming use, I interpret that to mean for use in your own operational farm as opposed to in the delivery of farming services.

So I guess in the context of that definitional change I would ask

that the sponsor of the bill, the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, and the department of agriculture look at this and see whether or not that is truly the interpretation they wanted. If not, maybe some clarification needs to be put in there so that we have a clear definition of whether or not someone buying equipment for use in custom operations would also be included in that definition. I don't consider a custom operator as buying a piece of equipment for their own farming use if they're using it to earn an income by farming for someone else.

I guess the other issue here is the amendment under section 5 where they're talking about the change to 50 hours. I guess what's happening here is essentially looking at it and putting in a minimum standard for effectively a time frame or a use frame for warranty work. Then what we should be doing here is essentially putting in a statement that stipulates that a clear definition of a warranty must be provided in the context of some issues, because potentially there are situations where to acquire a minimum standard of warranty creates an opportunity or a hardship in the context of a sales contract. But if we actually say that there must be an expressed warranty even if that warranty is zero, then the purchaser is buying in a situation of awareness; you know, they're fully informed, and they know what they're getting.

As long as there's a clear definition of a warranty, I don't see why we in the Legislature should be telling manufacturers, distributors, dealers, and use purchasers what kind of commitment to service they should be putting in place. This should be something that is negotiated and becomes part of the relative trade negotiation between different dealers and dealerships, manufacturers and distributors. So I guess as we look to truly allowing marketplaces to work and marketplaces to express themselves, to me that essentially legislates into the market some kind of a restriction that effectively should be allowed to be developed by the participants in a sales agreement.

With those couple of comments just on the record so that they can be looked at in the context of the time frame, I would urge everybody to look at this and consider it very seriously, because the farming sector has been asking for this kind of change in the act to satisfy their expectations, I guess, in terms of how they can relate to a dealership and how it will provide them with a degree of openness and accountability when they purchase farm implements. So congratulations to the member for bringing it in. It's been waited for by the agriculture community.

With those couple of considerations that I've brought up, I think we should look at this very favourably. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close debate.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to thank the hon. member for his comments. I appreciate his comments.

With that, I'll close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a second time]

4:40

Bill 13 Farm Implement Dealerships Act

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, is

designed to improve competition and remove restrictions placed on farm implement dealers by preventing distributors from terminating dealership agreements without cause. This bill defines cause, process, and options available for canceling a dealership agreement. I would like to be very clear that we are not for a moment suggesting that distributors cannot and should not be able to decide with whom they would like to do business.

[The Speaker in the chair]

What we are proposing is a process whereby the playing field is level. Both farm implement dealers and distributors are able to make sound business decisions knowing that unilateral impositions will not negatively impact the future direction of their independent businesses.

Mr. Speaker, currently, through strongly worded dealership agreements, farm equipment distributors can dictate the day-to-day operations of a dealership by mandating, for example, the brand of equipment available, the size or number of facilities, and the colour of paint on the floor. It's important to remember that we are not talking about a McDonald's or Tim Horton franchise. We are talking about a family business where the father cannot pass the business down to his son or daughter because the distributor refuses to provide product to a new owner. We are talking about businessmen who have carried a specific line of equipment, trained their service technicians, and have provided quality service to customers for 15 or 20 years now being told that they need to discontinue offering these services and that if they don't comply, they will be shut down.

Mr. Speaker, in many rural communities the local farm implement dealership is the largest single employer. It is imperative that the economic viability of these communities continues to be maintained. Bill 13 goes to the heart of one significant concern for farmers and implement dealerships, which is the availability of products and services locally. Without this legislation we will continue to see closures of dealerships, resulting in greater cost to farmers through increased travel for parts and service. As well, farmers will be forced to carry large parts inventories on-site. When the weather is right for seeding or harvest, time is of the essence. Farmers can ill afford the time required to make a 100-mile trip one way for a repair part. This bill will go a long way to ensuring that manufacturers don't lose their retail outlets and local dealerships and remain in the neighbourhood providing support to the community and its economy.

Saskatchewan was the first province to recognize the need for dealer protection. Manitoba and Prince Edward Island quickly followed suit by passing similar legislation. Bill 13 will ensure that Albertans receive the same standards and function under the same principles as other agricultural operators in Canada.

Bill 13 will support dealerships in carrying a greater selection of equipment and services for their customers. Through this improved opportunity will come greater profitability. Farmers will see competitive pricing, selection, and service.

Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we reap the benefits of strong competition and a business environment with little or no government interference. Bill 13 will ensure that the farm implement industry is granted those same privileges. A dealership's fate will lie in the hands of the market and their own business acumen and not in the hands of distributors.

Since the initial release of Bill 13 on May 7, 2001 – that was just yesterday – response from dealers and rural constituents has been strongly supportive.

Bill 13 will help to support our rural communities and the backbone of Alberta, and that's agriculture.

Having said this, Mr. Speaker, I ask for the support of the members of this House for second reading of Bill 13.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would support the member in saying that this is a good bill, long waited for by the agriculture community in Alberta. This is going to essentially provide some options for purchasers of farm equipment, when we're seeing more and more a concentration of the main-line manufacturing activities. I think we're down now to basically four different significant manufacturers of farm equipment.

We have to look at it from the point of view of: how do we encourage and create competition in the market, and how do we increase the ability of farmers to both be able to shop but also be able to deal with some of the specialized equipment that's out there? We've heard a number of cases brought up in the last few years where main-line manufacturers or distributors have come along and asked dealers to give up short lines even though that short line was not in any way in competition with the pieces of equipment that were being supplied by the major distributor. So what we have to look at then is: how do we encourage that competition? The other provinces in western Canada have had dealership protection legislation in place for a number of years, and I think this is one of the pieces of legislation that will be well received in Alberta.

Again, as I read through this bill, I have just a couple of questions that have come up in the context of some of the particular sections that are there. In section 2(3) we're looking here at some restrictions on price discrimination. I guess the concern there that I would like to raise is some of the issues that might come up in the context of some of the larger dealerships that are able to buy quantity orders from the distributor. Does that not allow them to negotiate volume discounts? You know, we're talking here only about discrimination based on grade and quality, but the issue, then, I guess is that as long as it's the same grade and the same quality, the price has to be the same. But if you're buying a number of them, what we have to do is look at: is that an option? How can we clarify that in the context of section 2(3), and is that the way we want to deal with it?

So I guess the next section there as well, 2(4), is where we're talking about "substantially different contractual requirements related to dealership agreements on different dealers." I know that there are some cases out there where the distributors, in order to sustain a local dealership, have provided significantly different relationships so that they can actually keep a dealership in a region. I think what we've got to do here is look at it and make sure that the wording in this section is such that it doesn't allow a distributor to impose "substantially different contractual requirements" that create a disadvantage for a dealer.

That's, I guess, the way we want to look at it, more than just a blanket different type of a contract, because some of the distributors do provide reasonably beneficial or concessionary agreements to some of their dealers in order to keep them there. If we're going to say that they have to provide that same kind of concession to every dealer, then what we're doing, effectively, is not allowing the marketplace and the commitment to service to show as it could.

Mr. Speaker, I guess as we look beyond the bill here, I think section 2(5) is really the meat of the whole thing, where we have to make sure that a distributor is not allowed to discriminate against a dealer based on their carrying secondary lines or short-line equipment. What this is going to do is help the purchaser have an option, especially when we're dealing with specialized equipment, equip-

ment that could potentially be recognized as unique to their kind of use.

What this kind of a restriction also does is it provides in many ways a real opportunity for a manufacturer of a specialized product or a local manufacturer the opportunity to have their product sold through a dealership that already has kind of the support network to be a dealership. This is really good, because what we've got to do is encourage and provide opportunity for new manufacturers to enter into the market of providing equipment for the agricultural producers. If we can make sure that a distributor can't restrict their dealerships from handling additional product, even if it is a competing product, then what this does is it facilitates the new innovators.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the agriculture community, I can probably sit here and name off for the rest of the evening the pieces of equipment that you've seen developed by small manufacturers. They've developed them in the context of a specialized need to meet a condition that's either relevant to their area or to their type of farming. Then we end up seeing that piece of equipment later being picked up and the patents either taken under licence or actually bought out and become part of the major distributor's new line or new piece.

So what it does is it encourages innovation and kind of the adoption, because we look back and see how often new equipment, new ideas, new applications occur at the smaller level rather than at the big level where they're just thinking about improving their product or because they don't have the grassroots connection to actually see where farmers have changed their farming practice or have changed their cropping rotation or have changed the way they want to handle the product when it comes out. So they don't sense to the same degree that maybe their piece of equipment is becoming obsolete.

What we end up with here is a chance for small manufacturers to get a chance to put their product into a dealership, allow other farmers to have access to that product, use it for a little while, and essentially give it a chance to prove itself. Then it can be adopted or it is adopted by the major manufacturers and sold through their distribution channels.

So on that, Mr. Speaker, what we've got to do is look at this and deal with it from how it would best serve Alberta farmers. I think the way to do it is to put this in a way with the changes that are suggested through Bill 12 and look at them as a package of bills or two bills here that are going to really send a message out to the agriculture community that we've listened to them. We've heard the concerns that they've raised, and they'll now have farm implements, both dealership restrictions or dealership commitments, that are consistent with the other provinces around here and really also are intended to serve the best interests of the agriculture sector. So we end up with these ideas of innovation that I talked about being made available, and when a farmer goes in, they can also in many cases get a better match between the implement that they want to serve the need that they've got for it yet have it at a local level.

One of the other complaints that comes up an awful lot – but within the context of legislation, I don't think it's our position to get involved in it – is the whole idea of how dealerships are getting concentrated, and we've heard the comments already about the distance that has to be traveled to get equipment and to get to your dealership. We're looking at these now in the sense that within Alberta, especially right now, we're seeing two or three corporations taking over the line dealerships pretty well across the province as opposed to having a series of independent dealers where you really have the competition even within the same product line. This is

something that farmers are expressing concerns about, yet within the legislation it's not really appropriate to deal with the idea that amalgamation and expansion in that way are not in the best interests of the system. These are the kinds of things that have to come up in the context of both the dealer/distributor negotiation and the relationship between the purchasers.

In many cases I've seen situations where a farmer will drive past one dealer all the way to the next dealer to buy their product rather than support the one that's closest. Who knows what reason that is, but they do it, and it does in some ways create competition that spurs on the economy and creates price sensitivities that are necessary when we have to deal with how we look at dealerships and competition in the market.

On those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll take my seat and encourage everybody to support this one in conjunction with Bill 12. I think the two of them put together form a good package that will send a strong message to Alberta farmers that we listen to them and that we're acting to make sure that the kind of structure they want in their farm dealership relationship both in terms of accountability in Bill 12 and here in terms of the diversity and flexibility to carry multiple lines through one dealership – these pieces of legislation will really serve their needs.

On that, Mr. Speaker, I hope everybody supports this piece of legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan to close the debate.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First I'd like to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for his positive comments and excellent suggestions. Bill 13 recognizes that farm implement dealers are very important to rural communities, and this bill should help to minimize the erosion of our dealerships in our small communities.

I would like to end our debate and discussion on this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a second time]

Bill 16 School Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today on behalf of the hon. Minister of Learning to move second reading of Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, 2001. I would make a few comments on behalf of the hon. Minister of Learning, simply to underscore what the intentions were or are with this particular bill.

First of all, to clarify administrative and governance processes of the education system. Secondly, as stated in the Minister of Learning's news release, which bears today's date,

the School Amendment Act, 2001 introduces a process to ensure that learning opportunities for students will be considered, along with utilization rates and other criteria, when decisions are made on new school facilities (complete criteria has yet to be developed by Infrastructure and Learning).

5:00

Mr. Speaker, other proposed changes contemplated under this bill, as introduced by the Minister of Learning, include:

- clarify the process for establishing charter schools and encourage better links with public and separate school boards in order to meet diverse student needs and parental expectations through the provision of alternative programs;
- ensure public and separate school supporters are assessed the same property tax rates;

- clarify the regions governing Francophone education and ensure that students have access to both linguistic and denominational rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada; and
- introduce alternatives to the existing separate school establishment process calling for further cooperation between public and separate jurisdictions and furthering the move to co-terminous boundaries across the province.

The bill also will impact school boards, obviously, private and charter schools, and a number of other aspects of our learning system.

Mr. Speaker, on my own behalf and on behalf of many constituents who have been speaking with me over the last several years, I should say, about the importance of continually updating and improving our learning system, I simply want to reiterate that the issue of utilization rates, which will be impacted by this particular bill, has been by far the single largest issue that I've had to deal with in terms of education-related concerns. In particular, the tremendous growth of cities like Edmonton – and by growth I mean expansion out beyond our boundaries – has created a phenomenon that is frequently referred to as urban sprawl, and it is in fact in many of these outlying areas where so many people have brought to my attention the need for new schools to be considered.

In one particular area of my constituency called the Meadows, which is nicely placed east of 34th Street, south of the Whitemud freeway, there is a tremendous need for a new Catholic school, and I've been working very closely with the Catholic school trustees, listening to their concerns on how they plan to address those needs, as well as with a number of individuals that are on various parental committees, particularly out of the Blessed Kateri school. So I'm looking forward to seeing what impact this amendment act will have in that regard, Mr. Speaker.

The other point, very quickly, is with respect to the impact on the Francophone education network in our province. One of the privileges I have in my new portfolio, Mr. Speaker, as you know very well, is the responsibility for le Secrétariat Francophone, and as part of that responsibility I will read this bill with great care to see how it may or may not impact the delivery of Francophone education in our province.

So at this stage, Mr. Speaker, I personally will not be passing any judgment one way or the other on this bill. I'll keep an open mind, hoping that it addresses all of the concerns very squarely. I'm sure it likely does, but I will read it through more carefully and at this stage allow others to participate in this important debate.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make some comments about the principles underlining Bill 16 at second reading, and it seems to me that there are some important principles at work in the amendments that we have before us.

I'd like to first start with the mention in the bill of charter schools and a change in the treatment of charter schools under the School Act. It's a change that I think is welcome. The notion is that those schools should be, if at all possible, under the umbrella of one of the elected school boards in the province, and I think that that's a good move. It also is a reflection on what's happened to the public school systems – when I say “public,” I mean both the Roman Catholic separate and the public system – over the last number of years, and that's their ability, their flexibility in terms of responding to a variety of apparent interests.

I think it started with the alternate school programs that were introduced, some of them rather tentatively initially. The alternative school programs under the public system have grown to the extent

where there are a wide variety of options and possibilities open to students and their parents in accessing public education. They're able to find programs and to find schools that suit their particular children yet are still under the aegis of a publicly elected board, a board that they can have some influence on, if at no other time at least at election time, a board that they can help have members elected to. Those schools adhere to the principles of public education in the province in that they are open to all, that they're publicly funded through the tax system, and that they are governed by a group of elected trustees.

I think the bill doesn't quite insist that they be umbrellaed, but the preference, I think, is certainly there. It's my hope that the public schools boards in their response will look with friendly eyes on those applications as they come in, because it will serve all of us and serve all children well to have those schools under one of the public boards and the opportunity to have a school that reflects a common set of values, that public schools do. I think that that's in everyone's best interest.

The principles as they affect charter schools I think are sound. It will be interesting to see the charter school applications that come forward that can't find a residence in one of the public systems. Given, as I said before, the wide range of alternate programs that are now available, from religious-based programs to fine arts programs to academically challenging programs like the international baccalaureate to an all-girls school, there is just a whole wide range, a rich range of choices of public schools. Yet we can be assured that those schools adhere to a number of requirements in terms of the teaching staff and the kinds of programs of study that are followed and the security and safety and behaviour of children. It will be interesting to see if any at all are rejected and, if they are, on what grounds.

Just a footnote on this, Mr. Speaker. It's been a growth in the alternate school movement that seems to have had more initial success, at least in this city, than it has in our neighbour to the south, in Calgary, where at one time a board there at election was entirely removed. The issue was the provision of alternate school programs.

The principle underlying this part of the bill that charter schools should be governed under elected school boards is a principle that we support. We're happy to see this provision in the act before us.

5:10

I move on to a second principle. I'm not sure that I'm articulating the principle the best way it could be, but it's that the School Buildings Board as such was not adequately reflecting the educational interests of the community. The School Buildings Board acted in a manner that seemed to exclude it from ministerial or school board pleas, and it was almost acting independently. It was, I think, most frustrating for school districts and boards to go to extensive plans in terms of their building and their repair requirements and to set a list of priorities, to send that list of priorities to the School Buildings Board, to submit it, and then to have projects – certainly not priority projects – approved that were five or six down the list or to have projects ignored year after year that they really wanted.

Always there was the spectre of the utilization formula that loomed in any kinds of submissions to the board. The utilization formula doomed many school districts to failure in terms of new school construction even before they made any applications. The whole utilization formula, particularly in large urban areas and in very small communities, was very, very difficult and is very difficult to handle because the percentage of space used in a school is but one measure of the value of that school, even the use of that school in a community. As such, it was I think very, very frustrating for boards and parents and communities to have that formula stand between

them and what they saw as sound decisions for their community, primarily in terms of the educational programs that were being delivered but also in terms of the health of the community as a viable neighbourhood or as a viable town or village.

It will be interesting to see, now that the decision-making is going to be moved back to the Learning minister, if there will be more consideration given to educational concerns in decisions that are made. It will be interesting to see what happens to the utilization formula and what kind of weight it is given in decisions. It will also be interesting to see how much of the decision-making the minister will have once this act is passed, how much of that decision-making is going to be passed on to local boards. I think that the plea has been made, Mr. Speaker, that block funding, allowing local boards to ultimately be the decision-makers who decide where buildings will be built, which buildings will be closed – they get to close buildings, but right now they have little influence over where new buildings are built or the kind of construction in terms of their needs.

I guess if there's a disappointment in the bill, it's the provision for local decision-making and allowing the minister to pass that decision-making down to where it properly belongs, and that's with local school trustees. They're the ones that have to answer to the community at election time. They're the ones that best know their communities. I think they are the ones that can best make school building decisions, school program decisions. So while wresting the decisions out of the hands of the School Buildings Board is something that I think is a move in the right direction, I'm also concerned that we will have created in the Learning department a new bureaucracy that will be just as inflexible and just as difficult for boards to penetrate as the one that currently exists. So I guess in terms of the move to the replacement of the School Buildings Board, I'm cautiously optimistic, but I think it's just a first step.

I had some conversations with the minister about this. I hope that he'll see fit if not to move completely to block funding to at least explore the possibilities in some school districts. I know that there are problems in any kind of abrupt movement to block funding because there's a history of districts that has to be taken into account, the kind of building and repair activity they've been engaged in over the recent past. That history would have to be taken into account, so the transition period to block funding might take some time, but at least I think that should be the goal and that should be the target in terms of where the government goes with those kinds of decisions.

I think there's a good provision in the act, and that's in terms of identifying unsuitable teachers. It seems to me that with teachers who have had difficulty in the classroom, teachers who've had difficulty with students, to be able to remain anonymous and to move to another jurisdiction, either in the province or in the country, was a disservice to children and certainly a disservice to the profession. So I'm pleased that those school jurisdictions and charter schools will be charged with identifying those people and making the registrar aware of the kinds of difficulties that individual has experienced and that that record is going to be available to other employing boards so that those teachers are not able to pick up their practice and move and inflict poor practice on another group of children or students elsewhere in the province or the country.

I think we saw a parallel of that just recently in the news with hockey coaches, where a coach from this country turned up in Spain working with another group of young adults. How inappropriate that was, and for it to happen in the teaching profession would be even more inappropriate. So I'm pleased that those unsuitable teachers are going to be identified and something done about tracking them in the system.

I wanted to talk for a few minutes about the principle in the act that will allow citizens to choose to be a resident of a public or a separate school district. We've had a history of residency and residency requirements that is a little checkered. I think if I understand the act – and I have to admit that I had to read it and ask one of my colleagues to read it a couple of times to make sure I really understood that the choice is there. The whole business of residency has been a thorn in the side of boards for a number of years. I remember in the past act that you were deemed to have been born into a school district and to be a member of that district, a resident of that district. While it sounded good in theory, in practice it caused a whole lot of difficulties.

5:20

I remember the attempt to have school boards charge nonresident students for programs. So if a youngster with Catholic parents attended a public school, there was the expectation that there would be a nonresident fee paid by that student. The whole problem of that in terms of urban areas is that students would come from out of town, access programs, and claim they were residents of the city by living with a relative and using that relative's address in terms of residency requirements, so the board they were really resident in wasn't charged for their program.

I remember an effort on the part of the public school board at one time to try to determine the religious persuasion of students in a 70,000-student system. Parents were asked to identify their religion, and 10,000 of them refused to do so. So this whole business of where you are resident, what school district you are a resident of, has a history of presenting problems to boards. The act reads now that there's a choice for parents, for citizens to identify themselves as residents of either the separate or the public school district.

Just a footnote in terms of the amendments themselves, Mr. Speaker. One of the pleas we've made in the past is that there be plain-language legislation. I remember back in 1992-1993, when the present government was campaigning, that one of their promises was to come forward with plain-language legislation, and there are some sections of this act that I don't think meet that criteria, to say the least.

So with those preliminary comments – I haven't even touched on the big, important change in that, and that's regarding separate school districts; I'll have an opportunity later to do that – I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 16, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very productive afternoon. I move that we now call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene this evening at 8 p.m., we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would all hon. members in favour of the motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried. The House will reconvene tonight at 8 o'clock in committee.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 8, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/08

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. We're going to practise the usual tradition of only one hon. member standing and talking at a time.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

International and Intergovernmental Relations

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll ask the minister if he'd care to make a few comments.

MR. JONSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here this evening to present the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations. The mandate of our ministry is "to provide leadership in the management of Alberta's international and intergovernmental relationships."

I think it's important to note in the estimates, Mr. Chairman, that responsibility for aboriginal affairs has been transferred to the new Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Our business plan and budget have been amended to reflect this change. Our main priorities and our main goals in the coming year – and our business plan reflects this – are, first of all:

- To secure benefits for Alberta from strengthened international relations [and]
- To secure benefits for Alberta as an equal partner in a revitalized, united Canada.

These two goals support the overarching goals found in the government of Alberta's overall general business plan.

I'd like, Mr. Chairman, to note some of the key initiatives on the international front. In the year ahead my ministry will continue to focus on expanding Alberta's trade and investment opportunities. Since the Canada/U.S. free trade agreement came into force in 1989, the value of our exports in goods has more than quadrupled to approximately \$55 billion per year. In the year 2000 Alberta was the third largest provincial exporter of goods, behind Ontario and Quebec and ahead of British Columbia.

As the Alberta economy continues to diversify and prosper, value-added exports have experienced very, very strong growth. Value-added exports include products that are processed or manufactured as well as service exports such as engineering, environmental, and consulting services. Of course, those efforts are backed by the initiatives in other government departments such as Learning, where we are working with a very skilled and capable workforce. Last year Alberta's value-added exports totaled \$21.4 billion, up from \$16.4 billion the year before. Mr. Chairman, goal 14 of the Alberta government's business plan commits to further increasing the value of these exports to \$28.5 billion within the next three years. My ministry will contribute to this goal by promoting greater trade liberalization through international and interprovincial agreements.

At the upcoming World Trade Organization ministerial conference this fall we will convey our province's desire for a more level playing field for all through the elimination of agricultural subsidies and the reduction of trade-distorting domestic support programs. On the domestic front we will press for new negotiations to remove interprovincial trade barriers through the agreement on internal trade. A key concern, Mr. Chairman, for the ministry this year is defending our forest management practices in the dispute over

softwood lumber exports. We will work with our legal counsel in Washington, D.C., to prove that our forest management system is market based and that our forestry resources are managed in a sustainable manner here in Alberta.

Our main objective, Mr. Chairman, is to maintain the greatest possible market access for the least cost and disruption to business. In the year ahead the ministry will continue to implement the government's framework for Alberta's international strategies. This strategy document helps internationally active departments more clearly understand how their current activities fit into the broader international framework of the Alberta government. It also provides some opportunities for joint projects and better co-ordination of international partnerships. At the same time, the ministry will continue to play a role in the co-ordination of ministerial missions and planning the intergovernmental dimension of Premier's missions. The ministry will also remain active in developing information programs for foreign decision-makers to ensure Alberta's strengths in international interests are promoted.

The ministry will continue to broaden Alberta's international focus by building economic and cross-cultural twinning relationships with foreign states or provinces. A twinning strategy will be implemented this year with the goal of raising Alberta's profile in key international markets. We will also continue to co-ordinate the provision of public-sector expertise to the private sector through the international governance office.

As a major energy-exporting province we will continue to advance our interests in the development of a continental energy policy by participating along with the federal government in multilateral and bilateral discussions. It's critical, Mr. Chairman, that Alberta be closely involved in any discussions of increasing Canada's energy supplies to the U.S., given the fact that the natural resources are a provincial responsibility.

With respect to overall Canadian intergovernmental activity – and this is something of course much closer to home – the department helps manage and co-ordinates relations between the province and the federal government to ensure Alberta's interests are promoted and protected as an equal partner in Canada. The ministry takes seriously its responsibility for ensuring that federal activities respect Alberta's constitutional roles and responsibilities, including those in key areas such as health and social programming. In this regard we will continue to develop strategies and recommendations on constitutional issues, national policy, governance issues, and Canadian unity.

In consultation with the Premier's office and other departments ministry staff are responsible for setting the agenda for Alberta's participation in first ministers' meetings, Premiers' conferences, and ministerial meetings. In fact, Alberta's leadership on health funding issues at intergovernmental meetings last year led to the federal/provincial agreement on restoration of funding to the Canada health and social transfer. We will continue to provide policy analysis advice and continually work in this area.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, in terms of some specifics. To support these efforts that I've outlined very briefly and these initiatives, we have a strong complement of staff on board in my department, and we have budgeted \$6.1 million for the year ahead. It is perhaps a small amount in terms of other departments, but we feel that we will use that money very effectively. The budget for international and intergovernmental activities is the same as last year except for the increase required to offset the negotiated provincewide salary increase.

In terms of staffing, our ministry will have a complement of 54 staff this coming year, a decrease of four from the previous year. The four positions have been reassigned to the Corporate Service Centre, which is part of Government Services.

Finally, a brief outline on our performance measures. Since the ministry outcomes are often long term or dependent on external factors, our data is difficult to present through a series of quantitative examples. Therefore, our overall reporting process is quite unique. We survey, we solicit, we provide an opportunity for our partners in the other departments and other sources to respond to how effective they feel our efforts are being, and our new business plan and budget lays out how we will meet the priorities for our province in the year ahead.

I look forward to working with the dedicated and hardworking staff in my ministry to achieve these goals. We as a department are very cognizant of the fact that our role is important. We know that it is complementary to the rest of government and very important to the overall future of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to have an opportunity to address the estimates of International and Intergovernmental Relations. It's been quite a few years that I've been talking about this particular department, and it's undergone some changes in that time. For the most part, I think the changes have been positive in nature, and for the most part I think the initiatives from this department are important and necessary and in many ways have been measurable over the years.

I, too, would like to compliment the minister's staff. I think they do a very decent job. I've had an opportunity to get to know a few of the people over the years and certainly have enjoyed working with them on a few projects and sharing information whenever possible.

8:10

Certainly one of those initiatives is PNWER, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region initiative, of which I understand there are some meetings that are being undertaken next week, I think, in preparation for the summer meetings. I think that's an excellent initiative. It's an initiative where this government has participated in all-party participation. In fact, they have been promoters of all-party participation at that level, and I think that's been a very positive step.

I certainly encourage them to take what's happened in that initiative and expand it to other areas of government. Certainly that's a role that International and Intergovernmental Relations could undertake because of the work they do with all departments to see that sometimes including opposition in the workings of government can have positive outcomes. While we're there to be the watchdog and report back on what we see and what people may not like, we certainly also are another set of eyes and ears and ideas and perspectives and I think can add value to some of the decision-making that happens around the table if we have the opportunity to sit at the table. So I would like some feedback on that proposal and ask the department and the minister if they would review that, put it forward to their colleagues, and see where that takes us. On a trial basis, Mr. Chairman, it would be interesting to see how that would work. We have established some interesting, positive working relationships with some of the ministers in this 25th Legislature, and I think that's helpful.

I would like to talk about some of the softwood lumber issues that the minister pursued as one of those examples. I'm looking forward to a briefing from the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development in the near future on an update on the softwood lumber situation. When that happens, what happens, Mr. Chairman, is that we see an elimination of what the government may see as frivolous

questions in this Legislature because we have more information on which to base the questions that we ask the government and can then ask questions on areas where we disagree. In fact there are many areas where we do agree. I think the government's position on softwood lumber is one of those areas.

I'm very happy to promote the government taking a strong stand on this particular issue. We do not believe that Alberta or in fact Canada has taken a wrong position here. We do not want to see any more duties on Canadian lumber. We do not believe that there has been dumping by Canadian producers and would certainly encourage the department to continue taking a strong stand on this particular issue.

We'd certainly like some information on where the role of Sustainable Resource Development is and where the role of International and Intergovernmental Relations is in this area. My understanding is that this department's mandate is a broad kind of mandate for the province and that Sustainable Resource Development takes a more targeted kind of focus. If that's correct, I would like that confirmed, and if it isn't, then I would like some more information and, at any rate, some more details on the division of labour there: who takes what role and at what point International and Intergovernmental Relations takes a lead role in that particular kind of an issue. Certainly I think they should. They're in close contact with the federal government, who is heavily involved with other provinces on this issue, but obviously there's a role for both ministries. Of course what we want to see is a minimum amount of overlap and duplication in all areas.

Just before I get directly to the estimates for the evening, I just want to talk a little bit about the Auditor General's report. The only comment he made in International and Intergovernmental Relations last year was to the part of this department that is no longer within the department, and that is having to do with aboriginal affairs, the Metis Settlements Transition Commission specifically. While I understand that this is no longer in this department, I would like an update on what happened in terms of meeting the expectations of the Auditor General. In here he had talked about, when he did the review of the ministry's statements, that there was a reservation of opinion. The reasons for the reservation were listed on page 264 of the Auditor General's report and talked about "focus on improved accountability and alert readers that the financial statements are not complete and accurate." So that's a fairly significant reservation, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to know if before this area left this department's mandate, they had complied with the Auditor General's request, which is that this information should have been brought up to date and that the conditions were met for the performance measurement and reporting, where they recommended that the commission "measure progress towards its core goal 'Good Self-government Practices' and include this information in its annual report." So if we could get an update on that. There may not be time when we get to aboriginal affairs to cover that particular aspect of the AG's report, so I wanted to ensure that we got that done early on in these particular estimates.

One more sort of general thing I wanted to talk about was the social union framework agreement, which, if I understand correctly, is this department's particular mandate. I'd like to know about it in terms of the current impact on federal/provincial relations and social policies. Specifically there, has there been any progress made on minimizing program overlap with a view to a more efficient and responsible government? Now, this is an area where I think that this provincial government is often in conflict with the federal government, yet they signed on to the social union framework agreement, so it would be interesting to find out, Mr. Chairman, how that's

progressing. What are the key areas of concern for the department in this area? What progress has been made? What kind of progress are they expecting? When are the next set of talks established? What is this government using as key indicators of progress, and are they benchmarking what's happening there? So if we could just get an update on the social union framework agreement, that would be helpful for me. I would appreciate that.

Certainly the overall services and core businesses in this department are commendable, Mr. Chairman, and we don't have any particular issues with them, I think. Some good things are happening here when they advance Alberta's interests through intergovernmental negotiations and discussions. Seems like the Premier is taking a lead role in that area these days. So I don't think anything that anyone in this province can complain too much about.

"Coordinating Alberta's strategies relating to international and intergovernmental relations" is interesting too, particularly the international relations. I listened with interest when the minister talked about twinning opportunities, and I'm wondering if that is part of the reason why they're going to be spending more money next year. If he could elaborate on that.

I see that there's an increase of 16.8 percent over last year's budget estimates. That's only \$880,000, Mr. Chairman, not very much money in the whole context of departments, but certainly for this department I think significant and something to talk about, particularly when we're talking about decreasing the number of FTEs, as the minister talked about in his opening comments.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

With twinning comes a lot of opportunity for travel and a lot of opportunity for hosting delegations here and when delegations are in other countries. So, you know, in terms of promoting Alberta in tangible kinds of measurable outcomes, that's great, Mr. Chairman. We don't have any problem with that, but I'm not sure whether in the past that's been precisely the case in this department.

8:20

We have in the past FOIPed some of these hosting receipts and found them to be quite unbelievable in terms of the kinds of expenses that were incurred, certainly beyond the test of what's reasonable and fair. So I'm hoping that this government and this minister keep that in mind as they take a look at the opportunities they have before them with the kind of twinning that's going to go forward. If we could have a list of the countries and cities, whatever, that they're planning on twinning with in the future over not just this year but perhaps some longer range goals they've got – the minister didn't talk about that – if he could give us that information, I would certainly appreciate it.

The kinds of budgets that we expect specifically for travel out of the province and specifically for hosting events: if we could have that information, Mr. Chairman, that would be good. I know lots of work goes into these hosting opportunities, and I know lots of good work comes out of them. We just want to make sure that Albertans are getting a good bang for their buck. I think that's part of the minister's mandate too. So if we could have that information, it would certainly be helpful to me.

The minister talked a little bit about the cross-border trade and that being part of their mandate, to try and facilitate that. You know, that's also very important. Seems like these days we often have better trade north and south with the States than we do between B.C. and the eastern provinces. We still have many, many trade barriers, Mr. Chairman, and it seems like we make very little progress on that from year to year, so specifically I would like to know what's

happened in that regard. If we've seen a reduction in regulations or an increase in agreements eliminating provincial barriers, if we could have that information forwarded to us, that would be very beneficial. When we talk to small businesspeople and particularly those in the transportation field, it's one of the largest areas of concern they have. It's a concern that has if anything increased over the years that I've been in this Assembly. I think that's an area where we could take some real leadership. We've just got to get rid of some of these regulations.

I'm wondering, too, if this department is doing anything specific in terms of reducing transportation costs. Certainly it's an area that needs some development. And I'm not talking north/south. We know that some excellent progress has been made in that regard, particularly with the twinning of the highway and the work done there, but east and west is really the issue. If we could see that outlined here, that would be beneficial.

You know, the minister talked about client satisfaction surveys in his comments, and I find those, Mr. Chairman, not really an accurate kind of survey. This is the department of gripping and grinning. Nobody complains about what they do, certainly not on survey results, so I think there has to be a better and more accurate way of measuring the outcomes for this particular department, particularly when most of the outcomes that they're measuring are between government departments themselves or with the federal government. Who's going to complain? Nobody wants to wreck relations. The surveys are not done on a confidential kind of basis, so I'm not sure that they really are accurate reflections of what happens here. Even when they go outside and talk about client surveys that may include businesspeople, who wants to complain about the government when you're doing direct business with them, Mr. Chairman? I don't think that that's necessarily accurate.

If they had an independent company do that – and maybe they do. If they do, then I may have to take back what I've said about that particular outcome, but I don't think we're seeing an independent survey done where the results are anonymous. That would be interesting, if that's happening. I would sure like some information on that if that's the case. Or if the department is in fact thinking of doing that, I think that would be a progressive step for them if they would.

Measuring outcomes, like the minister said, is sometimes hard in this department because they're of a more long-term nature, but I think it's really good, Mr. Chairman, that there is a department in the government that does take a long-term perspective and view on some of the issues that are outstanding for the province. So I don't think that's a problem, but I do think that we could see some more tangible outcomes listed here that we could start to track.

The same with the secondary indicators and the public polling data: nice to talk about it, but let's see it, Mr. Chairman. If they are spending Alberta tax dollars on those, then they should be included in the business plan, and we should be able to track them from year to year and compare the outcomes. They're not in this particular year's business plan, but perhaps they could be forwarded from the minister. I'm sure none of that kind of information is confidential in nature, so I'll be looking forward to getting the information they used for the public polling data that measures the performance of the provincial government. The secondary indicators that track the macroeconomic and sociodemographic trends: if those could be tabled or sent over, that would be excellent.

Also the intermediate outcomes. I'm not sure if we need the entire progress reports in these areas. I can go to the web site and look for some of that information, but if a concise kind of format could be included in this business plan, Mr. Chairman, that would be very helpful for us to, just at a glance, track it from year to year. So

if that information could be provided, I would also very much appreciate that.

Now to get down to the specifics. I'd like to talk first of all about the trade policy. Seeing a minor increase in this particular estimate, it certainly doesn't look like that increase is going to be a big problem, particularly as I think there are some pretty aggressive strategies that Alberta is going to have to put forward, particularly in our softwood lumber dispute, in the next year. So I don't think I have a real problem with that. However, if we could have a breakdown of the operating expenses – and we'd like it by components if we could, Mr. Chairman – that would be helpful.

So that's the salary side. When we talk about the permanent positions and the nonpermanent positions, particularly I'm interested in the contract positions and which particular areas they're expecting to contract out in the future. That would be interesting information to have so that we could see where the government is positioning itself and where they go outside of government staff for what I'm expecting to be specialized expertise.

Also, if we could talk about travel expenses, what they're expecting to spend on advertising, hosting, in as much detail as we can get it, and telephone and communications.

Can we also know at this stage how many FTEs are employed in the trade policy for 2001-02? Can the minister provide us with any documents, reports, briefings, or studies that the trade policy has completed with regard to the current U.S. softwood lumber dispute, an area of huge interest for me and of course for all Albertans in terms of its impact on Alberta's economy, and their strategy in response to various possible outcomes? I'm expecting a briefing also from the Department of Sustainable Resource Development. I expect that while there's some overlap there, maybe we could do the briefing together. I don't know how that works between the departments, but however that works out, I'm quite prepared to spend some serious time taking a look at that. Like I said, so far I certainly applaud the government's direction in that area.

Mr. Chairman, if the minister could also provide a list of the private-sector organizations that the department co-ordinates that with, that would help. I've seen some of that activity with PNWER. I certainly don't have any concerns with it, but it's also a part of the lobbying.

I'll have to come back. Thanks.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, have a number of questions regarding the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations this evening.

As I understand the four key services that it provides under its core businesses, Mr. Chairman, it certainly advances Alberta's interests through intergovernmental negotiations and discussions. I have some questions directly to the minister regarding this and highway safety and co-ordinating Alberta's strategies relating to international and intergovernmental relations. Also, I understand that there is a provision to give "strategic advice and policy analysis to Alberta ministries and other clients" and also to obtain, supply, and analyze information for Alberta ministries and other clients. This is in the business plan.

8:30

Now, in the time I have I have a lot of questions. I guess I should get started. If the minister does not have the opportunity this evening, certainly if he could respond in writing, I will be patient, and I will be anxious to hear his written reply.

There is an increase in this year's budget over last year's estimates

by 16 percent, or roughly \$880,000. Now, there's an increase this year of 0.4 percent, or \$22,000, over last year's preliminary actual, and it is noted that there's an increase of 16.4 percent, or \$858,000, from last year's budget estimates to last year's preliminary actual.

The number of full-time equivalents is decreasing from 58 to 54 due to four full-time equivalents being transferred to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. I know the hon. minister has had nothing to do with that. I think there are 1,100 people now. I could be inaccurate, Mr. Chairman. I don't have the number in front of me, but there's a significant number of people that have been transferred to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. I think that the jury is still out on this initiative. This is another initiative that was put forward by a retired member who certainly left a large wake, so to speak, as his boat went through the waters of Alberta, and that would be the former Minister of Energy.

Mr. Chairman, if the minister could please provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses of a little over \$6 million for 2001-02 by object for the following components: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, hosting expenses, and dry-cleaning expenses if there are any.

Will the minister also provide a breakdown of the cost to Alberta taxpayers of splitting the department by moving aboriginal affairs out of International and Intergovernmental Relations and into the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development?

What measures or actions have been taken by the ministry to ensure that an overlapping or duplication of services is not occurring between International and Intergovernmental Relations and other Alberta ministries. For example, Economic Development, as I understand it, is responsible for foreign offices, and foreign offices used to attract an awful lot of attention in the media, Mr. Chairman, in years past, because former members of this House would suddenly be getting these appointments. If it wasn't in London, it was in Hong Kong. I just wonder if there's going to be an expansion of that, but I think we'll get to that later on this evening in the debate on the estimates of another crucial government department.

Now, program 1, international and intergovernmental relations. The budget information for program 1 is the same as provided on page 5 of the briefing for the whole department, because there is only one program in this ministry. That's fine. In regard to the 16.4 percent increase that I spoke of earlier, will the minister provide a breakdown of operating expenses for program 1, international and intergovernmental relations, by subprogram – minister's office, ministry support services, international relations, trade policy, and Canadian intergovernmental relations – for the fiscal year 2002-03 and 2003-04? Could the minister please explain why the international and intergovernmental relations budget was 16.4 percent greater than last year?

Now, I'm quoting here the business plan, page 247.

The department continues to be committed to the goals of the Cross Ministry Initiative – Corporate Human Resource Development Strategy. The department is implementing a Human Resource Plan with a priority focus on leadership development and succession planning.

Can the minister please provide a detailed copy of this human resource plan including its objectives, how it will be implemented, and what it will mean for employees of the Ministry of International and Intergovernmental Relations?

Here again on page 249 of the business plan one of the performance measures outlined is client satisfaction surveys. However, no examples or details of these client satisfaction surveys are provided in the ministry's business plan. Why does the minister provide us

with no examples of the client satisfaction surveys in the ministry's business plans? Also, can the minister please provide all members of the opposition with a detailed breakdown of what questions are asked, how many people are asked, how the surveys are conducted, how often they are conducted, and also the ministry's targets for these performance measures for the years 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04?

Now, the minister's office. I notice that there is no change between this year's estimate and last year's budget estimate. There is no change between this year's estimate and last year's preliminary actual. There is no change from last year's budget estimate to last year's preliminary actual. Will the minister provide a breakdown of the operating expenses of \$300,000 for the minister's office for 2001-02 by object for the following components: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses again, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses? How many full-time equivalents are employed in the minister's office in 2001-2002?

Also, Mr. Chairman, what benchmarks or targets have been established within the minister's office to meet the mandate of the ministry? For example, New Zealand includes correspondence received from the public, numbers satisfied and unsatisfied. That would be a terrific measure in the Ministry of Health and Wellness, particularly regarding the whole issue of Bill 11.

To the minister: what benchmarks have been established for the number of replies to Legislative Assembly questions, ministerial correspondence, motions for returns, written questions, and reports to cabinet? What time frame or due date benchmarks have been established for ministerial, MLA, and other public correspondence? Again, I would note that New Zealand provides such information in their business plans.

8:40

Now, in ministry support services on reference line 1.0.2 the 2001-02 estimate was \$1,594,000. The preliminary actual for 2000-2001 was \$1.7 million, and the 2001 estimate was the same. There's a decrease this year of 7.4 percent, or \$128,000, over last year's budget estimates. There is a decrease this year of 7.4 percent as well over last year's preliminary actual. There is no change from last year's budget estimate to last year's preliminary actual.

Will the minister please provide a breakdown of the operating expenses of the \$1.594 million for ministry support services for 2001-02 by object for the following components again: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses? Also, how many full-time equivalents are employed in ministry support services in 2001-02? Can the minister please provide an explanation for the decrease of 7.4 percent, or \$128,000, in ministry support services for 2001-2002?

International relations. In 2001-02 the estimate was for \$1.775 million, and the 2000-2001 preliminary actual was \$1,648,000, and that was the same as the estimate for 2000-2001. This is an increase this year of 7.7 percent, or \$127,000, over last year's budget estimate. There is an increase this year of 7.7 percent, or \$127,000, over last year's preliminary actual. Now, there's no change from last year's budget estimate to last year's preliminary actual, Mr. Chairman.

In due time will the minister please provide a breakdown of the operating expenses of \$1.775 million for international relations for 2001-02 by object for the following components again: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and

communications, and hosting expenses? How many full-time equivalents are employed in international relations in 2001-2002?

Can the minister please also tell us what trade missions are planned for the coming year? What performance measures have been set to judge these trade missions as a success and worth Alberta taxpayers' money?

Can the minister explain what co-ordination exists between his ministry and that of Economic Development with regards to Alberta's foreign offices abroad in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, Hong Kong, China – and that is located in Harbin; in China there's also the China-Alberta Petroleum Centre – Taiwan, Mexico in Guadalajara, the United States in Portland, Oregon, and Germany in Frankfurt? What co-ordination of projects is planned for the coming year between Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and International and Intergovernmental Relations with regard to agriculture in the international arena?

In the ministry's business plan summary on page 307 it states:

the Ministry's International Relations budget will increase from \$1.65 million to \$1.77 million, with its priorities including implementation of the International Strategy Framework and the Twinning Strategy.

Could the minister please provide more information on how International and Intergovernmental Relations will implement the international strategy framework and the twinning strategy in 2001-2002, including a breakdown on the increased funds being diverted towards achieving these objectives?

Now, also, on page 307 of the business plan summary: "Build and maintain alliances with key U.S. federal and state decision-makers and organizations." Can the minister provide a list of which U.S. federal and state decision-makers the department considers key and what alliances the ministry has built with them? Can the minister tell us what joint projects are planned for 2001-02 between the Alberta government and foreign governments? Can he also provide us with a list of what criteria and/or benchmarks the department uses to evaluate the effectiveness and success of these joint endeavours? I was thinking of earlier today before question period, Mr. Chairman, and the fact that a delegation from Montana had been introduced in the Assembly. Certainly those delegations are essential not only to build relations with our neighbours but also to improve our trade and, as a result, improve our economy.

I received, as all members of the Assembly probably have, a letter from the teamsters' union, which represents 100,000 members throughout Canada, and among them are, I understand, 45,000 truck and bus drivers who are strongly opposed to some proposed changes that are occurring with the federal government and, as I understand it, with the provinces. I'm wondering: as minister of intergovernmental relations, has there been any discussion of this problem in your office? It has to do with the fact that the Canadian government along with the provinces is about to adopt the proposed changes in the number of driving hours for Canadian truck and bus drivers, and if adopted, these changes will increase the maximum number of driving hours from 13 to 14 hours per day.

Now, in going through this information, I understand that recent statistics confirm that the growth in the transport of goods to the United States is much higher than it was for east/west traffic. Certainly free trade has changed the flow of goods, in my opinion, from east/west to north/south since it was initiated in 1998. As far as harmonization is concerned, an increase in the number of driving hours to 14 hours per day would mean that on a daily basis our drivers will drive four hours more than our southern neighbours, who drive for a maximum of 10 hours a day.

The author of this letter goes on to indicate that they feel that that is total nonsense, and I understand that there is presently, as

indicated in this letter, no scientific data confirming that an increase in the maximum number of driving hours to 14 hours a day would be beneficial to road safety. Now, I'm very curious if the minister or his department has had any discussions with any other province or with the federal government in relation to this issue, because it certainly is very important. I hope I can get some answers on these questions and on other questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll start by reflecting on some of the opening comments by the minister. I'm especially interested in international relations, that aspect of his department's responsibilities.

He commented at the end on hoping to be working towards the end of agricultural trade subsidies. I think we'd all agree that's a desirable and applaudable or laudable objective to work towards. It would be interesting to know how many resources, what resources are going into that objective and if there is any kind of a plan B should history prove to be the precedent here and we make very little progress in eliminating agricultural subsidies. What is our fallback? What resources is he looking at in developing a fallback position? Likewise with the forest management dispute with the U.S. The softwood dispute is a concern, as my colleagues have mentioned, and the resources that have gone into that or will be going into that to protect Alberta's now fairly well-developed forestry industry.

8:50

Probably of greatest concern for all Albertans is the issue of the continental energy policy and how that might play out. It would be useful to know what research the department is undertaking on issues such as cost and benefit of the continental energy policy broken down both by petroleum products and electricity. Reflecting on our visitors who were here earlier today from Montana, I'm sure they would have some useful input for the minister on issues of continental energy policy, particularly as they relate to electricity. Montana has experimented with electricity deregulation with some devastating results, and I know there's a substantial lobby in that state to reverse that trend. At least, I understand that's the case. It would be interesting to know if we have looked at their experience with energy policy and electricity.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I'll give the minister a compliment here and some good credit, even though I'm not supposed to do that. [interjection] I know. I'm kidding.

If I'm reading the estimates correctly – I'm looking at the intergovernmental relations program – it looks like last year's budget is probably going to come in right on target, which is commendable, and that there's no change between this year's estimate and last year's actuals. So that's a nice, refreshing position to be looking at here.

When we look more carefully at the program on intergovernmental relations and the expenses there, which are perhaps by the overall standards of the government modest but still a substantial amount of money, it would be useful to know in a bit more detail, in really giving an assessment of these estimates on things such as salaries and expenses and advertising and so on, how the budget breaks down in that particular program area. There is always, I think, public interest and concern in departments dealing with international

trade that there is room for perhaps what the public might regard as unnecessary frills and expenditures, and the public will always be sharp and keen on looking for those opportunities. The minister, I'm sure, would want to make sure the public is well informed on those.

The whole issue and whole area of intergovernmental relations and trade agreements is one of unusually high interest these days in Canada and internationally with the fallout from the so-called battle at Seattle and the showdowns in Washington with the IMF and the recent riots and problems in Quebec City with the free trade agreement of the Americas discussion. I'm sure the minister is well able to stay on top of this, but I think that as much public information as possible on how the provincial government is approaching these very delicate concerns would be appreciated.

There will be substantial public concern over, for example, the impact of NAFTA, the costs and benefits of NAFTA. Albertans are backers of free trade, but there will be, nonetheless, concerns on issues such as water exports and electricity exports. I heard, certainly throughout the campaign and on the doorsteps, concerns over our natural gas exports, and I imagine that some of the cost-benefit analysis of these deals will involve the minister's department. It might be interesting to have some details on that and on issues around complaints filed under NAFTA. How much concern is expressed by the public on NAFTA and other trade agreements?

I suppose that in these very dry conditions we're facing, we may find the most concern under trade agreements relating to water and water exports. Well, in fact there are talks going on, quietly I believe, in terms of continental water policy. It would be interesting to know what the minister's position is there, who he's getting his advice from, how much he's spending on getting that advice, and what the future may hold for Alberta and for Canada on water exports.

A different area of concern for international trade agreements is trade in services. Historically, trade agreements have dealt with commodities, agricultural products, manufactured goods. More and more now we're seeing a tremendous amount of international trade in services and, with that growth in trade of course, pressure for international agreements on trade in services. These can be of profound concern or implication for Alberta's future and Canada's future, and I would encourage the minister to take a very long, hard, careful, and open look at the impact of international agreements on trade in services on things such as education, health care, in fact all kinds of public services which under international agreements on trade in services may come under those agreements. We may find that we are deeply concerned or in the long term not well served because we haven't put adequate resources into developing our positions on what Albertans want and should get in these agreements.

So if the department, if the program on intergovernmental relations was to perhaps pursue a public consultation process on some of these issues, I would certainly endorse it, and I would be pleased if some of the modest budget of this department went towards that kind of activity.

I think with those comments I will wrap up my own statements on this. Again, I congratulate the minister on bringing in last year's budget, to the extent that he was responsible for it, right on target and drawing the line there and keeping it there.

MR. MacDONALD: He leads by example.

DR. TAFT: He leads by example.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll take my seat.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to finish up some of my comments here on this particular ministry. I'm hoping that if I don't get through all my questions, the minister will take them in writing and respond to them in the future. Yes, he's agreeing to do that, so that's excellent. Thank you.

One of the issues that I didn't get a chance to get to in my earlier comments was the trips in general. We'd like to know how many trips are planned for the year and how many of those are with the use of the government plane and how many are otherwise. When the government plane is in use, who is there, and how are they allocating those costs? I'm assuming that for the most part industry picks up their own costs on that plane, but to have that verified would be important.

9:00

I remember the days when ministers used to table their itineraries before they went, not just where they were going but how many would be in the delegation and the approximate costs broken down by expense category. It would be helpful if we had those, Mr. Chairman. We've had some instances in the last session where ministers have gone on what appeared to be junkets or certainly extensions of government business, and the question always was: who pays? So if that information is tabled prior to the trip being taken, then it eliminates the potential for a lot of concern from people throughout the province, including opposition members. If we could address that, I would appreciate it.

In some of the time that I have left I would like to focus on part of what I believe this ministry's role is, which is looking towards collaborative government. For my reference I am taking the article written by Susan Delacourt and Donald G. Linehan entitled *Collaborative Government: Is There a Canadian Way?* This is, I believe, where this government is trying to go, collaborative government. Talking about collaboration with the general public interprovincially or with municipal levels of government is something where this government has certainly stuck their toe in the water to see how hot or cold it is and have made some steps towards collaborating in areas. Clearly that's because there is a perceived need for this to be happening.

When you take a look at this report by these two people, they talk about the perceived need for engagement. Where they've surveyed the general public on the topic, "The government of Canada must place much more emphasis on consulting citizens," of the general public 87 percent of the people strongly agree with that and of decision-makers, being primarily politicians, 68 percent of them agree with that. If we take a look at, "We would probably solve most of our big national problems if decisions could be brought to people at the grassroots level," of the general public 68 percent say that's true, only 29 percent of decision-makers. So clearly there's a push from the general public to have a more collaborative kind of approach and more input into decision-making. This government has heard that and has started to move in that direction.

Some of the ways these authors would indicate that it's possible to have a collaborative government – is there a way that Canada can move there in responding to change? – are by developing new tools and practices. A lot of those new tools and practices focus on results. Some of the ones they say are very important are ensuring that public services are delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible, ensuring that programs are responsive to client or citizen needs, ensuring that programs and services support the department's strategic direction, and providing feedback to management and staff on the quality and effectiveness of programs and services.

Now, I know this government would say that they're in fact doing that, and I think they're trying to, Mr. Chairman, but if we then go

back to the Auditor General's report and we take a look at the top three recommendations that he made in his report for last year, we find that this government is still falling woefully short in those areas.

The number 1 recommendation, which is one that has been in this book consistently for the last few years, is that "the Department of Treasury, in conjunction with other ministries" – so this ministry too – "clearly define the core measures and targets in the government business plan." The second recommendation is to "improve the link between goals and core businesses in ministry business plans," and the third one is to "ensure that all performance measures in ministry business plans include clearly defined targets." So it's not enough, Mr. Chairman, to spend the money; you have to be able to define whether or not that money was well spent. Not enough to consult, but ensure that that consultation process is actually inclusive. You just don't run out there, talk to the people, and do what you want anyway.

We've seen some good examples and some bad examples of that kind of consultation process for which this department would have had some input if not a leadership role. I'm thinking in terms of all the roundtables that were held around the province. We had many, many groups come to us as the Official Opposition and say: "You know, I've been consulted to death. When are they going to listen to me? I've sat on the last roundtable I'm going to participate in. We spend all this time and energy and come up with these really great ideas and then don't actually see them implemented down the way."

However, I can think of one exception to that rule, Mr. Chairman, and that would be when they talked about climate change.

MR. MacDONALD: Climate change?

MS CARLSON: Yeah, climate change. That roundtable presented some surprises to politicians, to government politicians to more precisely define that. I'm not sure that it presented any surprises to people working in the departments, this department and the related departments at that time, being at least Environment and Energy. But certainly the politicians were quite surprised to hear what different leaders from the community, not only business but environmental leaders and citizens, had to say about what was needed and where we needed to go as a province.

As a result of that particular consultation, there was some good work done. Government politicians and ministers were brought up to speed on the issues. I think the bureaucrats always knew what the game was and where they needed to go, but they had a hard time convincing their bosses. That was one roundtable where recommendations came out that I believe politicians took to heart. That was a good example, a process that could work and that met much of the focus on the results that this collaboration talks about. So that's interesting, and I wish we could see more like that.

I'm looking forward to seeing what comes out of this Future meeting that will be happening here in the fall. I hope it takes more of that kind of a mandate. The problem with what happened with the climate change meetings is that we haven't had much progress on that issue since then. I'm not quite sure what the problem is, what seems to be stalling at what level. Perhaps the minister could update me on why we haven't seen more progress and what their particular relationship is in terms of helping departments meet Alberta targets or what they're doing in terms of lobbying the federal government on the Kyoto protocol. I would be very interested in hearing an update on that.

There is no doubt that at some point in time, Mr. Chairman, Alberta and the government of Alberta will have to take some steps in terms of if not meeting that protocol meeting some sorts of

measures. No doubt industry sees that. I believe industry is leading in this issue. I think that they are not constrained by the Alberta government mind-set, which is, "We're based on oil and gas revenues, and we'll do what we want because that's where our money comes from. CO₂ emissions don't matter, and we'll fight to the bitter end to establish that kind of a precedent." I don't think that's very forward thinking. I don't think that is where industry is going.

We're seeing industry take a more global context. We see them saying that if we're going to be competing in a global marketplace, we need to be seen by global citizens as being proactive. We see that regardless of where people stand on the issue of CO₂ emissions and the ozone layer, this is where industry is moving as a whole. They need to be leaders not followers, so they are taking proactive steps in terms of reducing CO₂ emissions and finding credits and looking for options. Too bad the government isn't taking the same leadership role. I think they're playing catch-up on this issue. It's too bad, because Alberta has a lot to lose.

Certainly this is an area where we could take some leadership, and I think the leadership is there, Mr. Chairman, in the bureaucracy in the various departments. I don't know what it's going to take to get the ministers and the government as a whole to listen and understand, but it's certainly worth the effort, and I wish they would pursue that.

I think I'm just about out of time, Mr. Chairman, so I would like to talk about the couple of attempts this government has made to manage horizontally rather than in a stovepipe kind of fashion. They're not making very much progress, and we look forward to hearing more information on that.

MR. VANDERBURG: I'd like all your attention just for 15 or 20 minutes here. I'd like to make just one comment regarding the budget of International and Intergovernmental Relations. The minister in his opening remarks talked about the twinning opportunities that our government is involved in. Some 20 years ago Alberta signed an official twinning agreement with the province of Hokkaido, Japan. At the encouragement of our province 10 communities in turn twinned with similar communities in Hokkaido. Presently these communities get very little monetary support from our province, and just the opposite is occurring in their sister communities in Japan.

[Mr. Johnson in the chair]

It's becoming more and more difficult to compete with these communities in the exchange programs. The students especially are having difficulty raising funds. Has there been any recognition of these local exchanges and the great work that the Alberta twin communities do to promote the great relationships that have been occurring?

Thank you.

9:10

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister for concluding remarks.

MR. JONSON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I did want to just respond to five or six of the points raised, but first of all I would like to make it clear that we'll commit to responding in writing to the other questions that were raised, although I was going to suggest to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that if he would perhaps discuss with his colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, who does appear to understand the estimates, that would cut down on our work quite a bit. We will nevertheless reply in writing.

First of all, I'm starting with some of the most recent remarks.

Certainly in the overall priorities that we have for the year ahead, we will be working to be represented in the structure that is being established to look at an overall energy strategy and energy agreement in North America. Those negotiations will be carried on nation to nation, but as I have indicated previously, we have made every effort through our department and working with Energy and Sustainable Resource Development to make sure that we will be represented, as will other provinces, on the working group that will be involved in those discussions.

With respect to the Kyoto accord, there are further meetings planned in Bonn, Germany, and in Marrakech, Morocco, following that, where the goals of the Kyoto accord will be pursued. Alberta, I'm sure, will participate as part of the Canadian delegation going to those particular conferences.

However, I think the important thing I'd like to emphasize – and I'm speaking now about a broad-based effort in government, particularly through the Department of Environment – is that these are long and protracted negotiations, but in the meantime, as was indicated today or the day before in question period, Alberta is taking its responsibility of protecting the environment very, very seriously. The Minister of Environment was pointing out that we have higher standards in terms of drinking water quality in this province than is the case nationally, and we could go through a list of other examples of that type. So we are not being stalled in our efforts and commitment to protecting the environment because the Kyoto process has not come to a conclusion. If it doesn't come to any conclusion, we'll still take that view as a government.

The Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne mentioned the exchange programs, and these were also alluded to in remarks from the members of the opposition. No, we do not have in this budget any particular assistance program for student travel or student exchanges. All we can state at this particular point in time, although it is something that we will see is discussed – we know that these are very valuable activities. It is something that I thank you for drawing to my attention, and I'll commit to discussing this particular topic, although I cannot promise any specific funding at this particular time.

With respect to the whole area of the softwood lumber situation, the investigation there that is proceeding as far as the American government is concerned with respect to their view of our softwood lumber production and trade into the United States from across Canada, we are very active there in assisting and preparing the Canadian case with respect to the softwood lumber dispute. In the written responses that we will provide to the member, we will give a briefing in terms of the status of those negotiations. I would like to assure the Assembly that we are making every effort to present Alberta's case as part of the overall Canadian position, and of course we have major participants in the presence of the British Columbia government. The Quebec government is a big player in this. We are working collaboratively in that regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I do commit to providing written responses.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you. After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense

\$6,104,000

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Economic Development

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: To begin our deliberations, I'll call on the Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Legislative Assembly. Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge some people that have joined me in the gallery today. With me are my deputy minister, Barry Mehr; my assistant deputy minister, Rory Campbell; my executive assistant, Hazel Cail, who invariably gets blamed for everything; and big Jim Bauer, who is our senior financial officer of the ministry. I would like to thank them for their support this evening, their help over the first two months of this ministry, and for helping me find my way around this building, including to the bathrooms. Thank you very much.

It is my privilege to present the 2001-2002 estimates and the 2001-2004 business plan for the Ministry of Economic Development. [some applause] Thank you, hon. gentlemen.

As you are aware, this department is the lead sales and marketing arm of the government and works with the Alberta Economic Development Authority and the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council to carry out its roles and goals. Today I will briefly report on the state of Alberta's economy and the department's plan to continue to foster a positive business climate that promotes job creation, growth, and investment in our province.

In the year 2000 our real gross domestic product increased by an estimated 6.1 percent. Real gross domestic product growth in Alberta for the year 2001 is expected to be 4.5 percent, the highest of all the provinces. By contrast, real gross domestic product growth in Canada in the year 2001 was expected to be 2.6 percent and for the United States only 2.3 percent.

In addition, Alberta's international value-added exports increased by an estimated 25 percent to \$20.4 billion, and we anticipate that the resource-based industries, including oil and gas, forestry, and agriculture, will lead the economic growth of the province with petrochemicals, food processing, and manufacturing also contributing to that growth. Expansion into new economy industries such as aerospace, telecommunications, software development, medical devices and health services, life science, and the information and communication technology field will also play a large role.

Turning to the ministry, Mr. Chairman, we encourage the province's business community to find new opportunities to expand business and create jobs by striving to ensure that Alberta is and is known to be the best place to live, work, and do business in the world. Our mission is to promote Alberta's continuing prosperity. We accomplish this by leading the government's strategic marketing as a credible player on the world economic stage. We perform this function through three core businesses: strategic leadership for economic development policy and planning, market development and investment attraction, and thirdly, tourism marketing and development.

The department has three goals related to these core businesses. We want to ensure that, number one, Alberta has a vibrant and versatile economy; number two, Alberta's businesses, communities, and industry sectors are globally competitive; and number three, that Alberta is a globally competitive tourism destination. But we cannot achieve these goals in isolation. Rather, we will continue to facilitate economic growth in Alberta through our partnerships, partnerships such as the Alberta Economic Development Authority,

the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, the Travel Alberta Secretariat, business and industry associations, and other provincial departments and governments.

In conjunction with its private- and public-sector partners the department has developed a number of initiatives that are helping to build Alberta's economic future.

Looking at our first goal, ensuring "Alberta has vibrant and versatile economy," a major strategy that guides us to accomplish this goal is Get Ready Alberta. Early last year the government launched Get Ready Alberta: Strengthening the Alberta Advantage, a new six-year economic strategy for the province. The strategy is co-led by Alberta Economic Development along with Alberta Innovation and Science and Learning. Get Ready Alberta focuses on four key directions: unleashing innovation, leading and learning, competing in a global marketplace, and making Alberta the best place to live, work, and visit.

9:20

The early accomplishments of Get Ready Alberta are simply outstanding. Here are just a few examples of this overwhelming success. Employment expanded in Alberta by 35,000 new jobs in the year 2000, including an estimated 4,000 jobs in the information and communications technology field. Now, listen to this, folks. Tourism revenue increased to an estimated \$4.4 billion in 2000, up \$200 million from 1999.

MR. MELCHIN: Could you repeat that?

MR. NORRIS: I shall repeat that, because it bears repeating. Tourism revenues increased to \$4.4 billion in the year 2000. Unbelievable.

Value-added exports increased by \$4.1 billion to \$20.4 billion. Get Ready Alberta is part of the department's ongoing commitment to keeping Albertans informed and involved as the province moves toward a debt-free future.

Alberta Economic Development will continue to monitor the province's performance against targets established in Get Ready Alberta and will lead initiatives that enable the province to meet those targets. [interjection] That's okay. It gets better.

Alberta international marketing strategies. Moving to our second goal, seeing that "Alberta's businesses, communities and industry sectors are globally competitive," a strategy that targets our efforts to improve Alberta's global competitiveness is the Alberta international marketing strategy, or AIMS. AIMS was developed to co-ordinate with the Alberta Economic Development Authority after broad consultation with industry stakeholders. A number of government departments such as Learning, Energy, International and Intergovernmental Affairs, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, and Innovation and Science were also involved.

The goal of AIMS is to increase exports to and investments from key geographic markets and priority value-added sectors. In doing so, the plan highlights marketing strategies that ensure that Albertans receive the best return on their investments.

Along with promoting Alberta internationally, the department promotes the formation of regional economic alliances across Alberta that allow business and community leaders and local residents to develop long-term economic plans that meet local needs. Mr. Chairman, I will be providing an update of AIMS to the standing policy committee next month that proposes enhancements to Alberta's international representation.

Our strategic tourism marketing plan. Guiding our focus on the achievement of our third goal, ensuring that "Alberta is a globally competitive tourism destination," is the strategic tourism marketing

plan, or STMP. Developed by the industry-led Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, the STMP is a three-year plan that provides vision and leadership for tourism marketing in Alberta. The plan sets specific goals for tourism revenue, market share, private-sector investment, client and stakeholder satisfaction, efficiency, and financial management. The overall goal of this three-year plan is to increase the total tourism revenue in Alberta to \$5 billion by the end of December 2003, up from its current \$4.2 billion in 1999.

Tourism is the fourth largest industry in Alberta and has significant economic spin-offs for the province. In light of the importance of tourism, last year the department reallocated on a permanent basis \$2 million from its existing budget to the tourism marketing and development programs. At the same time, our department supports the development of newer tourism products in order to respond to changing market needs that are crucial to the success of the tourism industry and the government's tourism marketing.

Specifically regarding the budget estimates, Mr. Chairman, the budget for this department is \$51,455,000. As I indicated earlier, Alberta Economic Development has three core businesses. The structure of the department programs and their budget estimates reflect these three areas and provide 100 percent alignment of our resources to our core businesses.

The first departmental program, ministry support services, consists of the offices of the minister and the deputy minister, finance and administration, corporate . . . [Mr. Norris' speaking time expired] I could go on. I'll close, Mr. Chairman, with letting you know that it's an outstanding department.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Well, it's nice to think that this minister of a whole two months could be responsible for all the good news he's talking about this evening, but we know that isn't really true. Perhaps it's good news to him, but it's not good news to everyone in this province.

Mr. Chairman, this has been one of my favourite ministries since I've been in this Legislature. In 1993, when I was first elected, I was the junior critic for Economic Development. The more experienced critic at that time was Frank Bruseker, and he used to refer to this ministry as the ministry of cookies and pork. I think that aptly describes some of their ventures in those days. Cookies was a reference to investments that this government had made in not just one cookie factory but a number of business ventures that turned out to be less than profitable. The pork reference was a reference that I think all of us are familiar with in politics. He got called to account several times when he made those references. Those were some pretty bad years for Economic Development in terms of the kind of wastage of dollars that there were in different business ventures in this province.

After that time period, there seemed to be a bit of a slump in what Economic Development did and the profile it had in this government, Mr. Chairman. As gambling and lottery revenues took over some of the profile and some of the discretionary funding in the province, I believe we saw the Economic Development department somewhat gutted and changed in its format.

It underwent some changes, and some of them I think were pretty good changes, Mr. Chairman. We see it coming back into a little more prominence in its role in this province, and I think that is both good and bad. If they're successful in their four goals, it's good. But we've seen some very recent examples where they still haven't been able to figure out how to manage partnerships or ventures

under their direct control, and that's certainly still bad, Mr. Chairman. I will speak to some of those shortly, when I talk about the comments the Auditor General has made about this department and expect some feedback.

9:30

Just a few overall remarks in terms of what the minister had to say here. He talks about this department being the leading sales and marketing arm of the government, and that's good. Certainly that's the kind of role Alberta has taken in the last decade, and it's been a positive influence, for the most part, in terms of the feedback in Alberta. But like marketing arms or sales arms in businesses, they need to make sure that the checks and balances are in place to make sure this kind of department stays in line with what its goals are and doesn't overextend its abilities selling what it doesn't have, investing what it doesn't have, marketing what it doesn't have. So that's a very legitimate concern I bring forward, given its past performance in promoting investment opportunities and working in partnerships.

In caution, I would ask the department to put forward as a filter over all the decisions they make – particularly this is a department that can get carried away with things. They need to ensure that they're benchmarking what they're doing and that the goals they set are both measurable and attainable and realistic and that they are not interfering in the marketplace in any way, shape, or form. So I would ask him to bring that cautionary aspect to his job.

When I look through the business plans and listen to the minister talk, the focus is on international trade, on external kinds of trade, and that's good. Certainly the big growth is there, Mr. Chairman, but I don't want this minister to forget about what keeps Alberta viable and attractive for the tourism he's trying to attract, and that is the small-business sector of this province. I didn't hear any specific references in his opening comments to that, and it seems to me that when I take a look at the goals and core businesses, that seems to be somewhat overlooked here. We're only as strong as the foundation we're working from, and small business is certainly the foundation of this province. We have seen many recommendations come forward from small businesses that would help them with their practices in this province and would build a little steadier foundation for work to be done. Not the least of those is the reduction of regulations. I'm sure that pressure from this minister and his department in seeing that that is acted out and that paperwork is reduced for these organizations would be something very helpful.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

One of the things we don't see reflected in this ministry and one of the key areas of concern for businesses moving forward is venture capital dollars, Mr. Chairman. We don't see any references here to them. We'd like to know what the minister's plans are in that area, what avenues there are for organizations that are trying to promote their businesses or to keep them globally competitive, and there doesn't seem to be much of a reference there.

I note in the opening comments of the Auditor General that he talks about government changes impacting the ministry, and one of them is the new tourism framework that the minister talked about in his opening comments. The Auditor General makes a reference to the previous Alberta Tourism Partnership Corporation structure that was discontinued in 1998, the most recent by far, Mr. Chairman, of boondoggles entered into by this particular department. A clear indication there that while the government obviously was looking forward to moving forward on collaboration fronts and by striking a partnership with what should have been an arm's-length operation, the rules of engagement weren't clear. There weren't clear objec-

tives and benchmarks that could be measured and reported back and strategies where, if the benchmarks and the goals weren't achieved by a certain time period, retrenching or reorganizing or disbanding was done at an early stage.

The end result was that lots of money was spent on this Alberta Tourism Partnership with very, very few results and in fact some very hard feelings, particularly in the northern part of this province, in terms of allocation of dollars and the kind of bang they got for their buck. Subsequently the department contracted out over \$10 million worth of marketing and tourist information services in the 1999-2000 year. I don't see what we got for our money there, and perhaps the minister can enlighten me on that. I do wonder, as I'm sure northern Alberta tourism departments wonder, what they could have done with \$10 million and what kind of impact they could have had in terms of bringing tourism to the north. Certainly in the early days when I was cocritic for this area, not much happened north of Red Deer, Mr. Chairman. It seems like they're still the forgotten cousin in this equation here. We would like to see if this minister has some specific strategies there and, if he does, what they could be.

We see again year after year the same problem here when the Auditor General talks about problems with the minister's financial statements. The very basic and fundamental problem when you talk about Economic Development, where lots of money flows out in expenses, is that their basic controls over management and assets and payments are a problem. In fact, the AG recommended "that the senior financial officer of the Department ensure that key internal controls over the management of assets and payments be complied with."

He goes on to talk about lack of staff and those kinds of issues. We know that there was a significant reduction of staffing components in this particular department over that time period and in fact over the years prior to that, but it's no excuse for not being able to count the dollars, Mr. Chairman. We would like to know what the minister has done to comply here. Specifically, what we'd also like to know is: where were the problems that the AG found? What specific departments and what kinds of dollars are we talking about here? Have they been rectified?

The AG goes on to talk about identifying "the need for improved controls over payments" and identifying "weaknesses in payment controls in the tourism program." Overpayments were made to contractors. One was for more than \$141,000. So the department had a problem with their paperwork; the contractor had a problem with his paperwork. It looks like it might have been improved. It doesn't say here whether or not the money was ever recovered. That's a question we'd like answered. I mean, \$141,000 is a lot of money. How could this happen is, I think, a reasonable question here.

The Auditor General makes a formal recommendation, recommendation 12, where he recommends

that the Department of Economic Development ensure that expenses and assets arising from new initiatives are disclosed in its financial statements based on the substance of the transactions.

That's quite a shocker to anybody with an accounting background, Mr. Chairman, to see that this didn't happen.

In fact, the department sloughed through the reporting of an agreement it made

with a contractor to open and maintain a bank account for receiving contributions and payments of expenses for this project. At March 31, 2000 the Department had contributed over \$700,000 into this account.

An interesting kind of slush fund accounting when "this amount [was] treated as a grant expense in the Department's financial statements," even though it should have been included "as an asset and the transfer of funds into the bank account should not have been recorded as an expense."

I'm assuming they're hiring qualified people there, and I have to wonder how something like this could happen. Good for the AG's department in finding it. Bad news for this department for having allowed something like this to happen. We would like to know the kinds of checks and balances they have in their system so that this doesn't happen in the future.

You know, they go on to talk about another recommendation, where he says:

We again recommend that the Department ensure that its branch plans encompass all significant activities of the Department's operations and indicate how all funds in the budget are to be used.

So they had branch plans that weren't even including significant areas of operations. Thirty-five percent of the department's budget was not included in branch plans. For example, the regional development branch did not indicate how any of its \$3.2 million budget was to be spent. Well, a nice slush fund to have, Mr. Chairman, if you can get your hands on it. It's not the way the government should be spending their money. Interesting to see that this would happen.

9:40

International office branches did not include all of its foreign operations. Well, what's that about, Mr. Chairman? We need to know how those dollars are spent. The minister can talk all he wants about what great strategies they have, but when they have no intent to control the dollars and cents and how those dollars are spent, how can Albertans ever assume that they are getting value for their money and that in fact people just aren't off on junkets all over the world having a great time at Alberta taxpayers' expense? We've had examples tabled in this Legislature where this particular department certainly did pursue junkets that did not give value for the dollars spent, and we don't want to see that happening. So we would like a report back on how those significant activities are now being recorded and would hopefully be available for scrutiny by people in the general public.

There are also six delegated administrative organizations within this ministry, and it's always been a problem for us, these DAOs, because lots of times we don't seem to have a lot of input or review processes built in place to take a look at how these dollars are being spent. The Auditor General has some concerns about those, too, and made some recommendations. They followed up the recommendations that they made, and of the six, "Monitoring appears to be strong for four of the six DAOs." Which four are those? Which two have problems still in the monitoring and managing of the relationship between the ministry and the other two DAOs? If we could have that information, it would be helpful to us.

So, Mr. Chairman, for what really is a very small department, the Auditor General devotes a fair amount of time explaining problems and issues in this department. I hope that's going to change with the next Auditor General's report. This minister has only been in the portfolio for a couple of months, so he's got a few months here where he can see if he can't ensure that this department is a little more accountable than it has been in the past.

In his opening comments the minister talked about what they were going to do in terms of tourism, and I'd like to ask him what his specific strategies are for promoting tourism as a parallel industry in resource-based regional economies. You know, I'm thinking particularly of some of the areas that were hit by the closures of coal mines. In the central and northwest sector of this province we have some beautiful, beautiful regions that are not promoted to any great extent from a tourism or an ecotourism perspective. I think there is a huge amount of potential there. They have been resource-based economies in the past. They're in a transition stage or phase. I'm sure they could use some support, Mr. Chairman, and I'm wondering

specifically if this minister has got any strategies there. He talks about the big dollars coming into the province for tourism. In order to ensure that those tourism dollars stay here and grow, areas do need to be promoted.

I can't remember the studies I have most recently seen on this, but it seems to me that there's an absolute, direct correlation with regional and provincial promotion to bringing tourism dollars into the province, so we would like to see that continued. I think that's money well spent, although it certainly needs to be benchmarked and evaluated. Particularly I would like to see him spin some focus on the northwestern parts of the province because the southwestern parts are well known, Mr. Chairman; no doubt about that. The Banff and Crowsnest Pass areas of this province have had large exposure in the past and are very attractive areas for tourism dollars and will continue to be in the future, but we have some underdeveloped areas in this province that could certainly benefit from some ecotourism or environmental development kinds of projects.

What is this minister specifically undertaking, Mr. Chairman, on the energy efficient initiative side? We see the direct rebates going back to taxpayers in this province, but we don't see any direct intervention by Economic Development to support alternate energy sources. There are lots of options on the research and development side, lots of options on existing kinds of alternate sources, be they solar or wind. No doubt a small percentage of the dollars that have been invested in oil and gas and coal over the past decades would be well spent if they were put into those alternate kinds of sources, not only from an economic development and a jobs perspective but from an energy efficiency perspective and long-term forecasting of being able to meet the requirements we will have as a province under the Kyoto protocol. So if the minister could identify those strategies, I would be very supportive of that.

You know, something I haven't seen this minister talk about and something which has been an issue for as long as I've been in this Legislature is the pillow tax, Mr. Chairman. I read something recently where the minister talked about options for that particular tax. Of course, what the industry wants is those dollars directed right back into their industry in terms of promotion. I'm sure they would like them redirected back in proportion to the dollars collected per region. Certainly we would support an initiative like that. Exactly where is he going on that issue? We'd like to know. The pillow tax actually is a regressive tax, but people seem to be used to paying it, so there doesn't seem to be a huge degree of discontent about the tax itself or the collection processes for it. Certainly just having that money come in and go into general revenue is something the associations have been concerned about for many years, so we would like to get this particular minister's feedback on that. If he could give us that information, that would be very helpful.

A progress report from his perspective on the economic spin-offs from the Canamex highway would be beneficial. We haven't seen that yet, and I would appreciate that.

I'll be back later, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and participate in the budget estimates of the Ministry of Economic Development this evening. I listened with interest to the minister's opening remarks, and I'm astonished that the low rate of the Canadian dollar has had nothing to do with the dramatic increase in the tourism trade in this province. Also, the low rate of the Canadian dollar and the resources that are readily available for, in this case, exploitation have not come into consider-

ation regarding the robust economy of this province.

The robust economy of this province continues despite attempts not only to privatize our health care system and ruin a natural competitive advantage we have there but also with our electricity prices. I will be curious to see what the minister has to say in another couple of years, because if the present trend continues, industries are going to have no choice but to vacate this province for other jurisdictions with more reliable, competitive electricity prices.

Now, understandably the primary focus – and I can understand why the minister gets quite excited about the portfolio of the Ministry of Economic Development – is to strengthen the Alberta economy and support job creation by the private sector, and I wish the minister well in all his endeavours. To achieve the goals, the minister must work closely with other provincial government departments, the Alberta Economic Development Authority, which my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie mentioned, the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, the Travel Alberta Secretariat, business and industry associations, and other governments to create a positive economic planning framework.

9:50

Now, a core business of the Ministry of Economic Development is strategic leadership for economic development policy and planning. I'm interested in any of the concerns the minister has regarding the problem of the Alliance pipeline. The minister spoke about the petrochemical industry, and certainly we've got to recognize the effect it has on not only our current prosperity but our future prosperity. Where are we going to get the ethane? We're shipping so much of it out on the Alliance line. We need an affordable feedstock for a petrochemical industry, and I wonder if the minister has any thoughts on that.

In the time, unfortunately, that we have allotted here, I'd better get directly to some of the questions I have. There's no information provided in the estimates or the business plan of the Ministry of Economic Development regarding the number of full-time equivalents in 2002-03 or 2003-04. Will the minister please provide information on plans for full-time equivalent levels in the Ministry of Economic Development for 2002-03 and 2003-04? This is on page 134 of the estimates.

Will the minister please provide a breakdown of ministerial expenses by object – the budget here is over \$51 million – in the following components: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, wages for contract employees, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting? Will the minister please provide a similar breakdown for consolidated program expenses in 2002-03 and 2003-04? This is in the business plan, page 116.

Also, will the minister please provide a breakdown of other revenues anticipated by the department for 2001-02? I believe that figure is 750,000. For 2002-03 it's also the same and for the next year as well. This is also on page 116.

Could the minister please provide a report on the activities that the executive committee established within the Department of Economic Development to identify areas of policy need, setting priorities for policy development, and approving selection of qualified candidates to fill key jobs within the new organizational structure?

Also, could the minister please describe how successful the Council of Economic Development Ministers has been to date in meeting terms of reference recommended in the July 1997 Coopers & Lybrand report. They have a few points here: to ensure co-ordination across government departments of public policy formulation activities for economic development across the province; secondly, to ensure that government initiatives in economic

development policy fully take into account private-sector directions and input being received by AEDA and the private sector; thirdly, to collaborate with the AEDA chair and committee members; also, to ensure that economic development planning takes place in a co-ordinated, consistent manner across all departments; lastly, to ensure effective monitoring of the effectiveness of economic development policies and activities across all departments.

In regards to the Council of Economic Development Ministers, what planning initiatives will be undertaken by the council?

Now, the minister mentioned Get Ready Alberta. Can the minister provide a detailed update on Economic Development's role in the implementation of Get Ready Alberta? [interjection] A boondoggle? Yes. Unfortunately, in particular with this government after 30 years, history has a tendency to repeat itself, and people have said to me: Mr. MacDonald, be patient. I believe they're absolutely right.

Can the minister provide a detailed list including costs and type of projects his ministry is involved in as part of preparations for hosting the 2001 world track and field championships in Edmonton? That would be very interesting. There's a lot of money going into that. Gosh, I hope it's all been spent well. Will the ministry also be doing a study, upon completion of the games, of the effect the games had on the economy and the cost and/or benefits to both the public and private sectors for hosting the 2001 world track and field championships in Edmonton? If so, will the minister commit to making the full details of this report public?

Now, the program spending here in the ministry support services. Mr. Chairman, key initiatives under ministry support services include "enhancing the collection, management, and dissemination of the department's information and knowledge" – hopefully that's going to include question period as well – and "implementing innovative and responsive human resource programs and services to ensure the availability of a highly competent workforce in the department."

In regards to this, how many full-time equivalents are employed under program 1, ministry support services, in 2001-02, and what is the breakdown of the subprogram areas: minister's office, deputy minister's office, finance and administration, communications, and performance management? What are the projections for full-time equivalents in 2002-03 and 2003-04? That was on page 124 of the estimates.

Now, on page 116 of the business plan of Economic Development. Will the minister please provide a breakdown of ministry support services by subprogram for 2002-03 and 2003-04?

The minister's office. It's always interesting to visit the minister's office.

DR. TAFT: You won't get invited there often.

MR. MACDONALD: I'm not going to be invited to the minister's office too often. Well, that's fine.

The gross operating expense of \$311,000 represents an increase of \$16,000, or a 5.4 percent increase, from the previous year's budget estimate. Now, what is the breakdown of the \$311,000 minister's office budget for 2001-2002 by the following components: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, wages, contract employees, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, hosting? Again, hosting and travel: I'll look forward to receiving that.

What benchmarks or targets have been established within the minister's office to meet the mandate of the ministry? For example, New Zealand, again, includes correspondence received from the public. In the opening remarks of the minister, Mr. Chairman, one could only conclude that the public is very, very satisfied and that

there are very few that are unsatisfied, but it would be interesting to note.

What benchmarks, Mr. Chairman, have been established for the number of replies to Legislative Assembly questions, ministerial correspondence, motions for returns, written questions, reports to cabinet and Treasury Board? What time frame or due date benchmarks have been established for ministerial, MLA, and public correspondence?

Can the minister explain also why gross operating expenses are up this year by 5.4 percent over last year's budget estimates when the preliminary forecast for last year is \$14,000, or 4.7 percent, below the budget estimates for last year? If we didn't need the money last year, why do we think we need it this year?

10:00

Now the deputy minister's office. We're going to visit the deputy minister's office now. Could the minister please explain his explanation for the \$61,000 increase, or 16.9 percent, in the deputy minister's office budget between the year 2000-2001 budget estimates and the 2001 forecast?

One of the budget highlights I read here in Economic Development after Get Ready Alberta is "service the growing needs of the ICT sector and other advanced technologies sectors through a co-funding relationship with Innovation and Science." Now, the first thing that would come to my mind with this are the CCTs, the clean coal technologies.

Now, it doesn't matter whether the CCTs are concerning the Inland Cement proposal, that is going to affect the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, or the coal-fired power plants west of the city. For the clean coal technologies is the minister's department responsible for some of the funding for this research? These clean coal technologies are going to be essential for the future electricity generation of this province, and I would be very curious to know how much money, if any, is going out of Economic Development and who is getting it and how this research is being conducted. I would be very anxious to receive a progress report on any of this research that's being done. In fact, I would like to if possible visit a pilot plant that is operating. The PCs, or the pulverized coal generating stations, are – well, the only way to describe them is as dinosaurs. [interjection] Someone is awake.

Now, Mr. Chairman, what outputs and outcomes are used to evaluate the performance within the deputy minister's office, and how does it link to the mandate of the ministry?

We're now on reference line 1.0.3, finance and administration. There's just not enough time to go through this budget thoroughly, contrary to what other hon. members at this Assembly may think. How does the minister explain the fact that last year's forecast of \$2.507 million is \$499,000, or 16.6 percent, less than last year's budget estimate of slightly more than \$3 million?

Now, this finance and administration, in my view, is a very important branch. It co-ordinates the records and management activities of the department as well as compliance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. I visited this office in my role as opposition critic for the pine shakes, whether they're treated or untreated. There was a lot of action back in the early '90s in this department regarding the promotion of pine shakes, and ultimately the consumers in this province paid for that problem.

Now, this branch assists the department also to achieve its business plan outcomes through the management of its employees. Finance and administration also co-ordinates and enhances the corporate management of the department by providing planning and resource management support in the areas of finance, administration, information technology, and business planning.

Now, how much of the slightly over \$3 million budget has been

allocated to support activities planned in the financial services unit? How much of the slightly more than \$3 million budget has been allocated to support activities planned in the administrative services unit? How much of the slightly more than \$3 million has been allocated to support activities planned in the information technology unit? How much of the finance and administration budget deals with the development of business planning and performance measurement processes across the department?

Again to the minister: what is the status of the Alberta Corporate Service Centre initiative and the corporate human resource development strategy that's been implemented in the department in the areas of employee skills inventories, job profiles, performance management, and rewards and recognitions? Will the minister please provide further information on plans to implement shared services with other departments in the areas of financing, resources, administration, and information technology services. What role does the government administration play in the Alberta Corporate Service Centre? Now, this is on page 109 of the business plan.

Will the minister provide an update, please, on the continuity plan, the virtual teams, and the coaching leaders program, which is again on page 109.

How does the departmental business planning committee, chaired by the executive director of finance and administration and comprised of senior representatives from each division, assist in the development of the ministry business plan?

Mr. Chairman, what changes have been made to travel policies and procedures, internal controls of the payroll function, and the grant policy for supporting conferences and functions and other sponsorship initiatives?

Will the minister please provide an update on the results being achieved by the following initiatives that have been undertaken by finance and administration over the past three years: development of the core database integrating client-related information for access across the department, implementation of the SMART system to support visitor information centres, enhancement and upgrading of internal and external information systems such as issue management, correspondence, and action requests. The classic AR: we send a letter across, and we can generate an action request. I don't know, in relation to the pine shake file, how many action requests were initiated, but it became a cottage industry. I'm sure with the electricity deregulation and what a boondoggle that is becoming, action requests are going to be a big issue there as well.

With those questions, I'm disappointed my time is up.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to address the minister on his first submission, his first budget, one rookie to another. I'll start with some wide-ranging comments here. Something that all the members will realize is a theme that will last for years to come and will be, I'm sure, of particular concern and I expect something of a headache to the Minister of Economic Development is the impact of electricity deregulation. I imagine the minister is familiar with the work of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, a very detailed economic analysis of the impact of higher electricity prices on manufacturing in Alberta and the potential risk of up to 31,000 jobs. I note again that we had visitors this afternoon from Montana, and undoubtedly they will have very close experience to provide on electricity deregulation with the minister here.

I am familiar with earlier documents from Economic Development I think – if my memory serves correctly, my own reading of them from 1998 – which actually championed Alberta's cheap electricity prices as a keystone of economic development and

diversification. Clearly, we can no longer do that, and I'm sure that that is going to be an ongoing problem for the minister and his department and, indeed, for the entire province.

10:10

I also note the minister is responsible for some programs that may in fact be in tension one with the other, for example electricity. If we go into electricity exporting through, say, an expanded tie-line to the United States and generating large amounts of power from those pulverized coal dinosaurs, we may find that we actually end up damaging our environment and working against the interests of our tourism industry. Certainly having some familiarity with the coal-fired plants to the west of the city – the Wabamun plant, the Sundance plant, the Keephills plant, and the Genesee plant – those are not the kinds of things that work well with developing a tourism industry. So the minister will need some care and wisdom in sorting out those contradictions.

I'd also point out to the minister some warnings of the past, warnings of the economic development and diversification initiatives of the later 1970s and through the 1980s. I will make a prediction here that he's going to need to fight very hard to stick to his plans and his budget if we aren't to repeat those kinds of problems in this department and under this minister. We ended up in a situation where subsidies to business in one form or another, direct and indirect, everything from tax credits to direct subsidies, cost this province untold billions of dollars. I express my concerns now that we do not get into repeating those mistakes.

There is much to be said for the diversification of Alberta's economy. I, however, remain a skeptic of some of the claims, for example, that Edmonton's economy is the most diversified in the country. I suspect that if all the economic spin-offs of our sitting on oil and gas were to be tallied up and sorted through the economy, a great deal of our economy and our economic prosperity still relies on the fact we were lucky enough to have huge pools of petroleum in the ground beneath us. Our manufacturing industry, for an example, relies to a very large extent on manufacturing products for the oil and gas industry. By way of that, I think it's an indication that economic diversification in Alberta may not be nearly as advanced as we like to think it is.

I've spent a notable amount of time going through the department's material and estimates and annual reports from before and have quite extensive briefing notes. I'll just deal with a handful of concerns.

I note a curious pattern in the department in which some programs are markedly underbudget and other programs are markedly overbudget. There are some programs in which spending is way off budget, and it makes me wonder and express my concerns that the minister will need to work hard to tighten his control on the budgetary process of the department.

Looking, for example, at the industry development program. There's a decrease of 5.8 percent this year over last year's preliminary actuals. Decreases are fine if they can be justified, but I would like from the minister an explanation of why last year's preliminary actual is down from last year's actual and markedly down from last year's budgeted expenditures. In fact, last year's preliminary actual is actually 18 percent less than what was budgeted. So what was going on in that particular program? Maybe it was good and maybe it wasn't. Maybe there was inactivity there. What was going on that saw the actual expenditure come in some 18 percent less than was budgeted? Was it an error in the previous year's budget? Should we be concerned that that error is being repeated here? What is the explanation? I'd like to hear that from the minister.

Moving on to the area of tourism marketing and development,

which has been an area of some controversy within the tourism industry in the last few years, there is widespread concern that the provincial government, which was at one time an exemplary leader in tourism marketing and development, actually took the tourism industry through a pretty tough time and perhaps an unnecessarily tough time.

Looking at the budget now and looking towards the future, there are areas where spending is again significantly out of whack with the budget, and we are seeing real changes in the budget estimates this year compared to what was spent last year. For example, in tourism marketing and development, if I'm reading the figures correctly, the 2001-02 estimate is \$19.145 million. Last year's estimate was only \$16.9 million. That's a very significant increase. Again, why is this occurring? Why was the actual expenditure for last year in this program more than 10 percent over budget? That's a worrying trend and, again, fits in with the pattern in which the budgets of this department are not reliable indicators of the actual expenditures of the department.

I could go through a series of other examples of that. I'll only go through a handful of others. The regional marketing program that's done within Alberta, which is intended to increase interregional travel by Albertans within the province and to encourage and strengthen the so-called shoulder season travel in Alberta by Albertans, has some rather startling changes in spending patterns. The increase between last year's preliminary actual over last year's budget estimate is over 41 percent, which is really quite a remarkable misjudgment or miscalculation in the budgetary process. Well, it indicates some problem in budgeting or financial controls, that I certainly hope are addressed this year.

It would be interesting to know what exactly is being achieved with these expenditures. So much of these expenditures are intended to leverage private-industry funds. We spend public funds to stimulate and leverage private-industry funds. I'd like the minister to indicate to us: what are the leveraging ratios for the resident tourism marketing program for last year, this year, and the next couple of years? What are they expected to be in the next couple of years? If those ratios are not what they are expected to be, it may indicate that our performance is inadequate in that area.

Shifting from marketing programs within Alberta to international marketing, again we have evidence that last year's budget was a very unreliable indicator of what was being spent, and it makes me concerned about how reliable this year's estimates are. There was an increase of more than 22 percent between last year's preliminary actual and last year's budget estimate. This is a worrisome trend. I'd like to have the minister explain this to the Assembly.

Again on the international side, since these moneys are spent to some extent to stimulate and leverage private funding in different regions of the world, what are the leveraging ratios for the Americas, for Asia Pacific, and for Europe for last year and this year, and what are they expected to be in the next two years? Anybody who has worked extensively in the tourism industry knows that tourism marketing programs take some extended period to come into effect, so we'll be wanting to know what the plans are not just for this year but for the couple of years after that.

Of course, related to tourism marketing is Alberta's image promotion program. Yet again, startling figures on how far the budget was off from the reality last year. This time it's a decrease of 51 percent over the budget estimate. There's clearly some explanation for this. I would like the minister to explain why the Alberta image promotion was so far under budget last year. Was it a breakdown in activity? Was there some shifting of responsibilities? It's a remarkable deviation from the budget plan, and it does make me concerned about the reliability of this year's budget plan.

10:20

Again, on the research side we're seeing this year's estimate at \$350,000, a decrease of 30 percent from the previous year's estimate of half a million dollars, an exact \$500,000. What's the explanation for that? Are we doing less research? Is that wise? Given the importance of research in guiding our economic development and our tourism policy, marketing research is crucial to tourism development.

I'll wrap up, Mr. Chairman, with a handful of comments more generally on issues that certainly relate to economic development but in some ways do not fall directly under its purview.

Investments in education are vital to our economic development. I'm sure the minister will be working with other members of his cabinet to ensure that our education infrastructure, tuition fees, accessibility are well developed. I would go even more broadly to suggest that one of the strongest indicators and attractors for economic diversification and development is a general quality of life. While we all agree there is a good quality of life in Alberta, we should not be taking it for granted. The kinds of things that contribute to a quality life, including an education and health care systems, good roads, and a clean environment, must not be underestimated and should be taken in mind by the minister in his broader view of his responsibility for expanding and diversifying Alberta's economy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll wrap up with those comments.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, in the four and a half minutes.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to conclude some comments on the Economic Development estimate. Just a few wrap-up comments on budget highlights.

I would like to go back to some of the comments that my colleague made with regard to the growing needs of the ICT sector and other advanced technology sectors through a co-funding relationship with Innovation and Science. We'd sure like some detail on what's happening there. I, too, am very interested, as he is, in the clean coal technology. We've heard the Premier talk about clean coal technology and zero emissions, which would seem to be a scientific impossibility at this time in the world, never mind in this province. So if this minister has any information on this or other advanced technologies in that area, certainly I'd be very interested in talking to him about any information he has, viewing any progress being made in that regard. I certainly look forward to hearing from him on that area.

Good job with the stuff that he's doing with Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I think that department is making some real forward progress in taking a look at the tertiary development of some of our basic foodstuffs in this province and would like a report on exactly what activities they're involved in there but applaud the work that he's doing.

One of the other budget highlights talks about assisting "the film industry to develop a report card on the performance of the film sector in Alberta." I'm not sure that that's all that's needed there. We seem to have gone into these cycles where we heavily support the film industry, then withdraw that support, then try to get re-involved. I think over the 30 years that I have been involved with the film industry in this province, we have seen a great deal of discouragement there. That's really too bad, because I think there was a point in time when we could have been a leading factor in the film industry in this country. I'm not sure that that is still possible, but certainly I would look forward to an update in that particular area, specifically information on how the minister expects us to be

competitive just in the Canadian marketplace. With the reduced Canadian dollar we are attractive for film investments, but I think we've missed the boat in terms of competing with B.C. and Ontario and even Manitoba in that regard. So if there are any updates in that area, I would hope that the minister would share those with us.

He talks about the ministry budget including \$2 million for strategic leadership for economic development policy and planning. We'd sure like to see some details in that regard. Sure it's dollars well spent, but I'm not sure that this particular department has done a good job of strategic leadership in the past, so details there would be very helpful.

I looked with interest at goal 3, "Alberta is a globally competitive tourism destination," and wondered at some of the growth forecasts, the targets that are here for the next few years. They seem to me to be not very high, Mr. Chairman. Could the minister tell us how he arrived at those figures and whether or not they did a cost analysis in terms of what they could expect the forecasts and targets to be given the amount of dollars they had to invest in the various areas, particularly as they've gotten them broken down between Europe, Asia, and the United States? So if we could get background on that: how they got to those dollars, why the targets are so low. If this is a major push, a major drive for us to increase tourism in the province, it seems like we should be able to achieve higher targets than what we've got. So if he could just give us some information on that.

Then just above that on page 131, where they talk about "the most cost effective location in North America in selected value-added sectors," what I'd like to know is why they selected the ones they did. Were there others in the plan, and if they're going to be the most cost-effective locations, exactly what factors went into determining cost-effective? We have some natural competitive advantages in this province. Particularly I think those have to do with manufacturing and location and taxation. So if he could give us some information on that, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development, final comments.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would just like to close by very briefly thanking once again my colleagues in the gallery. Thank you for sitting here. I promise you it won't happen for at least another year. I appreciate that. I was told by some of my colleagues that my presentation rated an average of about 8.2. I'll try a little harder for you, but I won't let you down.

I've listened very carefully to all the comments, and I want to thank the hon. members. I will do everything in my power to answer their questions to the best of my ability and as quickly as I can.

Just a few very brief comments, Mr. Chairman, about the direction of our ministry. During the recent campaign I was very, very pleased to try and join Premier Klein's team. I want to let the hon. members know that we're on the right track. Your questions are valid ones. We'll try and make this a better province for all of us, and I can guarantee you that we are growing, and growing in the right direction.

Only one comment that I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman, about the size of my ministry. I was interested to hear the hon. member say that it's a relatively small ministry, but I would remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie that most great things come in small packages, and she should watch what's going to happen in the next couple of years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll close now.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Economic Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$51,455,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

10:30

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very electrifying debate tonight. Most enjoyable. Therefore I would move that the committee rise and report the votes and request leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: operating expense,	\$6,104,000.
Economic Development: operating expense,	\$51,455,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 9, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/09

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this House two individuals from my home province of Saskatchewan. Located in the Speaker's gallery are Mr. Jason Vogelsang, who is a master of public administration student at the University of Regina. With Mr. Vogelsang is an old friend and colleague, Professor Garnet Garven, dean of the Faculty of Administration at the University of Regina. Dean Garven and I both go back to the mid-80s, when we were both servants of the government of Saskatchewan. Mr. Vogelsang and Dean Garven are in Edmonton attending the national conference of the Institute of Public Administration of Canada. This national conference, sponsored in part by the government of Alberta, saw more than 400 public servants from across Canada come together to focus on public administration in a knowledge society. As an Edmonton MLA it is a pleasure to be the host city for this national conference. Please join me in welcoming our special guests.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I request that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to support legislation to protect the right of healthcare professionals and healthcare workers to refrain from participating directly or indirectly in treatment or procedures that offend against their convictions that human life is inviolable, and to protect equally their right to so refrain without fear of discrimination, penalty, harassment, or dismissal.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 14

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce Bill 14, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this act provides the authority for the Alberta energy

tax refund and makes a minor technical change to the foreign tax credit and the overseas employment tax credit. The Alberta energy tax refund program was announced September 6, 2000, to help relieve the pressures of higher than normal energy costs, including home heating costs, and higher prices at the gas pumps. This program was possible because of the higher than expected revenues from resources and returns \$690 million to the pockets of more than 2 million Albertans. The technical component of the amendment will ensure that Albertans who are eligible to claim the overseas employment tax credit and the foreign tax credit receive that full benefit as intended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Bill 209

Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 209, being the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001.

The goal of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to reduce injury, disability, and death related to the 82 percent of children and teens under the age of 18 riding bicycles without the use of helmet protection.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

Bill 210

Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, I beg leave to introduce Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001.

Bill 210 will amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to allow for a greater tax exemption for individuals who are caring for dependent adults or relatives in their home. Specifically, the bill would allow for a nonrefundable tax credit equal to the spousal credit of \$12,900 per individual who has dependent adults or relatives living with them.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud today to rise to file with the Assembly copies of a news release announcing that the Alberta government has been awarded the gold medal for innovative management from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada. This award recognizes the government's corporate human resource development strategy, which focuses on learning, leadership, and promoting the Alberta public service as an attractive employer.

I am also tabling a memo I sent to all members of the Alberta public service congratulating them on this great honour and thanking them for the excellent work they do every day on behalf of the people of this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings for

the Assembly today. Firstly, I have five copies of the 29th annual report of the Alberta Automobile Insurance Board for the year ended December 31, 2000.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation's 2000 annual report. I also have five copies of that report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter to the Minister of Justice containing the details of concerns of a conflict of interest in the Calgary regional health authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today for the benefit of all Members of the Legislative Assembly a letter from Alberta Labour dated September 14, 1993. It is signed by Bruce Allen, research and approvals officer, and it's regarding the acceptance of pine shake manufacturers in the province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table in the Assembly a document called Reasons for Judgment of the Honourable Mr. Justice E.S. Lefsrud, related to the case between Her Majesty the Queen and Ziad Jaber.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. My first tabling is a letter from Mrs. Gail Duiker making a case for an immediate raise in the basic social services living allowance.

The second tabling is a corporate registry document pertaining to 530376 Alberta Ltd., a numbered company owned by Nawal Jaber.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two very special guests from Chilliwack, B.C. This is their first visit to our Legislature to observe a fiscally responsible government at work. They are very special guests to me: Jim and Lona Peacock. Jim happens to be number one of my six brothers. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.
1:40

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two constituents of mine, Louis and Ruth Adria of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying them are Ann Pavelich and Joe Green. Louis and Ruth are with the Elder Advocates of Alberta. They're very active in assisting the elderly and advocating on their behalf. I can attest to you, Mr. Speaker, as many of my colleagues know as well, that Ruth and Louis will not let a matter go if they think it needs advocating, and they will not desist if they believe that there's an elder in need. They do an excellent job of bringing those needs to the attention of myself and my colleagues. They are with us today to observe debate on Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask that

they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to be able to stand today to introduce to you and through you to various members of the Assembly a family from the Calgary-North West constituency. It's always a pleasure to have someone from our area here. The Heger family: father, Karel; mother, Sheila; their two sons, Tim and Nick. We got to know this great family over the past provincial election. We've got a very enthusiastic young man in Tim, who has a great interest in the government, wanted to come here and observe the political process, got all of his family involved in the campaign. He's 11 years old. He's shown great interest in being one of the future Prime Ministers of this country. So it's an honour to invite them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature Chris Langton. Chris was a volunteer who spent many hours assisting in the office and door-knocking during my campaign. Chris is very interested in the political process and has offered to serve on my constituency board. He intends to observe our democracy in action as often as he is able. I would ask Chris to please rise and receive the usual and traditional warm welcome of the hon. members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very special honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the very first school from my constituency that I've had the pleasure of introducing as MLA for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. They are accompanied by teachers and helpers Mr. Jacob Van Vliet, Mr. Jim Ferguson, Mrs. June Harrison-Leir, Mrs. Elizabeth Shen, Mrs. Brenda Rawluk, Mrs. Joy Boyle, Mrs. Judy Freehill, Miss Fay Green, Mrs. Kelly McConkey, Mrs. Liz Rice, and Mrs. Barb Redel. We have today with us in two groups – and I ask for your indulgence later on, sir – 150 grade 6 students from Percy Baxter school in Whitecourt. I'd ask my guests seated in the members' gallery to please stand and receive the warm welcome from this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you two very hardworking young women who are here visiting us in the Legislature today. They are Sheryl Burns, who is the director of the Alberta centennial celebrations office, and her very capable administrative assistant, Antonine Bergeron. I would ask them both to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House. We're all anticipating a great 2005 and thank you for your work in that regard.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a friend of mine visiting here from Ontario, Mr. Gord Lang. Gord is seated in the members' gallery. I'd like Gord to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome back to Alberta, because I believe he's moving back.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Conflict of Interest Court Case

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Premier. Will the Premier direct the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission to hold an inquiry into the Jaber case, given that they have the power under section 13 of the Gaming and Liquor Act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what more there is to look into. There was a police investigation. There was a prosecution, which was a successful prosecution because it resulted in a conviction. What more can be said?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, will the Premier direct the commission to report to the Minister of Gaming on any implications that it may have had under section 31 of the gaming act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit I'm not familiar with that particular section. I will however have the hon. Minister of Gaming respond, and I hope that he's familiar with the section.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that I will take that question under advisement and in due course advise all members of the Assembly as to what that section deals with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question again to the Premier: will the Premier commit to making public to all Albertans any documents that his office, the Ministry of Justice, or the Ministry of Gaming may have that relate to this case?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it – and I'll repeat – there was, I would assume, a complete police investigation into this matter. Charges were laid. As I understand, there was a preliminary hearing, where the prosecution had ample opportunity to produce all the documentation it deemed required to prosecute this particular case. The case went on to trial, at which time there was, as I understand it, an agreed statement of facts, and a conviction was obtained. So I would have to assume that all of the information pertinent to this particular case has already been made public through the court process.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Horse Racing

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the Jaber case it was revealed that a top aide to Premier Getty won \$20,000 at Northlands racetrack in one day of horse racing and that no record was kept. My question to the Premier: why is it that no record is kept of winnings of such large amounts as this at Alberta racetracks?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I used to be involved in horse racing a long time ago. As a matter of fact, I owned the back quarter end of a horse, so I know something about horse racing. There's no requirement anywhere in this country, as far as I know, to declare

either losses or winnings from a horse race on either the front quarter, the middle, or the back quarter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If no record is kept at the racetracks on winnings or losses, how is it that we know how our public dollars are being spent when that comes into the Gaming ministry on a commission basis? That kind of relationship has to be dealt with.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is no law against owning a horse, there is no law against betting on a horse, and there is no requirement under any law that I know that requires a person to declare winnings or losses from bets placed on a horse race.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister tell us whether or not an investigation will be held into why we have such a lack of record-keeping?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that the question is indeed vague, but as the Premier has indicated, there is no place that we are aware of where this type of record-keeping is necessary. I would point out to the hon. member that under the Racing Corporation Act the corporation is the one that is responsible for the control and management of racing in this province, and perhaps he should pursue that matter with them.

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

1:50

Rossdale Power Plant Expansion

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the EUB gave approval for expansion of the Rossdale power plant in the river valley of downtown Edmonton. My first question is to the Premier. Is this what we get when the Premier talks about fast tracking: a power plant built in an environmentally sensitive area, on a historic site, next to a residential neighbourhood?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is a quasi-judicial body charged with the responsibility of conducting a fair and thorough hearing into each and every application, and this was done. I would point out that in the approval of this particular application the EUB set conditions for allowable impacts to air and water quality and put in place strict noise limits.

More importantly, EPCOR, the proponent, is also required to work with Alberta Community Development should any human remains or artifacts be found. Relative to the historical impact and the cultural impact, I'll have the hon. Minister of Community Development supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this particular site and this particular project do have a fairly long history, which culminated with some specific hearings called by the AEUB in January. The upshot of it all is that there was a very thorough

environmental impact assessment done on the area. There were also two historical resource impact assessments done on the area. In conclusion, there were some significant finds, of course, discovered.

We are looking right now at how to work through this with EPCOR and see what can be done about further designations, possibly with the low-pressure power plant, which the hon. member I'm sure is familiar with. There's the pump house there, and there's also an administration building.

Relative to the cemeteries that were there for either known or unknown individuals, those, the majority at least, I believe about 200 or so, have been moved under careful ceremonial guidance of the individuals' families that were involved, and they've been relocated under the proper guidelines to proper sites in this city.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. My next question is to the Minister of Community Development. He has mentioned the dealings with the remains that are on the site, but there are significant historical issues as well. My question is: is this the type of community development and protection and preservation we can expect from this department and the minister when the department had the ability to stop this expansion? Why didn't it happen?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no simple answer because there are a lot of very complex issues involved in this. I would like to tell the hon. member that we do have an interdepartmental committee of deputy ministers that has been struck to help continue looking further into this and see if there are any further requirements that have not yet been satisfied. We are concerned that the architectural as well as the archaeological resources are maintained, preserved, and cared for in an appropriate way.

We are considering a designation right now of the low-pressure power plant as a historic source, and I should also say that the area in question, where some significant finds have been made, is actually at the very, very west end. A very small part of it is on the RD11 site. The majority of the area that has been of some discussion is actually west of that, and it goes underneath what used to be the old traffic circle, where the traffic lights are now. So we've done quite a bit there, and we'll continue to do that. We'll continue to work through this so that the area is given its proper consideration.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. To the same minister: given that the department has given their blessing to this project, what other avenues are available to concerned citizens to appeal the decision other than lobbying Edmonton city council?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That is a very good question, and I'm glad she raised it, because I intended to refer to it in my earlier answer. There is an appeal mechanism that can be accessed. If the individuals in question wish to do that or if some of the organizations or the neighbourhoods wish to do that, they certainly can give my office a call. I'd be happy to tell them how that process would work.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Gaming Licences

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier likes to pretend that the Jaber influence peddling case is somehow in the past. However, Mr. Jaber served as chair of the Alberta Gaming Commission until June 30, 1995, more than two and a half years after the Premier took office. The time period in which Mr. Jaber was chair

was a period of unprecedented gambling expansion in Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the former chairman of the Alberta Gaming Commission has been convicted of influence peddling, has the government taken steps to investigate whether decisions of the Alberta Gaming Commission taken during the tenure of the former chairman, which involved millions and millions of dollars, were free from inappropriate and illegal influence?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was no evidence at that time of any undue influence or any wrongdoing relative to any gambling activities in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the government has known since at least November of '99 that a wrongdoing had occurred, has the government investigated whether any illegal activity occurred in the awarding of hundreds of licences covering thousands of VLT machines while Mr. Jaber was chair of the Gaming Commission, and if not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: There have been no allegations of any wrongdoing relative to any gambling casino licences or VLTs or any other activity associated with gambling, Mr. Speaker. All of these applications are thoroughly reviewed by the commission, by the minister, and by the administration. We go to great lengths to make sure that any application is absolutely clean and aboveboard.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier: in light of what the Premier just said about the successful prosecution and conviction of Mr. Jaber, will the Premier commit to reviewing all of the records of the Alberta Gaming Commission during this time period of Mr. Jaber, that nothing else improper took place? If not, why not? We need to know this.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the offence took place in 1992, and at that time Mr. Jaber, as I understand it, was not involved with the amalgamated Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. He was associated with the Alberta Liquor Control Board.* Subsequent to that, of course, that board was amalgamated with the Gaming Commission to form the AGLC. I don't think there would be any useful purpose served in tabling that information relative to the ALCB, but if he wants it, I'm sure that he can submit a FOIP request or submit a written request for answers relative to the specific questions. But there are not rooms big enough to hold all of the documents that probably exist from the former Alberta Liquor Control Board. You know, it's been around since Prohibition anyway.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Poverty Rates

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently federal and provincial governments released a national report that outlines what governments are doing to reduce child poverty and promote parents' ability to stay in the workforce. The report shows that there are fewer children living in poverty and more parents working across Canada. Would the Minister of Human Resources and Employment confirm that this trend is the same in Alberta?

*See page 472, right col., para. 4

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, I can. What we use as a reference in this matter would be the market basket measurement, that of course we're using as a performance measurement in the Measuring Up document as it pertains, then, to the government of Alberta. Actually, we can notify yourself, Mr. Speaker, and all members here in the House that based on that kind of analysis, Alberta has the lowest poverty rate here in the country. Fewer than 28,000 families are in the supports for independence program, and our unemployment rate, of course, remains below 5 percent.

Again some more context on this. There are 248,000 children in this province whose parents receive the federal national child benefit supplement. Nine out of 10 of these children's parents are not in our supports for independence program, indicating that a strong economy is not only good for Alberta business; it's good for Alberta working families.

2:00

MRS. JABLONSKI: This question is also for the minister of human resources. What is Alberta doing for families through the national child benefit?

MR. DUNFORD: This is an excellent example of flexible federalism, Mr. Speaker. When the federal government increases its financial support to families, this allows some savings in our SFI, supports for independence, program, and we can reinvest, then, those savings in programs that do in fact support low-income families. For families receiving supports for independence, we've increased monthly shelter allowances. As a matter of fact, last fall we increased the annual back-to-school allowance to help these families with school expenses. When our families move into the workforce, our reinvestment helps with prescription drugs, diabetic supplies, emergency ambulance service, dental and optical services. We believe that we're helping over 62,000 children this past year.

Perhaps I'd ask the Minister of Children's Services to supplement further on this particular category.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we have reinvested \$30 million in families of low income with children. I'd like to point out one additional thing if I may. The low-income family in Alberta, those earning \$30,000 per year with two children and a single parent, can expect through their taxes, through their health premiums, through the fuel tax, through the tobacco tax, through all of the other things they may pay, to pay the grand total of \$531. The next best province in Canada is Ontario, that pays over \$1,700. We do at least \$1,200 better for low-income families and for children than any other province in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister of human resources: how can taxpayers be sure that national child benefit funds are really supporting families who need it?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we see the results in the children in our families. Since this program was developed between the federal government and ourselves, we've reinvested more than \$30 million in these particular programs. We believe and the feedback is indicating that Alberta children are healthy and they're giving their parents a hand up and support for the world to work, that this is a proper philosophy and proper programming for this area of our population.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Energy and Utilities Board

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy tabled on April 11 in this Assembly a TransCanada Energy news release announcing new electricity generation in Grande Prairie when the project had not yet been approved by the EUB. My first question is to the Premier. When a company like TransCanada Energy is putting out press releases announcing new projects 13 days before the actual hearing at the EUB has been held, does that suggest that the EUB is seen by the Premier and such companies as a routine rubber stamp and not an independent quasi-judicial agency of the government of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I really take offence to the preamble and the suggestion that the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board is a rubber stamp. As I pointed out earlier, it is a quasi-judicial body charged with the very serious responsibility of undertaking a thorough review and investigation through public hearings and other administrative procedures to make sure that all applications for energy projects are in the best interests of the public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the EUB indicated that it would treat TransCanada Energy correspondence dated February 21, 2001, as a request for review and variance of decision 2001-13, dated February 19, regarding location-based credits, should not formal approval be granted by the EUB before projects are announced?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the details of how the AEUB rendered its decision, frankly I have to admit that I'm not privy to those particular details. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy is, and if he can shed some more light on this matter, I'll have him respond.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly, the announcement or the tabling of the TransCanada proposal and the cogeneration project was just that. I don't believe that in my memory that proposal mentioned anything about offset credits or whether the EUB would be awarding through the transmission administrator a fair and open competitive process to grant location credits, that in fact that was mentioned at all in the press release.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: in light of this announcement 13 days prior to the EUB hearings, how can the citizens of Edmonton now have confidence in the decision of the EUB to allow the Rosedale power plant to expand in the heart of the city?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I was just through that relative to the Rosedale plant. I understand that this application was made some two years ago, and since then there has been a thorough investigation not only by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board but certainly by the Department of Energy, the Department of Environment, the Department of Community Development, and all the ministers involved. It culminated in a hearing, of course, before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board has rendered its decision with a number of very strict conditions relative to the impacts to air and water quality and relative to noise

and relative to all the cultural and heritage components of the project. As I understand it, it's now up to Alberta Environment to further approve the project and set conditions for the expansion to ensure that all components and all aspects of the environment are protected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Nonconforming Secondary Suites

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness and the lack of affordable housing is an issue of concern to many and is often accompanied by demands for more government money for projects. Critics like myself, however, believe that one of the main reasons for the lack of affordable housing is overly restrictive building codes and municipal land zoning policies, possibly driven by exclusionary attitudes hiding in a cloak of safety and other concerns, policies which may be making it too regulated, too prohibitive, and too costly for average or senior citizens to be able to build low-cost, affordable, and legal secondary suites in their own homes. My question to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is: considering anecdotal evidence that thousands of people may be living in so-called illegal suites and therefore estimating that there may be, in fact, a large number of nonconforming suites in existence, has a comprehensive review been done recently or a study of the reasons why homeowners might not be complying with the regulatory requirements? Has such a study been done recently?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, under the Municipal Government Act municipalities have the authority to allow secondary suites, or, the term we all know, basement suites, keeping in mind, though, that the affordability in our province is very important to housing. But I want to assure the members of this Assembly that we want to strike the right balance between what is safe, what is affordable, and what is unrestrictive. Presently that mandate of the compliance and the monitoring of the building codes is done by municipalities and done very well within this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: could a new review of building codes be considered to review regulatory requirements and standards that may be creating unnecessary or overly costly barriers to citizens wishing to build legal secondary suites in their own houses?

2:10

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is yes. In fact, the Safety Codes Council, who I met with just today at lunch, is reviewing this very issue, and I'm looking forward to their recommendation, specifically, again, keeping the balance between what's safe, what's affordable, and also what is unrestrictive pertaining to housing.

MR. LORD: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary is to the hon. Minister of Seniors. When discussing the issues of house-rich, cash-poor or maybe just lonely senior citizens being able to stay in their own homes, would it be desirable to foster secondary suite formation as one of the win/win solutions?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In my opinion it is desirable

to encourage secondary suite formations, especially with respect to seniors. It does give them an opportunity for additional income, it also gives them an opportunity for companionship, and it provides a home to those who need it.

Just as an example, Mr. Speaker, my ministry supports the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired here in Edmonton, who have a home-sharing program currently in progress. How this basically works is that the society promotes affordable housing alternatives where two or more people can share a facility if one of the people is 55 or older. We support this program through the ministry to the extent of some \$43,000 per year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Lesser Slave Lake Water Diversion

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stream flow volumes for many of the important rivers in our province are forecast to be at much below average this summer. Across the province people are already asking where the water will come from if traditional sources are running too low. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. What is the status of the application by the municipal district of Lesser Slave Lake to draw 65 million cubic metres, or two and a half inches, of water off Lesser Slave Lake for industrial use?

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you for that question. I can say that we do have guidelines in place. People have to be licensed for their water supply, and without licences they cannot draw water. In terms of licensing, I would point out to the member that it's the first one on in historical precedence that is on, and it's the last one on that will be removed first. So in regards to this particular case in Lesser Slave, I'm not familiar with that particular case, but I will get the information and provide it to the member.

MS CARLSON: Well, the fee is only \$7,800 to remove two and a half inches off the top of that lake.

Will the minister table any studies or reports that his department has about the long-term viability of such massive water diversion projects on this lake?

DR. TAYLOR: Absolutely. Before any water diversion can occur, Mr. Speaker, there has to be a complete study of what the total effect of that diversion will be on that water body, whether that's Lesser Slave Lake or any other lake, and as I say, I will provide that information to the member.

MS CARLSON: That's not what happened when they did this last year.

Do Albertans have any opportunity to appeal this application which is a water diversion that is more than 100 times the annual amount used by the towns of High Prairie and Slave Lake together?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Water licences can be appealed to the Environmental Appeal Board. If somebody is not happy with the granting of a particular water licence to anywhere or anybody or any industry in this province, it can be appealed to the Environmental Appeal Board, and then there will be a complete hearing, a public hearing, a public appeal process that occurs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Schoolyard Cleanup

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's come to my attention that schools are involved in cleaning up the schoolyards. It's an old practice, and it's kind of a tradition. However, there have been cases where there have been things in the schoolyard. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Does the government mandate this activity?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No, the government does not mandate this activity. What happens is a lot of schools and school boards undertake this activity with the students as a form of community service, so it is up to the individual schools.

MR. MASYK: My second question is to the same minister. Since there could be items in schoolyards that are a risk to children, condoms and needles, what policies does the government have in place to ensure children's safety?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, any policies that are related to school cleanups are policies of the particular school boards, but I would encourage the school boards to ensure that there are not such things as needles and condoms and issues like that. Some schools, for example in the inner city of Edmonton, have janitors go out first and take a look around the schools and ensure that there are no condoms and needles, in particular, so the children could be jeopardized, and then the cleanup is allowed to continue.

This is a very important issue, Mr. Speaker, and I would certainly encourage all school boards to do this as we do not want a student obviously to be exposed to needles or condoms.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. When students are cleaning up the schoolyards, they could get pricked by a needle or pick up condoms. Could the minister tell us what health risks the children who are picking up these materials such as condoms and needles can incur?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should say first of all that I think the intentions of schools are good in this regard, but there are a number of precautions that should be taken if children are to participate in this kind of activity. The public health nurses from the Capital health authority are working with schools to ensure that children are safe when they are participating in these school cleanups.

Nurses advise the school to have children contact an adult if they do find condoms or needles or other dangerous materials. They also provide written handouts to children on the type of protective clothing that they should wear and the types of precautions that they should take while participating in a cleanup. Children should be told to get an adult to pick up needles. Adults should also of course take precautions to use proper gloves or tongs in picking up such materials. They should also make sure, for example in the case of needles, that they are disposed of in a container that is puncture resistant so that the people who are handling the waste and taking it away from the school are also protected from such danger.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Underground Petroleum Storage Tanks

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Underground petroleum storage tanks have the potential to cause contamination of drinking water supplies, adverse health impacts on people on or near the site, and can be a fire hazard or cause other safety concerns. On Monday the Minister of Municipal Affairs confirmed that cleaning up these tanks is a top priority and a very important issue, but Albertans need information, not confirmation of the problem. My questions today are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Will the minister table any studies or reports that his department has about the effects of the estimated 5,200 leaking petroleum storage tanks on Alberta's drinking water supplies?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say and assure this House that the program is working on a priority basis in dealing with remediation. It's working very well, and the \$80 million that was put in our budget to deal with this is something that we heard when we were talking to Albertans. I am quite prepared to deliver to this House information pertaining to the remediation work and the good work of environmental people.

MR. BONNER: Also to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister release a list of the locations of all the tanks identified to date and the planned date of remediation?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the information in front of me pertaining to the sites, but I do know that our officials are working very closely. In fact, it is my understanding at this time that we are still receiving applications, based on the work, of Albertans who are saying: we require help. That is the intention of the \$80 million in remediation work.

MR. BONNER: Then, Mr. Speaker, will the minister table a copy of the proposal and program design for tank remediation that was submitted by the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta to the government?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We work very closely with many stakeholders, and the information that we collect we believe is very important in this remediation plan. We're going to continue to work with those stakeholders towards this case so that the \$80 million is on a priority basis and that it's dealing with the remediation so that we protect the environment, which is the number one commitment of our government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:20

Gaming Licences (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is to the Deputy Premier. During the tenure of Mr. Jaber as chairman of the Alberta Gaming Commission major developments occurred in the gambling industry in Alberta. Mr. Jaber's term as chairman began immediately following the commission of the offences for which he has since been convicted. How many casino licences were awarded during Mr. Jaber's tenure as chairman, and what is the value of them in subsequent profits to those who received the licences?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question. I will defer to the Minister of Gaming, who I am sure would more appropriately have that information at hand than I would.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That particular question calls for a great deal of detail, which obviously is not before me today. I'll take the question under advisement and report in due course.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How many VLTs were licensed during Mr. Jaber's tenure as chairman of the Alberta Gaming Commission, and how many licensees does it involve? What profits were produced by these VLTs to the people who received the licences?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, if the question is directed at me, I would say on observation of the first question and this one that these questions might be more appropriate through a request for written questions or motions for returns rather than taking up the question time of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Deputy Premier. Given the fact that the government appointed an individual as chairman of the Alberta Gaming Commission who has been convicted of criminal offences which occurred at approximately the same time as his appointment as chairman, why does the government continue to stonewall demands that his activities should be investigated while he was chairman of a commission which makes decisions worth millions of dollars to those who were given licences? Why should it not be investigated?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think that this item has been dealt with in many questions over the last week. I believe that it has been made very clear that all requests for information from this government, from ministers of the Crown – all the information that has been requested has been provided. However, to ensure that the hon. member understands this, one more time I'll ask the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to answer more fully.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated numerous times in this House, we have a criminal justice system in this province that works. No one is above the law. Everyone who commits a criminal offence, if there's information available about that – it's investigated, it's brought forward, charges are laid, and the person is prosecuted. That's what happened in this case.

I would assume and I think any hon. member of this House and the members of the public in Alberta are entitled to assume that if the investigating police force, in this case the RCMP, had any indication, any evidence, any suggestion of wrongdoing that went beyond the individual information that they have in this case, they would be pursuing that investigation and they would be bringing forward subsequent information to the prosecutors for charges to be laid. I assume that that would happen.

It is not appropriate, Mr. Speaker, for one to jump off a charge of this nature and to assume that one should then have public inquiries

and investigations into a wide band of things. If there is any evidence to suggest that anything further should be done, then in fact we would be more than happy to make sure that that is done. No one is above the law in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Young Offenders

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, there has been considerable concern voiced by school boards, school administrators, teachers, and parents about an element of the new federal Youth Criminal Justice Act. The act allows for but does not require that information about young offenders be shared with school boards. There is some concern that because this information sharing will not be mandatory, both students and teachers may be put at risk. My first question is to the Solicitor General. What is the government of Alberta's position on the information-sharing provisions of the Youth Criminal Justice Act?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, providing our children with a safe learning environment is the government's top priority. We think it's important for schools to be given the information they need about young offenders when there is a real or even potential threat to the safety of other students or teachers. Officials from my department have been in contact with senior officials of the Canadian School Boards Association and the Alberta School Boards Association to discuss proposed changes to clause 125 of Bill C-3.

We support changes that require Justice officials to disclose information regarding young offenders to school boards in order to ensure the safety of staff and students and to facilitate rehabilitation of the young person. We feel this is a commonsense policy, and I have written a letter to Justice Minister Anne McLellan regarding this issue.

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Solicitor General. What is currently the policy within the Alberta Solicitor General's office on notification of schools where a young offender may be in attendance?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta we've had procedures in place since 1996 to manage the sharing of information about students with young offender status in the school system. Since September of 2000 my staff have been required to notify school boards of any young offenders under their supervision who commit category 1 offences. Category 1 offences include violent crimes, drug trafficking, sex offences, and other serious offences that could pose a threat to other students and school staff. We feel the exchange of information about young offenders is necessary to ensure the safety of students, staff, and other people involved with the school.

In cases where a youth is under the supervision of the department and a serious violent offender is involved, the department requires that designated school officials be advised, without exception.

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, my final question to the Solicitor General: are there any other initiatives under way that might help prevent youth in our schools from committing violent crimes?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Solicitor General and Alberta Learning have created a joint committee that will explore opportunities to share information. The mandate of that committee goes beyond Justice and Learning issues.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have the Minister of Learning supplement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Safety in schools has been a prime issue for our department over the past several years. We have launched the initiative called the Safe and Caring Schools initiative, which is something that has met almost universally with a great amount of success. We have a conference every year. We ensure; we monitor. Very briefly, safety in the schools is of prime and utmost importance to us, and we will ensure it happens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Electricity Prices

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 13, 2000, just a few months ago, the chief economist of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters made a report to the Alberta business forum on power supply and demand at the Shaw Conference Centre here in Edmonton. The report found that electricity deregulation had led to Alberta's electricity prices climbing from among the lowest in North America to near the highest. The association argued that this was adding significantly to the cost of manufacturing in Alberta and could cost Alberta up to 31,000 jobs lost in manufacturing alone. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. Given that this report comes from the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, presumably an organization he will be very interested in, has the minister reviewed the report?

MR. NORRIS: In a very simple answer, Mr. Speaker, I haven't. But I would like to point out that Alberta is an industry leader with this deregulation movement and that when supply comes onstream, not only will our costs be the lowest in Canada, but our supply will be the envy of the nation.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, has the minister prepared a specific response to this report?

MR. NORRIS: Again, Mr. Speaker, I haven't seen it, but I'd be delighted to. Again, supply is what we're going after. We're going to have a more bountiful supply than anywhere else in Canada. Supply equals industry growth. Industry growth equals jobs. Alberta is the place to be.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering: can the minister name any jurisdiction in Canada where the delivered cost of electricity to small manufacturers is higher than Alberta?

MR. NORRIS: I'm sorry; I didn't hear the question.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, can the minister name any jurisdiction in Canada where the delivered cost of electricity to small manufacturers is higher than in Alberta?

MR. NORRIS: I'll take that under advisement and get you an answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Government Centre Security

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When people come up to the building here, to the Leg. Annex, and the grounds, they expect to be able to come here with some sense of security and safety. It seems that last week there was some discussion about the use by the government of surveillance cameras and whether it was an intrusion on people's privacy and those kinds of issues. I think we have to hearken back to last spring and whether or not we want to see some damage to publicly owned buildings. My questions today are to the Solicitor General. The first one: is the Solicitor General going to change a policy that currently allows for surveillance cameras to be used within and outside these buildings?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We will not do anything to lessen security in the Legislature Building and on the grounds. If anyone has a question about the need for the security measures, they only have to look at the bullet hole by the elevator on the ground floor. These security measures were increased after a man with a gun walked into the Legislature Building intending to harm someone. Security cameras are here for the protection of the people who work in this building, the school groups that visit, and other members of the public who visit and conduct business in the public building.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Member for Little Bow that these guidelines recently introduced regarding the use of security cameras are just that: guidelines. They're not the law. We're carefully examining these new guidelines. A committee has been established with representatives from security operations and from Alberta Infrastructure. The committee is developing a strategy for complying with the guidelines. The Information and Privacy Commissioner will be consulted before it's in place. It appears that guidelines will be satisfied by simply placing signs around the perimeter of the Government Centre indicating that the area is under security camera surveillance.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those that seem to want to protect the criminal or the vandal, is a camera more intrusive than four or five live security guards doing the same thing? Yes or no?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, this sounds like an opinion.

MRS. FORSYTH: The cameras are less intrusive. All of the cameras with the exception of one are in full view of anyone on the premises. They are large cameras mounted on brackets. The only camera not in public view is in a private office area. Security staff have the ability to monitor the cameras 24 hours a day. It would take a small army of security officers to cover all the areas the cameras cover.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister

assure our public that come here and our school groups especially that there will be no reduction in the surveillance that's available here right now?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, for the public record, we intend to continue to use the security cameras to ensure the safety of those who work in and those who visit the building. The Privacy Commissioner quite rightly raises privacy issues. However, there are also security and public safety issues to be considered. All of the cameras are in public areas. People do not have the same expectation of privacy when they are out in a public area that they have when they are in the house. This building will remain a safe place for all those who work and visit here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Electricity Transmission Line Capacity

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been noted by a newspaper in southern Alberta that electricity transmission lines from Pincher Creek wind-powered generation plants are inadequate to carry the full capacity of generated power from these sites. Also, there are many new wind-powered generation plants that are being considered in the area that will put further stress on the existing transmission capacity. My question for the Minister of Energy: is there anything the government of Alberta can do to assist increasing the transmission capacity of these lines?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact the Alberta government has contributed by putting forth a competitive market model that allows the risk of new generation to be taken by the private sector and to recognize that transmission is a very important part of the electricity equation. The government will not put further money into transmission. That money comes through a process of the transmission administrator. The transmission administrator will act as a financial clearinghouse for transmission services to the generators. It sets provincewide tariffs for system access. It interacts with the Power Pool on these issues.

Where we find that there is new, important generation that does not add to any greenhouse gas, such as the great windmill potential that sits in southern Alberta, the wind generation – the transmission administrator is reviewing plans now, to my understanding, and is drawing up proposals that allow for the adequate transmission of new power so that the marketplace generator can take advantage of these market opportunities. For example, with the TransCanada announcement that was referred to in the House and dealt with transmission and offset credits, everything was pending regulatory approval, Mr. Speaker.

So, in fact, the process is that the transmission administrator calls for proposals. They take the winning proposals, which is a competitive process that is open, and then go to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and ask for approval to be granted additional transmission capacity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the same minister: can the government of Alberta do anything to see that power generated at these sites is not wasted by incorporating new possible available technology?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's been clear in the answers both today and in previous times that the real key to putting further

downward pressure on prices is new generation and new generation that's delivered to the marketplace with as little as possible power loss through the transmission lines. That's one of the reasons that we have offset credits: the ability for us to facilitate new generation through a competitive, market-based model, generation that puts Alberta ahead of the curve, generation that has now come into place even since a report, for example, from the Canadian Manufacturers' Association that talked about the loss of some 31,000 jobs. That never materialized. Why did it not materialize? Because there's been new generation added. Power prices have dropped 40 percent since the issuance of that report. There's more going on here than there is in the rest of Canada. We're ahead of the curve.

THE SPEAKER: Before the Clerk deals with the next matter that we have in our Routine today, hon. members, I'm going to call on the Government House Leader for clarification of a point. I did this the other day when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview asked for such an opportunity. I'm doing it as well today.

The hon. Government House Leader for clarification.

Gaming Licences

(continued)

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period, I think with respect to a question from the leader of the third party, the Premier in response indicated that Mr. Jaber was a member of the ALCB. That was clearly incorrect. I think it was cleared up in terms of subsequent questions and answers, but the Premier asked that I clarify for the record that it was the Alberta Gaming Commission, not the ALCB, that he was a member of.*

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Leighann Doan

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday night Calgary's Jack Singer hall was packed for the ninth annual Howard Mackie awards to honour the excellent quality of Canada's university athletes. These awards also bring financial support from the corporate sector in the form of postgraduate scholarships to Canada's top male and female university athletes.

Mr. Speaker, we should all be proud that Leighann Doan from the University of Calgary was selected as the Canadian female athlete of the year. Leighann started her basketball career in Stettler and went on to tremendous accomplishments with the U of C Dinos: four times all Canadian, best CIAU player, and best Calgary athlete of the year to name just a few of her achievements. Leighann's coach and teammates also recognized her as leader and role model both on and off the court.

We all wish Leighann well with her personal and professional goals, which include playing for Canada in future Olympics. This outstanding athlete is an inspiration and role model not only to younger athletes coming up through the ranks but indeed to us all.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Nursing Week

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to acknowledge nursing awareness week and reflect on the essential role of nurses in the Alberta health care system. Nursing is among the most challenging jobs in health care. Nurses carry the daily load

*See page 466, right col., para. 8

of patient care and feel the weight of the pressures that challenge our health care system. Nursing combines community service with the science of health as nurses offer counseling, education, wellness promotion, and patient care. Each of us, I'm sure, has personally experienced the cheerfulness and care a special nurse has provided to us or given to a loved one in a time of illness or injury.

Because nurses are so valued, this government continues to do what it can so that nurses that are already here, those looking at Alberta, and young people considering a nursing career can all share in the Alberta advantage. As our government works towards sustaining our health care system for the years to come, I am assured that nurses will continue to be part of that system and part of the solution. I ask all members of this House to join in thanking Alberta's nurses for their commitment to patient care and to our health care system.

2:40

St. Albert Public Library

MRS. O'NEILL: I am particularly proud of St. Albert Public Library, and today I'd like to recognize several of their services. Library users in St. Albert borrowed over 675,000 books and other items last year. We have a collection in our library of over 137,000 books, including 3,000 books in French, plus we have 8,000 items in audiovisual formats, books in larger print for the visually handicapped, interlibrary loan service, and access through the provincial consortium to a collection of books in over 30 languages. We have 250 magazines and newspapers in print format and several hundred additional magazine titles in electronic form. We also have nine Internet stations for public use, and we have a membership in The Alberta Library, which permits our members to borrow from libraries across the province: public, university, college, and special libraries. We also have programs for children and for seniors and especially those to train them in computer usage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Foremost Municipal Library

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize this year's recipient of the creative public library service award, the Foremost Municipal Library. The award was presented to the Foremost Municipal Library for its innovative pumpkin festival, a celebration of families and community. Many events are tied to this annual festival, including silent and live auctions of items donated by local businesses, as well as the traditional pumpkin carving contest and much more. This event, which has been in existence for the past 12 years, is a clear demonstration that libraries are vibrant centres of the communities they serve, places where individuals and families gather, find information, and are inspired to learn.

I join my colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat in congratulating the Foremost Municipal Library on receiving this award recently presented to them in Jasper by the Minister of Community Development. I encourage all Albertans to visit their local libraries and discover the latest developments in technology and new services offered to their communities. Congratulations, Foremost.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Battalion Park Elementary School

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday, May 3, I was very honoured to participate in the grand opening of Battalion Park elementary school, a public minischool with 149 students living in the Signal Hill and Richmond Hill communities and located in my

constituency of Calgary-West. Although it has only been 10 months since the sod turning and arrival of 10 relocatable classrooms, Battalion Park has swiftly become an integral part of a thriving community hub including rinks, a functional storage shed unit, and a soon to be built playground built through community fund-raising efforts and the provincial government facility enhancement program.

Most important, Mr. Speaker, was the evident pride and happiness of the students, who in their Battalion Bears T-shirts enthusiastically sang their theme song, *The Battalion Park Bears*, for the many dignitaries and parents crowded into the narrow hallway and down around the corner.

Heartiest congratulations go to the principal, Carol Murray, and her staff and to the 40-member devoted school council parents for achieving so much for the young people of these communities.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the honour of attending the ceremony for the Downtown Development Corporation awards for 2000. This fine organization was formed as a result of a 1984 report, the Mayor's Task Force on the Heart of the City, chaired by Joe Shocter. Mr. Shocter chaired the DDC until 1990. The Downtown Development Corporation has a mandate with its unique public/private partnership to lead the way in the developing of a vibrant downtown for the benefit of all citizens.

The award recipients recognized yesterday for projects which contributed to the vitality of downtown were DECA, the Downtown Edmonton Community Association, the Empire Building renovation, the new MacCosham lofts, and Telus Plaza redevelopment. I'd also like to recognize the following nominees: Chance Restaurant, Churchill Exchange Building, Fifth Street Lofts, and the TD Waterhouse call centre. Our thanks to each of you for making downtown Edmonton a better place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Jack McMoran

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize an outstanding Albertan. Last month at the United Way annual labour appreciation night Mr. Jack McMoran was presented the Jim Shewchuk award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to union life, the community, and the United Way. Many organizations have been recipients of Jack's hard work and dedication to his community. The Edmonton and District Labour Council, the United Way, and the leukemia society of Canada have all benefited from Jack's skill in organizing people around causes and never giving up until the job is done and done well.

Those acquainted with Jack always make mention of the tremendous energy he brings to whatever project he is involved with. Jack will be retiring at the end of this year from his employment with UFCW local 401. There's no doubt in my mind that for Jack retirement will mean more time to dedicate to his passion, which is helping the unemployed and the underprivileged.

Congratulations, Jack McMoran, and kudos to the United Way for their choice of a most worthy recipient of the Jim Shewchuk award.

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Oral Question Period Rules

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today in question period the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands asked questions of a nature which I believe violates rules 408 and 409 with respect to oral questions. The type of information which was requested goes far beyond the nature of question period.

I only rise on this point of order because it should not be the purpose of question period and should not be a member's opportunity in question period to ask questions of such a specific nature, of such specific information that one could not possibly have the answer at hand or the ability to answer the question. In other words, a question being asked should be a question capable of being answered by a minister within their capacity and general knowledge of their department. It's totally unrealistic to expect that a minister would be able to answer a question about the specific number, for example, of licences issued during a period of time or the specific value of licences issued at a particular period of time. That, Mr. Speaker, is precisely the purpose for written questions and motions for returns, which have their places on the Order Paper.

I would refer to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* book, which you so graciously provided to House leaders earlier and, in particular, page 438 of that book, which outlines the purposes of written questions and the process and guidelines for written questions there.

My purpose for rising today, Mr. Speaker, is to ask you to indicate to the House and to rule on this situation that it is not appropriate to try and embarrass or to try and ask questions to set up a further question if those questions ask for such detailed information that a person could not possibly have that information for the House at that particular time.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, did you want to participate in this point of order?

MR. MASON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if I'm allowed to take a point of order under advisement. That is reserved for the cabinet, I suppose.

I would say that I certainly accepted the undertakings of the minister to provide that to me later, and I certainly had no intention of embarrassing the government in respect of not knowing those particular points. Other points of embarrassment remain to be seen.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair invites any other participation from hon. members with respect to this point of order, but the bottom line is that the hon. Government House Leader very correctly raised the point of order at the time, dealt with it in *Beauchesne* 408, and I would like to read it into the record again. It basically advises and cautions hon. members and provides them with some guidance with respect to asking of oral questions.

- (1) Such questions should:
 - (a) be asked only in respect of matters of sufficient urgency and importance as to require an immediate answer.
 - (b) not inquire whether statements made in a newspaper are correct.
 - (c) not require an answer involving a legal opinion.
 - (d) not be asked in respect of a matter that is sub judice.
 - (e) not be of a nature requiring a lengthy and detailed answer.
 - (f) not raise a matter of policy too large to be dealt with as an answer to a question.
- (2) Answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate.

Of course, there's other very, very good reading that hon. members would want to pay special attention to.

2:50

The difficulty that the chair has in dealing with this, an intervention in that type of question, is that the chair always is amazed at the ability of certain people in this Assembly to respond to very, very specific questions when they're confronted with such a question and in recent days has noticed with a great deal of personal satisfaction and, shall one say, with almost admiration the way certain ministers may respond to specific questions given to them by having all kinds of specific information available at their fingertips. So today was a situation where a very detailed question was asked, no doubt at all about that, and the chair did stir and wasn't sure if in fact the minister would or would not have the answer. If all hon. members would like to review the questions in the question period of the last 12 or 13 days, the members will see that the chair is correct in his observations. Some very specific questions have been asked to various ministers, and they had the ability to respond very specifically to those questions. So one is never sure when one should intervene or one should not intervene.

However, the point made by the hon. Government House Leader is a very valid one, because in this case the chair absolutely believes that the questions were of a very, very detailed nature, much beyond what would ordinarily be the scope of an ordinary human being to be able to comprehend: the specific number of licences given seven, eight, nine years ago.

So today is unique. Today is unique. Oftentimes it's not a requirement that the chair would dole out a punishment to an hon. member who is found guilty on a point of order, but today is the first time in this session that the House will have the experience of dealing with the resolution of written questions and motions for returns. This hasn't happened yet in this Assembly, so the chair would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to remain in the Assembly for the remainder of the afternoon as the Assembly deals with the disposition of these written questions and these motions for returns to actually get the experience of the milieu with respect to specific questions. It's a positive learning experience and a positive learning environment.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Always a pleasure listening to your rulings, always something to learn.

Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is indeed my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 1 and 2.

[Motion carried]

Solid Waste Costs

- Q1. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.
- What is the average cost per tonne for treating solid wastes at the Swan Hills waste treatment centre?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to accept this written question with some amendments. Those amendments would be that we need to add the word "projected" after "average cost," and the second change needs to be by striking out "solid."

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we are always very anxious to provide as much information as possible, and we want to make sure that it's absolutely accurate. Before the hon. member gets excited about the amendments, I think it would be very important that we elaborate on why it is necessary to do this so that we do get that proper information out there.

A little bit of history about the Swan Hills special waste treatment plant. The government did sell it, and it was operated by Bovar Inc. for some time, but last December 31 it was given back to the province, so we have had an operator in the facility operating as a contract operator since that time.

Now, with the question the way it was written asking for the specific cost, I think it could be very misleading when we only have four months of winter operation to go by. That's why we want to put in "projected" so that in fact we can give the information that we used as we were looking at the budget.

There are a few other things that are fairly important. The budget that we put together is based on an estimate of the costs for the whole year, and when you establish that, you also have to put in some projected volumes in order to figure out what the total budget would be. The reason that we have to strike out "solid" is because we did not differentiate between the solid and the liquid wastes that were being treated at that plant, but I think it's also important to point out that there are many factors that come into the cost of incinerating various materials at the plant. For example, the liquid might not contain much heat. It may be a chlorinate type of content. It may require secondary and tertiary treatment, so those kinds of things come into it.

The operational costs, of course, too are going to vary with the cost of energy, with the cost of labour, with the chemicals, with the maintenance of the plant. There are a whole number of factors that come in, and of course the volume that comes to the plant, because there are some fixed costs that are there. So if you get the mass, you can in fact treat the waste at a lesser cost per unit.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will accept the question as amended, and then the question would read: "What is the projected average cost per tonne for treating wastes at the Swan Hills waste treatment centre?"

THE SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hate to disappoint the member, but I wasn't excited by his answer, but perhaps the next one. [interjection] Yes, I know he's crushed; I know.

Projected cost is generally a cost in the future, and it's just interesting to me that the government wants to look at the future costs of this rather than the average cost. Usually when you're looking for an average of something, you would add up the total costs involved and the total of what was produced or the number of units produced or the tonnage of the waste that goes through. You divide the two into each other, and then you have an average cost per tonne. So it's just interesting to me that the government wants to do it in a projected way, but on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie we'll accept that.

I'm less pleased about removing the word "solid" from Written Question 1, because, obviously, if you examine the two questions put forward today, the first was a question on solid waste, and the second was a question on liquid waste, and by removing the "solid" from it, it's removed the specificity of the question. However, we are interested in getting the information, and therefore in anticipation of the detailed response, I will accept the amendment as put forward by the hon. minister.

[Written Question 1 as amended carried]

Liquid Waste Costs

- Q2. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Carlson that the following question be accepted.
What is the average cost per tonne for treating liquid wastes at the Swan Hills waste treatment centre?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we will reject this question because it is redundant.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

3:00

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, sir, to close the debate. Well, as I mentioned earlier, I am disappointed because this has watered down, so to speak, these two questions, one of which was seeking information on solid waste and one which was seeking information on liquid waste being treated at the Swan Hills plant. It muddies the water, so to speak. But the first question has been accepted, and we're looking forward to receiving the information. I'll express my disappointment on not receiving the information on the two separate questions. The purpose of these written questions, as the Speaker pointed out, is to get detailed information from the government. I'm always disappointed when we can't convince the government that it's in the best interests of Albertans to be open and transparent and to release information.

Having said that, I will resume my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 2 lost]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to now move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

[Motion carried]

Power Purchase Agreements

- M1. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the ministries of Energy and/or Sustainable Resource Development or sent to the ministries of Energy and/or Sustainable Resource Development for the period April 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001, regarding options under the market achievement plan (MAP) for dealing with unsold power purchase agreements (PPAs) held by the balancing pool.

MS BLAKEMAN: It's always important for us to be seeking additional information to clarify the activities of the government, and I would ask that this motion for a return be accepted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we feel that absolute transparency and the ability to clarify is something that is very important. In September of 2000 the Department of Energy did post a discussion paper entitled Market Achievement Plan on the Internet discussion forum. That primary document set out the

options for dealing with the balancing pool held power purchase agreements, or the PPAs.

In October 2000 a balancing pool advisory group was formed to provide advice to the balancing pool administration and the government on implementing the market achievement plan. The balancing pool advisory group, Mr. Speaker, was made up of balancing pool and department staff, consumer representatives, market participant representatives, i.e. PPA holders, and consultants – seems that you always need a consultant in this business – retained by the balancing pool to provide expert advice on options and implementation of the market achievement plan. Documents related to the process and implementation of the market achievement plan were updated and then posted on a regular basis on both the department and the Power Pool of Alberta web site.

I must recommend the Power Pool of Alberta web site. It's quite a good one. It details a great amount of information both in today's world and in market information running up to the new competitive market model that sits in place in Alberta today. There is a forum there where you can register for your own stakeholder comments. Of course, this does indicate that the method is totally transparent, and there is great clarification. Simply by dialing into www.power-pool.ab.ca the opposition, the seven Liberal members, can spend a great deal of time going through that. I would recommend they do so, and in fact because of that I would be recommending rejection, Mr. Speaker, of this motion for a return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take it then – and I'm sure the minister has an opportunity to correct me if I'm mistaken in some way – that all studies and all reports around the matters detailed here are posted on the web site. If that is the case, then we are delighted that all studies and all reports mentioned under this motion for a return are indeed posted on the web site. Given that, I will have to accept the minister's refusal to provide the documents. I understand, then, that everything is to be on the web site and readily available to everyone. We will seek that to ensure that all the ones that we're aware of in fact are there.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

Royalty Tax Credit Program

M2. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the ministries of Energy and/or Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue for the period January 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001, reviewing the operation of the Alberta royalty tax credit (ARTC).

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I did detect from the hon. member in her response to the original Motion for a Return 1 that there might indeed be a dash, if ever so little, of skepticism on our ability to co-operate and deal fair and square with the opposition. In hopes of being able to promote that feeling and to be able to generate a feeling of co-operation in the interests of taxpayers and all citizens of Alberta, I am pleased to accept Motion for a Return 2.

MS BLAKEMAN: Excellent. I'm pleased to see the Minister of Energy setting such a prime example for his colleagues.

[Motion for a Return 2 carried]

Electricity Deregulation

M3. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the ministries of Energy and/or Sustainable Resource Development or sent to the ministries of Energy and/or Sustainable Resource Development for the period April 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001, evaluating the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills of various classes of Alberta consumers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. There are many, many variables to consider when comparing prices in a deregulated market to those of a regulated market. We have, in fact, a new competitive market model structure out there where we've seen prices drop some 43 percent in a very short period. We're seeing a market unfold. We're seeing competition starting to move in other areas, and there are some areas where some competition needs a hand. As the market develops, Mr. Speaker, there is downward pressure on prices.

There have been no specific studies on the impact of deregulation, as it was called then, on utility bills. There are numerous factors, of course, other than deregulation that impact electricity bills. As we know, there's a terrific tie-in with gas prices. As one member so pointedly raised in question period two days ago, there are times when there are power-generating devices that are out of operation, hopefully due to mechanical means. Water levels: we're worried about the snowpack and the amount of water that's available to generate hydroelectric power.

3:10

Of course, we've all seen the Alberta advantage at work throughout this period, where there have been increased jobs, increased business formations. We've seen a tremendous amount of profits being generated in both small business and in our oil and gas sector.

Rates, of course, can be compared between 2000 and 2001, and it's no secret that not only have electricity prices increased here in Alberta, but they've increased virtually continentwide. If you were to look at some of the run-up narrative to the impending energy plan coming forth from President Bush and Vice-president Cheney, you would know, Mr. Speaker, that there's virtually an infrastructure, transmission, and electricity generation crisis looming over all of us in North America. So it's very difficult to say that increased rates would solely be the result of one small event. There are a number of other considerations.

I know that the member was getting very eager, was responding to us in this new environment, and thought that this might be an example of a colleague – so I just want, in order to temper that response, Mr. Speaker, to reject MR 3.

Thank you.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I am so disappointed. It was going so well. Further than that, I have to say that I am, well, shocked and appalled that there would have been no studies or reports or cost-benefit analysis evaluating the impact of electricity on Alberta consumers in that entire period of time. That is a truly frightening thought, especially since, as the minister is well aware, I have so many consumers of electricity living in high-rise condominiums and apartments in my riding who are very interested in the effect on these different classes of Alberta consumers.

I am very disappointed to hear that the government has not been monitoring and evaluating the progress of the impact of the electricity deregulation on these utility bills. But, you know, the government has the ability to be open and transparent, and if they're not going to be open and transparent, I will have to accept that.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

Centre for Frontier Engineering Research

M4. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by or for the ministries of Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue for the period January 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001, as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual pertaining to financial assistance provided by the government to the Centre for Frontier Engineering Research.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I would like to stand and reject the motion as put forward on the basis that there was no actual analysis prepared during the period January 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001. As well, a subsidiary of the Alberta Research Council has the obligation to repay the guaranteed loan, so no analysis was considered necessary.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I'm certainly disappointed to hear that there was no analysis prepared during the period which we are questioning and extend my sympathy to the minister that on his very first opportunity to accept a motion for a return, he was unable to do so.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 4 lost]

Treasury Branches Status

M5. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies, reports, background documents, and memoranda other than the CIBC Wood Gundy report prepared by or for the ministries of Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue and sent to the ministries of Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue for the period January 1, 1999, to April 9, 2001, assessing the feasibility of a change of status and/or privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance and reject this motion on the basis that the documents on the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches contain policy advice to the minister and the government and do contain sensitive material and commercial information which if released could result in direct financial loss to the Alberta Treasury Branches and the government.

In July of 1999 the former Treasurer, Stockwell Day, announced, following a survey of Albertans that showed they were split on the future of Alberta Treasury Branches, that the government had decided that Alberta Treasury Branch would complete its three-year business plan and that the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch would be considered again in consultation with Albertans in 2002.

The executive summary of CIBC Wood Gundy report was released at the same time, July 1999, as well as information on the survey results.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Finance has received six FOIP requests on this topic from elected officials. The only information released has been the executive summary, the financial sector overview, and a partial table of contents of the Wood Gundy report. Exemption of the rest of the report from disclosure was upheld by the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a delight to rise to speak on my first motion for a return, and I hope the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands is learning from his detention.

I am concerned about the response – and I'm reflecting on discussions, if I may do so, Mr. Speaker, from this morning in the Public Accounts Committee in which it became apparent that there was no business analysis, no business case developed contrasting the accelerated pay-down of the debt versus the taking of that money and investing it. There was no business case done there. I am concerned about the statements from the minister that the future of ATB sounds like it's being determined by political poll rather than by the kind of financial and business case that we might expect from a businesslike government.

I am also concerned that given the value of ATB – it's a very large asset, I believe, for the people of Alberta – the people of Alberta, who are in effect its shareholders, are not being given access to this information. So I certainly speak out to express as a citizen and as a person with an interest in the businesslike operation of public affairs that I'm very disappointed in the minister's response.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to conclude the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the answer of the minister certainly piqued my interest, and I'm sure that we will continue to seek information on that. It is curious that every study, every report, every background document, and every memorandum is containing policy advice to the government, and there was a second FOIP phrase that he used there. Very interesting that every single study, report, background document, and memorandum falls under that catchment.

Of course, I'm very disappointed on behalf of the minister that he's had a second opportunity to promote openness and accountability to the citizens of the province and is unable to do so.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 5 lost]

Expansion of Government's Reporting Entity

M6. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the ministries of Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue or sent to the ministries of Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue for the period April 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001, assessing the feasibility of expanding the government's reporting entity to include universities, colleges and technical institutes, regional health authorities, and school boards.

MR. MELCHIN: Once again, Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Minister of Finance and reject this motion. Certainly there's been a lot of discussion between the government and the Auditor General over the last number of years on this specific topic. The Auditor General's office has reported in a number of years that certain entities have been inappropriately excluded from the reporting entity. For example, the Auditor General's office believes that regional health authorities, universities, colleges, and school boards should be consolidated in the financial statements of the ministries of Health and Wellness and Learning as well as in the consolidated financial statements of the province. Alberta Finance, Treasury before that, has disagreed with those statements in the past.

The proposed amendment would result in the tabling of excerpts from the Auditor General's September 29, 2000, letter and the government's January 10, 2001, response. Mr. Speaker, this government responded to a similar motion for a return in 1999, Order for a Return 117, by providing a summary paper rather than a series of individual documents. While there has been ongoing discussion between Finance and the office of the Auditor General, little has changed in our respective positions as outlined in the above paper.

I'd like to further outline, though, that there is no common practice across the country and that, actually, this issue has been referred due to the disagreement between the Auditor General's office and Treasury, now the Department of Finance – the public-sector accounting board of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants is actually dealing with and is in progress of developing some guidelines on this topic, on the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of entities in the government reporting entity, and I would suggest that it's more appropriate to wait for the conclusion of that exercise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This motion for a return cuts to an issue that I am concerned about. It's come up in my particular case relating to regional health authorities. The reporting to the government and through the government to the Assembly on the regional health authorities, particularly on their estimates, has been quite disappointing to me. I've contrasted them to earlier years when, for example, estimates on health care spending included detail on capital expenditures, on staff expenditures. It allowed us to decide whether there was money going towards long-term care, towards for-profit nursing homes or district nursing homes. There used to be much more detail.

I think that probably the pressure the minister is feeling from the Auditor General and through this motion for a return is intended to provide this Legislature with better information for decision-making. I need to express quite strongly my disappointment in this information not being brought to the Assembly through this motion for a return and even more greatly not being brought to this Assembly through such things as more detailed estimates.

So it is with sincere disappointment that I finish my comments here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 6 lost]

Canada Pension Plan Reform

M7. Mr. Bonner moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the ministries of Treasury and/or Finance and/or Revenue for the period April 1, 2000,

to April 9, 2001, outlining proposals and recommendations developed by the government for reform of the Canada pension plan or options to replace the Canada pension plan.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of the Minister of Finance I reject the motion because there were no studies or reports actually prepared during the period requested. However, Finance has one study on options to replace the Canada pension plan that was completed in November of 1999, a study by Bill Robson of the C.D. Howe Institute titled *Cost-effective Pensions for Albertans: The Economics of an Alberta Pension Plan*, which we have provided to members of the public requesting the information. In addition, the Institute for Public Economics of the University of Alberta cosponsored with Alberta Treasury a conference in January 1999 on a separate pension plan for Alberta. The Minister of Finance is willing to provide copies of the Robson study and the report on the conference to the opposition leader if he would be interested.

We also published appendices in Budget '99 and Budget 2000 on CPP reform.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry to close the debate.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we do appreciate the comments made by the minister that there were no reports made during the period April 1, 2000, to April 9, 2001, and we would welcome his offer to provide us with other information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 7 lost]

Treasury Branches

M8. Mr. Bonner moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the full report and appendices prepared by CIBC Wood Gundy for Alberta Treasury for the period July 1, 1998, to July 31, 1999, relating to a change of status and/or privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance again I'd reject the motion for the same reasons as Motion 5 was rejected. The CIBC Wood Gundy report contains sensitive, commercial information which if released could result in direct financial loss to both Alberta Treasury Branches and the government. Furthermore I would say that the exemption of the rest of the report was upheld by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. These are topics of great sensitivity to the ongoing viability and I'd say security for all those who deal with the Alberta Treasury Branches and for such reason reject this motion.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a very brief comment. Obviously, again we are disappointed. I stand to be corrected here, but I believe that CIBC is the bank of record for the provincial government, and I am very concerned about the potential for, shall we say, a failure of a proper arm's-length relationship between the bank of record for the provincial government and the people

advising on the future of Alberta Treasury Branches. I would be more comfortable if there were an organization advising, assuming that such advice is going on – and I believe it is – that had no connection whatsoever to any of the chartered banks to ensure that there's a proper arm's-length relationship.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry to close the debate.

MR. BONNER: No further additions than what were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

[Motion for a Return 8 lost]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ridley Grain Ltd.

M9. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by Alberta Treasury as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual for the period March 31, 1999, to March 31, 2001, pertaining to the loan between the government and Ridley Grain Ltd.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again on behalf of the Minister of Finance and reject this motion due to privacy issues. Financial analyses involving third parties cannot be released due to the confidential nature of the economic material being reviewed. In January 2001 the hon. Steve West advised the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund that the government was negotiating a possible settlement to the loan with Ridley Grain Ltd. Disclosing information at this time could compromise the negotiations.

On March 23, 2001, a response was given under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act pertaining to Ridley Grain. The financial analysis and other information was severed pursuant to section 15, "disclosure harmful to the business interests of a third party"; section 16, "disclosure harmful to personal privacy"; section 23, "advice from officials"; and section 24, "disclosure harmful to economic and other interests of a public body." For such reasons we reject this motion.

[Motion for a Return 9 lost]

Vencap Acquisition Corporation

M10. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by Alberta Treasury as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual for the period March 31, 1999, to March 31, 2001, pertaining to the financial arrangements between the government and Vencap Acquisition Corporation.

MR. MELCHIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Finance we reject this motion for similar reasons as outlined in the previous one: due to the confidential nature of the economic material reviewed.

[Motion for a Return 10 lost]

THE CLERK ASSISTANT: Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders. Committee of the Whole.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, we're saved. We can go now.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: You're welcome.

MR. MASON: I've enjoyed the lesson, and I assure you that I've learned my lesson and won't do it again.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 203

Residential Care Housing Committee Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to speak again to this bill in Committee of the Whole. My concerns raised while we were in second reading were around the fact that this bill essentially establishes a committee. It doesn't go any further than that. It just establishes the committee which will look at developing a set of standards covering the level of care and the type of accommodation to be provided and maintained, and the safety and security of persons in care.

It goes into detail about how the committee is formed and who is to be assigned or appointed to the committee from various ministries. We have the departments of Children's Services, Community Development, Health and Wellness, Human Resources and Employment, Justice, Municipal Affairs, and Seniors. So eight departments have representatives on the committee plus Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Now, there's not to be more than 20 members appointed in total. It also includes representatives from the regional health authorities under the Regional Health Authorities Act, a representative from the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta or the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, and then any number of MLAs. It doesn't restrict it to just one MLA. In fact, the rest of the committee, the rest of the 20 could be made up of Members of the Legislative Assembly.

It does allow for the minister to designate one of the members now appointed to the committee as the chairperson of the committee. It sets out how long the terms are and how the transition between a member with an expiring term and an incoming member, a new appointment, would happen. It does allow for remuneration of the members of the committee, and travel, living, and other expenses incurred in the course of their duties under this act.

All of this is familiar to me as it's very much the same setup as the legislation that I worked under as executive director for the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues. Very similar. The difference

is that the advisory council legislation had in it a requirement that the government had to respond to the recommendations that were put forward by the committee. So whatever work the advisory council did and submitted to the government, we were safe in the knowledge that in fact the government would have to read it and think about it because they were required to respond to it. In fact, the one drawback to that process, I would say, was that there was no particular time line on when they had to respond back. In some cases it was six or eight months before we had a government response to the recommendations made by the Advisory Council on Women's Issues. So when I looked at this legislation brought forward by the Member for Calgary-West, that's immediately what came to mind for me, that it's very similar legislation.

3:40

I was quite comfortable with the way it was set up, with a few minor exceptions. I was looking to have additional representatives of the community through grassroots organizations like the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired, and the Alberta Council on Aging would have been an excellent addition to this and perhaps even something like the Lions centres here in Edmonton or the Kerby Centre in Calgary, all groups that work extensively with seniors in the community. There are additional groups, like the Elder Advocates of Alberta.

So I'm concerned that in the group that's set up here to develop these standards of care, out of all of the 20 possible positions, we're really looking at perhaps one person from the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta being on it, and in fact that could be someone from the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. While there may well be some MLAs who are seniors, that narrows the field of choice somewhat as to who would be appointed to this committee. So that's one of the specific disappointments I have when I look at exactly what is spelled out in this legislation.

The major concern that I was raising was the fact that it's a committee. That's all this bill does: it sets up the committee. It says what the purpose of the committee is, but there's nothing in here that says that what the committee recommends is even going to be responded to by the government or that it will get done. I've heard quite a bit of interest in this legislation out in the community. I've been on radio talk shows. I know other members of the Assembly have been as well. Everybody is talking like this is what this legislation will produce, that it's a done deal: a set of standards of care. In fact, that's not what the legislation gives us. So there's a gap, a jump, a chasm between what is set out in the legislation specifically and what people are hoping and assuming will be the outcome of the passage of this legislation. I think that's a concern.

So this committee that's established develops the standards for residential care and establishes a registry and develops education programs. Now, I'm being very specific with the wording here, Mr. Chairman, because that is the wording that is in the legislation: "develop standards" of care, "establish a registry," and "develop education programs." That's it. It doesn't say that this actually gets implemented.

If I look farther down, the committee can "receive and hear submissions" from various people in the community, they can "provide information to the general public on the purposes of the Committee and matters affecting residential care," they can "access research and data" on these issues that they are charged to cover, and "appoint subcommittees." Nowhere in here does it say that we're going to come out of this with a response from the government or indeed with standards of care. That was developing standards of care but not implementing in any way, shape, or form.

The Member for Calgary-West had asked me if I had an amendment, and I had to keep admitting I didn't know if I'd actually get it

ready in time. In fact I did, and I would like now to move this amendment to Bill 203.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, just a moment. If it's an amendment, we will need to make sure that it's received by everyone. We will refer to it as amendment A1.

Hon. member, you can proceed now.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. So the amendment that I'm proposing is adding after section 6(2):

- (3) The Minister shall, within 60 days after the annual report has been laid before the Legislative Assembly, make public an official Government response to the Committee's report.

As you can see from my earlier comments, what I'm trying to do is strengthen the legislation by ensuring that in fact there would be a government response to the reports and submissions that come forward from the committee. In other words, I'm trying to make sure that what is obviously the underlying intent, that the establishment of the committee results in the creation of standards of care, the registry, and various other educational proponents, will actually come into being rather than being created by the committee, staying with the committee, and not having an opportunity to go further.

In section 2(3) it would "make its recommendations to the Government through the Minister," which is the process by which the committee can in fact deliver its recommendations or the proposed standards of care or information on the registry through to the government. There's no requirement there that the government ever respond to it. I think this is such a vital issue for so many people in the community, not only for those who are frail, elderly, who are in need of care in a facility that would be covered by these standards of care but for their families.

I'm sure that many of us in this Assembly either are currently or will be shortly dealing with parents who have reached a point in their lives and in their health where they are in need of specialized care. If we're not in a position to be able to care for them ourselves in our own homes, we want to know that they are going to be cared for well. We know that in this day and age if you want that kind of thing to happen, you've got to be specific about what your expectations are.

3:50

It's not enough to say that somebody will be fed, but you need to say that they'll be fed three meals a day and that they will be fed according to the Canada food guide. You have to be specific about these things because unfortunately the world and the outcome of various litigation cases have told us that if you don't write it down in the first place, nobody's obliged to follow it. If it's not there, then it may not be followed. So I think it's important for all of us in Alberta to be following through on the excellent ideas that are presented in this legislation.

As legislators our obligation is to provide leadership and to facilitate processes happening in Alberta that make it a better place for all Albertans. I certainly think that's what's possible under this legislation, but it doesn't go far enough. That's why I have done the amendment and proposed it before everyone.

I've worked with a number of groups in the community who feel very strongly that we are lacking standards of care in all institutions. The registry is specific to residential care homes

- (i) that do not receive government funding, and
- (ii) in which 1 to 3 persons receive residential care.

The standards of care that are to be developed don't specify the size or the number of people that are involved in the institution. It merely says standards for

- (i) the level of care,

- (ii) the type of accommodation to be provided and maintained,
- (iii) the safety and security of persons in care;
- (b) to develop methods for monitoring residential care homes to ensure compliance with the standards established under this section.

So part of this is around residential care homes, which are defined in another section: "assistance, lodging, and meals are provided for compensation to persons who are 18 years of age or older who are unrelated." So it isn't specifying how large or how small the residential care home is, the number of people in care. I would hazard a guess and my research has said that it does not cover things like existing nursing homes, extended care, auxiliary hospitals, assisted-living centres, et cetera.

I keep hearing in the community and on the news that this is going to establish standards of care for homes that have less than three people that are receiving this care, but in fact the one to three persons receiving care is specific to the registry, not to the standards of care. The standards of care is just talking about people who are paying, where there's compensation involved and receiving personal assistance, lodging, and meals in a residence. So less specific there.

I would really like to see this legislation succeed. I had spoken earlier of working with FAIRE, which is the group out of Calgary, and I know that the member who proposed the bill had responded indicating that what they were looking for wouldn't be covered under this bill, but I still think there's a way that we can go to strengthen this.

Specific to the amendment is making sure that when all of the hard work of the committee is done and is sent through to the minister, there is a careful consideration and a response and that the response is made public. Because that's the other frustration. I mean, we've just gone through a series of written questions and motions for returns in which information has been requested, and we've been told: no, you can't have it under freedom of information and protection of privacy; there are a number of different caveats that are placed upon the information.

I would encourage everyone to carefully consider the amendment. I hope it will find support in the Assembly. It is certainly brought forward as a companion and as a piece to strengthen the legislation that's been proposed by the Member for Calgary-West. I'm sure that many in the community would be excited to see this pass and have it implemented, and I congratulate her and her committee on the work that was done for it.

With that, I will take my seat and allow any others that wish to speak to the amendment to do so, but I do urge all the members of the Assembly to accept this amendment. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I acknowledge the suggestion that's within the notice of amendment put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Anybody else on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to get up and support this amendment to the Residential Care Housing Committee Act that's proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I think her concerns in this particular case are very, very valid.

In earlier debate on Bill 203 that members on this side of the

House certainly viewed this particular bill with a lot of skepticism. One of the reasons for the skepticism was a report, probably one of the more extensive and inclusive reports ever done for this Assembly, completed by a former member, the MLA for Olds-Didsbury. He had put this out on December 10, 1992, and it was a report on seniors titled Looking to the Future. This was a report; it was an action plan. It was to take us to the year 2005. Unfortunately, this report was shredded after all this tremendous work, after consulting with so many, many groups here in the province.

You know, the people that were involved in that, Mr. Chairman, were the general public, including seniors, people who were 45 and older, and the community at large, as well as service providers, including community organizations, continuing care facilities, home care, family and community support services. We had the business community involved, service clubs, media, academics, other levels of government, and related organizations and associations. Again, a very, very comprehensive report done at a tremendous cost to the Alberta taxpayers, and this report was shredded.

Now we have a amendment here that I think adds further strength to this particular bill in that it will result in some action. So I would urge all members of the Assembly to support this very good amendment as proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre on Bill 203.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased as sponsor of Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act, to open Committee of the Whole in this Assembly today. Bill 203 was fully debated in second reading by many hon. members on Wednesday, April 25.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we are on the amendment as it has been circulated. Do you want to speak on the amendment?

4:00

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. I will be speaking on the amendment in my speaking notes, Mr. Chairman.

My sincere thanks to researcher Darcy Dupas and researchers for their hard work on Bill 203. My remarks will address the essence of Bill 203, including the amendment proposed by the Member for Edmonton-Centre today and also the principles that are supported in the bill and will address not only the amendment but other concerns of colleagues.

As noted, Bill 203 promotes the establishment of a steering committee, and it has a cross-jurisdictional approach that would include relevant government departments, MLA representation, and key stakeholders. This committee would consult, develop, and oversee the framework for broad-based standards for residential care homes housing three or fewer people. The main objective of the committee is the development of provincewide standards for residential community care options and a system of monitoring and investigation and also information for individuals looking for residential care options.

Information needs to be collaboratively shared and collected between many government departments as well as appropriate key stakeholders involved in this important issue. To not include representation from all government ministries that monitor children's services such as Justice, Health, housing, Seniors, and Human Resources would really be a grievous error. To exclude key expert contributors in this area of policy development would also be overlooking . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-West, currently we have before us an amendment. We could have a vote on the amendment, deal with it, and then you could proceed with your speech as you have prepared. But we'll have to deal with the current amendment that's before us.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. We'll have the vote on the amendment, and then I will continue with my speaking notes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, to not include representation from all government ministries that monitor children's services such as Justice, Health, housing, Seniors, and Human Resources would be a grievous error, and to exclude key expert contributors in this area of policy development would also be overlooking a major resource.

Also, with up to eight persons on the committee not named, flexibility remains for the minister's discretion. This is the main reasoning for the composition of the steering committee as defined in section 2. Obviously, there must be limitations on the size of the steering committee, and regrettably, some groups familiar with this policy issue area will not be able to be named. However, it is noted in the bill that there must be public consultation with key stakeholders. Therefore, organizations and individuals with an interest in residential care housing would then be able to lend their expertise to the committee, whether it's in writing or in person. Most importantly, the committee will retain a good portion of representation from the government that the people of Alberta elected.

I would like to point out that the first directive of the steering committee pursuant to section (4) of the bill is ongoing consultations which will occur with the individuals most affected by the residential care housing market. It is through the consultations with grassroots stakeholders and citizens that the steering committee will be able to best accommodate the needs and values of Albertans and reflect these elements in the recommendations for the regulations of the residential care housing market. It will be the responsibility of the steering committee to ensure that literally hundreds of stakeholder groups and individuals are heard from and that it is accurately documented. In so doing, their ideas will be discussed and reflected in the recommendations that will result from the consultation process.

Bill 203 is determined to protect at-risk, vulnerable Albertans: seniors, adults with special needs, brain injured, those with developmental disabilities, and adults with mental illness and mild dementia. It would regulate the activities of the residential care provider to ensure safe residential care alternatives and quality services.

That the debate around Bill 203 is primarily focused on housing needs of seniors is no accident, as seniors would seem to be the main beneficiaries of this legislation. However, the bill does not specify that residential care housing must involve a person over the age of 65, as Bill 203 is intended to serve all adult Albertans who may require or do require additional care in their daily living. The focus on seniors is an acknowledgment of the Albertans that will most likely be the residents in these housing units – nothing more. The directive of the steering committee is to develop regulations to include younger adult Albertans who require specific types of care in order to live independently in a community setting.

I am pleased that my colleagues in this Assembly support the general direction of the bill and acknowledge the need for the

formation of policy for residential care housing. It is important to act soon on these issues, as the need for residential neighbourhood housing living arrangements will only increase as Alberta's population ages and increases. Regulating the care of our at-risk, aging population is an opportunity to provide Albertans with innovative yet also commonsense approaches to housing options for all adult Albertans who require some assistance with daily living.

The regulation of this housing market will create new opportunities for entrepreneurs in Alberta and facilitate value-added living services for our elderly and our disabled who are paying an operator for accommodation, meals, and defined personal services. The monitoring of this market will create a level playing field that will ensure that standards are met, and this level playing field will foster a competitive market that ultimately provides more quality housing.

It is only through a collaborative effort that we can achieve the positive change that is necessary to have residential housing continue to grow and provide high-quality services. There has to be an inclusive process that takes into consideration the existing market and structure and one which encourages present and new operators to adopt standards of care that should be every Albertan's birthright.

I urge my colleagues to focus on the big picture of residential care housing and to keep clearly in mind those adult Albertans who need it as we debate the specifics of Bill 203 this afternoon. I look forward to hearing and perhaps responding to any existing concerns or supportive comments.

Mr. Chairman, to reiterate, there is a very strong case for the need for Bill 203. It is time for this government to assume the leadership role through a collaborative process and implementation and to move forward by proactively ensuring that at-risk adults have a quality, safe, independent lifestyle within a residential setting.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am very pleased to speak to the Residential Care Housing Committee Act. Bill 203 was vigorously debated in second reading by many members and received overwhelming support from the members of the Assembly.

Bill 203 promotes the establishment of a steering committee which would have a main objective of developing provincewide standards for residential care options, a system of monitoring and investigating and providing information for individuals looking for residential care options. Bill 203 would protect at-risk, vulnerable Albertans, seniors, adults with special needs, and adults suffering from mental illness and dementia. It would regulate the activities of the residential care provider to ensure safe residential care alternatives and quality services.

4:10

Many groups and individuals have identified a need for standards and monitoring of residential care. The need for care was addressed by this Assembly in 1995 when the then Member for Calgary-Bow proposed the motion which read:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that health and safety standards are being met in all personal care facilities by establishing regulations and a comprehensive monitoring system.

The motion passed unanimously. As a result of this motion the interdepartmental working group on private care in group homes was formed to identify issues related to private care and group-living options, to determine if there was a role for the provincial government to play.

Their report, the Safety of Adult Living in Residential Care Options, in 1998 made key recommendations that are very valid today and which are an integral part of Bill 203.

Even more recent government reports reinforce the need to pass Bill 203. For example, *Alberta for All Ages: Directions for the Future*, June 2000, presented a study on the impact of aging population. This document forecast an enormous demand for community and residential care. Also, the document *Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care*, November 1999, the final report of the policy advisory committee on long-term care review, a report I'm very familiar with, also recommends strongly that Alberta take measures to ensure the private and voluntary sectors expand their range of support of living options available across the province and expand the support of housing to include light- and medium-care cases: people with mild dementia and young people with disabilities.

Also, the report urged the government to set provincewide standards for supporting housing developments. Through a collaborative process this is what Bill 203 aims to do, Mr. Chairman, and I urge all my colleagues to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak before the Committee of the Whole today on Bill 203. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-West for bringing forward the Residential Care Housing Committee Act.

This is an important bill that would rectify gaps in Alberta legislation pertaining to home care. Bill 203 addresses several inadequacies that vulnerable Albertans face in terms of residential home care. Currently no legislative standard of care exists in Alberta for home care operations in residences housing three or fewer clients. Section 2, which would allow the steering committee to develop regulations concerning "the level of care" and "the type of accommodation to be provided" and standards for the health and safety of the residents, will protect all home care consumers from potential abuse.

The steering committee will also work to develop procedures for monitoring residential care homes so that they can ensure that established standards are being implemented. Initially the committee will only monitor those homes that have applied to the voluntary residential care list. Those homes that are accepted onto the list will have met the care, sanitation, and accommodation requirements established by the steering committee. This list will signify to those Albertans interested in residential care service that the providers on the list are of solid reputation and will undoubtedly provide good-quality care.

Mr. Chairman, the steering committee will work towards a goal of standardized home care where eventually all residential care homes with three or fewer clients will be regulated under the umbrella of legislation stemming from the work of the committee. These standards imposed on the operators will serve to protect Alberta's residential care consumers.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the population of Alberta is graying. Now is the time for this government to ensure that the rapidly growing senior population will find that there is adequate care waiting for them when they need it. Not only should they be aware that quality residential home care will be available; they should have the knowledge to make an educated choice of a provider. This is why section 2 of Bill 203 establishes a mandate for the committee to relay information to the general public regarding residential care. Through such an initiative the public will know what to expect when it comes time to choose a home for themselves or for a loved one. Public consultation and education will also apply pressure on home care providers to ensure that their level of care is up to the standards set out by the committee.

Bill 203, section 3, confirms that the steering committee will have a broad spectrum of input from many government departments, Members of the Legislative Assembly, regional health authorities, municipalities, and the Seniors Advisory Council. Mr. Chairman, such a variety of input will ensure that this committee will have adequate representation to make informed and reasonable decisions.

The Residential Care Housing Committee Act is essential for those members of the seniors community who are without the luxury of a network of friends and family who can care for them. This bill will provide a road map for Alberta's elderly when they seek quality, trustworthy, standardized care. This is the least the government of Alberta can do to ensure that those who have made vital contributions to Alberta's success will be cared for when they can no longer care for themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS. HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very grateful to have the opportunity to address private member's Bill 203, and I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-West for bringing this important issue forward.

There are, however, some issues that I would like to raise. I think that it would be easy to say yes to this bill. I mean, no one wants the elderly or the vulnerable members of our society to be abused or taken advantage of. I believe that is why a couple of years ago, when Bonnie Laing was here, we passed her Protection for Persons in Care Act. Perhaps this bill is the logical next step.

What concerns me is that there is always yet another step, a step that once again puts government into the mix of personal choices, another step that says that government can just pass more laws to make society perfect – well, perhaps perfect in the minds of people in this Assembly – another step that says that we know best and that you, Mr. and Mrs. Albertan, don't really have to think about things because government is there to do your thinking for you. We will make you safe; you and your family need not take much responsibility or concern about your choices because we're here to do that for you.

There is the likelihood that the formation of a voluntary registry will in fact create a liability for this province. None of us has forgotten the eugenics law. I mean, we are still paying for that one; it was repealed 30 years ago. Recommending or listing housing options for seniors without certification, without licensing or monitoring may put consumers at risk and the government at risk of being sued for contributory negligence.

We raise expectations that we may never be able to meet. There is reason for concern on this issue. I do not in any way deny we are all aware of our aging demographics, and just today in the *National Post*:

The C.D. Howe Institute, an economic think-tank, estimates that health care will consume more than half of all provincial revenues by [the year] 2040.

I believe it'll be a lot quicker than that.

That will likely increase the tax burden on a shrinking workforce paying for a growing pool of elderly Baby Boomers, he predicts. In 1998, 12% of Canadians were over age 65, yet more than 43% of provincial health care spending went to services for seniors, the report notes.

Yet there is little evidence that more spending meant better care.

I raise that simply because this is yet another layer, and nobody knows what it's going to cost.

We know that within 15 years or less our seniors population will

in fact double. We know that we will require more long-term care, more nursing homes, more lodges, more assisted living, and, yes, more residential-type care. So while we all want to ensure the safety and protection of our frail, our elderly, and our vulnerable members of society, I ask all of you to carefully consider if this is the correct vehicle. Our existing legislation I believe is currently being reviewed. There has been extensive work done by the Member for Redwater and a report issued with many recommendations that are currently being implemented, and more of them are coming forward. Bill 203 in my opinion will generate similar recommendations but could possibly forestall government action and possibly impede current initiatives.

Another question that you must ask yourself is what possible incentive there is for a residential housing owner/operator to voluntarily register. Anyone that could be in the least concerned about meeting standards would surely not register their home. What about the sole owner/operator? There are no employees to register a complaint about that person.

4:20

Is it possible that the registry could impact upon the cost-effectiveness of good residential care homes? I ask this because the bill does not talk about the cost of compliance. No one knows what the standards will be. Would there be flexibility in standards for different clientele?

Monitoring costs are significant. How many bureaucrats would it take? At what cost? Who pays? And if there's no monitoring, what good is it? Would it be like a Better Business Bureau that you could just phone up and get information from? I don't know that, but if that's all it was, maybe I could support this bill. But then there is a Better Business Bureau already, and maybe we should be talking to them about branching out into this area.

Bill 203 does not address costs or even propose to examine them. The vast majority of people in care home residences are there by personal choice, and we need more of those choices as our population ages. There are advocates out there, starting with family and friends, moving to the AISH caseworkers, home care operators, and RHAs, and of course we have the newly formed Department of Seniors. We have Government Services, and we have municipal housing authorities as well as law enforcement officers. If an individual is unable to report abuse, I'm not sure that another committee will change that.

Once again I would sincerely like to thank the Member for Calgary-West for bringing the issue forward. It is important, but I am concerned when we risk setting up yet another bureaucracy without any idea of what it may cost, without any idea of how many people will be discouraged from opening their homes to help others in this type of situation. They may not open those homes for fear of not meeting some arbitrary standard that may in fact be a moving target.

I for one would be far more comfortable if this issue were coming forward through the Minister of Seniors. That way it would have been thoroughly scrutinized. We would have a better idea of the cost of compliance or the penalty of noncompliance. We would have a better knowledge of the extent of the problem that we're trying to address here and what standards we could actually anticipate. We may have a better understanding through a public consultation process, though, of what really needs to be done and the impact of both the positive and negative aspects of doing something versus doing nothing.

I have to be honest, Mr. Chairman. In eight years as an MLA I have never had a call in my constituency office about this issue. I have had complaints about doctors, about hospitals, about long-term

care facilities, but I have never had a complaint about a residential care home. That doesn't mean that there aren't any problems out there. It just means that as a representative of my area I have to wonder why I would want to support a bill that nobody at home has talked to me about. I wish that on private members' bills Standing Orders allowed us to be able to send a bill like this to a minister and ask him or her to spend some time and, yes, even a little bit of money to more thoroughly review the issue, and then have it come back through the process.

I regret, Mr. Chairman, that that is not the case, because without a lot more information about the ramifications and the potential costs of this bill, I am unable to support it. I would ask that all hon. members in this Assembly stop and think carefully about the issues I've raised before we pass into law a bill that impacts 3 million Albertans, most of whom are totally and completely unaware of what we're talking about in here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to put my views on the record.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. I would just like to take a few minutes of speaking time to respond, very much in part only, to a couple of concerns raised by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. In terms of creating a layer of bureaucracy, we have at risk our vulnerable adults that we're speaking about here, who for the most part cannot advocate for themselves. We protect children as vulnerable through legislation. Why not vulnerable adults? As the final report on the Safety of Adults Living in Residential Care Options states: this is a collaborative, consultative initiative and process that builds on current initiatives and existing structures in the community and will not necessarily create an extra layer of bureaucracy.

I would be very pleased to provide the hon. member with an extensive list of people that I have consulted with and organizations that support the initiative that this bill sets out to solve. They are large organizations, but they have looked toward the province for leadership.

In terms of a registry it is really a voluntary list to help ensure that individuals are not at further risk while the broad-based standards are being developed. The main intent of it would be to help Albertans who are seeking information as to, for instance, where residential care homes are located, details of those homes, and types and levels of assistance that are offered.

Again, there are many resources and examples, such as the Department of Health in the government of Saskatchewan, who have been working with the Personal Care Homes Act since 1989, and two major regional health authorities, the Capital health authority and the CRHA. As I said, I would be very pleased to give the Member from Airdrie-Rocky View a list of resources, of people and organizations that have been involved in the consultations.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege to speak to Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act, proposed by my distinguished colleague from Calgary-West.

Mr. Chairman, as we all know, our population is aging, and the ability of our health care system to accommodate the inevitable surge in demand for health services is a real concern. This province has consistently shown that we are at the forefront of this issue and that

we are committed to taking a proactive stance in order to ensure that all Albertans receive the very best care available.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 203 seeks to address the need for long-term residential care. Seniors today are more independent than ever. Most elderly Albertans would prefer to remain in a residential setting even as they begin to require more regular supervision and direct medical care. The opportunity to receive these services in a residential setting and maintain a sense of self-sufficiency is a great benefit to many elderly Albertans.

In addition to the benefits that individual seniors receive, residential care options will serve to alleviate the stress placed on group homes and other care facilities. Residential care facilities are also extremely cost-efficient when compared to more formalized institutional services.

The reason we need Bill 203 is that currently residential care facilities with three or fewer clients not receiving any provincial funding do not have regulatory bodies created specifically to address the issues and concerns of residential care recipients. Mr. Chairman, we must work to protect the citizens who choose this type of care and give them the opportunity to live the best, safest, and most independent life possible.

As stated in section 2(2), the bill establishes a residential care housing committee “to develop standards for residential care” and “to develop methods for monitoring residential care homes to ensure compliance” with established standards. This committee would also develop a voluntary registry system of existing residential care housing providers who do not receive government funding and care for up to three people. This registry will provide the foundation for developing standards and requirements for the operation of these facilities.

Mr. Chairman, the passage of this bill will enable the elderly to receive regulated, properly monitored residential care as an alternative to formalized institutional care. Monitoring residential homes is vital to guide care providers toward better service while at the same time ensuring proper care of dependent adults.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, this bill is a proactive step in the development of a comprehensive system to care for our aging population. It ensures that no segment of our society is denied appropriate health and safety standards for their personal care. It further allows the elderly to choose care options that are the best for them, with peace of mind that the care they are receiving is governed by appropriate regulations and a comprehensive monitoring system.

It is for these reasons, Mr. Chairman, that I enthusiastically support Bill 203 and encourage my colleagues in this Assembly to do the same. Thank you.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Chairman, thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak to Bill 203, the Residential Care Housing Committee Act. As I look at this bill, I think it would benefit and protect many vulnerable Albertans. I support the bill out of concern for the elderly, the infirm, the permanently disabled, and the mentally ill. This legislation would help all of those who are in need of constant yet flexible care. It will protect them from many of the crimes that they are vulnerable to.

4:30

At present there are no legislated guidelines that protect these residents from abuse. The law does not set certain standards that these care facilities must comply with. These facilities offer lodging,

meals, and personal assistance for one to three elderly persons or adults with extra needs. These facilities are special because they provide care in a residential setting for individuals who need some assistance and cannot live alone but do not need nursing or medical support. They provide a safe environment, support, protection, supervision, and assistance to the residents in that home.

Mr. Chairman, I'm particularly concerned about one factor. There is nothing stopping an operator from opening five, six, seven homes and having three seniors living in each home. What that effectively does is give them responsibility for 20, 21, 25 elderly people with no management or control in place. Currently the department only regulates those facilities which house four or more. Why shouldn't we be doing that for those homes that have three or less in their care?

The specific purpose of the bill is to identify, list, and eventually regulate care home operators housing three or fewer clients. To begin this development, a steering committee would build a voluntary list of private health care providers. That is one area where I'm wondering: why should it be voluntary? It probably should be mandatory. Why let them provide a list on a voluntary basis? I think that should be mandatory.

Then it would use this list to help formulate regulations. The findings of the steering committee will be the basis for standards and regulations that ensure that private care facilities are being maintained at the highest quality level.

On some specifics on a line-by-line basis I'd like to kind of highlight for the mover of this bill a few pointers. As I indicated earlier on, I think that there should be a mandatory registry and not a voluntary one according to section 2. The committee should probably have more resources made available to it so it can carry out the task of visiting the various facilities, talking to the clients, talking to the clients' families, and then providing a report to Albertans.

I notice in this bill that

one year after the date this Act comes into force, and every subsequent year on the same date, the chairperson of the Committee shall submit to the Minister an annual report of the activities undertaken by the Committee during the previous fiscal year.

Now, what if that date turns out to be a Sunday? I'm wondering whether such fixed times are required within this bill.

Overall in principle I support it. I think it is needed. I have had many concerns expressed to me about the quality of care received by seniors in small group homes. So I'd like to compliment the hon. member for bringing forward this bill. It may not be perfect in every which way, but I think the intent is right. This is an opportunity for us to bring about amendments if we so choose. I hope the hon. member will take the debate into consideration, and I hope that every member will support this bill.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: We'll call on the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you. I just have a couple of comments I'd like to make on this bill, Mr. Chairman, because I think it's an important bill. I want to commend the Member for Calgary-West for the intent that she brought this bill forward with. However, having said that, I do have some concerns with the bill. I'm not going to go through them all, because some of the concerns certainly were well spoken to by the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

One of those certainly is the whole area of how much government gets into people's lives and people's choices. For those of you who

know me from years in this Legislature, you will know that I believe people should have choices. I believe that the less government is in your life, the better off we all are. Having said that, I also believe that there is a vulnerable part of our society that needs protection and care.

Like the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View I would prefer that this had a more thorough vetting with the Minister of Seniors to better understand from my perspective what abuse is out there. Frankly, in 14 years I haven't had a call on this issue, and I do represent quite a large constituency. So I have that concern with the bill.

As I indicated, I respect that the Member for Calgary-West brings this bill with a feeling and a knowledge and a belief that this is important. An aspect of the bill that I do like is that the registry would be voluntary, and I would support that if it were to go ahead.

Again, as people make a choice as to how they want to live when they can no longer be independent in their homes, I would like to see that choice left to persons when you are in what is almost a noninstitutional setting of three or less people. I think people choose that because they do want to be in a more familylike setting. They do need some care but not the care that you would require if you were slated for institutional care.

I feel that way about other areas as well, and I've spoken on them in the Assembly. One of those areas is day care. I think people that choose to put their children in day care should understand that they have a regulated environment, that the factors are all there, but I always wanted to leave it to mothers who want to leave their children with friends or family to make those choices for themselves. For many people that is the better choice. I feel that that's applicable in this as well.

I also have a concern, having some experience in this Legislature, of dismantling committees that have been in place for years that actually didn't function. I was amazed at how many committees we had in place that hadn't met for three or four years. So when we talk about setting up another structure, I wonder if there isn't a structure already existing that can manage some of these things. I'm not in favour of large bureaucracies, and I'm not in favour of large committees, but make no mistake, hon. members, I am in great favour of ensuring that the people who are vulnerable in our society have protection. I just happen to believe that that's available today. I do happen to believe, as I've indicated, that in homes that look after less than three persons, that can be left to the choice.

I wouldn't feel that confident about it if we didn't already have in place a system of very fine care homes for people which are regulated, which are monitored through the social care facilities committee, which has done an outstanding job over the years of visiting those places and making sure that residents are cared for and protected.

4:40

There's one other area I just want to mention. There's a group in Calgary that many of us are familiar with, and I'll just single them out: the Kerby Centre. The Kerby Centre has represented seniors over the years and has been a place for seniors who have concerns in those areas to go and have been great advocates for them. Perhaps groups like that can better respond if there are issues on a one- or two-person dwelling. Once you get over three or four, you're probably in an institutional-like setting and government perhaps has a role of monitoring.

Those are my comments, Mr. Chairman. With those comments I support the intent of the bill, but I would not support it passing in its present form.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's also a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to address Bill 203 this afternoon. I, like many others, would like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-West. I think that the intent of this bill is well thought out. I think the member truly does believe that there is a need to address some concerns for the quality of living conditions that are found in some of the residential care facilities throughout the province.

But like the previous couple of speakers, the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, this is an area that I, too, have not had a lot of calls on. I do hear from time to time complaints with respect to day care, complaints with respect to formalized institutional care settings, but I have not heard specific complaints as they relate to a residential care situation. I'm the first to agree that that does not indicate that there are no problems. I'm not so foolish as to believe that there are not some situations that could be potentially hazardous and create a very poor environment for people who really are not in a position to speak for themselves and to stand up for themselves.

I have concern with this bill. The concern that I have is that this is the type of bill that has very little detail in it. Basically, the bill says that we'll have a committee, that the committee will establish standards, that we'll have a voluntary system, and that the committee will enforce those standards. Then it goes on to say that the government will pay for it all. Like the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View we have no idea how much this is going to cost. In order for it to be done properly, conceivably there would have to be literally dozens of persons who would be responsible for enforcing and visiting each of the various facilities throughout the province.

In addition to costs to government, which I think all of us should be concerned about – nevertheless, we also have to keep in mind that it is the role of government to provide services to its citizens, so I don't think that the cost to government should be the overriding concern when you get into a discussion like this – there are costs to the individuals. In a case where you have care providers providing the services, I have grave concern that not knowing what the extent of the standards are that this committee may or may not develop, there could be some substantial costs involved in upgrading facilities where the committee makes an arbitrary determination that perhaps a certain minimum number of square feet are necessary for a room. There could be any number of standards that are set that would tend to be arbitrary and would tend to be extremely expensive.

Then we run into a situation where we've got this voluntary list of providers that meet, quote, the standards, and you've got another group of providers out there who don't meet the standards and hence would not, obviously, be listed on this sheet. The implications would be that there's an inferior level of care if any provider is not listed on this voluntary list.

Well, it could very well be that the standards that have been established are unreasonable in some circumstances. What is reasonable accommodation in one community may not be reasonable in another, and I'm not so sure that setting some kind of a province-wide standard would be a workable solution in this particular case.

We also would have a situation where the costs that would be borne by the clients may in reality end up being substantially higher for those providers that are providing services under the, quote, voluntary registration, and then we get into a whole argument on the equity of the situation. Those that can afford to go into a voluntarily standardized accommodation will be assured of having the committee and the enforcement provisions provided by the committee at their disposal to ensure that either their loved ones, in the case of a guardian, or individuals are looking after their own affairs. On the other hand, where there is a case where an individual may not be

able to afford accommodation that meets the arbitrary standard, they're going to be living in accommodation that is not on the list, that is not going to have access to the enforcement criteria of the committee, and what have we accomplished? We've accomplished nothing. We still have people living in inferior accommodation.

So even if this bill was to be passed and supported, I don't think it would solve the problem that it's trying to solve. I think that we need to think very seriously about this situation.

I agree with comments that have been made. Let's determine if in fact there is a serious problem in our communities around this province. If there is, let's do some broad-based consultation. Let's talk to people who are in fact providing residential care throughout the province, get some input from them, get some input from people who are living in residential care, and come up with a solution that will in fact be a long-term solution. We'll deal with the problem if that problem does exist. Mr. Chairman, I unfortunately feel compelled not to support this legislation at this point.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments that have been made by the last three speakers, and I also, though, feel that I would like to respond briefly to some of their comments. I realize I can't answer them all satisfactorily, but I will do my best to address a few of them.

Looking first to the government and our policies, it's my understanding that we support the continuum of care – and I think it has been mentioned already this afternoon by the Member for Redwater – in terms of health, housing, health needs. The long-term care review report substantiates that, and the aging population study substantiates that. We know that individuals, Albertans, want to truly age in place in their communities. Their first choice would be to age in their own homes, and their last choice would be to be in an acute care setting. But in between we have, happily enough, new models of living around the province where personal supports and help can be added as needed. We have congregate living that's in the private sector, we have lodges that are in the public sector, and there is subsidized housing for seniors.

4:50

So we have got some choices in there, but we do know that in many instances we have a housing shortage, and there are waiting lists. I am aware through my research – again, I have done extensive research on this – that there have been organizations in the province that have set up similar minisystems, because they are, in their own way, dealing with this problem that we do not have regulations and standards for people who live in housing. Say, for instance, the one that I'm proposing here that has one to three or less than four residents: there are basically no standards of the sort that would protect, again, vulnerable adults. I'm talking about seniors, for instance, who may be healthy today but not necessarily healthy tomorrow. We all probably know through personal experience that this does happen to seniors. Dementia could be diagnosed or Alzheimer's.

The main thing along with this continuum of care is, I believe, that this type of regulated housing would give us additional housing in the communities. We talk about costs, as did the hon. Member for Medicine Hat. The cost of this housing in terms of bricks and mortar is nil. It is housing that already exists, and it's out there in the private sector. Seniors or persons with special needs would be paying their own way.

Basically, I think the main point to remember is this is another

housing choice that we will have for our at-risk adult Albertans, and with the aging population the demand is only going to increase.

In terms of not having complaints or not knowing, I made a statement earlier today that these are vulnerable adults, and probably most of them are not in a position to speak for themselves – perhaps through their families, but some of them do not have families close by or do not have families that can speak for them. So, again, a main reason why this bill is being proposed is at-risk people.

With not having a present registry we don't know how much of this type of housing exists. Again, we have no idea of negligence unless there have been reports such as in the media. These things have happened, and I do have documentation of negligence that has occurred.

I think, basically, the main impact of this too is that truly many, many people will be allowed to age in place within their communities in safe housing and, again, be provided with these personal supports that are necessary.

I tend to have focused on seniors and not on people with special needs. I know that for people with PDD, brain injuries, with mental health problems, their own agencies and their support organizations are working to support them. As an example, one of many examples I've heard, a mother is distraught because her son, who did have an accident and is brain injured, has been living in a long-term care centre mostly with people with advanced Alzheimer's. He has progressed to the degree that this is not a suitable setting for him. So where does he go from there? He even actually does one day of volunteer work a week at the Children's hospital, and he's capable in many areas, but he cannot function without supports in a home. So it's not just the seniors. We are talking about people with special needs.

I say, yes, there are challenges, and I acknowledge the points that are made by the hon. members, but I would like to ask the members of this Assembly to support this bill. I rest my case.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the clauses of the bill, are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? The motion is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Gordon	Nicol
Blakeman	Hancock	O'Neill
Bonner	Jablonski	Taft
Broda	Johnson	Tarchuk
Cenaiko	Kryczka	VanderBurg
Dunford	Mason	Zwozdesky
Forsyth		

Against the motion:

Ady	Jonson	Ouellette
DeLong	Knight	Rathgeber
Evans	Lougheed	Renner
Friedel	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove

Haley	Lund	Stelmach
Herard	McClellan	Stevens
Hlady	McClelland	Taylor
Horner	McFarland	Vandermeer
Jacobs	Melchin	

Totals: For – 19 Against – 26

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The motion has been defeated.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In view of the clauses of this bill having been defeated, I would move that the chairman now leave the chair.

[Motion carried]

5:10

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 205
Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection)
Amendment Act, 2001**

[Debate adjourned May 8: Mr. Lund speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed in *Hansard* that as we adjourned debate yesterday, I was in the middle of a sentence. No aspersions on the Speaker; it was just that I was trying to stretch the time. Maybe I should complete the sentence that I had started.

I was commenting on the conflict that we find occurring out in rural Alberta with the fragmentation that's happening, and I was commenting about the number of things that we find that people complain about. I see where I had said that we find that there are complaints about sprayers. I need to clarify that in fact it was the aerial spraying that I got a lot of complaints on when I was minister of agriculture.

I think there's a bigger picture here that we are discussing. Certainly what Bill 205 speaks to is the approval process. I must admit that I did make a lot of comments about those other peripheral issues. Certainly in the whole area of the ILOs I guess that the approval is probably the starting point, where we need to concentrate. I want to take this opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler for bringing this forward, because it is a very, very important issue, one that the committee that toured the province three times came back and quite frankly did not have a clear answer to.

As a matter of fact, what we see happening today is pretty close to what that original committee had recommended, and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it's not working. We have to discuss further how this process needs to evolve and how it needs to work. What's happening out there today are a couple of things. It is dividing the communities. You have local officials being pitted against, in some instances, even neighbours to make a very difficult decision. The emotion runs high, and the first thing you know, there's division. There's that problem.

Then there's the problem of being inconsistent, because what will happen in one area doesn't happen in another. As well, there's the issue that I touched briefly on yesterday about having one body saddled with the responsibility while the authority lies in another jurisdiction. That causes a great deal of concern, and I must repeat:

it doesn't work. We've seen cases in other areas where that happens, where the responsibility and the authority are not in the same arena, and as soon as that happens, you're doomed for failure.

I think that the code that we issued about a year ago on the safe handling and disposal of manure and other operations certainly goes a long way to addressing the issues of operation that are out there. I'm looking forward with great anticipation to a report that will be coming from the most recent committee that toured the province taking information and taking advice on how to solve the two issues, the operational and the approval.

So with those comments I once again thank the Member for Lacombe-Stettler for bringing this forward. It's probably one of the toughest issues that we are going to have to make a decision on in the short term. I believe that this is a good start for the debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 205. As I understand it, the intent of the act is to take away from the local municipal jurisdiction the authority to deal with intensive livestock operations and to have those issues settled elsewhere, particularly at the provincial level.

Now, there are many issues around this, Mr. Speaker. The development of these very, very large-scale intensive livestock operations has produced controversy throughout the province and, I think, rightly so. In general, these intensive livestock operations often pose a threat to local groundwater. I think that's an issue which is of great provincial concern. We have seen increasing questions raised about the state of the groundwater in this province, which is by its nature not the wettest place on Earth and which I think has less open water than most other provinces in the country if not every other province in the country. It is fundamental that we preserve pure and adequate levels of groundwater if the many other activities of this province are going to continue, not just agriculture but in particular, in this case, agriculture.

So the control of ILOs is of very great concern, I think, to everybody in the province. The question then is: what are the other impacts of ILOs? Well, there are economic impacts in the sense that they threaten the smaller family farms with competition that they cannot meet. I think that that's another impact that needs to be considered. Now, I know members opposite take a different view and believe that these are natural evolutionary tendencies and are best left alone and that if the family farm is consigned to the dustbin of history, then so be it, that it's sad, but there's not very much we can or even should try to do about it.

We take a different view, Mr. Speaker. We take the view that the family farm is an institution that's worth preserving in this country and in this province and that the industrialization of agriculture, with all its attendant disruptions to our society and our environment, is not a welcome development. So we have, I think, a difference on that with members opposite or at least with some members opposite.

Then there's the question of local government and local authority. One of the things that local government does, whether it's in the city or in the countryside, is evaluate whether or not different types of land use are compatible. That's a fundamental function of local government not just in Alberta but pretty much everywhere in the country.

What I read in the comments in *Hansard* by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler when she introduced this bill or spoke to it at second reading concerned me a little bit, Mr. Speaker. It was obvious that what had happened was that the local government there had made certain decisions that certain larger scale agricultural

producers found hard to live with, yet those decisions were made through the democratic institutions of local government. Then we had the hon. member coming to this place and seeking approval of the Assembly to override the local decision and in fact take away the power of local municipal governments to make those decisions with respect to ILOs right across the province.

I note, Mr. Speaker, that a number of hon. members on the government side who have a background in rural municipal government have stood up and spoken against the bill and have argued that the local government is in the best position to make these kinds of decisions. I read their speeches with interest as well, and I agree with them. I think that they are correct in saying that local government is in the best position to make these decisions. Whether or not you can satisfy issues of groundwater or pollution and disposal of waste products, if it in fact creates a nuisance for people who live in the country, then it is the local government that ought to be making decisions about which land use is compatible with which other land use.

5:20

So on that basis, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking against the bill because I think we should, first of all, protect and enhance local government and its traditional responsibilities. I don't like at all the idea that if local government makes a decision that you disagree with, you come to this place and ask everybody to take away the power of that local government to make the decision. Can you imagine if every time the government in Ottawa disagreed with decisions that were made by this government – and I know they don't have the power, as we do, over municipalities – if every time Alberta exercised its authority in an area and the federal government disagreed with that position, it took away our powers? How would that go down with members of the Assembly? Not very well, I think. So I think on those issues it's clear that the power should go with local government to control these.

Now, there's a broader issue that I think the provincial government needs to be very strongly concerned about, and that is the deterioration of the groundwater of this province, which is perhaps one of our most precious and underrated resources, because of intensive agricultural uses and because of undercontrol in the gas and oil drilling industry, which is causing tremendous contamination of our groundwater in this province. When the groundwater is

severely compromised, the economy and the livability of this province will suffer tremendously.

So the government has an obligation, in my view, to take up this question as one of the key questions facing the future of this province and to really address it with a view to preserving the groundwater of this province for all of the purposes that people require it for on a permanent basis, on a completely sustainable, permanent basis so that it never, never is compromised. To not do so would be compromising not just the economy of the province, not just the agricultural sector of the province, but in fact the very livability of this province, Mr. Speaker. I think that the member by bringing this forward raises this issue, and I appreciate having the opportunity to make my points.

I will now take my seat and let other speakers proceed. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on this bill. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn and recess the House at this point, that we call it 5:30, and that we reconvene in Committee of Supply tonight at 8.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion proposed by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 9, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/09

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. We'll begin with the usual admonition that only one person will be standing and talking at a time.

Before we begin our deliberations on the estimates of Human Resources and Employment, I wonder if we might briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure this evening to introduce a visitor from Ontario. She happens to be the grandmother of James Hamilton, who is a page here in the Legislature. Her name is Anne Andrews. I would first of all like to say, Mrs. Andrews, that your grandson is doing an excellent job. We're all very proud of him here, and you can be proud of him as well. Now, would you please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

Human Resources and Employment

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd like to begin this evening by calling upon the minister. Hon. minister, if you could lead us off this evening.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's certainly nice to see a packed House tonight. That's very good. All of the opposition members are in their seats. That's good. I do that because I realize that *Hansard* . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: They're not all there.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, hey, I'm going to cut them some slack. Maybe they'll cut me some slack. More importantly, I want to give all of them the opportunity to ship *Hansard* around to as many of their friends and relatives as they can. I know we'll be listening to their remarks with close attention.

Before I begin, we have members of our department here tonight in the members' gallery. Duncan Campbell and Dan Thompson are from Human Resources and Employment, I guess main body, but here representing the personnel administration office are Shirley Howe, Debra Tiffen, and Lorne Saul-Demers. Shelby MacLeod is here, my executive assistant.

I would want to take up just a few minutes of my time and hope that the members would perhaps let me add to this time by just indicating to all of you that earlier today the Alberta government on your behalf received an award from the Institute of Public Administration. I forget what the "C" in their acronym, IPAC, means. We heard the Premier earlier today table the press release. The personnel administration office – and that's our department – received a gold medal from this body because of the corporate human resource development strategy that we have here in the provincial government. So all of our people are to be congratulated for that. [ap-

plause] Thank you very much. *Hansard* will note that there was a thunderous ovation throughout the Assembly.

The ministry that I'm responsible for, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, is becoming known as the people and workplace department. Just to review, it includes the Department of Human Resources and Employment but also the personnel administration office, the Alberta Labour Relations Board, and the legislative component of the Workers' Compensation Board. We spend about a billion dollars of taxpayer's money, so I think it's important that we talk a little bit about how we do that and what we're really trying to do.

If you could visualize our situation: we find people where they're at, and then we try to move them forward. If we find them in social services, people needing temporary assistance on our part, we provide that assistance, but then we want to move them into training and into some sort of career development plan. Again, the philosophy of this government is the fact that our assistance program, the welfare program in Alberta, is one of a temporary nature. We believe very strongly that Albertans feel pride in themselves and in their families, and of course they want to be independent. So it is our task and it's our mandate to then move them toward independence. If we find them in social services need, we move them into training. If we find that they need training, then we'll provide that training and then move them into the workplace. When we find them in the workplace, we want to make sure that we have a safe and an equitable situation in that workplace.

Before going on, I need to clarify one of the items in the estimates that's contained in the supports for independence and the assured income for the severely handicapped. To correct a change in accounting for these two programs, a 13th month of benefits has been included, and this results in a onetime expenditure of \$35 million. Again, just to reinforce this one particular item, the basic principle behind Alberta social programs is that resources are dedicated to the people who need them most.

Now what are some of the programs that we have? We have AISH, assured income for the severely handicapped, the most generous in the country. We also provide support for the homeless. This year we propose to spend \$12.9 million to keep a roof over the heads of men and women who come to Alberta looking for work, people that are already here that might be experiencing mental illness, or people facing addictions. Our supports for independence helps people in need, and it helps them become self-supporting and independent. As mentioned in the throne speech, we will be conducting a review of all of these programs and services that are provided to low-income Albertans. The details of that will be announced shortly.

One of the main areas in the training area is our skills development program. This provides grants to low-income Albertans who are upgrading basic skills. In the year ahead we expect to help 12,500 people in this particular area.

Some of the other programs that we are involved in in terms of labour market supports is one that we're actually very proud of, and that's the Youth Connections program. It continues to expand. There are representatives in this House that have had some experience with this particular program. I want you to understand that the feedback that we get on this program is very good.

The minister's Employability Council has been set up. This is an attempt to move some 20,000 disabled Albertans into the workforce. We have very, very good materials that have been developed to help not only the disabled person that might want to be entering the workplace but materials to help the employer and also to help service providers that are there to support the disabled.

The Alberta child health benefit is of particular pride to us,

because in our relationship with the federal government through the Alberta child health benefit program we believe that we've developed a model that fits right in line with this government's philosophy of flexible federalism as it relates to the federal government. It's through that program that we can help with prescription drugs, dental, optical, and ambulance coverage for some 62,000 children of low-income families here in the province.

8:10

Employment standards is a part of our responsibility. Again, in that manner we're trying to provide a workplace situation that is deemed as equitable both from the employer and the employee's side. A recent change in that area that you will be familiar with is, of course, the change to maternity and parental leave.

Workplace health and safety is, again, a main area. Of course, Alberta enjoys one of the lowest incident rates of injury on the job, so we should not have to accept any particular statistic in that area. But there are going to be things that happen, and we need to keep them controlled as best we can.

Under the personnel administration office we have a budget of \$7.9 million. Again, we're responsible for providing services to other departments that really are involved with 21,000 public service employees across this province in 166 locations. Many of you understand that there are challenges both in attraction and retention in the Alberta public service. Really, as a workforce we are aging, and there are going to be some major challenges for us in that area in the future. This fall we'll be negotiating with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

The Alberta Labour Relations Board comes under our jurisdiction as well. Here, again, we enjoy probably the lowest statistic in any jurisdiction in Canada in terms of time lost due to labour disruption. We're very, very proud of that area and very, very proud of all of those functions and the 1,899 employees that I represent here tonight.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to participate in the debate this evening on the budget estimates of the Human Resources and Employment ministry. This is one of these departments that is getting rather difficult to keep one's eye on because it gets shifted here and shifted there, parts of it go to another department and another department further down the front benches. It gets rather difficult and time consuming to keep a watch on the delegated administrative organizations, that were formerly part of the labour department, which was of course amalgamated into this. With all the expansion of the cabinet it was surprising that there still is not a stand-alone ministry of labour in this province. It may have been a small department, but it certainly was a vital department.

Contrary to what the hon. minister has just said, the labour relations climate in this province is certainly in need of improvement. Whenever there was a long and drawn-out strike, what happened? That strike was just excluded from the performance measures. You look at the overall department, and the minister certainly has his work cut out for him, certainly his staff. You see the role that the employment standards office plays in workplace rules for almost 80 percent of the entire workforce of this province. It's a small office, but it enforces the rules that govern the workplace relationship between employers and employees for close to 80 percent of Albertans.

We look at OH and S, occupational health and safety, the law and the regulations. We look, of course, at the Labour Relations Board,

the WCB. The majority of the department is devoted financially to programs for Albertans with low or no income. Now, it is quite comfortable, Mr. Chairman, for many to express in their comments on increasing welfare rates, or SFI rates, the notion that these rates produce dependency, unwillingness to find employment, increased rates of drug abuse, crime. That's simply the easy way out.

I would certainly encourage the minister and his officials to have a look at increasing SFI rates. If you look at the cost of energy, if you look at increasing costs that are related to energy, if you look at the time frame since there was a significant increase to those rates, if you look at all those factors plus the idea that was discussed at the growth summit that the clients, the individuals that are directly affected by the rates, would also be included in the discussions on what levels those rates should be set at, then I certainly would encourage the minister and his department to have a look now. If there are figures available, let's see them, and hopefully before the weather turns cold again in the fall, there will be some adjustments made to the SFI rate in this province.

While we're talking about this, there will be further discussions on the use of the claw-back in this province. This is the only province in Canada that claws back money from those people. We need to have a long discussion on that, but, Mr. Chairman, we first need to go through the department program by program.

I'm sure it's not the individuals that are clients of SFI that would be going to an establishment such as Buffet World, which has been a chronic violator of the Employment Standards Code. The minister, to his credit, has certainly done something that his predecessor in the department of labour for whatever reason did not feel comfortable in doing. The minister has shown a willingness to enforce the occupational health and safety rules and regulations. Now, that is a good start.

The accident rates in this province and the death rate on jobsites have been deplorable. Members can stand up and state: "Oh, we are increasing our workforce. The participation rate in the workforce has gone up dramatically, and that's the reason why accident rates have gone up." The number of new claims filed, Mr. Chairman, with the WCB is far greater than the number of individuals that are entering the workforce, whether they're young or old, and that argument cannot be made.

Again I would like to comment publicly on this minister's willingness to enforce the occupational health and safety laws and also to try to improve them. I don't know what the cost is of the occupational health and safety call centre, that provides advice to employees, whether they're young or old, employers, foremen at construction sites, or workers at construction sites. I would like to have a detailed short-term analysis of how successful the call centre has been to date. How many calls have been received? What areas of the province are they coming from? What age groups, if they're measuring how old these workers are that are calling, and exactly what sort of information is the minister's department collecting at this call centre? I'm told that it is successful, and I would be pleased to receive that information.

8:20

Now, given that the minister is quite willing now to enforce the occupational health and safety laws, I would like to see the minister do the same with the employment standards office. Case after case is coming to the constituency office in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and they're chronic repeat offenders in my view. I would like to see the minister devote some time and attention to that office, because, as I said before, it's very vital. With our participation rates in unions in this province being very low, the majority of workers depend on that for fairness. Albertans have demonstrated that they're willing to

work hard, and I feel that at the end of the day they should be paid. Unscrupulous operators should be taken and let the courts decide what to do with them, and only the minister can do that.

I would certainly hope that the minister continues with the diligence that the department has displayed. Unfortunately, today I read in the paper where there was an explosion that injured six oil field workers in central Alberta. Just by having a quick look at this accident report, which happened at an oil battery, one can conclude that during the vessel cleaning operation that was being conducted, there was an explosion; there were vapours around. It is under investigation. This sort of accident, in my view, is preventable. The minister cannot rest easy.

Now, given the fact that an underage worker, unfortunately, died – and this is not what we think of in Alberta: someone that's untrained and underage working on the construction of a luxury condominium on the south side, almost directly across from us on the other side of the river in Edmonton last summer. This is the most unfortunate of circumstances, and it cannot occur again.

I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to visit the Human Resources and Employment library on the third floor on 108th Street. It is a chilling experience to go and open the files on all the occupational health and safety fatalities. These are reports, Mr. Chairman, that have been done, completed. Some of them, I think, are late in coming – and there are deficiencies in the legislation – because there was a shortage of staff. To go through those is a sobering, chilling experience. They're from all over the province and in all sorts of industries.

There's a family behind each and every one of those files. There's a family that has lost a loved one, in some cases the primary breadwinner. We can't dismiss or diminish the importance of these occupational health and safety rules and regulations to Albertans. We just can't.

Buffet World. I'm looking forward in the next year to seeing the minister tackle those problems.

I'm confident that the minister is going to have some success in reducing our accident rates in this province and the fatality rates, which have gone up 34 percent between 1999 and the recent statistics in 2000. A 34 percent increase in one year is totally unacceptable. Mr. Chairman, this year there were, I believe, 58 people, unfortunately, killed on Alberta work sites. In the year before there were 43. I will not be one to complain if the minister has to increase his budget and somewhere find more occupational health and safety inspectors and investigators.

The Buffet Worlds of this world: those practices cannot continue, because again it's not fair to businesses that abide by the Employment Standards Code. It's just not fair to them. How can they compete economically with someone who is not paying wages, vacation pay, holiday pay, overtime in many circumstance. It's just not fair to the businesses.

When we look at labour relations in this province, Mr. Chairman, we need not go any further than a strike that started on the 1st of April. It's with CEP, the Canadian Communications, Energy and Paper Workers at the Petro Canada refinery. This is the first time that this enterprise has seen a labour dispute of this nature. This is going on now six weeks. I would encourage the minister to use all available powers to see if this dispute can be resolved. There was a similar dispute north of the Yellowhead highway at a drywall factory, and it lasted six months. People were on the picket line.

Regardless, the best agreement that can be reached for collective bargaining purposes is an agreement that's reached freely by both parties, and it's an agreement that both parties can prosper and profit by. Those are the best agreements.

I was astonished. I reviewed *Hansard*. I review *Hansard*

extensively, and I saw comments and quotes from different individuals who are still in this Assembly and were speaking about not wanting to interfere, Mr. Chairman, with the collective bargaining process. There've been former ministers of education; there've been former ministers of labour; there've been Premiers: "Oh, no, we're not going to get involved with collective bargaining; we're not going to interfere. We're just going to let the process play itself out."

I was astonished, and I don't think this bodes well, unfortunately, for labour relations in this province. Of course, I'm talking about the idea that we're going to make a dedicated line amount in the budget for teachers' salaries. That announcement in the budget is going to come back to make a difference in the labour relations climate and the labour relations adjudication.

The minister will have this summer and this fall – I predict the minister is going to be working overtime, because that was very, very provocative. We need to ensure that everyone feels comfortable with not only the Labour Relations Code but also the Labour Relations Board. By everyone I mean employers and employees and unions and management. Everyone has got to feel that they can go there and be treated with fairness and impartiality. Those last two issues, the issue of fairness and the issue of impartiality, are the cornerstones of a positive labour relations climate.

8:30

Now, Mr. Chairman, when you think of the issues that will have to be dealt with in this budget by this hon. minister, I don't see a line item specific to any changes that are going to occur in the Labour Relations Code. I heard the hon. minister on two occasions at standing policy committee meetings say that, yes, after the election there will be changes to the Labour Relations Code. I'm wondering if it's possible for the minister to share the changes that are being proposed to the Labour Relations Code with this member and also the other hon. members of the opposition. Perhaps if the minister were to share this information, then these changes, if they are positive, would be much easier to explain and discuss with the labour relations community in the province.

Now, I was at a reception earlier this evening, and that idea was put forward with the Cooperatives Act. The changes in the legislation were discussed with all stakeholders, Mr. Chairman, and that amount of background detail and work is going to result in a very free and easy passage through this Assembly for that act. I would encourage the minister to do the same with amendments to the Labour Relations Code.

The WCB is another area that is under the control of the minister. Now, the minister may not like that description. I'll get back later on to my comments on the WCB, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to ask a few questions about the estimates before us this evening. I was interested in the minister's opening comments. I'm not sure whether he was being cynical and dismissive of the process; I would hope and think not. We're spending a lot of public money in this budget, and we're spending public money on some really very important programs, programs that affect some of the most vulnerable members of our community. So it's an important budget, one that does deserve close scrutiny and one that I think deserves a great deal of attention.

I thought I would, in the limited time I have, try to focus my questions and comments on that part of the budget that is on page 210 of the business plan, which is that "Albertans in need of assistance will receive support." I do it for a couple of reasons.

One, I have a constituency where my constituency office is across from a low-income area. We deal with a lot of people who are dependent upon the government for their income and for their standard of living. Secondly, and probably more importantly, is that I think it's a measure of our society how well we treat the vulnerable. Hopefully, in any kind of measure a society as materially rich as ours would be sharing some of that material benefit with those who are more vulnerable or unable to make their way alone.

As the minister has indicated on other occasions, the caseloads for people seeking and needing supports for independence have dropped dramatically. That's not just an Alberta phenomenon, but that is a countrywide and continentwide, at least in the United States, phenomenon. I looked at the figures given in the business plan, and for supports for independence in 1999-2000 the actual for the caseload is indicated as 31,112. The forecast is that that will go down. I noticed on a sheet from the Internet from the National Council of Welfare that the estimated number of people on welfare in Alberta has dropped from 196,000 to 64,800, a dramatic drop from 1993 until the year 2000. That pattern, although not as dramatic, is repeated in every province, and as I indicated, it's also repeated south of the border, where the nationwide caseloads there are estimated to have dropped by 40 percent since 1994.

So obviously a lot of effort is being placed on trying to decrease individual support on government assistance. I think that's a goal we'd all support, but I think we have to be careful that those figures don't mislead. I look at what's happened south of the border, and I would ask, in terms of our progress here, what kind of information we have on recipients after they leave welfare. What's happening to those people?

I note that the minister said there was going to be a review of the department. I hope that review might look at recipients after they leave the rolls of the department and what happens to them and their families. This interest is one that I think is very important. We should have a handle on what kinds of jobs they find. We should know what kinds of services they're using or continue to use. We should, most importantly I think, have a handle on what kinds of difficulties they face as individuals and families, particularly what those difficulties are in terms of feeding and housing their families.

This is being taken very seriously by a number of American states, which have put in rather extensive programs to find out and to track recipients after they leave welfare. As I looked at some of them, I was interested in the kind of information they were seeking and how they sought that information, the kind of process they used.

A couple of examples. I had one from Massachusetts and one from Kansas. The welfare department in Massachusetts actually paid the recipients who had left their rolls, paid them \$25 for the first interview and \$10 for the second one, to try to get some information on what was happening after they had left the rolls. It was rather interesting. They posted some of their results. At the time they were interviewed, about 60 percent of the recipients were employed, and of those about 35 percent were employed full-time. They went on to ask questions about how they found their jobs. It's fine to get off welfare, but how did they go about finding a job? Some of them indicated they got them from friends, some from the newspapers, and some by word of mouth. Government sources only accounted for 12 percent in terms of how they actually ended up getting a job. Given all the agencies and all the effort that's put into trying to help people get those jobs, I'd be curious if the same is true here. Some indicated that by just going door to door, by interviewing, they got their jobs.

8:40

They asked, in terms of food security, that now that they were off welfare, did their family, did their children have enough to eat? They had a scale. If they had at least one day without food, they tried to give an index in terms of the food supply for people who had left welfare.

They went on to look at a number of other factors, but I thought they had taken seriously the task of trying to find out what happened to these people once they had left the welfare rolls. The one from Kansas had them identify the biggest problems that they faced having left the welfare rolls. Again, 20 percent of them said that there wasn't enough food for their children. Overdue bills plagued over a third of them. Some had been evicted. Some had had their utilities turned off.

So life for the recipients, for many of them, was not easy, and I guess most devastating is that most of them continued to live in poverty. They got off the welfare rolls, but they and their families were still living in poverty. They were asked whether they were better off financially, and almost half, or 42 percent, said much or a little better off, but 37 percent of them said that they were much or a little worse off. In terms of being concerned about the welfare of those individuals, I think those findings should cause concern. As I said at the beginning, it's nice to look at the statistics and say that, yes, Alberta's welfare rolls have been reduced dramatically over a 10-year period, but it doesn't tell the story of the lives of those people in many ways.

Nationally, the States has looked at what's happened, and the big impact in terms of families of people who have left welfare is that they are doing better, but they don't have enough money, and they are still struggling very, very hard to get by. They are facing hardships. They don't have enough money for food or rent, and they indicated that life was a struggle.

There was an interesting project conducted by Human Resources Development Canada and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation. They identified the problem that seems to plague people who leave the welfare rolls and indicated that our history of social welfare is one of oscillation between efforts to relieve poverty, on one hand, and then our attempts to decrease welfare dependence. There's been a great deal of effort here, and the minister has been involved in massive programs to try to decrease dependence on welfare.

There are a number of strategies that are used. When dependence is minimized by cutting benefits, families who remain dependent on social assistance fall deeper into poverty, and when benefits are raised, we have the problem of people depending on welfare. So they had a demonstration project. I'm not sure of the date on it, Mr. Chairman, but the project was concerned with single parents who had left welfare. They were given additional moneys to supplement their earnings. I know that we don't have a similar program, but for the recipients of AISH there's a benefit that can go to employers if they employ handicapped or disabled citizens. This one was for single-parent families, and they were given money to supplement their earnings.

That's been the problem, of course, with many people who leave social assistance. They get into the job market, but they're in very low-paying, minimum wage jobs, and they live in poverty. The demonstration project "doubles the income of workers who take jobs paying as much as \$8.00 an hour." The problem a lot of welfare recipients going to work face is the problem of low starting wages, so during the demonstration project they tried to resolve that by topping up the wages generously, doubling it by as much as \$8 an hour.

It was a rigorously controlled project. It wasn't put together hastily. There was a control group so that at the end of the project they can actually make some conclusions that we might trust. But the results, if I could just quote, Mr. Chairman:

A year and a half into the program, eligible individuals had higher rates of full-time employment and earnings, and lower rates of welfare receipt, than control group members.

So they got into jobs, and this initial supplement managed to get them over the initial problem they often faced. The precis of the project indicates that there's some reason for optimism about the project's future relevance and benefit for those who are engaged in the project.

I really have concern about the amount of money. The line item is 2, and it's \$752,288,000. That's only part of the money that's paid in supporting families. It leads me, I guess, to another question. I wonder why – and maybe the minister can explain – there seems to be such a limited number of performance measures with respect to social assistance and those programs for the vulnerable. The base structure of the government's business plans rests on performance measures and the business plans themselves, being able to see a number of measures attached to dollars and being able to take those measures and judge whether the progress is being made or whether it's not. It seems to me that the business plan offers very little to the average reader in terms of understanding the progress in terms of social assistance and what's happening to Albertans who are on those programs.

I would suggest that as a minimum we might have information in terms of how many recipients who leave it are finding jobs, what the employment rates are of those people who have left social assistance, and how many of those families are still living in poverty. I guess an important index would be how many of those families and how many of those recipients returned to the assistance rolls. There's a great deal of information that is not here that I think would be useful in gauging the progress of the department and assuring us that the money being spent is being well spent. That goes far beyond the number of recipients and then quantifying the drop in those recipients.

8:50

As I've tried to indicate in my remarks, Mr. Chairman, I think there is a great deal of work. I read an article recently where there's been sort of this huge push to get people off social assistance. Now people are asking: exactly what have we done? What are the implications of what we've done? Let's start now and put a human face on the figures we're so proud of in terms of the welfare roll reduction.

I think with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude. Thanks very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I had to arm-wrestle to get into line here. Thanks very much.

MR. DUNFORD: Now, remember: I'm your constituent.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. We'll talk about that later.

DR. MASSEY: Did he vote for you?

MS BLAKEMAN: I doubt it. You all are gentle people, most of you.

Now, this is such an important ministry for so many people in

Alberta. It really can be their lifeline in many cases. So I'm glad we're able to give it the full two hours of scrutiny today. Let me start with a few questions that have come to me as I go through the business plan, 2001-2004, of the Department of Human Resources and Employment. When I look at the section under Challenges, this is a really interesting section because in fact the department is surprisingly observant about what are the challenges that are being faced by Albertans. They're sort of put out there and then just left. So we can get things like, "Alberta's low-income individuals . . . are finding it harder to meet their basic needs due to rising costs." Good observation. Yeah, great, but then there's no additional assistance there.

So people are having a tough time, and it doesn't go any further than that, which I find really curious, especially with what we know now and what would have been known when the budget for this department was being developed about the pressures people were experiencing around increased utility costs and certainly decreasing vacancy rates, which is something we've dealt with a lot in Edmonton-Centre. You know, the rents are going up substantially, in a lot of cases by a 20 and 30 percent bounce in one notification. The individuals, of course, start looking for another place to live where they could be paying more or less the same amount of rent, and guess what? It's just not out there.

My question around that is: what kind of report back are we going to get from cross-ministry initiatives around housing issues? Everybody seems to pay lip service to it, but we don't actually seem to see movement happening there. I recognize that in fact housing is in a different ministry now – it's been bounced around to about four places in the last two years – and it's not specific to this department. Certainly if we're willing to recognize that people are having trouble paying for food and rent and things like that – to just shrug and go, oh, well, and leave it strikes me as particularly odd.

Ah, yes. The WCB. Right at the very beginning there's a neat little statement that the following departments and agencies are included in this department and then this little sentence:

Since the Workers' Compensation Board is an independent employer-funded organization, their five-year Strategic Plan is not included with the Ministry's Business Plan.

Well, the Auditor General has repeatedly stated that if a minister is responsible under legislation for an agency, then they should be reporting on it. Certainly the minutiae, the fine details of this sort of thing, often escape the public. If they know that this is the Ministry of Human Resources and Employment and WCB falls under it, then they expect to see some kind of reporting from WCB. So I just find it very odd that we don't get that included here, and frankly I think we should.

The Auditor General has been on for some time to have consolidated statements. If the legislation sets up a relationship with the minister, then we should have the reporting out here, where everybody can see it. I know that the minister is well aware of the many problems that people experience with WCB. There's been a number of promises that things are going to get better and that we're going to hear about things, so I'm looking forward to how that's going to happen.

I'm going back to the Challenges again and the supports for independence. I'm wondering if the minister can supply me with an answer about why this government has a policy of discriminating against lower income women. We have an instance where the government is actively encouraging and promoting women from middle-income families. Where there can afford to be a single earner and one person stay home, there are tax breaks and initiatives being put in place. But under supports for independence, where we're obviously dealing with someone in a lower economic stratum,

there's an insistence that a mother be looking for work when the child is six months old. So right there we've got a very odd setup. There's an encouragement here and incentives for women to stay home. But gee, you know, if you're going to be depending on the government, no. Better be at work as soon as the kid is six months old. I've asked that question before, and no one in the government has ever been able to explain why they've made those choices. So I'll put it on record again. Maybe I'll be three times lucky.

When we look at the core business of "positive workplace environments and the establishment of professional and workplace standards," there's an interesting thing I'm hearing about from some of the labourers, workers out in the field. With a move to no monitoring at all or to self-monitoring in an industry, a strange thing has happened. We have companies, who I'm sure intended this as a positive incentive, setting up things like, you know, if the team goes so many days without a workplace accident, everybody on the team gets a trip to Hawaii or they all get some kind of merchandise. [interjections] Yeah, oh yeah. What's happening is that in fact the workers, in loyalty to their colleagues, may well get injured but don't want to . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, could you find your seat?
Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much.

So I'm sure without meaning to, we've had what was meant to be an incentive perverted or corrupted. We now have workers that are afraid to in fact go through the process that's available to them to report injuries and have an opportunity for practices in a workplace that are contributing to injuries to be examined. That whole system is being corrupted in that workers are choosing not to report. I know that members of the government would say: well, that's their choice if they don't want to admit that they've been injured. But really they've been put in a position through peer pressure and other considerations where they feel they can't. We have injured workers who are not getting the care they should have. We're also not getting the statistics about where injuries are happening. I'm not pretending that this is widespread or that there are thousands of cases of this, but it is something that has been brought up to me more than once. I'm probably thinking three or four different folks have come in to talk to me about this, and I'd be interested in how the minister plans to deal with that kind of aberration in the intent.

9:00

You know, this government's relationship with workers has always been really interesting. It's almost as though – and this can't be true – the government doesn't really like workers, people that work.

MR. DUNFORD: Not true.

AN HON. MEMBER: Say it isn't so.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's for the minister to say it isn't so, and I'm sure when he gets his opportunity, he will.

When we look at the things we prize in our society, where did they come from? Was this brought to us on high from the truly powerful and wealthy? Did they come up with the idea of public health care? Nope. Did they even come up with the idea of public education? Nope. This came from the workers, who said: this is what we all need to have a better world, a better Canada, a better Alberta. I often find this government's relationship with workers almost destructive. It strikes me at times that the government doesn't want to see any unions at all for anybody, no how, no way.

It's interesting what's going on in question period where questions

are being asked about why for the first time ever the government would take out a line item, hold a press conference on it to highlight it, to say, look, this is how much money we've allotted to a given group of people in a collective bargaining situation, highlight that, and then shrug and look innocent and go: "Gee, no, we're not interfering in the collective bargaining process." Huh? Well, yeah. I mean, that sure told everybody exactly how much money was there. That's exactly what was going on.

The words both on and off the microphone that I've heard in the Assembly around unions like the ATA or the United Nurses association, around the AFL, around AUPE or CUPE – it just seems to be a lack of appreciation for the people who really make our world go round, frankly. They're the people that get the work done.

On the one hand, we have the government admitting that we're going to have to find new entrants to the workforce and we need higher immigration to be able to fill all the jobs we have in that working sector, but there sure is a bad attitude from the government towards that working sector. It almost is the idea of being a Mexico north, where workers are all earning low or minimum wages and the manufacturing sector or whatever sector could make mountains of money with very low-paid workers.

This has got to come back on the government. Who do you think pays the taxes? I mean, yeah, the wealthy pay a certain percentage, not as much as everybody else. Some tax money does come from the wealthy, but frankly most of it comes from the working folk. If you manage to make everybody work at minimum wage or slightly above, it's going to affect your bottom line, but that never seems to be taken into consideration by this government.

One of the other things that I'm interested in around labour relations – a couple of things. I'm interested in a discussion around replacement worker legislation. One of the things that I'm glad has been brought to my attention while I've been in this Assembly is the number of strikes we have here that go on for an extraordinarily long time. We're not talking a couple of weeks, six weeks. We're talking six months, eight months, a year, more than a year. Why is that happening? Well, I mean, what incentive is there for an employer to settle, to go into a bargaining situation with workers? What the heck? I mean, they just bring in replacement workers and keep right on going. The transit strike in Calgary. What's the incentive for any employer to settle when they just bring in replacement workers and keep going? You know, the original workers can just be on the street forever, which frankly is coming close to happening in some of these strikes.

I think what's most important in that, if there was only one thing I could convince the government to do, is to have binding contract arbitration on first contracts. That's certainly what happened to the *Calgary Herald*, and I think that's the most chilling prospect: those people interested in forming unions don't even get a chance to get off the ground. I'd be really interested . . . Oh, I am an optimist at times, aren't I? Well, I'd be really interested in seeing that kind of support from the government for binding contract arbitration on the first contract. I'm an optimist, but you know, I'll just keep working on it. Yeah.

Now, my very favourite: performance measurement. Well, let's have a look at the performance measurements in this department. Please let there not be anything about a survey of satisfaction. Oh, boy. Look under goal 1: "percentage of clients satisfied with workplace and labour market information." Huh.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's a lot of sighing.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, I know.

You know, this is not giving the scrutinizing public the tools to

work with. It's not giving the department the tools to work with. I mean, yeah, it's nice to know that people are satisfied. But is that the driving purpose behind everything: people are satisfied? Don't you want to know if they're employed at a job that brings them above the minimum wage or that we have enough workers in sectors where we are short of workers? No. We're satisfied with workplace and labour market information. Boy, that's really going to solve all the problems in the labour market today. People get good brochures. Yup, that'll bring us forward.

A couple of actual specifics. When I look under that, in a number of cases here we've got the actual for 1999-2000, and the targets for 2001 and higher are in fact lower than what the actual was. So Labour Market Information Centre services: 86 percent. I suppose that's 86 percent satisfaction with information. Then we look at 2000-2001 and 2001-02 and 2002-03 and 2003-04, and the target is "85% or higher." So you're actually dropping your standards there. Gee, you know, I would have thought you'd think better of yourself there.

Career information hotline requests. The department is expecting the number to drop because they're expecting people to be using the ALIS web site user sessions. And, whoa, do you ever expect people to be on the Internet there. Is this realistic? What's this based on? You're going from a little less than 400,000 on these user sessions, doubling that to 800,000 for the year that we just passed, for 2000-2001, and then going up to a million in this fiscal year we've got under examination. What's that based on? How are you believing that people are going to do that many hits on this web site? How many people looking for a minimum-wage job do think have computers? I recognize that they can go into the job centres and use them there, but that strikes me as very high.

9:10

Now, when we look at goal 2, we have a performance measurement: "percentage of participants employed post-intervention." How exactly did you get these figures? What's this based on? Thankfully, it is not a survey of satisfaction, which makes me a happy person. How are you knowing that in '99-2000 the actual rate was 72 percent? From where did you get these figures? Are you extrapolating based on how many people were receiving training and now how many people are in the workforce, and the difference somehow gives you your number? Or are you actually tracking these people and finding out how many people get employment as a result of the intervention, so-called, from the department? As far as I know, we've asked repeatedly to see if you're tracking where people go once they're cut off social assistance and have to get involved with these job-training clubs and resume-writing sessions, and the government has always said they weren't able to track people. So where are you getting this percentage from?

Interestingly, here's another one where the actual in '99-2000 was 72 percent, and the targets are "70% or higher." How is this a useful working management tool for the department? I think this department is one of the ones the Auditor General's talking about when he says that the departments really have to get useful, realistic targets.

Thank you so much for your enthusiasm.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to be able to participate in the Human Resources and Employment estimates this evening. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to bring quite the degree of enthusiasm that my colleague from Edmonton-Centre did, but it certainly isn't because I don't believe these estimates are very important. While this is a department that sees really a small

percentage of the budget dollars allocated to it, it is a critically important department in terms of meeting the needs of people in this province. It is one of those departments that better than others or more than others shows the philosophical kinds of differences between the Conservative governing party and the Liberal opposition.

We see how the government treats this particular department, which now includes advanced education and career development, labour, and family and social services components, as very much a throwaway kind of department. We see them treating these people as not really a part of the Alberta advantage but as people who have needs that they try in the most basic sense to not necessarily meet but begin to address. That's where the difference is in the philosophy for us and from them, Mr. Chairman. We think that this is where we can provide the Alberta advantage for people. With the budget dollars allocated in this department, certainly not only do you give a hand up but you give a guiding hand sometimes, and you give additional support as required to get some people in these areas in employment that is not only meaningful but at a standard of living so they can raise families and enjoy some of the advantage the majority of the people in this province have.

So when we take a look at how the government has managed this department, then we take a look at their past record in part and see how that relates to what they're currently doing. With that I will be spending most of my time this evening talking about the Auditor General's report. It's too bad I have to spend most of my time there, Mr. Chairman. When we talk about a small department in terms of dollars, it's actually got a great deal of coverage from the Auditor General. He's devoted a full nine pages of his report to this particular department, and specifically he devotes it to the parts of the department that talk about people not in the mainstream kind of labour market.

So let's go through some of what he's had to say and find out what the government is doing to accommodate some of the concerns he had and see if we'll be looking at improved performances in the next year to come. I have my reservations about whether or not this is going to be happening. I hope; it would be great to see. We had a bit of a philosophical change in the government in that they started to support these particular areas in a more appropriate fashion, but I'm not holding my breath on this one.

The Auditor General talks about past years where there have been problems with controls over funds spent on training and employment support programs. As far back as '96-97 he was outlining these concerns resulting from inadequate program development and contract definition and contract management. In fact, we had public allegations about the kinds of concerns that were happening there, lots of questions in the House on that throughout that time period. There were deficiencies in performance measurements in employment support programs.

Let's just take a look and think for a moment about what these programs are addressing. These are programs for people who are trying to get retrained or trained and back into the workforce. So who are these people, Mr. Chairman?

These people are people in our society who are very, very vulnerable. They are people who have been at a disadvantage for whatever reason – social reasons, lack of training reasons, emotional reasons, family support reasons – and they're trying their best to get back into the workforce. They go to the government for help. The government says that they can help them, that they've got all these support programs, and then in fact when they're in the programs, they find out that they're not adequately meeting their needs in many, many areas, in fact to such a degree that the Auditor General repeatedly, annually comments on them. So when he got to the '97-

98 part of this report, there was some progress, but there were still instances of inadequate monitoring which resulted in a risk that external providers could receive payments for services not fully rendered. The risks associated with this, then, are that when reliance is placed on external service providers, there are significant problems that can arise from this. They spent a lot of the focus in the 2000 year on taking a look at these skill developments, and there were still significant problems.

What happens then, Mr. Chairman, when there are problems in these programs and, in fact, moneys are not properly spent? We've got situations where the government is not only being ripped off but also the people who are in the programs. If money is overspent in one area in these programs, then there isn't money left for other people coming up through the system who need dollars. I'm wondering if the minister could comment for us on the overall progress that has been made in this regard and if he could tell us what they're using now in terms of performance measures and what's happened with the dollars that have been overspent in the past on particular individuals. Has the difference between that overspending been returned to the department to help other people, or were some people just left by the wayside on this? So if he could answer that for me, we would certainly appreciate that.

When we talk about the ministry financial statements, the Auditor General talked about needing to do

a follow-up of the prior year's recommendation that a plan and agreement for the delivery of shared services for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) boards and child and family services regional authorities be developed.

This is an ongoing problem, Mr. Chairman. Can this minister tell us, please, how this has been addressed?

This seems to be a cross-ministry issue. If we take a look at who he is talking about here, child and family services, and if we take a look at what the Children's Advocate talked about in the '99-2000 annual report, we see that not only are there problems with that particular issue in Human Resources and Employment but the same problem happens in terms of the department of family and social services between child welfare and income support programs, that there's a strong requirement for providing an integrated approach to service delivery. This is point 5 that the Children's Advocate makes in his summary of recommendations in terms of priority issues. So clearly this is an issue that the government has been unable to address. Can the minister tell us what steps he has taken to rectify this and what kind of progress we can see?

These aren't numbers on a page, Mr. Chairman. These are people. These are vulnerable people for the most part, people who come to the government for help and support often as a very last resort. When they can't co-ordinate the services, then clearly that indicates a big problem, and if the government could tell us what they're doing to address that, that would be very important, I think, for us to know, not only on the children and family services side but the persons with development disabilities.

9:20

The Auditor General talks about "a review of the systems in place to administer the Workplace, Health and Safety Program." So could we have an update on what's happening there?

He also talks about "audit of claims for federal cost-sharing." This is a piece of work, Mr. Chairman. It's unbelievable if you read through what the Auditor General has to say here, and I'm a little surprised that it didn't come forward as a major recommendation. That's coming up later on. He talks about audit reports on the federal cost-sharing claims where they had some recommendations. In the preparation of claims for federal cost sharing, they recommended "that the Department strengthen its procedures to prepare,

review and provide documentary support for claims on the federal government for cost-shared programs." So of course this department has an ongoing responsibility to make sure that claims on federal government programs for certain cost-shared programs are made and are made adequately.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

What happens when the Auditor General takes a look at it, Mr. Chairman? He finds that in the final claim under the Canada assistance plan made over the seven years from 1989-90 and '95-96 they were overpaid by approximately \$11.4 million. There were significant errors. How can that happen? You know, when the Auditor General starts to scratch the surface and finds some issues and problems, he keeps going and had to go back quite a few years to figure out just how much this particular claim was out of whack and states here that "the draft final CAP Claim contained large errors."

The federal government had agreed that the Final Claim include adjustments for certain administration costs of Home Care Services for 1994-95 and 1995-96 that had not been included in the CAP claims for those years because of the then unavailability of information.

Well, we know home care has been a big mess, Mr. Chairman. There's no doubt about that. I mean, you've got to wonder with the kind of hassle that people have to go through to get an extra half hour of care in their home and then we find out that the government can't even do its paperwork. What is going on with that? Can the minister tell us what they've done to correct those problems? What kind of paperwork schemozzles do they have now? Is it being done in a timely fashion? Can people expect that this government is going to make adequate reimbursements from the federal government that are accurate?

They "identified errors in the calculation of these adjustments which understated the amount claimed by \$1.1 million." Well, how much home care is that for individuals, Mr. Chairman? I would suggest that \$1.1 million would have satisfied the needs of many, many, many people in this province. That's absolutely inexcusable, I think, and we would like some comments on how it happened and what they're doing to suggest that that doesn't happen in the future.

The Auditor General "identified errors in the calculations to reduce the maximum limits on the amounts claimable" as far back as 1991-92. That "resulted in an overstatement of the claim of approximately \$2.5 million." What happens there? They were corrected, but then

also, the Department had failed to retain material to support the adjustments amounting to approximately \$6.4 million to the 1995-96 claim for administrative costs incurred by the Province in providing Home Care services.

What happened to the paperwork, Mr. Chairman? Were those shredding machines going full time, or people just didn't submit the paperwork? What kinds of checks and balances are there? How can you have any kind of benchmarking system if the paperwork isn't kept in order? So serious concerns, I think. Has that all been rectified? I think that's an appropriate question to be asking. We'd like some detail on that.

Then we get to the formal recommendation that the Auditor General made, recommendation 24, on the skills development program. He talks about recommending "that procedures to monitor compliance by educational institutions with the terms of the Skills Development Program be improved." It goes on to detail many issues with that particular process, which is quite frightening when you think about the people who are taking these programs put on by the government and supported by the government. In some cases

they are expected to come out of those programs with skills that make them employable, that they're not just going through a never ending cycle of programs that never actually result in a job but only result in huge burdens of student loans, eventually plunking them back at the beginning of the cycle somewhat better trained but still back on social assistance.

We see this cycle happening all the time in the constituency office, where people are on assistance for whatever reasons and are asked to retrain or choose to retrain, either case. So they get into these programs, and they're make-work programs. They're not coming out of them with any skills. They come back into our constituency office. They are frustrated with the process, and now they're carrying a student loan. They don't make enough money by any stretch of the imagination to get ahead of the game, never mind even keep on par with what basic living requirements are. Then they're told that they've got to go back for more retraining, and the cycle keeps happening.

These people get worn down by the system, Mr. Chairman, and it's a frustrating process for them. I admire their stamina. A lot of them end up just giving up, and you can understand why. In the very program where we should be providing more support and assistance, what happens is the government falls down in their ability to have compliance in these institutes and falls down in their role to support these people through the process.

In this particular recommendation the government's response has been to accept it in principle. To accept in principle isn't to accept in fact and accept in doing. What they've stated is that

a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been finalized that addresses the risks identified in the audit. The Ministry will develop interim procedures to ensure compliance with the program terms to provide adequate assurance until the new MOU is fully implemented. In addition, the Skills Development Program is currently being reviewed along with other related programs to determine the most effective method for delivering these services.

Well, if they asked people on the ground, Mr. Chairman, we could tell them that they've got to be delivering services that are actually providing useful training. You know, sometimes they're throwing these people into programs where they're expected to sit up at a desk eight hours a day, starting at 9 o'clock and ending at 5, when they're dealing with people who have life-skill challenges. Sometimes there are intermediate steps that need to be taken there, not necessarily the job-skill training. First, they need some life-skill training. They need to know how to get out the door in the morning and show up at the job and get themselves settled and start to work, basic requirements, steps that the government seems to miss. Of course, somebody should have been responsible in the past for teaching those people that, but it didn't happen. They didn't. So now is the chance for the government to fill a gap in the process, and they don't do it. Anyway, those are some comments on that side of it.

The Auditor General goes on to comment on the acceptance in principle, where they talk about ongoing problems as a result of this only being accepted in principle. So there's a whole two, three pages that the Auditor General talks about between that recommendation and concerns that they've got, things like significant overpayments in tuition fees and living allowances. Overpayments here mean underpayments to somebody else.

They talked about how "until the new contract which addresses the present inadequacies is implemented, the Department continues to be at risk." So what's the interim process? What's happened here, Mr. Minister? What have you decided that you're going to be doing between now and then to ensure that overpayments aren't made?

9:30

The Auditor General goes on to talk about how "further audits of

educational institutes are necessary, but no audits are planned." Why not? When they found such significant problems, why haven't they gone on to pursue this in more institutes?

The Auditor General talks about:

Results from the pilot audit indicate that there is a significant risk of overpayments. In our view, to address all risks of non-compliance with Programs terms, the Department should audit the remaining (approximately 90%) of educational institutions or establish other interim measures pending the implementation of the proposed new MOU and contract. These audits should include a review of educational institutions' monitoring of individual student academic progress.

They have determined that "on-site audits of educational institutes have not been planned either directly by the Department or indirectly through Alberta Learning." Please tell us why.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to arise to participate in the debate over the 2001-2002 estimates of the ministry of Human Resources and Employment.

The ministry was first established two years ago during one of the periodic reorganizations that the government likes to engage in. Now, at that time the ministry was formed out of the ashes of the old social services department and the old labour department, and the responsibilities of the ministry are as broad as any within the provincial government. The ministry is responsible for income support to individuals and families, for skills development and employment training, for labour relations, for employment standards, for occupational health and safety, for workers' compensation, for personnel administration within the government, and for the office of the Public Guardian. Given these diverse and in some ways unrelated sets of responsibilities, I will try to divide my remarks to reflect the various categories that the department represents.

I'd like to begin with income support to individuals and families, which covers both the supports for independence program, which is social assistance or welfare, and assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH. Mr. Chairman, let's be clear; social welfare and AISH are income support programs of last resort. They are the only permanent barrier that stands between those not able to work and homelessness or starvation. As such, it is imperative that these income support benefits are adequate to meet the recipients' basic needs.

Now, how do Alberta's rates measure up? Well, not very well. I'd like to quote from an editorial in last month's *Edmonton Journal* entitled "Alberta's miserly welfare rates." The editorial says:

In 1993, the Alberta government slashed welfare rates as part of its overall budget cuts. Now, eight years later, with the government's coffers full to bursting, this province's poorest and most vulnerable citizens are still feeling the full effects of those cuts.

Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to briefly refer to a report that was done last year by the Inter-City Forum on Social Policy. It was done by a number of people representing 18 urban areas in Alberta including Calgary, Edmonton, Strathcona county, Lethbridge, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, St. Albert, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, Lloydminster, Airdrie, Spruce Grove, Leduc, Camrose, Fort Saskatchewan, Wetaskiwin, Drumheller, and Cold Lake. So it is fairly comprehensive, and, you know, it's not just limited to the inner cities of Edmonton or Calgary. It was released by a number of people who work in municipal government, and they worked on it for a number of years.

Here are some of the findings.

Approximately one in five Albertans is poor, a rate that is similar to the [rest of] Canada. There are wide variations across the

province however. As expected, the greatest rates of poverty are in Edmonton and Calgary, but Wetaskiwin, Red Deer and Lethbridge also have rates above the provincial average.

Children, youth, and the very old are more likely to be poor. In Alberta urban centres, the highest rates of poverty are among children 14 years and younger, people aged 15 to 24 years, and seniors aged 75 and over.

There are significant gender differences as well in the profile, Mr. Chairman.

On average, the poverty rate for women is 20%, slightly higher than the 17% rate for men. Among people 75 years and older, the poverty rate for women is 17% higher than for men.

Lone-parent families are more likely to be poor than are other types of families.

Some of this is not surprising.

Members of our Aboriginal communities and persons with a disability are more likely to be poor.

There is a direct link between the level of education and poverty.

This is interesting:

Being employed helps in reducing poverty but is not necessarily a safeguard against it. Over three-quarters of the 106,610 poor families in Alberta (77%) were employed for at least part of [that year]. Just under one-half worked full-time (44%). These are the "working poor" who earn the minimum wage or close to it . . . One in five poor Albertans works part-time.

This is interesting, and I think this comes to the point that I want to make in my comments tonight.

Being poor means making choices – difficult choices because the money is rarely enough to meet daily needs. Under Alberta's Supports for Independence allowance, a single parent with two children ages 3 and 7 receives \$11,852 a year. The same parent earning Alberta's minimum wage for a 37-hour [work] week would make \$15,220 . . . Both of these incomes are well below any of the urban [poverty line] LICO rates for a three-person household. The lowest LICO for a household of three is \$20,790, the rate for an urban centre with a population of 30,000 or under.

So it's pretty clear, Mr. Chairman, that whether you are on AISH, on social assistance, or working at or near the minimum wage in this province, you are poor. That amounts to nearly one in five of the people that we represent here in this Assembly, so I think that's something that deserves the government's attention.

We have in Alberta the lowest social assistance rates in the country with the sole exception of Newfoundland. The throne speech gave Albertans some hope that the government might finally give some relief to low-income Albertans, yet even these hopes were dashed when the budget came down and we were dealing with these estimates, because there's no new money in the budget to cover increases in social assistance.

Now, there are those who argue that raising social assistance reduces the incentive to work. I'm sure that that idea has a considerable amount of currency in this Chamber, but it's belied by the fact that the vast majority of those on social assistance today cannot work and are not even expected to work.

My questions to the minister. What is the scope of the review of income support programs? Who will be consulted, and what is the time frame for the review?

Moreover, if the government wants to increase the incentive to work, I would suggest that they look at raising the minimum wage in this province. At \$5.90 per hour Alberta's minimum wage is the lowest outside the Atlantic provinces. Does the government have any plans to increase Alberta's low minimum wage? Why doesn't the government link future increases in the minimum wage to a benchmark such as the inflation rate or average weekly earnings? If it's good enough for us, Mr. Chairman, it's good enough for the poor of this province.

9:40

I note from the estimates on page 257 that the government is looking at a small increase in AISH rates. Is the government planning to increase the \$855 per month rate received by AISH recipients, or is the increase designed to cover rising caseloads only?

I want next to move to the area of labour relations or, as the estimates book prefers to call them, workplace relationships. Albertans belonging to trade unions tend to have higher pay, better benefits, and more job security than Albertans who are unorganized. Despite the clear benefits to working Albertans from belonging to trade unions, we have a provincial government that barely bothers to disguise its contempt for organized labour.

Just last week in this House we had the minister of labour say that the reason Alberta enjoys the lowest unionization rate in the country is because Alberta workers don't want to belong to unions. Well, that's an interesting statement, Mr. Chairman. We would certainly ask about those workers at the *Calgary Herald* who lined up to belong to a union and went out on a very bitter strike to defend that union and to defend their right to organize. The government turned their backs on them and left them hanging. Let's take also in Calgary another example, the Dynamic Furniture workers, who democratically decided to join a union, yet were unable to obtain a first collective agreement because their employers refused to bargain in good faith.

In the case of the *Calgary Herald* journalists, decertification was a condition of their returning to work after a protracted labour dispute. Now, why do we have legislation at all governing the formation of unions if an employer is allowed to bargain and insist, as a condition for a collective agreement, that the union be decertified? I think in any other jurisdiction – and I stand to be corrected – this kind of thing would be beyond anything that was permitted under a labour act. So here we have a situation where workers go out on a strike, they can't get an agreement against one of the most powerful employers in the entire province, and in the end the employer makes it a condition for them to return to work that they not have a union. If that doesn't fly in the face of any reasonable intention of labour relations, I don't know what else does, yet that's allowed here in Alberta, and I think it's a real shame.

Alberta's unfair labour laws are a contributing factor to our low unionization rate. In that respect I want to ask the minister if the government would consider progressive changes to Alberta's labour code, such as automatic first contract arbitration in cases where an anti-union employer refuses to bargain in good faith. Will the government abandon plans to ban the right to strike for ambulance workers under so-called essential services legislation? Why doesn't the government acknowledge that banning the right to strike does not prevent strikes but rather poisons the labour relations environment in the place where it's imposed?

I note that the government is proposing to provide a modest increase in workplace health and safety funding. What specific measures is the government planning to undertake to address unacceptably high accident rates? I saw that there was another case today: a number of workers were injured in a battery explosion in this province. We all have agreed in this House that the rate of workplace injury and death is far too high, but without more inspectors, without better enforcement of even the existing laws, Mr. Chairman, we're not going to change that. So it's something that the government has to make a priority in terms of finances and policy as well as just words.

In the area of employment standards the government has a reputation for being quite lax as well. In addition to the minimum wage there's another specific area which I'd like to ask the minister about. It has to do with the blanket exemption from employment

standards by the agricultural sector. While there's some justification for this in small family farm operations, we need to recognize that the agricultural sector is changing. We debated this a little bit this afternoon, Mr. Chairman. We're seeing a growing level of industrialization of the agricultural sector where you have massive operations organized very much on the principles of industry rather than traditional small-scale farming. So why do we not then extend the industrial protection to workers into a field in which industrial types of organization and scale are becoming predominant?

The livestock sector particularly is changing rapidly into an industrial style, with dozens or maybe hundreds of employees. What possible justification is there for continuing to exempt employees working for these large-scale operations from basic employment standards and from WCB coverage?

My final question relates to the minister's responsibility for personnel administration in the Alberta public service. Two years ago the Supreme Court ruled in the *M versus H* decision that continued discrimination towards those in same-sex relationships could no longer be justified. Yet within Alberta's public service same-sex partners of Alberta government employees continue to be denied equal access to employment pensions and benefits as those involved in opposite-sex relationships. When will the minister move to rectify this continued discrimination?

Those are my questions on the estimates, Mr. Chairman.

In conclusion, I just would like to say that all of these areas which come under this ministry are areas in which I believe the government continues to have some significant blind spots. When it comes to workers' rights, when it comes to issues of poverty, the government prefers to believe that the one-fifth of Albertans who live at or below the poverty line simply don't exist. I've heard that before. When I get up and talk about poverty in this House, I get all kinds of comments from all around the semicircle of the government side that it's not really an issue, that it's not really a problem, or that I should prove it and so on. Well, these are real people. There are many, many of them, hundreds of thousands of people, many of them who are old or who are children. The government needs to address this.

The government has lots of money now and is prepared to spend lots of money on lots of different things, and many of those things are good things. Some of them are, in our view, wasteful, but it's not wasteful to do something to get people off social assistance by giving them some encouragement to get into the workforce and be able to earn a living.

That's the last point that I'd like to make. It has to do with the issues that we deal with at my constituency office. The maze of regulations that people face who are on social assistance or some other form, such as AISH, really stand in the way of them getting off welfare. The government likes to say that they don't want to keep people on welfare, but their own regulations make it very difficult indeed to get off. As soon as you begin to earn a little bit of income through your own work by going out and getting involved in the labour force, it's clawed back by the government.

MR. DUNFORD: Not true.

MR. MASON: Well, to a large extent it's true.

I would suggest that if the government really wants to help people get off social assistance, they should provide more incentives for them to do so by allowing them to keep a greater proportion of the income, up to a reasonable limit, and that would really, I think, provide a real, material, and financial incentive to people to get out and work instead of remaining trapped in welfare. The welfare system as it's designed here in this province, Mr. Chairman, is a

trap. It is difficult to get out of. The government should make it easy to get out of, not by punishing people who are trapped there but by making it attractive for them to leave and allowing them to retain more of the income that they earn as a result of getting involved in the workforce.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat and listen for other comments tonight.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

9:50

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're making our way through the questions on the business plan. My colleague from Edmonton-Centre had raised questions about goal 1 on page 206 of the business plans. I'd like to pick up where she has left off, if I might, and ask some questions starting with goal 2 on page 207.

Under 2.1 there's an item, and one of the strategies is: "Leading changes to remove inter-provincial barriers to enhance mobility of workers as committed to in the Labour Mobility Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade." My question is: what progress has been made on this in the last year, and just what progress is expected in the coming year? There are no details here, and it would be interesting to hear from the minister just exactly what has happened and what they hope to achieve in the coming year.

It's rather curious in 2.2 that one of the strategies is to "develop a multi-year plan to address the demand for scarce skills." I say that it's rather curious because hasn't that been a problem in the province for a number of years? Why now a multiyear plan? Just how flexible is that plan going to be? It is rather surprising to see it here. What are the skills that they're looking at? What kind of people are they looking for? What are the areas that they expect to try to beef up in terms of available workers? So could we have some more details on that multiyear plan and maybe a bit of an explanation why at this particular point it appears in the budget and the kind of resources that they expect are going to be needed to carry that out?

If I could skip over to the performance measures on the bottom of page 207, where it's got the "percentage of participants employed post-intervention," it was 72 percent in 1999-2000, and targets are 70 percent or higher. How long after the intervention is employment measured? When is this index computed, and is it measured again? It refers, I guess, to my previous comments, Mr. Chairman. How often do they intend to take that measure? A year, two years later? How long will the tracking go on?

If I could raise some questions about the supplemental information on page 208, under goal 2 of the business plan. Under the total number of learners by special group type that were employed, the youth 1999-2000 actual was 82 percent employed. What's the explanation for dropping the target to 70 percent? It doesn't seem, on the face of it, to make much sense, Mr. Chairman, that you would have a target that had been reached at 82 percent and it's dropped to 70.

Along the same line, why the rather low target for aboriginals of 60 percent? Can we have a bit of an explanation for that? The total number of learners was 42,166 in 1999-2000 and is expected to rise to 42,400 in 2001-2002. The total budget, the cost for that training and employment support, is \$276,206,000. Now, I know you can't do the math this way, but if you roughly divide the number of learners into that budget, it comes to about \$6,500 a learner a year. Are we getting that kind of value for the money that's in this budget?

Under goal 3 on page 208, "Alberta will have a fair, safe and healthy work environment," I have some questions under the

subprograms. In 3.1 one of the strategies is to complete "the comprehensive review of regulations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act." Could we have some explanation as to why the review was undertaken and when they expect that that review will be completed? Again, what are the outcomes? What can we expect from the review?

There's another strategy: "targeting inspections for poor health and safety performers and uncontrolled hazards." Just how are these targets going to be set? What is the process that is going to be used? Is this going to have implications for other operations like the random inspection of work sites? Could we have some information on that.

A further strategy under 3.1 is "working with Alberta Justice to ensure [that] specialized Crown prosecutors are available for prosecutions under the Occupational Health and Safety Act." Just what are they looking at in terms of numbers of Crown prosecutors? Could we have an indication?

The last strategy that I'd like to focus on there is the one that indicates: "ensuring the number of Workplace Health and Safety officers keeps pace with the growth of the Alberta economy." Because the economy is growing and expected to grow in the next few years, exactly how many are going to be hired this year? What's the budgeted estimate in terms of those officers?

I'd like to then spend a few minutes on goal 4 if I may. I'm sorry; I covered goal 4. I think, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I'll conclude. Actually I've lost my place in my notes, and I'll pick it up in a few minutes.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At this point I would like to continue where I left off initially, and that was in my discussion of the WCB. Now, as part of the business plan here one of the key initiatives is to co-ordinate "interdepartmental responses to the recommendations arising from the two reviews of the Workers' Compensation Board." I inherited this job as critic from my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry, and he has been providing advice to me regarding the WCB. That member like myself and like many members of the public is very anxious to see these two reviews in relationship to what the hon. minister is going to do with these reviews.

Now, I described it as the brag book – grandparents have brag books, and so do governments – and this is what I would describe this document as. We're looking at workers' compensation premiums here and the Alberta advantage, and they're quite low. "Alberta's WCB premium rate remains the lowest among the provinces", 14% lower than second place Manitoba." However, I have to ask the hon. minister: how long is this going to continue? Our accident rates are skyrocketing. The files are opening up. I would like to see it continue, but someone is going to have to pay here. If the hon. minister could provide that information, I would be very grateful. If you just go over a couple of pages here in this brag book and you see the natural gas rates and the electricity rates, the accuracy of those forecasts or charts is in my mind highly doubtful. So if the minister could please provide the future premiums for businesses on WCB, I would be very grateful.

10:00

In relation to this whole co-ordination of interdepartmental responses, could the minister please tell me what role the Public

Affairs Bureau is going to play in this? I've come to the conclusion that the Public Affairs Bureau is the control centre of the entire government, if I could describe it as such, and I'm interested to know what they're doing in relation to these two reviews.

Now, the WCB. It is my view, regardless of whether you're employed on a farm or you're employed in industry or you're employed in a store, that if you're earning a wage, then you should be covered by WCB premiums. That statement would of course exclude a lot of family farms where family members pitch in and help one another out. That concludes my remarks on the WCB.

Getting back to Alberta Human Resources and Employment and the fact that the department – and I'm resentful about this – demanded a \$54,000 fee before it would release information to me. This was in relation to a little better than \$300 million that's come from transfer payments from the federal government. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie talked about this earlier. In his 1999-2000 report, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General revealed that in the Department of Human Resources and Employment there was a pilot audit of 10 percent of educational institutions that provide "basic education, upgrading, post-secondary and apprenticeship instruction" under the skills development program that "showed significant overpayments" by the department.

The minister, to his credit, after question period at one time tabled one audit, and I was of the impression that there was a second audit. I would encourage the minister to release that audit, look through his files and find that audit. There is a lot of money here. The pilot audit covering the period from October 1998 to March 2000 revealed noncompliance with an unenforceable memorandum of understanding, failure to deal with student nonattendance, failure to report changes in financial status, and failure to properly calculate refunds to the department for tuition fees.

Perhaps I wouldn't mind paying this \$54,000, if I had it, to get all of this information and sift through it, but to be stonewalled by the department was quite frustrating. Now, if the \$54,000 was used to alleviate child poverty, then that would be a useful purpose for this excessive fee. But this is totally unacceptable if a government is to be open and accountable.

All government money is tax dollars, but the federal government and what information they have regarding this – and this has been tested through FOIP. It will be interesting to see how open and accountable they are regarding this issue. This is totally unacceptable. As I understand it, there are going to be future programs like this.

Now, I understand that with the Alberta skills development program the department pays a fee per student to educational institutions and in some cases a living allowance to students. The Auditor General had indicated that "the controls in place . . . are inadequate," that there's a risk of overpayment of fees and allowances, a risk that record keeping by institutions will be inadequate, that obligations to monitor student progress are inadequate to evaluate the success of the program, and that there are no requirements for the educational institutions to report to the department on a regular basis.

This fee can be \$54,000; the federal government charges \$5. This is simply hiding inadequacies of the department, and I know the hon. minister doesn't want to do that. I'm looking forward to the production of that second audit, and I will go through it at my leisure.

I also have in the time left here some other questions, and they concern the child health benefit at this time. We all know that one of the first priorities of any government would be children who are living in poverty and also persons with disabilities. I notice, particularly with the child health benefit – and if you could please

bear with me, because I've got to flip some pages here – that the minister in the business plan talks about a roughly 25,000 increase in the number of caseloads for the child health benefit between the last year and 2003-2004.

Now, could the minister explain the expense on page 218, the roughly \$18 million, an increase from \$11 million? Is that going to be adequate to cover that child health benefit? What exactly is included in that child health benefit? Is it premium-free coverage for prescription drugs, optical and dental services, emergency and ambulance transportation, and diabetic supplies? Does it also include the shelter allowance and school expense benefits for families in the supports for independence program, the SFI? How much of this money is coming from the federal claw-back, if any, in this program? I would be very curious to find this out.

Also, I understand that the department is reviewing the widows' pension programs. When will this be done, and will the minister table this, or if the House is not in session, will the hon. minister have one of his department officials phone me and say, "Mr. MacDonald, come on over and pick this up"?

MR. DUNFORD: Hey, will you make a note? Get his number; will you? Give him a call. Can we call anytime, Hugh? Can we pick the time?

MR. MacDONALD: That's the spirit. I like to see that. The minister can certainly pick the time.

Now, I have one more question regarding the Workers' Compensation Board, and it's the settlement that was made with the widows. Now, as I understand it, there have been previous settlements made in other jurisdictions, other provinces, and those settlements were exempt from taxes. I want to know why the settlement that was agreed to last year in this province, as it has been explained to me, is not exempt from taxes.

10:10

MR. DUNFORD: Ask your federal cousins. They're the ones doing it.

MR. MacDONALD: Now, I already hear that the federal Liberals are getting blamed for this.

I would be very curious as to why in other jurisdictions it was not. If this is a so-called political decision, perhaps the minister can work and co-operate with the federal government and resolve this issue and resolve this issue in favour of those who waited years and years and years for compensation that is rightfully theirs. I would appreciate it if the minister would stand up and be counted on this issue again and work for a successful resolution to this, because it is my view that all compensation from the WCB should be exempt from taxation, and that's as I understand it.

We also have to look a little further, Mr. Chairman, at the business plan and see how the performance measures are going to work.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, the time has expired.

Hon. minister, any closing remarks?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank all of

the members that participated in the debate. We had a wide-ranging field of questions. Some of it was on topic. In any event, staff were here tonight listening, making notes. We will have written answers provided as soon as possible.

MRS. NELSON: By tomorrow; right?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, not by tomorrow, no, but certainly within a reasonable time.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Human Resources and Employment, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$1,092,777,000
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THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee now rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again another time.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following department.

Human Resources and Employment: operating expense and capital investment, \$1,092,777,000.
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THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed. Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am refreshed by a very enlightened evening, and I would move that we now stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[At 10:15 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 10, 2001**
Date: 01/05/10

1:30 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Bill Pr. 3

The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 3, being The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

Bill 15

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

MR. GRAYDON: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill effectively lowers the single-rate tax from 10 and a half percent to 10 percent and increases the value of some tax credits, lowers the fuel tax on railway fuel from 3 cents a litre to 1 and a half cents a litre, and exempts tax legislation from the provisions of the Limitations Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 15 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Bill Pr. 1

Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 1, being the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Bill Pr. 2

Burns Memorial Trust Act

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 2, being the Burns Memorial Trust Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Bill Pr. 4

Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill Pr. 4, being the Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As part of this government's commitment to openness and accountability and in accordance with the Legislative Assembly Act and the Conflicts of Interest Act I would like to table five copies of the report of selected payments to members and former Members of the Legislative Assembly and persons directly associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly. This report is for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2000.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to table five copies of the report detailing every payment made by government in the form of grants, supplies, services, and capital assets. The report of the general revenue fund, better known as the blue book, is also for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2000. This report is another example of the openness and accountability of this government.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, a letter from Kim Bouwmeester of Edmonton, who is calling on the Premier to abolish health care premiums because in his view they are causing huge, unnecessary hardships for many, many Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a letter from Mr. Robert Bouvier, president of Teamsters Canada, dated April 30, 2001, urging the provincial government not to support the extension of driving hours of truck drivers and bus drivers to 14 hours a day.

My second tabling is the statement of claim in a case involving Mr. Ziad Jaber.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the requisite number of copies, being five, of the Alberta College of Optometrists annual report for the year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to table for the information of the Legislative Assembly a letter from 1994 from Alberta Labour signed again by Bruce Allen, research and approvals officer, regarding the certification of pine shakes.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. On behalf of Mr. Speaker I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. Seated in the members' gallery are nine grade 11 students from the Covenant Canadian Reformed school in Neerlandia. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Henry Stel, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. Seated in the members' gallery are 12 grade 6 students from the Busby school. They are accompanied by their teachers Mrs. Nancy Zeise and Claire Stitsen and parents Beth Andersen and Mary Ann Isaacson. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. VANDERBURG: Again on behalf of our Speaker I would like to introduce to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon guests from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, my neighbouring constituency. Seated in the members' gallery are social 30 students Jill and Erin Holub, Adele Little, and Karli Wurm from Swan Hills. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ms Cora Ostermeier, and their vice-principal, Nadine Marchand. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to see that so many guests from your constituency have joined us in the Legislature today. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce a number of guests from my constituency. I'm very pleased to be joined by a representative of students, teachers, and parents from two different schools in Medicine Hat that are in Edmonton over the next couple of days. Unfortunately, the one group will not be able to get into the Legislature until tomorrow, but I would like to acknowledge that St. Louis school has a delegation in Edmonton today and will be visiting with me tomorrow.

Today joining us in the Legislature I would like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a large group of 89 students representative of Crestwood Elementary school in Medicine Hat. Accompanying them are teachers David George, Kathy Western, Jackie Sehn, Karen Shaw, Wade Lawson, Gary Ziel, and Mark Traber. Also accompanying them are parents Ron Hill, Don Milne, Cheryl Noble, Sharon Pudwell, and Mark Klautdt. I would ask them, being seated in both the members' and the public galleries, to rise at this time so that they may receive the recognition of all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my distinct pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly five students and seven adults from the Rosedale Christian school. They are seated in the public gallery and are accompanied by teachers and group leaders Mr. Roger Klassen, Mrs. Lisa Klassen, Mr. and Mrs. Murray Loewen, Linda Wohlgemuth, and Mr. and Mrs. Irvin Klassen. I would ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of members of the Alberta division of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada. They are the people who provided us with the reason for wearing white carnations today. Their names are Darlene Cavanaugh, the chair of the MS provincial board; Glen Lavold, a provincial board member; David Johnston, president and CEO of the Alberta division; Howard Riddel, executive director of the Edmonton chapter; and Kim Cassidy, social action manager. These people are found in our members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Gaming Licences

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As more details of the Jaber case become public, there are more unanswered questions. Court documents show that the head of the ALCB had correspondence with a minister of the Crown regarding a liquor lease. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. Can the Deputy Premier tell us how often a minister of the Crown becomes directly involved with the granting of a liquor licence in the province of Alberta?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier certainly couldn't tell you that, but I can tell you that ministers of this government come in contact with people on inquiries several times a day.

This line of questioning has gone on for a couple of weeks. It appears that most of the issues arise out of court documents and court proceedings. I want to remind all hon. members that these matters have been investigated and charges have been laid where warranted. I'm not sure of the value of conducting these separate reviews or inquiries.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Deputy Premier tell us what effect a minister of the Crown's involvement in the granting of a liquor licence may have on the success or failure of that licence application?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think the minister most appropriate to deal with this issue is the minister who would be responsible for overseeing that department and would know all of the procedures of how licences are granted, and I would ask the hon. minister to respond.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time the AGLC is responsible for that particular process. There is a process that is followed relative to the granting of all liquor licences, and I can tell the Speaker and all members of this House that I do not get involved in that process. I have not been involved in that process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the Minister of Gaming: when can we expect a public review of the openness of those kinds of applications and the process so that Albertans know who's being involved?

MR. STEVENS: I believe that the hon. Minister of Justice should supplement my answer on this, but the fact of the matter is that the workings of the AGLC are very open and transparent. We have an annual report, which is tabled with this Legislature. We have audited financial statements. The fact is that there is no incident, no evidence which I am aware of that would warrant any investigation into the matter referred to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to supplement in order to clarify some of the suggestions that have been made and put them into an appropriate context. It's clear from the exhibits and the testimony at the preliminary inquiry, which have been provided to the opposition – the testimony has been provided to the opposition; I'm not sure if the exhibits have as yet. The memo that's being referred to clearly deals with and the conversation between the chairman of the commission as he testified in that was that he was concerned about the government policy relative to privatization and whether that should be taken into account before any determination about determining a new site. So it's very clearly an appropriate time for the chairman of the commission to consult with the minister on whether there was going to be a change in government policy relative to the privatization of liquor stores prior to determining a specific site lease. That must be put into that context.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Farm Income Assistance Program

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Bill 1 the government requires vendors to pass on the user rebate on natural gas to the actual user of that natural gas. My questions today are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Why is it that in the agriculture acreage payment program the ministry didn't require the registered operator of the land to pass on the acreage payment to the current operator of the land? In all of your news releases you talk about this being a payment to cover this year's high costs.

MRS. McCLELLAN: No, I don't think that we talk about it being this year's high costs, because costs started rising actually even before last year. However, it's very clear that this payment is made on the year 2000 acres, and I think I was clear on why. The federal government offered to be part of a cost-sharing program, and their criteria was on the year 2000 acres. We had an option of participating in that program, which we chose.

Now, if the hon. member is saying that we should have split this

out and written a cheque for one year and then a cheque for another year, I don't think that that type of administrative activity would have been helpful to farmers. What farmers told me is that they needed some help and they needed it now.

Yes, prices are increasing even more this year. However, I have had a number of calls to my office, as you might expect, on this program. Generally, they are extremely favourable, and generally they indicate what we indicated: it's a help; it's probably not enough. But they're most appreciative that this program is very specific. It goes to the actual producer, to the person who is farming the land.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the minister talks about passing this on, why couldn't you allow new operators of the land this year, say, a 30-day appeal period where they could apply to the government to have that title and the acreage moved to the new operator, away from the old operator, so that it actually goes to the people who are experiencing the high costs this year?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think I indicated in my first answer that the federal government made an offer to all of the provinces in Canada that have grains and oilseed production and, I suppose, others. The criteria was very clear from the federal government that it was on 2000 acres.

Now, as I indicated, I guess we could have administratively separated that out. It didn't seem to be in the best interests, one, of keeping administrative costs down, which, I will tell the hon. member, on this program are very, very, very low. The very large majority of this money is going directly to farmers.

Secondly, the application forms were able to be in their hands in a very short time. I announced the program about 20 after 12 on a Friday, and by 12:58 we had our first applications. So I think that speaks to the urgency of the program and also the need to make a turnaround.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: why is a farm operator able to receive the payment on privately leased land, yet they don't get a payment on land leased from a public owner, from the public?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I think the program is very clear on what this covers, and it is for land that's under a cultivation disposition. That's a very simple way to say it.

Now, we do have Crown lands that have improvements on them, that have been seeded to hay maybe five years ago, maybe 10 years ago. Maybe this year somebody is adding fertilizer to it; maybe they aren't. This program was very specific to cultivation disposition. But to protect the producers who in their management practices deem it a good practice to seed their land that they have under private cultivation to hay or to a forage, we ensured that it covered those crops.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's appropriate, I think it's practical, and I think it would have been very, very difficult to try and deem what public land that had tame forage seeded on it would be eligible.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Alberta Hospital Ponoka Sewage Lagoon

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last May, an entire year ago, the Official Opposition brought to the attention of the minister of health the health and environmental problems with a landfill at Alberta Hospital Ponoka. No real answers were given to our questions, so now we'll go back and see if they have answers this time. My questions, of course, are to the minister of health. When the department of health was made aware of the health and environmental concerns of the garbage dump, why did it order the contractor to keep working rather than stop work and fully consult the Environment department?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, a year ago I was the Minister of Environment, and although this is some time ago, to the best of my recollection the Ministry of Environment was involved in an evaluation of the particular site in question at Alberta Hospital. It was found that the materials that were found in the landfill site were in fact safe for the contractor to continue to operate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Given that the Battle River periodically has dramatic floods, how can the minister be sure that contaminants from the dump have not been flushed by these floods out of the dump site and into the surrounding watershed?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly review this matter with my colleague the minister of environmental protection, and I will undertake to do so. But to the best of my recollection, again, the Department of Environment did conduct such an evaluation as to the safety of being able to operate within this area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to complement what the minister of health has had to say, last year the Ministry of Environment, as the minister has recollected correctly, began an investigation of that site. We are just finishing that investigation, writing up the results of that site. I can assure you that we bored holes in that site, a number of holes, and there is no evidence of any toxic waste, no evidence of any contamination. What is there in that dump: things that were put in the dumps all around this country in the 1960s. What we found is that there are bricks, glass and that type of thing, and some building materials but no evidence of any contaminated or toxic waste.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess to the minister of health: given that people have experienced repeated frustration in obtaining government reports, will the minister release all reports and studies related to the sewage lagoon project at Alberta Hospital?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I will undertake to consider that request. Again, I do not know what documents would be within the control of the Department of Health and Wellness and which would be under the Department of Environment, but I will undertake to review that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Conflict of Interest Court Case

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the govern-

ment continues to stonewall the Jaber affair, the questions simply multiply. In the statement of claim against Mr. Jaber, which I tabled earlier today, it is revealed that on or about March 27, 1998, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission was carrying out its own investigation into the prior business activities of Mr. Jaber during his term on the Gaming Commission. My questions are to the Minister of Gaming. How comprehensive is or was this investigation, and did it focus only on Mr. Jaber's lobbying efforts on behalf of Mr. Naqvi, or did it investigate all aspects of Mr. Jaber's activities while chairman of the Alberta Gaming Commission?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tabling today is something that I have seen for the first time. The hon. member referred to the allegations contained in this statement of claim as if they were fact. The fact is that a statement of claim is nothing more than a series of allegations which may have some foundation in part or in whole or not at all in fact, and that is what is important about this particular document.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, then, commit to look into whether or not his department has conducted an investigation into these activities and table the results of that investigation in the House?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the hon. member that I will take a copy of this tabling and discuss it with the AGLC.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, what I would request of the minister, then, is that he will undertake to report fully on this investigation to the Assembly, including the results of the investigation.

MR. STEVENS: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that this matter has come to my attention. It may well be that there is something here to report on; it may well be that there isn't. In any event, I have undertaken to the hon. member that I will conduct appropriate inquiries of my officials.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Drought Assistance

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we know, the lack of precipitation around the province this spring and the leftover dry conditions from last fall and the winter have caused significant concern with the province's farmers and ranchers on how they will manage this year. Of particular concern right now is the pasture situation for our cattle producers. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister advise us what options are available for cattle producers dealing with no pasture and in many cases no water or limited water and herds to feed?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this is a particularly dry year, and unfortunately it's continuing on into the spring much longer than any of us had perhaps anticipated and/or hoped. One of the things that is most remarkable about this dry period is the extensiveness

across the province. It isn't limited to any one area. I understand that the city of Edmonton hasn't recorded as dry a period in 121 years of records. So while we don't like to talk about drought the first week in May, we understand that this has already caused some severe problems in the pasture and water conditions.

Members would be aware that we provided an acreage payment on pasture for farmers. It was \$3 an acre. Those cheques are going out. Many of them have. Many producers are making arrangements to move herds to other areas. That's not the best solution, but it's one that's possible, particularly to the west country. We've announced the program on pumping water where that's appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges that these producers are facing are many, and we're certainly talking with them to look at what solutions we might be able to support them with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Specifically again to the minister: could you advise us on what kinds of options are being assessed right now?

2:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we're working very closely with Alberta Environment, with the PFRA, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, in both the monitoring and looking at solutions. I would say that ultimately right now our most pressing concern is water needs of the cattle producers. We're monitoring that and talking to producers about what type of assistance would be most appropriate to help them.

Water pumping is great if you've got a source to pump from, but if you don't, that doesn't work. Water hauling is another option. Again you have to have a source. Unfortunately, it's a large intake of water for beef cattle especially, and it's an ongoing, daily job, and when you're done, that's exactly what you've got. You've put in a few months of hauling.

We've been talking with the federal government, as I indicated earlier, about tax deferral if a producer has to reduce a herd significantly or indeed sell out. That is not a preferred option, especially with the demand for the quality beef that we provide in this province.

I just want to assure the hon. member and all hon. members that Alberta Environment and Alberta Agriculture will continue to work closely and quickly to look at what we can do to respond to this serious situation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the minister of agriculture: again can the minister please advise us – she referred to it quickly – as to the time frame that we're looking at in terms of acting on any of these options?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the very short answer is just as quickly as we possibly can. I'll again repeat the commitment. Alberta Agriculture and Alberta Environment will continue to work hard on this with our federal partners, the PFRA, and try to bring some options forward as quickly as we possibly can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Young Offenders' Programs

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 1999-2000 report of

the Children's Advocate chronicles the poor treatment of some young offenders who have child welfare status. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. What is being done to prevent young offenders who have child welfare status remaining overly long in closed custody due to lack of community placements?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there are several things that are being done. We have in fact improved considerably the number of placements and the residency of children once they have been apprehended for any reason either under temporary or emergency situations. We have been able to expand our placements by agreements with various agencies so that there is additional capacity. We've also been able to ensure that one of the previous practices, which was a fairly costly practice, a fairly ineffective practice of putting these types of individuals in hotels, has been discontinued and that we have other secure placements for them where they are properly managed and cared for.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that over the last two years each child and family service authority has made considerable advances. If you look at that report and cite the number of times that there are references from individual children as opposed to a recommendation that perhaps identifies the outcome of certain measures that have been taken, it would be hard to read that report and evaluate that children are being protected in a less desirable fashion than they were previously.

DR. MASSEY: This is about the young offenders. Why do those young offenders often lack access to optical and dental services that they need?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any being denied access. I have not had any complaint to my office, and I would appreciate it if in fact the hon. member has any knowledge that they are or individual cases that are – references of incidents that happened previously are the very things that we are driving so very hard to overcome.

If I could remind the hon. member that when I was first given the privilege of being Minister of Children's Services, the expenditures were \$467 million. If you look at the record of this year's budget, the addition of almost 400 frontline workers, the addition of at least 30 percent plus on the front lines in our budget, you can see that there have been dramatic improvements, and to suggest that things may not be improving is to ignore the obvious.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to improve the planning between child welfare and the young offenders' system?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are numerous things that are being done. Currently I've met with the Solicitor General, and I've also met previously with the Minister of Justice. We have talked about ways we can collaborate and improve the system, ways that we can train staff so that they are fully cognizant of things that are being done in each other's shop. We engage in a number of workshops, including times where we discuss how we combat circumstances with fetal alcohol syndrome or deal with the neurological disorders that are appropriate. So we do a number of different cross-training purposes. As well, I'd remind you of the Alberta children's initiative, which continuously, vigorously approaches those issues that we may have in common. This year our special emphasis is on youth.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Orthopedic Surgery Waiting Lists

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Albertans, especially seniors, who are in need of knee or hip replacements are suffering while waiting for these medically necessary operations. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness advise the House and Albertans as to what is the maximum waiting time for these operations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should say at the outset that I can understand the difficulty that it can create waiting for health services. One of our greatest commitments in health care is to reduce waiting lists. Under our six-point plan for the health care system we have put in some \$55 million a year for the purposes of addressing waiting lists, and we are making good progress. Last year the number of hip and joint replacements went up by some 10 percent. Emergency joint replacements are done within 24 hours. The Calgary health region advises me that the waiting time currently for a hip replacement would be between three to nine months after a specialist has made a decision that the joint replacement is required. While we are doing more replacements than we have ever done before, the list continues to grow significantly. Regions are making every effort to ensure that there are the appropriate staff, operating space and equipment, and acute care beds required to continue to do more of these types of procedures.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since one of my constituents has been waiting 18 months for a knee replacement, does the minister believe that 18 months is a reasonable time to wait for a hip or knee replacement?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the blunt answer is no, I don't think that's reasonable. We have set a target time of four months for hip and joint replacements. Currently, individual circumstances may result in times taking perhaps more than that. We are concerned about the length of time that it takes for people to get this procedure done. I think those individuals who have the need for hip or knee replacement should stay in close contact with their physicians. If their condition worsens, they can certainly advise their physician, who can pass that on to the specialist, because specialists do prioritize their own waiting lists and schedule patients according to the urgency of their need.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister of Health and Wellness aware of any CRHA rationing of operating rooms in order to save money and that specialists are only allowed to use operating rooms five times a month?

MR. MAR: Well, the answer, Mr. Speaker, is no. The CRHA is not limiting times and is in fact offering additional time to specialists. The operating rooms that the CRHA has at its disposal right now are being fully utilized, and in fact at the Peter Lougheed centre they are putting in place plans to open and staff three new operating theatres for the purposes of providing more such services. It will take some time to reach the desired levels of service that we want in this area, but I expect that there will be improvements, particularly in this specific service of hip and joint replacement.

As well, I should say that the recently released report on the western Canadian waiting list project will be an important step in standardizing and co-ordinating wait lists for selected services like hip and joint replacement, and the next step of this project is to look at the recommended wait times for each particular procedure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

2:10

Coalition of Power Companies

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A large block of electricity generating companies in Alberta – included in this coalition are such industry giants as Aquila, ATCO Power, Duke Energy, EPCOR Utilities, TransAlta Utilities, and Fording Coal – appears together routinely before the EUB. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Would the minister agree that this coalition has the potential to become a cartel?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister. Seeking an opinion here.

MR. SMITH: Opinion, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: what measures have been taken by the Department of Energy to ensure that the coalition does not become a cartel?

Thank you.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no discussion about whether the coalition is or is not operating with oligopolistic power or disproportionate economic power. There is in the marketplace through the Power Pool Council a market surveillance administrator that looks very closely and carefully at market actions and reports back through the Power Pool. Of course, there's also the other avenue of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board, that has the ability to, as it is doing now, conduct a marketing review.

I think that as desperate as the opposition member is to avoid competition in free market activities and would much prefer a socialist environment, as he's expressed on many other occasions, we think that competition will provide a number of opportunities for businesses that are owned in Alberta, public corporations that have shareholders in Alberta, and, in fact, over the long term, Mr. Speaker, will benefit all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: what measures are there in the Department of Energy to deal with the concerns about another block in Alberta called the Firm? The Firm is made up of associations representing municipalities, consumers, and large users of electricity who expressed concern to the EUB in December with the degree of collaboration in the coalition, noting the volumes of net supply that the coalition now controls.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the hon. minister did stand up when the question was asked. Please proceed.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult for me to

remember that far back to the original question, but scaling my memory as I reviewed the second part of the member's question, there are the safeguards of a market construct that certainly promote competition at the wholesale level. It is early in the new competitive market model, but we do know that prices have come down some 40 percent since January 1 of this year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Energy Rebates

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past couple of weeks my constituency office has been kept extremely busy dealing with calls from constituents about the Alberta energy tax refund. The people in my constituency are extremely frustrated and many are angry over problems that they are experiencing in receiving the second installment of this \$300 that was to be paid to all Albertans by the provincial government. As we all know, the federal government is responsible for issuing these cheques, and my constituents have a number of questions that they have asked me to pass on to the Minister of Finance. I would like to do that at this time. Why does it appear that there are inconsistencies between withholdings on these cheques that were issued in November as compared to the cheques that are currently being issued?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I've tried to go through the difficulties with administering this program a few times in the House. This is a good question from the hon. member, because there does need to be some clarification as to why there were no difficulties with the November cheque for \$150 that people received and the cheque that they did or did not receive in April.

When the program was announced in September, we approached the federal government, in particular the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, who administers income tax collection and refunds, to put the cheques through their system for us. We did that so that these cheques would not be taxable, to run it through the program. By using their system and because we didn't give them much notice that we wanted to access their system – that's why people had to have filed a 1999 tax return, so we knew they would be on the CCRA system – there was not an opportunity at the federal level for a crossover between outstanding debts for income tax to be deducted off those fall cheques.

Now, I know you're asking me to move along, but I think this is important. We have an agreement with the federal government for tax administration and tax collection that allows them to withhold payments if there are outstanding taxes on an individual's file. In the situation of November there was not the time frame to be able to cross-check between systems. On April 1 the federal agency did do the crossover, and that's why they held some of these cheques back: to deal with outstanding debts on accounts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question I hear most often is: why is it that people who were organized enough to file their income tax return early and delay payment until the end of April, which they were entitled to do, are being penalized by having cheques withdrawn or reduced, yet people who were not organized enough to file their taxes until the end of April or in fact didn't file their tax return at all are receiving their cheques with no deductions?

THE SPEAKER: Let's get to question and answer period, not debate back period.

MRS. NELSON: Clearly, Mr. Speaker, again it goes back to the original answer. The time frame involved between the first cheque and the second cheque gave the federal tax collection group an opportunity to crossover their systems or to link them together, and for those that filed early or even through the Internet but subsequently sent a cheque, the debt for the tax owing was sitting on the books as of the date of these cheques being released.

I said last week in the House that we have been in touch with the federal minister. Our deputy has talked to the deputy of CCRA and asked them to correct this and mail back to Albertans the \$150 if in fact people have paid up their taxes for the year 2000. It's my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that that cheque run will be made this next week and will be sent out to Albertans to rectify the situation.

MR. RENNER: Final question: who will be responsible for paying the additional costs for Albertans who will now receive two separate cheques, each amounting to a total of \$150?

MRS. NELSON: Well, it's my understanding, as I said before, that the cost of the two program runs is \$1.25 per cheque for the November and the April cheques. This additional run that we've requested will be at the expense of the federal agency because of the holding back of debts or current tax obligations on something that was supposed to apply to the 1999 tax year.

Class Action Legislation

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, an Albertan recently wrote: it is our view that there is no good reason why Alberta does not pass class action legislation; this is an access to justice issue. Who said it? It was the Calgary lawyer the province has just hired to represent it in its lawsuit against Servier, the French pharmaceutical giant. Both the Alberta Court of Appeal in '98 and the Law Society of Alberta in June 2000 called for quick class action reform, as did the Law Reform Institute in a report to the Minister of Justice. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. Would the minister please advise this House as to the status of his review on this matter?

2:20

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, we're always looking at ways to make the access to justice and access to the courts and dispute resolution more effective and more efficient for Albertans. There are jurisdictions which allow class action suits, and we've looked at them as well as looking at the reports that have been brought forward by the Law Reform Institute. People do have concerns about class actions as to whether they promote litigation, so we've looked at the question as to how class action legislation might be brought forward in such a manner as to deal with those types of concerns, and it's a matter of ongoing review.

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, would the minister please explain why he's dragging his feet on reforming class action legislation? It would have been very helpful to Albertans who were suing over involuntary sterilization, pine shakes, silicone breast implants, or residential schools. Why dragging the feet?

MR. HANCOCK: I don't recall, Mr. Speaker, indicating that I was dragging my feet on the particular question but that we were doing a thorough review, examining all aspects of it to see how it could be brought in most appropriately. When we're ready to proceed with a proposal, we'll be prepared to bring it forward.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, in the meantime, then, Mr. Speaker, what other remedies does the minister offer to Albertans?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, of course, Mr. Speaker, anything that can be brought forward in a class action can be brought forward in an individual action. In some cases when it's appropriate, things can be brought forward in a representative action. I certainly don't disagree that it would be more efficient, more effective, and more appropriate in certain circumstances for Albertans to have access to class action suits. They can, of course, join class action suits on some of those issues in other jurisdictions where class actions are being brought forward, but certainly in some of the areas that were mentioned that are specific to Alberta, it would have been appropriate, and that's one of the reasons why I'm very interested in looking at the issue and finding out if there's an effective way that we can deal with the concerns that people have and still provide that opportunity for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Code of Conduct and Ethics

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Jaber affair has raised serious questions about how and how seriously the government goes about ensuring that senior appointed officials act appropriately at all times. Its blanket refusal to require senior appointed officials to file a public disclosure statement is just one example of the government failing to ensure that strict standards are set for senior appointed officials. My simple and straightforward questions today are for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Are all government officials required to acquaint themselves with the code of conduct and ethics for the public service of Alberta?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, there has been a Conflicts of Interest Act since 1992. It was reviewed, I believe, by a committee of this Legislature. I may be wrong on that, but nonetheless a thorough review was reported I believe in 1996 and amendments to the Conflicts of Interest Act brought forward in 1997. In addition, there's a code of conduct under the act which governs the public service. Its name I can't recall just at the moment. All senior public service officials should review the code of conduct under the terms of their employment pursuant to that act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be a little more specific this time. What procedures are in place to acquaint senior public officials with the code of conduct and ethics for the public service of Alberta?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that may be a question that the Minister of Human Resources and Employment may want to address further, being the minister responsible for the PAO, which stands for personnel administration office, as to what policies he has in place to make sure that senior officials do review that code of conduct. I can't specifically speak to that, but I would hope that any senior official of government would acquaint themselves with the rules of their employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, just the fact that we do have a program in place for senior officials, and we believe it stands the test of reasonableness and natural justice.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is again to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that the statement of facts agreed to by the Crown states clearly that Mr. Jaber has no recollection of the code of conduct having ever been brought to his attention, how can Albertans trust this government to enforce that code of conduct and ethics?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, the enforcement is obviously clear in the results of the case, Mr. Speaker. If there is someone who violates the code of conduct or violates the criminal law, they'll be prosecuted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that two children are born every day in this country with either fetal alcohol syndrome or another alcohol- or drug-related birth defect, resulting in significant human cost and cost to public services, which I find disturbing. My question is for the Minister of Health and Wellness. What has this government accomplished in addressing this devastating and I believe preventable condition?

MR. MAR: This is a very costly issue, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, that our efforts in this regard are an example of where you can spend money in order to save money in the long run. Since 1998 there has been a fetal alcohol syndrome cross-ministry initiative involving partners across government and outside of government as well. This committee has been championed by AADAC and the Department of Children's Services and has worked with departments like the Ministry of Health and Wellness, regional health authorities, child and family authorities, also the Alberta Medical Association, Health Canada, and many others.

The purpose of this initiative is to initiate multiple strategies of training service providers, providing funding for communities, and public information to raise awareness of fetal alcohol syndrome. Mr. Speaker, I should say that there are a number of recent accomplishments of this initiative: a public campaign to raise awareness of fetal alcohol syndrome among professionals like teachers, physicians, corrections workers, social workers, and of course the public, women of childbearing age and their partners. Also, our partners have included the Alberta Restaurant and Foodservices Association, the Alberta Liquor Store Association. Members may be familiar with the Born Free program, where a number of restaurants provide free nonalcoholic beverages to pregnant women.

Also, Mr. Speaker, the initiative has introduced a priority for treatment at AADAC treatment centres for pregnant women. There has been funding provided to community associations. A fetal alcohol syndrome awareness program is being provided to all new young offenders in the province during their orientation process at young offender centres. Also, clinical practice guidelines have been established for physicians to increase their knowledge about the effects of exposure to alcohol during pregnancy.

This is a complex problem, Mr. Speaker. There's no single solution, but I believe that we are taking a number of initiatives across a number of different government departments and with nongovernment organizations as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You mentioned one of the partners being Children's Services. I'd like to direct my second and last question to the Minister of Children's Services. What are your government's future plans to address fetal alcohol and drug-related birth defects?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member. Just last week with the hon. member who was engaged in the responsibilities of the Youth Secretariat I attended meetings in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, with members of the prairie fetal alcohol northern partnership. It's a wonderful group of ministers and officials from Winnipeg through to the Yukon. We talked about how we could collaborate and publish best practices, three per province, to initiate some further discussion within provinces so that we're not all reinventing the wheel.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of the people that are most likely affected by fetal alcohol or people who would engage in drinking while they are pregnant or intending to be pregnant don't read the literature, and you have to find other ways to get to them. We've talked about spending time in consultations with community members, and through the Minister of Learning we're looking at the school curriculum. In the announcement made last fall in commitment to action, we announced \$48 million in the area of risk management. A good part of that funding will go for fetal alcohol syndrome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

2:30

Trucking Regulations

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. CRASH, Canadians for Responsible and Safe Highways, has some serious concerns about the proposed plans to allow truck drivers to drive up to 84 hours per week. The teamsters' union, which represents 100,000 members throughout Canada including 45,000 truck and bus drivers, is strongly opposed to these changes. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Does the minister support increasing the maximum number of hours that truckers can drive per day?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, our position in the department is that we will follow up, on further consultations, in reviewing the numbers of hours that our truck drivers operate. I wish to point out to the hon. member that our proposal that we have will actually look at a reduction in the total number of hours. However, I want to advise this House that we took on these public consultations with the clear understanding that the federal department would also work along with us and all provinces to ensure that we have a clear, concise policy that is harmonized across this country. To date, Alberta is the only province that has conducted public consultations with the industry and all of our stakeholders.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister table copies of any reports or studies that the government has on the effects, both on personal health and public safety, of truckers being behind the wheel longer?

MR. STELMACH: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I believe – and I stand to be corrected – we are the only province in Canada that is jointly funding a research project with the position of looking at

fatigue management. We know some of the issues with respect to truckers: issues of perhaps poor diet, overweight, maybe having a little heavier neck, not getting the kind of oxygen that's necessary as they're driving, all of these. I'm not pointing fingers at you, Mr. Speaker. I will say that these are all very important areas of review. At the end of the day, with the review that we're doing with the fatigue management team, with our department, and also all of the stakeholders, the goal is the same, and that is to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister support the replacement of logbooks with onboard recorders to enforce driving limits in commercial vehicles?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, this province, I believe, today is further ahead of other jurisdictions in a number of key areas. In fact, we have a project going together with the Minister of Learning and the minister of human resources to look at a program that would be similar to an apprenticeship program for truck drivers, covering a number of areas like fatigue management. The other area, of course, is to look at the new technology that's coming forward every day in the truck driving industry, and part of this may be global positioning rather than just simply logbooks. I do know for sure that there's a group of larger freight companies called Partners in Compliance, and they are very eager to work with the government to ensure, once again, that the integrity of the trucking industry remains intact.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before moving to the next item, let me just indicate to all hon. members that today is the anniversary of the birth of the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, and tomorrow is the anniversary of the birth of the hon. Minister of Transportation, who will hit five zero tomorrow and this afternoon is offering hamburgers to anyone who wants one.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. This month alone 80 more people in Canada will learn they have this disease. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world, with Alberta having the highest prevalence in all of Canada. Though MS is still deemed the mystery disease as the cause is unknown, its course unpredictable, and its cure is yet undiscovered, tremendous strides have been made. Today there are four therapies approved in Canada for treating relapsing-remitting MS, and one is approved for the treatment of secondary progressive. For those of us with MS this is very, very good news.

The MS Society continues to be a leader in funding MS research in Canada. For instance, earlier this year the MS Society approved nearly \$3.3 million for 14 research projects and 46 research scholarships. Half of these projects focus on how myelin can be repaired or regrown. Myelin is the vital protective covering of the central nervous system damaged by MS. The MS Society of Alberta is strong. Many individuals willingly volunteer their time and energy towards service programs, fund-raising events, and public awareness campaigns. Many events will be held across the province this month or next to raise dollars for research and programming: bike tours, walking tours, and of course the MS carnation campaign.

Having been asked by the central Alberta MS chapter to be their

honorary spokesperson for their seventh annual bike tour on June 23 and 24, I encourage each and every one of you to participate at such an event in your own community. I'm very pleased that I can announce that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness has willingly agreed to participate and will be biking in the bike tour in central Alberta.

Only through working together and understanding this debilitating disease can a cause and cure be found.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Edmonton Emergency Response Services

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to express a heartfelt thank you for the brave efforts of the Edmonton emergency response department's fire rescue branch with regard to the fire that nearly destroyed Fulton Court, a 70-unit seniors' condominium complex in Edmonton-Gold Bar. Fire stations 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 11, and 15 were involved in assisting residents out of the building and in fighting the persistent fire. Thankfully, none of the residents of Fulton Court were hurt or injured as a result of the fire. Without the tireless and quick efforts of the fire crews and police I am certain that we would have seen even more property loss and possible loss of human life.

In addition, I would like to commend those individuals and organizations who were also involved with the rescue and relief efforts, especially the two unidentified young people who alerted the emergency response department to the blaze, as well as the Fulton Place Community League for temporarily housing the displaced residents of the condominium complex.

I wish to point out that although the population in Edmonton has grown by approximately 8 percent over the past 10 years, the number of firefighters serving this city has not kept up with that pace of population growth. Firefighters continue to work hard to protect all of us. Their efforts do not go unnoticed. I would ask that all members of this House as well as the citizens of Edmonton-Gold Bar join me in thanking those individuals.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Rogers Sugar Ltd.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and recognize the significant contribution of a major business in my constituency. Rogers Sugar Ltd. operates a sugar beet processing plant located in Taber, Alberta. The plant is the last remaining sugar beet processing facility in Canada. Over the past three years the company has invested over \$50 million to upgrade and expand the processing capacity of the factory.

Rogers Sugar is one of the largest employers in southern Alberta, with more than 380 permanent and temporary employees on the payroll, which totals more than \$8 million annually. Each year contracts are signed with approximately 450 southern Alberta growers to plant 45,000 acres of sugar beets. Close to 1 million tonnes of beets are harvested and processed each year. Company payments to sugar beet growers total more than \$30 million each year. Another \$12 million is spent on operating and packaging supplies.

2:40

The factory is also a significant consumer of natural gas. For the 2000-2001 processing campaign nearly \$11 million was paid for gas and electricity. Soaring energy costs are a threat to

the future viability of this plant. The end of this campaign also marked the completion of the 50th year of operation for the plant in Taber, a remarkable achievement considering the vagaries of the world sugar market. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Assembly I offer congratulations to the administration and workers of this plant.

Thank you very much.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of our House leader I would ask the Government House Leader for the projected plans for the business of the House for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For Monday, May 14, under Government Bills and Orders in the afternoon, Committee of Supply, day 1 of lotteries, and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply with the main estimates of Finance and Energy, and as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday, May 15, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading Bill 8, Bill 11, Bill 14, Bill 15, Bill 16; in Committee of the Whole, Bill 1; and as per the Order Paper. Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the main estimates for Executive Council and Government Services.

Wednesday, May 16, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, Committee of Supply, the main estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and Community Development and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, May 17, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, as designated, the main estimates of Seniors and as per the Order Paper.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 5

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Finance I would like to move for third reading the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001.

The details have been discussed in second reading and Committee of the Whole, and I won't prolong debate by going into them other than to say that this bill is necessary to complete the finances for the last fiscal year. I'd ask the House to pass it as expeditiously as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Regarding Bill 5 and the fact that there is significant money for the departments of Children's Services, Infrastructure, and Learning and also in reference to schedule B, in light of the time, at this time I would like to adjourn debate.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 6**Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move on behalf of the Minister of Finance Bill 6, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, as you're well aware and as the Members of this Legislative Assembly are well aware, we're in the process in Committee of Supply of dealing with the estimates of the government, which will be dealt with in the appropriate appropriation bill at the appropriate time. The interim supply bill really is just that. It allows the operation of the government in the interim until main supply is passed. Thus, all the numbers and all the amounts that are being proposed for expenditure under the interim supply bill are actually going to be superseded by the main appropriation bill when it's introduced after Committee of Supply is completed. Therefore I would commend this bill to the House and ask for immediate passage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Again, Mr. Speaker, in regards to Bill 6, I would like to move that we adjourn debate on this bill at this time.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the meeting to order.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002**Children's Services**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services to open debate.

MS EVANS: Mr. Chairman, I'm very honoured today to present the estimates for the Ministry of Children's Services. I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce in the gallery some of the very key members of our staff that are here today accompanying me and listening to the remarks that would be made in the House this afternoon. First of all, we have our deputy minister, Paula Tyler; my director of finance, Bryan Huygen; and Nancy Reynolds, who is the executive director of partnership and innovation. I trust that there may be others that will join us, but presently we're delighted to have them here.

Mr. Chairman, I have on a number of occasions cited critical things from our business plan, both in response to members across the way as well as our own members, and I'm going to try and make this digest relatively succinct so that it affords me some opportunity later to make some brief concluding remarks.

If I may, this ministry, as you know, is new, but the work of the ministry has gone on for many years. We're engaged in child protection, adoption, services for children with disabilities, early intervention, day care programs, family violence prevention, help to children involved in prostitution, and those affected by fetal alcohol syndrome, and you're very familiar with our work through family

and community support services. We do a number of initiatives such as co-ordinating the Children's Forum, and the Task Force on Children at Risk commitment to action was a good part of our endeavours in the past year. More recently the amendments to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act resulted in an act that is unprecedented anywhere, I would suggest, not only in North America but worldwide.

Our partnerships are well known, but another honourable mention today – Born Free – the Great Kids awards, work we have done on raves, and advocacy that we have done generally in this province to elevate the profile of how people can serve the children of the province better. The Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency created a milestone this year, for the first time having a pilot project placing First Nations children for adoption with First Nations families. This has never been done in Canada, and the work that was done complements Justice, the ministry of aboriginal affairs, and many other partners that we're proud to have.

2:50

According to Statistics Canada there are about 760,000 children in this province between zero and 17 years of age. Many of these children are healthy and well cared for by responsible families in communities, and their parents do work hard and spend time with them. Mr. Chairman, last year, though, was a sore point when I heard in fact that a thousand youth that attended forums in Alberta said the one thing they wanted more of from their parents was time. What a sad statement on behalf of the people of this province that our children ask us simply for time, time to be spent with them, and those that cannot afford to or do not spend time with them more frequently result in issues which are creating work for Children's Services.

Mr. Chairman, we're challenged, too, by a number of the outcomes of society in general. Our handicapped children's services expands its mission every day in part because of an excellent health care system that enables our frail children and those that aren't as well to be served within the system as they grow. It results in many more programs and challenges for our department. Mr. Chairman, our caseloads have grown 60.7 percent since '95-96, from 8,800 in '95-96 to 14,207 in 2000-2001. Lest you think we are alone in this, this is a North American phenomenon in large part, I believe, symbolic of other issues that are surrounding us in society.

Government is the permanent or temporary guardian of 53 percent of these children, approximately 7,900 overall. We also estimate that the child welfare caseload may increase by 5 percent in the current year. The children with disabilities program helps families meet some of the extraordinary costs. Handicapped children's services' caseload has increased, and the cost per case is also increasing in large part because of new approaches and technologies.

Mr. Chairman, our ministry is a major contributor to the aboriginal policy framework, which is a tool outlining collaborative efforts in the development of services for aboriginal children and their families. We have delivery agreements with 16 child and family services on reserve agencies, that provide services to 37 First Nations. We're also working closely with our Metis population.

Because our ministry is only two years old, still at a developmental stage, we have operational challenges: reliable performance measures, fiscal accountability, and addressing concerns of the Auditor General, to cite just a few. We believe that in this business plan we are addressing our priorities; namely, aboriginal services, permanent living situations for children, better outcomes for children in care, youth services, and building effective partnerships.

Our core businesses differ slightly from last year's plan. We have reduced our core businesses from six to three, articulating better, we

hope, those key areas which impact significantly on children's lives. We continue to work, as other ministries do, through the Alberta children's initiative to identify those performance outcomes that can be most meaningful. Our corporate strategies and partnerships are enabling us to create effective human resources and to improve our strategies in caring for children.

In our new initiatives we have increased our budget by \$2.9 million for the treatment and protection of children involved in prostitution, quite specifically for treatment centres, and have added \$2 million to programs working to prevent fetal alcohol syndrome. We have received \$20 million through the Canada health and social transfer for early childhood development strategies that were identified through the forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk. We will focus on healthy birth outcomes, ongoing supports to parents, and optimal early child development. A total of \$6 million has been budgeted to initiate a home visitation program directed at parents of newborns, particularly those in high-risk situations.

For FCSS, a very important program in over 260 municipalities of this province, we have increased the budget by over \$4 million and look to further expanding our initiatives. We have Dr. Bruce Perry, an internationally renowned child psychiatrist who'll be working on contract with ourselves and with the ministry of health through the Mental Health Board on creating even better strategies dealing with children at risk.

In conclusion, I know that I'll be well able to address the questions that the hon. members have both in follow up and hopefully some at the very conclusion. I would say, Mr. Chairman, that I am delighted that the hon. members chose to conclude debate in order to enable a maximum time to hear the issues that they may wish to address. I believe there is absolutely no more important ministry in this government than Children's Services, because we address the beginning of our future society in Alberta, and we can make them better with a collaborative effort.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I concur with the minister: there is no more important ministry in the government than Children's Services and Learning. Without those there wouldn't be a concern for agriculture or some of the other ministries.

Because I'll have an opportunity several times in the next couple of hours to speak, I wanted to spend my first opportunity asking some questions about the report of the Children's Advocate. I've asked in question period several questions about the report of the Children's Advocate, and I keep getting the feeling that the advocate's report is dismissed as no longer applicable to children in the province, yet if you look at that report and you read it and you read on the back page the disposition of previous reports, this seems to be a pattern: the Children's Advocate is ignored.

I know there have been a couple of reports, and the government has those reports under review, but I think if the Children's Advocate is to be the tool that Albertans expect that office to be, then that office has to be taken seriously. I think certainly the matters that are raised are serious. I know in response to my question earlier this afternoon, the minister indicated that there had been some improvement in the placement of children, but it's been a recurring theme in the reports of the Auditor General that there is a shortage of placement and resources and insufficient spaces for secure treatment. They also indicated that there is a lack of mental health resources to help those youngsters. So placement remains a problem. I would

like to know exactly what it is the department is planning to do to make the matter better.

The report goes on to indicate that there's a "lack of consistent permanency planning." Some children weren't even aware that they had a caseworker, some had never seen their social worker, and many were unaware of the plan. That seems to be very damning, Mr. Chairman. Certainly you'd think that youngsters in care would at least be aware of their social worker. It may only be a few children, but still these are children under the care of this government, and they deserve better.

The report raises the problem of "refusal to provide support" to older residents and refusal to support them to adulthood. I'd ask what is being done on that. What are the plans in terms of overcoming that criticism?

3:00

A number of youngsters in care have behaviour problems. We know that those problems don't go away on their 18th birthday, so what kinds of bridging mechanisms could be put in place to help these youngsters make the transition to adulthood? Some of them even indicated that they had to fight for support to finish high school. You'd wonder how that could happen, given what we know about the importance of completing high school on future success occupationally for all children, let alone children who have suffered some trauma or some problems in their childhood.

I indicated earlier today and the minister did say that there was greater co-operation between the Children's Services department and young offenders, children who are under the Young Offenders Act, and I think that's a positive move. It seems incredible to me that there would be children in care in an institution that wouldn't have access to dental or optical care. Certainly the Children's Advocate report indicated that there are a number of children who were suffering because of that, so I hope the discussions the minister indicated she was having with the Solicitor General result in that no longer being a complaint in future reports of the Children's Advocate.

The lack of mental health services I mentioned before. Again there's a question as to the timeliness of mental health services that are available to them. The report indicates that often that kind of care is not there, and the root of the problem, according to the Children's Advocate, is the lack of resources. There's the problem of children who suffer abuse while in the care of child welfare. That seems to outsiders to be an incredible state of affairs, but it happens. Those individuals lack adequate support for legal representation, so it seems that the very children the government is charged with caring for are becoming victims under that care, and I think that's a state that's not tolerable in this day and this age.

The court delays of course are a problem, and it's not the Children's Services department that has direct control over those delays. But when rulings on guardianship do not occur, then plans for youngsters are made more difficult, particularly trying to put in place permanent plans for youngsters becomes very difficult. So there's a need again for the ministry to work with the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice to make sure that the court system accommodates children in care quickly, with the best interests of the youngster and not the court system being paramount.

Custody/access. For young people in care sometimes access to siblings is denied. For those not in care who are the subject of custody disputes between separating or divorcing parents, there's nobody who independently represents their interests, and that would seem to be tragic. I wonder what plans the minister has to try to accommodate those cases.

The advocate went on to say – and this is not a new recommenda-

tion – that in terms of child death review, “There is need for an independent, comprehensive, multidisciplinary body to review the deaths of children to try to reduce the incidence of childhood fatality.” There have been a couple of cases in the news recently, Mr. Chairman, that I would think would make this recommendation even more important to be acted upon, and I would ask the minister and the department exactly what kind of leadership they’re going to be taking in this area.

In terms of the system itself there don’t seem to be adequate mechanisms in place for the young people who are in the system to have any influence over it, to be offered feedback in terms of their treatment, leading to a feeling of powerlessness and again the notion that they are somehow or other being victimized by the very system that’s supposed to be working in their best interests.

There are problems with gaps in the education system for young people who have been neglected, who have suffered abuse. Many conventional school programs fall short, and there’s a need for alternative programs and for flexibility in educational programs. So again some gaps in the education system. There’s much to do made about partnerships and working with other departments, and I’d be interested in terms of how this particular criticism is being met by the department.

The boundary issues between regional authorities and the creation of the regional authorities are not unlike what’s happened with some of the health authorities. Maybe it’s only in the early operation of these divisions that we’re going to find these problems, but the pressure for resources has led to disputes between and among regional authorities. Again the people who suffer are the children and young people in care when those disputes start to govern what happens to them, and I’d like to know what mechanism the department has in place for dealing with those disputes when they do occur.

I think one of the worst kinds of criticism in the report was the charge that children are being warehoused and that they’re “being kept in short-term care facilities for long periods due to a lack of suitable alternatives.” The term “warehousing” has been used elsewhere in the care of children, particularly in the school system where special-needs children have been warehoused, according to some recent reports, put in classrooms with no suitable programs. So I can’t imagine what happens when a special-needs child in government care needs a program if the charges from the special education community and the charges of the Children’s Advocate in this report are true. It seems we’re asking for future difficulty when we don’t address those problems, and it seems incredible that in this year we would be talking about children being warehoused because there are not appropriate services or placements for them.

The concerns raised about the medication of children in care, the “inordinate use of medications as a behaviour management tool.” That’s a charge that has been laid to the school system too. The Ritalin generation is a reality, and we’ve raised it in the Legislature on a number of previous occasions.

Along with the lack of opportunities for children in care to give any feedback on the system, there’s the charge that youth are treated with disrespect, that they are sometimes confronted with punitive attitudes, and, again, that they lack any kind of meaningful input into the decisions that are going to affect their lives. I would think it would be a charge that the department would want to take seriously, and I’d be interested in measures that are being undertaken to make sure that that doesn’t happen.

3:10

The budget announces money for new positions. I think I heard the minister indicate that 500 new workers would be put in place to

help with handling the needs of children and youth. The problem with staff turnover is a problem not just here but in systems elsewhere. It results, of course, in discontinuity of care for young people, and the need for stable relationships for many of them is very, very great. So I’d be interested in knowing what kinds of programs the department has in place or is considering to reduce the amount of staff turnover.

The last concern is the extreme lack of services in northern Alberta. The resources are not there for children.

I took the time to highlight those issues that were in the report, and I hope they aren’t just dismissed as being last year’s or that was the system before the new system was in place criticisms, because having read previous reports, having talked to a number of constituents who spend some time in our office, I know that’s not the case, that many of these are problems that still plague the system. I think to disregard them is to disregard children, so I would hope there would be some response from the minister in terms of the recommendations. My preference has been – and I think the minister indicated it would happen – that before we adjourn the spring session, there would be some response from the government on the Children’s Advocate report, and I hope that that is still the case.

The advocate went on to identify the issues of greatest concern, and they were more limited. The top of the list again was placements, and the report chronicles the placement problems of some young people.

The second greatest concern was the delegated First Nations child welfare agencies, the kinds of problems that this delegated model has and the kinds of problems that are faced in this area.

A third area is services to older youth and the transition to adulthood, and it would seem to me again, Mr. Chairman, that this is an area that really begs some action. We can’t simply wash our hands of youth once they reach the age of 18, yet I know it’s fraught with difficulties.

Another issue is the disrespectful treatment of youth as being one of the areas of greatest concern. There is direct control, and something can be done immediately about the problem. There’s no excuse for this being an issue in a report from the Children’s Advocate.

Another concern and a concern for all of us – and I’ll ask some questions directly about this later, Mr. Chairman – is the child and family services authorities. I have some questions about the funding of those authorities, the kind of money that they asked for in terms of carrying out their mandate and the kind of money that was actually allocated to them.

So those are the comments that I had based on the Children’s Advocate, and I would like to move in the next few minutes to a question. In the business plan there’s the promise of a number of performance measures that are going to be developed. I would like to spend a bit of time talking about the child and family indicators and the kinds of indicators that are going to be put in place, but seeing you’ve indicated that I only have seconds left, I’ll save that for later this afternoon.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Chairman, it’s a pleasure to participate this afternoon in the estimates debate for Children’s Services. Certainly from my perspective I would like to commend my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods for his diligence in pursuing the issues and keeping not only the minister but the entire government accountable on this. The whole series of questions that the hon. member has asked regarding the Children’s Advocate report has been enlightening for this member. I would encourage all hon. members of this Assembly if they have not yet read that report to do so over this

weekend or the long weekend. It is my estimation that it has not yet been read by some members of this Assembly, and they certainly need to do so.

I see there's an additional \$105 million to be spent over three years to support children at risk and respond to the recommendations of the Alberta Children's Forum and the Task Force on Children at Risk. There's also funding for the child health benefit program. There are to be increases there of \$1.3 million to \$16.8 million in 2001-02, and this is, I understand, to accommodate increased demand for health benefits for children in low-income families.

I would at this time ask the minister if any of that funding is possibly coming – and I certainly hope it is not – from the federal claw-back. Alberta is the only province that's initiating that. I certainly hope the minister's answer is a straightforward no on that. I don't know for sure, and I would be grateful if the hon. minister could please provide that in due time.

Now, I see here also that the province will invest in the health and wellness of children with \$9.3 million towards the children's initiative aiding early childhood development and the prenatal program. In regards to early childhood development I hope later on in this debate to address some specific questions I have regarding day care, day care workers, and the day care industry in the province.

It is understood that the ministry has four pillars that it bases its work on: community-based service delivery, the integration pillar, the aboriginal pillar, and early intervention pillar. Now, when you look at the four pillars and you look at the trends and issues that we're going to be facing here, whether it's an economic issue of families continuing to come to the province who need economic support, the difficulty of the agricultural sector – commodity prices and weather patterns have contributed to this decline in the agricultural sector. This, as a result, has created stress on families in rural areas.

We look at 1996: "45% of Aboriginal people in Alberta had a total household income of less than \$25,000 compared with 26% of the non-Aboriginal population." The aboriginal unemployment rate was over 17 percent; the nonaboriginal population unemployment rate was slightly less than 7 percent.

If we look at Social Trends, we see that "alcohol-related birth defects are a widespread problem" for families in Alberta, and aboriginal people represent close to 40 percent of the total inmate population. Four percent of aboriginals had a university degree at that time. There certainly is a need for culturally appropriate and accessible services.

3:20

Now, I understand from the budget that the child population will decline after December of this year and that more children will be moving into the teenage bracket. I note that between 2000 and 2011 the aboriginal population will increase by 22 percent versus 12 percent for the rest of Alberta's total population, yet one-third, or 33 percent, of children in care are aboriginal.

Another trend is the regional trends that are occurring. We look at suicide, family violence, incarceration, low income, unemployment, education: all these trends are being felt by aboriginal children, youth, and families, especially those receiving services through handicapped children's services and the transition to persons with developmental disabilities.

Now, in the ministry goals, core businesses, "Promoting the development and well-being of children, youth and families," I have the following questions for the minister under line item 1.1.1. Certainly it is quite appropriate if at some time, if not today, the department officials get a chance to have a look at my questions, and if they could provide written answers on behalf of the hon. minister, I would be very grateful.

Regarding this line item, what programs – and this is specific to on-reserve early intervention and prevention programs – is the ministry developing, what is the cost of each of these programs, what accountability mechanisms are in place for each program, and how will the performance measures be calculated? I had a discussion earlier today with one of my colleagues regarding performance measures. I'm very interested to know how these performance measures are to be calculated. Another one of my colleagues said that it was a very useful tool of management. It was a very enlightening exchange between those two colleagues regarding performance measures.

Now, on line 1.1.4 there is discussion on best practices: "Ensure that best practices for early childhood care and education settings are being shared, implemented, monitored and evaluated." Again to the hon. minister: what best practices have been put in place for early childhood care, who is monitoring and evaluating the education settings that are being shared, and when will the final evaluation be made public? I don't know if this is an appropriate time to bring up the Cleland report, but hopefully I'll get an opportunity later to express my concerns about the Cleland report.

On line 1.1.5 there's again a discussion. We're going to "initiate a new home visitation or mentoring program for parents of very young children and at risk families." I have five questions in regards to this. Who is taking responsibility for the new home visitation program? What will the budget for the program be? How many families are expected to take part in the program, how will families at risk be identified for the program, and what educational training programs are being developed for mentors involved in the mentoring program?

Now, further along, on line 1.1.6, initiatives are being examined "to improve the quality of child care programs." I can only assume that somewhere in there would be the Cleland report. I'm very anxious to see that document tabled in the Assembly. We all know that child care programs for all Alberta families are very, very important, but what are the new initiatives that will improve the quality of child care programs? What is the budget for these new initiatives? What new performance measures will be or are being developed to measure the quality of the programs? How many children and families are expected to take part in these programs, and how many are single-parent families that will take part in the program?

Now, further along on line 1.2 there is a statement: "To provide a continuum of services to support and promote the well-being of children, youth and families." Again I have two questions for the minister, please. Why is "Families assessing Handicapped Children's Services report a positive impact on their families" to be a short-term goal rather than a long-term goal? Why is the performance measure those families "who report the services are having a positive impact on the family" rather than a measure of an increase or decrease in the quality of life for children and the family members?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

On line item 1.2.2 there is the statement: "Continue to enhance and implement a comprehensive inter-provincial . . . intervention, care and support of individuals with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effect." I have three questions for the hon. minister, please. What measures are being used to enhance the fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effect program? Will the minister provide reports regarding the plans for interprovincial intervention, care, and support of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effect individuals? Finally, what is the cost to enhance and implement this program?

Now, again further along, the statement on line 1.2.5, and this is to “complete a Handicapped Children’s Services complex case review to ensure that children are receiving supportive and high quality services.” I have three questions. Firstly, who will participate in the complex case review of handicapped children’s services to ensure that children are receiving supportive and high quality services? Secondly, will the minister provide details of review processes for the case reviews? Thirdly, how will the ministry ensure that privacy of the individuals is maintained?

The next reference is 1.2.6.

In conjunction with the Youth Secretariat, work in partnership to enhance supports available to youth making the transition to adulthood, including transition to adult services such as those provided by Persons with Developmental Disabilities.

I have three questions. What mechanism does Children’s Services have in place so that children enter the PDD system with no transition problems? Certainly all hon. members of the Assembly are well aware that there have been problems with this in the past. What mechanism does Children’s Services use so that children’s files are not held up when moving into the PDD system? What are the protocols used to ensure smooth transition from one system to another?

3:30

Now, moving along to 1.2.7:

Collaborate with other ministries to provide a range of integrated health and related support services to children with special needs (Student Health Initiative).

I have at this time, Mr. Chairman, four questions, again to the hon. minister. What are the other ministries that are helping to provide integrated health and related support services to children with special needs? What programs are available to children with special needs and their families that provide a range of integrated health and related support?

Included in that would be speech therapy. What programs are available for students who need speech therapy in the early grades? I would like to start in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3. If those children are enrolled in a public school system, what support can they expect? Then again, for instance, if they were to go to a school like the Tevie Miller school, what exactly could the parents of those students who for whatever reason perhaps don’t have the money – what support is available for them to ensure that speech therapy could be provided? Certainly it is my view that intervention at the early grades could possibly prevent a lot of problems as the child becomes a teenager and later on as an adult.

Again to the minister, please: what mechanisms does the ministry use to inform families about the programs? How is the ministry making the programs user friendly?

Mr. Chairman, on line 1.2.9 the discussion here is:

Collaborate with Child and Family Services Authorities to initiate mobile Community Response Team pilot projects to assist children, youth and families in crisis.

That seems to be quite an interesting initiative. I have five questions for the minister regarding this pilot project, the first one being: how many mobile community response team pilot projects will be carried out in the province? What authorities will the projects be carried out in? What are the professionals that will be part of the community response team? What is the budget for the pilot project? I understand, Mr. Chairman, that there is now only one pilot project for the entire province. When will the reports of the response team in this case be presented to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta?

Under goal 1.3: what mechanisms will the department ensure that “children in out-of-home placements stay connected to their family and community”? Because stable homes and ongoing nurturing

relationships for children and youth in care are very positive. There’s no doubt about that.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Now, reference line 1.3.4:

Develop the Custom Care and Adoptions Initiative in concert with First Nations agencies and Child and Family Services Authorities to improve permanency for Aboriginal children in care.

I have three questions at this time for the minister, and hopefully I can get them in in the time that I am allowed. Who is responsible for developing the custom care and adoptions initiative with First Nations agencies and child and family services authorities? Secondly, what is the budget for the custom care and adoptions initiative program? Thirdly, what is the vision, mission, and values for the custom care and adoptions initiative?

Mr. Chairman, I’m certainly anxious to get some more time to participate in the debate later on this afternoon, and I will hopefully get a chance to talk about child care and subsidy programs regarding all Alberta families. With those questions I will cede the floor to one of my hon. colleagues.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Glen-garry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again I’m honoured to be able to speak here today in regards to Children’s Services. I want to thank the minister and her staff that have shown up here, particularly on Thursday afternoon, our last working afternoon in the House, to answer many of the concerns that we have about perhaps some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and that is our children. In doing so, I know that it is a huge, huge responsibility, and I also know that this minister takes that responsibility very, very seriously. So we are, I think, being very well served in this province. Certainly this is one of those areas where no matter what we do, there’s always more that can be done.

My comments today and my questions to the minister will certainly focus around these needs. Particularly I’d like to note that some of these comments that I’m going to pass along are comments made to me by constituents of Edmonton-Glen-garry.

We were extremely happy when Ma’Mōwe was opened in Edmonton-Glen-garry. It’s a much-needed resource for the people not only of Edmonton-Glen-garry, but surrounding regions of Edmonton-Glen-garry as well as regions outside of the city limits now can make good use of it. Certainly it is there for the use of all and much easier for them to access than having, for example, to travel down to 107th Street here to get to the main location. These types of satellite centres are a great, great step in the right direction.

What I’m going to refer to first here is a survey done by the Alberta Children’s Forum: Uniting for Children. This is the paper Poverty & Physical Needs: 3 Good Ideas. It was done by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. I don’t think that even in our great days here in this province – this was quite current – that things have changed that much for a number of our people. So what we are looking at here are certainly a number of issues – and two of those are poverty and physical needs – that face quite a few children in this province.

Of course, when we looked at it, we found that when people were surveyed, their number one concern and their number one issue of the problems that Edmonton children face is poverty. It was quite an eye-opener for me, Mr. Chairman, when I was at the National Conference of State Legislatures last summer in Chicago and we had an opportunity to listen to Jesse Jackson. Jesse went on to say that

the poorest people in America today are not the new people that have moved to America, and it certainly wasn't the seniors who are trying to survive on a fixed income, but it was mothers with young families. I would think that those are the same challenges so many young mothers in this province face, and it's certainly one that I know as a province we must address. Certainly we all know the statistics that a dollar spent today will save us seven down the road. So in looking at this, as I said, poverty certainly is the number one issue.

3:40

After this I looked then at the ministry's goals, and they are admirable. I would hope that we could attain all of them, and certainly it is a goal to work towards. But I do have some questions for the minister when we get to performance measures.

Now, I also notice that

a number of the performance measures in the 2001-04 Business Plan are considered new measures and as a result there is insufficient baseline data to establish meaningful targets.

So when I'm going through this, I will pay special attention to those, realizing that that data is not available to answer questions at this particular time.

Performance measure A: the "percentage of childcare centres that meet critical standards." Now, these are given in percentages. When we are collecting data, certainly we would like to know the numbers. How did you arrive, for example, at an actual in 1998-99 of 95 percent? Were all child care centres surveyed in this? If so, how many of these child care centres were there? If it was a sample, then how many were used in the sample? Also, from what parts of the province was the sample taken? Is this truly a representative sample, or is it focused on the major centres, where I think, as a generalized statement, the majority of poverty would be centred? What exactly does 95 percent for the year 1998-99 mean?

I see that in the fiscal year 1999-2000 we have an estimated amount of 96 percent. I'm very, very happy to see that our target for 2001-2002 is 100 percent. So if the minister could just enlighten us on how that information is going to be gathered and who all is represented and from what part of the province that is.

Then, as well, performance measure B. Now, again this is one of those new measures, and this will be measuring the "percentage of families accessing handicapped children's services who report the services are having a positive impact on their family." Again, if the minister could provide what data is going to be used to reach this particular performance measure.

I notice here that another new performance measure is going to be the "percentage of children residing in a stable, long-term arrangement within 12 months of permanent guardianship order." The same questions would apply there.

Now, performance measure D: "percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while receiving child protection services." Again, a huge, huge challenge for people in this province who are dealing with this type of child who is under protection services. Certainly I'm very, very happy to see that our target for 2001-2002 is 100 percent. Again, if the minister could please just outline how they determine, first of all, whether children who are in protective services are free from abuse or neglect and, secondly, the number that they looked at for this. I certainly will be interested to see how the actual compares to the target of 100 percent.

Now, then, performance measure E:

Percentage of respondents to a public awareness survey who indicate that they are aware of activities undertaken by the ministry and its partners to address issues affecting children involved in prostitution.

Again, this will be quite an interesting statistic, particularly with the passing of Bill 1, the child prostitution act, and when we see these

statistics which have been compiled since '98-99 and see how this act is going to influence the number of minors that are involved in prostitution, then what I would like rather than a percentage are the actual hardcore facts of the number involved. It will certainly give us a much better idea to track just how effective the bill has been and how effective we are in this society at stamping out child prostitution.

Now, then, in performance measure F, we're looking at the "number of municipalities participating in family and community support" and the target is to "maintain or increase number of municipalities participating in family and community support services." We have here in 1998-99 an actual number of 278. I see that this decreased slightly – and this again is an estimated amount – in the year 1999-2000 to 272. Could the minister provide why we had a slight drop here of six communities?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

As well, what in the business plans and what in the budget is going to raise that amount to a projected number of 281 in the year 2000-2001, and I see that we also have that as targeted for the year 2001-2002. How does this number compare against all municipalities that could or should be participating in family and community support services? Give us a little bit better idea of the level of participation compared to how many could be participating.

Performance measure G is the "percentage of aboriginal children receiving foster care services from aboriginal foster homes", and I see that

this measure supports the short-term outcome of delivering services to children that are appropriate to their culture, and the objective of improving services to Aboriginal children.

I fully agree that certainly the best people to provide foster care services to aboriginal children are in the aboriginal community, but once again I see that we are using percentages, and percentages do not give us a total picture of what is taking place.

Now, then, I also see here that we have in the neighbourhood of 31 percent projected for 2000-2001 and again our target of 31 percent for 2001-2002. That is to me a very, very high number when we're looking at roughly three out of 10 children that fall into this category. So could the minister please indicate in the estimates what programs we are looking at in order to reduce that number? As I said, that does seem like a very, very high number, and we would like to certainly see that cut down from the standpoint of children not requiring it. So if the minister would please provide more information in that regard.

3:50

As well, I see that two other new measures here are performance measures H and I, H being the "percentage of respondents reporting awareness of services provided by the office of the Children's Advocate." Again the Children's Advocate is certainly a very, very needed position in this province, and it will be one of these performance measures that I will be following closely. It will be quite interesting to see how the role of the Children's Advocate is going to play out and the important role that it will fill.

In looking at performance measure I, the "percentage of survey respondents who access selected ministry services that indicate that they participated in decisions that affect them," I see:

Consistent with a community-based service model and the objective of meeting the needs of the children and families being served, this measure will assess whether recipients of Ministry services are provided opportunities to participate in decisions which affect them.

Again I have to agree with the minister on this particular issue. This is a very, very important performance measure. With the goal

of recipients participating in decisions which affect them, it is certainly one of those types of measures – when we give people ownership of a situation, then we expect the success rate to climb. I have to commend the minister for this. Could she please let us know what steps and what decisions are going to be made on this particular performance measure which would allow those people to make their own decisions? In other words, how are we going to get people involved to take ownership and to be part of this worthy performance measure?

Now, as well, in looking at the core business plans, I want to focus at the start of my time here today on core business 2: “Keeping children, youth and families safe and protected.” To do this, I want to look at goal 2.1: “To protect Alberta children from abuse and neglect,” an extremely, extremely needed goal, because we do have too many children today who are suffering from abuse, who are suffering from neglect.

I think what we have to do to highlight this particular problem is to look again at the number of students who go to school hungry. This is a basic goal and a basic need of all students. We look at people that are living in poverty and see that 73 percent say that they cannot afford to feed their children enough fruits and vegetables, 58 percent say that they cannot afford enough meat for their children, and 41 percent say that they cannot afford enough dairy products. What this means as well is that parents – and probably it’s mostly single parents that find themselves in this situation – are going without food themselves to feed their children. It was quite interesting in the survey that I quoted earlier that 46 percent went without food for a day or more, and 18 percent of the parents say that their children are missing meals because there is not enough food.

To start my questions on goal 2.1, “to protect Alberta children from abuse and neglect,” my first question to the minister would be: why is “children in care stay free from abuse and neglect” only a short-term outcome? My next question to the minister would be: when will the minister consider keeping children in care free from abuse and neglect a long-term goal? Again, we certainly have to look at this worthwhile goal from a very short-term perspective initially and make it a long-term goal that all children can grow up in safe environments where they are free from abuse and neglect.

So, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I will cede the floor to another member. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I’d like to spend 20 minutes commenting on the estimates of the Department of Children’s Services. I want to start by acknowledging the sincere interest that the minister responsible for this department has in the welfare of families and particularly of children.

While she is working hard to bring about changes, to muster the resources needed, what we need to do here is look closely at the proposed course of action as embodied in the business plan of the department, the highlights of initiatives as summarized on page 59 of the year 2001-2002 government and lottery fund estimates, and look at the budget operations by program. So the departmental operations by program and the budget allocations are something that I’d like to pay some attention to.

While we do this, I want to spend a few minutes talking about the overall context which gives rise to and produces the need for our extensive children’s services in the province and services for families. That context certainly is multidimensional.

There are all kinds of reasons why families and children get into difficulty and need help and services. But the one broad condition that produces the need for these services is, of course, the condition

called poverty, so we should pay some attention to the incidence of poverty, its distribution across Alberta’s population. Who are the poor? Why is that the case? What kinds of services are needed in order to alleviate those conditions if we are really concerned about taking action and undertaking programs that are as much committed to prevention as they are to providing relief after the problems have occurred?

I’m looking at an executive summary of a report that is called *No Safeguards: A Profile of Urban Poverty in Alberta*, produced by a group called the Inter City Forum on Social Policy, representing about 18 municipalities in this province. According to this document, the incidence of poverty is quite high in this province based on 1996 statistics. They’re subject to change by now; I would certainly acknowledge that. They count that about 1 in 5 Albertans is poor. The greatest rates of poverty are in Edmonton and Calgary, but Wetaskiwin, Red Deer, and Lethbridge also have rates above the provincial average.

4:00

Children and youth are more likely to be poor. The highest rates of poverty are found among children 14 years and younger, people aged 15 to 24 years, and then of course seniors. More women on average are poorer than are males. Lone-parent families are likely to be poorer than other types of families. In particular, members of our aboriginal communities are the most serious and the largest in percentage terms victims of poverty. Among the aboriginal population the incidence of poverty is about 62 percent. This is the figure for Edmonton. Compared to other places such as Cold Lake or Leduc the poverty rate goes down, but Edmonton has the largest concentration of aboriginal people, and 62 percent of them live in poverty.

Persons with disabilities are another group, of course, who are subject to conditions of poverty. The rate is quite high in places like Wetaskiwin. Their rate of poverty, according to this report, was 32 percent. Red Deer was 35 percent, whereas Strathcona county and Spruce Grove had the lowest rates, at 10 and 12 percent. So that’s another group.

Being employed helps in reducing poverty but is not necessarily a safeguard. There are lots of working families in Alberta that find themselves living in poverty. Over three-quarters of the 106,610 poor families in Alberta, almost 77 percent, were employed for at least part of the year for which statistics are taken, yet just under one-half worked full-time. These are working poor who earn a minimum wage or close to it. So a low minimum wage causes hardworking Albertans to experience poverty and live under those conditions which produce the problems that this ministry then finds itself addressing.

Mr. Chairman, this is sort of a very quick, brief background against which the adequacy of services and the need for them is to be assessed.

Looking at the initiatives and the highlights for the years 2000-2004, there are several initiatives being taken here. Many of them, if not all of them, are well called for, deserving of special attention, but very little is indicated here that would suggest that we are dealing with the symptoms and the consequences as well as the causes of poverty and children’s difficulties and troubles and crises, which are issues that are at the very heart of the minister’s efforts and certainly a *raison d’être* for the existence of this department in the first place.

The poverty issue is not discussed as to how to deal with the problem of the growing numbers of the working poor in the province, and no linkage seems to be acknowledged between that and the growing numbers of children who are falling in the care of this ministry. We all acknowledge a rather radical increase in the

number of children and the growth in the percentage of children that are coming in the care of the government. I don't need to repeat this. Headlines in papers made the story very, very well known across the province: a 60 percent increase since 1995. One has to ask: why is that the case? Is it just the case that there are more incompetent parents in Alberta? Or is it because more and more parents and families find themselves living under conditions of poverty in spite of their hard work, which leads them to then either neglect their children or fail in delivering the services that they need, and they would then become the responsibility of the government?

One other minor matter I was trying to look for through the budget to see if there's any change there, and that's the vision section, page 58, Major Areas of Emphasis. It talks about "better outcomes for children in care," and reference is made there to the critical role of the Children's Advocate. Again, looking at that commitment on one hand and then seeing if there is any action indicated on what's recommended by the Children's Advocate's latest report, *Working for Youth in Care*, I am disappointed to find no evidence here which indicates that the recommendations made by the Children's Advocate are being taken seriously by this government. Certainly there's no indication in the vision or in the three-year business plan that the government has.

Having said that, I also find in the business plan that of the nine performance measures that appear on pages 60 and 61, five are new ones. So there's no benchmark at this stage to make any really good judgments about how things may be moving for the better.

The one indicator that I have some questions about for the minister is the one that deals with the number of municipalities participating in family and community support and the targets that are set. The target for this next year, at least, is the same as for this year, with 281 municipalities that are participating. Then there's some indication that some increase in this participation is expected or sought or targeted but very, very small: one municipality to be added to the numbers already there over the next two years, so an annual increase of one.

I wonder: how many municipalities are there altogether? The minister will obviously enlighten me on this. Of the 281 that are participating now, what percentage are they of the total number of municipal jurisdictions? That will give us some idea as to why we are seeking such a slow increase, if it is a slow increase. Maybe the total number is 283, and the minister will hopefully answer that question for me.

4:10

On the next page, statement of operations by program, I notice that there are some areas where some considerable funds have been added for the year under discussion, the year 2001-02, where I find increases very minimal in light of the fact that the caseloads are increased enormously over the last five to eight years, from 12,783 cases in '92-93 to 22,905 in the year '99-2000. With this enormous growth, almost an 80 percent growth, the increase at least this year that I find in the child welfare part of the program expenditures is 2.4 percent. Is it adequate at all? It doesn't seem to be. That's a question that was raised by the Children's Advocate in his report as well: the inadequacy. Money may not be the answer to every problem, but in this case in the judgment of the advocate money is an issue. Financial allocations are an issue, are important.

Similarly for children with disabilities: in actuals in 2001 it is \$54.6 million, and the proposed 2001-2002 estimate is very slightly increased, maybe less than 1.5 percent, over last year. I certainly question this and ask the minister: how come? Is she satisfied there are enough resources there already? I question that very seriously.

Day care: 4 percent increase. That's an area where we need to pay

very serious attention if prevention is our goal. If children are to receive proper care when they're very young if their parents work – and most of them want to work and are working – the day care area of the ministry's responsibility certainly needs a lot more attention. Low wages for day care workers is a chronic problem. There was some talk during the election even from the government side that it may receive a review. I'd like to ask the minister if she has any initiatives on that score. You cannot get qualified workers to provide quality day care at that rate. It's less than \$10. We proposed in our alternative plan that the minimum be set at \$10 an hour, if not more. The low-wage problem for our day care workers is a very serious and chronic problem. Unless that is addressed, we will not be able to achieve a better quality in the provision of day care in our province for our children who badly need it.

The fact is that there are no direct operating allowances given to day care centres. The government therefore has lost the ability to enforce any provincewide standards. It's very difficult to do that when you don't pay money, when you pay the subsidies directly to families, who then use that money to pay for their day care bills. Also, the level at which families qualify is set too low to be able to access those subsidies. That means that the cost of sending children to day care becomes a major issue for low middle-income families. Consequently they find shortcuts. They send their children to day care facilities which may be cheap and that they can afford, and that means sacrificing their concerns about the quality of day care. I wonder what the minister has in her budget plan to address that issue.

I notice that the early intervention commitment has been strengthened, but the problems caused by the withdrawal by this provincial government over the years in that area have led to an enormous increase in the number of children in the care of the government, so I'm pleased that there is a clear indication here of investing in early childhood intervention in this budget. I'm pleased to see that.

Mr. Chairman, this will be my last point. The caseload for social workers and the ratio of supervisors to social workers is again important in reducing the ratio, making it more reasonable if quality children's services are to be provided by appropriately qualified social workers and child care providers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll take my turn again when the time arises.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to reinforce some of the comments of some of my colleagues and add a number of concerns and issues of my own.

The first particular point I'd like to make would be concerning the first goal, 1.1, under core business 1 in ministry goals, which has to do with "on-reserve early intervention and prevention programs." I think all of us here are aware that we need to be paying particular attention to the conditions on reserves for families and children and early intervention. In fact it came up, perhaps just coincidentally, in question period today concerning an issue that's certainly not limited to reserves but is found on reserves, fetal alcohol syndrome, and the value of prevention in cases like that. So I would reinforce the ministry's efforts when it comes to on-reserve early intervention and prevention programs and would be delighted to learn more about what the ministry is doing in those regards. What are the costs? What are the trends in those costs? It would be interesting also, though I know it's difficult to quantify prevention, to get a sense of whether the costs we are spending now will be saving us money in the future. I realize that's difficult to do, very difficult to measure, but certainly worth examining. So that's one area of particular interest to me.

Another area I raise partly because I know a number of constituents of mine are involved in handicapped children's services and have particular and, of course, very close involvement with that because it's their own children who may be requiring these services. Some of the cases are unusually complex and difficult, very demanding on the whole family, and it seems to me – and I think the research would support this – that family breakup and divorce and so on is more common in families which have handicapped, especially severely handicapped, children in them. So support services that keep those families together, keep the children at home without making them an unmanageable burden on the family, certainly would have my full support. Information to us on those kinds of programs would be of real interest to me.

I know from professional work, oh, 25 years ago that at that time it was very common for handicapped children to be institutionalized. Frankly, some of the conditions in those institutions 25 years ago were simply intolerable by today's standards. So the whole philosophy of shifting those problems – and they are problems – those burdens, and opportunities for sharing love, too, in these families and keeping those children at home will be very important.

So those are a couple of areas that I think my colleagues have mentioned and I reinforce.

Shifting to core business 2, "keeping children, youth and families safe and protected." The issue of family violence, child abuse, and neglect comes up in various forms under this core business area. Under goal 2.1 in the core business, "to protect Alberta children from abuse and neglect," a goal that I'm sure all of us would endorse and support, it seems to me it should be something that has a long-term outcome to it rather than simply a short-term outcome.

4:20

I'm also noticing under goal 2.2 this initiative: "to reduce family violence and address its impact on children, youth and families." I do notice in my travels through Alberta that there are, for example, billboards or bus ads and so on about services for children to combat family violence. I found myself thinking, as I went through the business plan there, about women's shelters and family shelters, and it brought to mind a particular case that's come to my attention and the attention of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre. It's a case involving a women's shelter that suggests that there are risks even in these days of expanding government spending and that funds to women's shelters, through the department and through the child and family regional authorities, may in fact be in some cases being reduced. It goes to questions of immediate service and justice to people who are seeking protection, and it also goes to the issue of trying to break the cycle of family violence that we see played out generation after generation in the same families.

If I could talk for a few moments about this kind of a case. It concerns a satellite agency in a smaller town in Alberta, at least a women's shelter that began as a satellite shelter and initially began providing a maximum of seven days of shelter. They quickly found that was inadequate and, probably working with the department and with local authorities, expanded to I believe a full-service women's emergency shelter which then allows them to provide shelter for 21 days. It allowed them to expand to provide the kinds of preventive and intervention services that I believe in the long run will create a much better situation. For example, they were able to hire a part-time child support worker and eventually increase the child support to full-time and hire a part-time outreach worker working on family violence prevention, going into schools, doing education programs for the public.

They noticed, as they got into this, that after a couple of years they were actually seeing a marked drop in the number of repeat clients.

So they were able to take clients in, provide them with short-term emergency service, and then move them out into the community and support them there while they went back to school or perhaps relocated in a different town where they were away from the violent situation. So it sounded like it was on the way to a real success story.

Then in the most recent round of budgeting they find that apparently they're facing funding cuts. As it is, of course, provincial funding doesn't cover the full operating expenses of women's shelters and family violence shelters. They cover the basics, as I understand it, for beds and food and crisis counseling for the moment. But in terms of longer term support and any enhanced services, these agencies rely on the community, and probably all of us have donated from time to time to various women's shelters. Certainly the shelters are not opposed to that sort of fund-raising, but the core funding, when it's reduced, means that some of the outreach and support services that allow them to break the cycle of family violence get eliminated. Then we take a step backwards, and we see an increase in repeat clients and an increase in family violence, certainly in the long run, and a decrease in people's ability to escape from those problems. So I would encourage the minister and the department to ensure that family violence remains a high priority in their department and in the activities of the regional authorities.

Continuing on through the business plan, again I'll settle on a few of the areas that I saw as particular highlights. I return, partly in my role as critic for aboriginal issues, to core business 3, "promoting healthy communities for children, youth, and families," and goal 3.2, "to support Aboriginal people to plan . . . implement, monitor and evaluate services in consultation with their communities," and, related to that, the goal of supporting "the development of a culturally effective training model for First Nations delegated agencies." Again, reflecting on the experience I had professionally many years ago, the whole challenge of delegating family and children's services to native and aboriginal organizations is one that is, shall I say, a great challenge.

There's a cultural conflict there between our own needs as a government to manage closely and be very careful and follow standard corporate procedures, as it were, for managing money and personnel and at the same time recognize that cultures such as a First Nations culture may have a different approach to those expectations and those issues. So it's a difficult and challenging area, yet of course we realize and groups on both sides of the issue realize that it has to be addressed and resolved if we're going to move ahead.

So I'd be interested to know, for example, how the ministry is planning to "support the development of a culturally effective training model for First Nations delegated agencies." How is that going to be done? I'm sure it's being done on the basis of now many years of experience. I'm sure we're learning from our experience, and if we evaluate that experience and move ahead, we will hopefully be improving each year that goes by. I'd be curious to know what training models have been developed for delegated agency personnel. Again, recognizing the cultural differences between maybe a very European-based model for providing children's services and an aboriginal model, how do we sort those out and mesh them, hold accountability yet delegate authority? I'd also be interested to know, along this line, what policies the ministry has in place across all children's authorities, in fact, to provide leadership in developing and implementing those training models.

So certainly anything related to aboriginal issues, the unusually high number or proportion of aboriginal children who form child welfare caseloads and aboriginal families who are needing support, speaks to our need to be very attentive in those areas. Of course, those same issues arise for areas that go beyond the scope of this

department – areas of poverty, issues of education, issues of justice – so it's certainly a multidisciplinary concern.

I also share my colleagues' concerns that seem to persistently emanate from the office of the Children's Advocate. Report after report of the Children's Advocate identify ongoing problems, and I'm prepared to concede that, with some of these problems, the best we can do is manage them; we cannot solve them. But I'm not convinced that some of them we can't solve and that others we cannot manage better. I'm frankly a bit skeptical that the department is responding as enthusiastically as it might to the reports of the Children's Advocate. We are, after all, in a position of enormous responsibility when we take on the role of looking after people's children. We are their surrogate parents, and we need to be their advocates. We need to ensure that everything possible is being done to support them, to break the kinds of patterns that see children growing up to repeat the same mistakes as their parents. So it echoes my earlier comments. I'd really like to know more about the department's efforts in these areas.

4:30

What recommendations will the ministry be implementing for the review of the Children's Advocate office? That issue, the Children's Advocate report, has come up in debate and in question period, and it's not something we're going to let go of. It's a high priority for us. It's a moral responsibility all of us share as legislators: to be devoted guardians of children in the care of the provincial government. I'd be interested to know how soon after the Children's Advocate's annual reports are released the ministry will be acting upon the Children's Advocate's recommendations. It would be interesting to know details about the activities of the office of the Children's Advocate, the number of families who are connecting with that office each year. So those are some of my particular questions around the office of the Children's Advocate.

I could go on with my concerns about this department. There was a time when I actually had extensive personal and professional involvement working in these kinds of areas. I know the sometimes grim realities of the cases that these authorities encounter and that the minister will be no doubt aware of and how insolvable they at times seem, yet what a moral responsibility they place on all of us. It's an area that I think I and our caucus will be watching very closely, so we'll be back again next year to see what has happened.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Because I may not get time to get to them later, I'd like to start, if I might, with some specifics about the budget items. In particular it's item 2.3 in the estimates, the financial support to child and family services authorities, and 2.3.1 through 2.3.18 have the allocations for the various authorities.

There's a discrepancy, Mr. Chairman, between what some of the authorities asked for or estimated they would need to serve their area and what has been allocated to them in the budget. In some of them the differences are very little, but in some of them the differences are quite notable. I start with Sun Country. I believe \$28,899,000 was their estimate of need, and they've been allocated \$25,474,000. Now, that's a fair slip in terms of the amount of resources they have to work with, and I wonder why they put in their estimate and then it was reduced to what it was.

That holds true for a number of regions. Calgary Rocky View asked for \$135 million, and the allocation is \$132 million. West Yellowhead asked for or estimated their need would be \$15,296,000,

and they were allocated \$13,632,000. That's an almost \$2 million shortfall in their estimate and fairly significant, I would think, in terms of the delivery of services. The amount in the budget of the Capital region is about – if my math is quick here – 8 and a half million dollars less than the amount that they estimated they were going to need to conduct business. There are a number of others on the list. As I said, most of them are fairly close to the estimate of the authority, but there are some discrepancies that, on the face of the figures we have, would seem to be fairly significant in terms of the operation of the authority.

So I have those specific questions about program 2.3 and would appreciate some information on why those decisions were made or why those figures appear to be the way they are in the budget.

I wanted to turn, if I might, Mr. Chairman, to performance measures. It's been sort of a constant theme as we've gone through the estimates for 2001-2002, and that is what seems to happen to performance measures. The Auditor General has put a great deal of faith in those measures as the basis for the business plans of the province and has made some cross-department recommendations. It seems to me that for a number of departments those recommendations have been ignored. If the performance measures are as intrinsic a part of the government's financial planning as they seem to indicate, it would seem to me that ignoring those performance indicator warnings from the Auditor General puts the whole process in question.

I know that this is a new ministry and people are still feeling their way around and there is a need for some new measures. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Glengarry has already made some specific comments about the percentages and the way the measures are being put in place, but I do have a question. There are a number of new measures that are being asked for, and baselines are being developed. But if I couple that, the development of those new measures, with what I hear from people working in the system about the heavy workloads, I wonder if adding the performance measures aren't going to add to the workload that some of them find very, very difficult already. I think there was a parallel, for instance, when the postsecondary system went to key performance measures at the local level with the kinds of complaints I heard from institutions then in terms of the amount of time that it was taking to develop the measures. Is that a concern, or are these developed elsewhere? Are there special groups that will be charged with developing the measures?

That said, Mr. Chairman, I may be evidencing the fact that I'm a newcomer to the area and to the ministry except for what I've been able to read in past budgets. But I've been doing some reading, and looking at the business of child and family indicators, I wondered if the department has considered or will be considering developing a comprehensive set of child and family indicators. I was interested in terms of what kinds of criteria might govern the development of such a set of indicators. We've always had a profound interest in families and children both nationally and provincially in terms of what is happening to them. It seems to me that a comprehensive set of indicators that was initiated by the government itself would be very useful.

4:40

It would also eliminate the kind of constant warfare that seems to be engaged in between agencies that are developing indices and putting forward claims based on those indices, only to have them rejected by the government as not being relevant, not being comprehensive enough, or not having been developed properly. I think of the disputes there have been over poverty, over how many Albertans are actually living in poverty and how many children are in poverty.

I think a comprehensive set of indicators that was done under rigorous development methods with standards that are very high could alleviate that, but more importantly they could be a very useful tool as we try to track what's happening to children and families both across time and in making comparisons with various groups.

Indicators could be useful for a number of purposes: providing descriptions of groups and subgroups within the population. They'd be useful in terms of monitoring. That's exactly what the performance measures are intended to do, to help us in terms of monitoring progress of particular groups. They would allow us to make some comparisons. We'd be able to see if conditions were improving or were deteriorating or even holding steady across a time period.

A comprehensive set of indicators would be useful in focusing activities across agencies and government departments. They would be useful in trying to develop strategies for dealing with problems. I think that indicators could be used to hold agencies and managers and even the government itself responsible for outcomes rather than focusing, as we do so often now, on the inputs into the system.

It would also help us in terms of evaluation. We've had, for instance, programs for pregnant teenage mothers for a number of years in the province. I have no idea what's happened in terms of those programs or how they have progressed. There are programs to prevent teen pregnancy. What has been the impact of those programs over time? Have the rates actually been reduced with the introduction of those programs in schools? So I think a comprehensive set of indicators could be very useful.

There was a set of criteria established, as I indicated, for developing those indicators, and one of the criteria would be that it is comprehensive. The performance measures that we have in most of the business plans are very selective, but it seems to me that this is one ministry, children and their families, that would benefit from a comprehensive set of indicators, as well as some other departments, but particularly this department. A comprehensive set of indicators would be very useful in terms of looking at youngsters from birth through adolescence and the transition into adulthood.

Any set of indicators I think would have to be clear and comprehensible. I think that's a given. It would fit into some of the performance measures here that are aimed at trying to make sure that programs are easily understood by the public. Any such set of indicators I think would have to make sure that they were open to common interpretation, and they would have to be geographically detailed. I think in our province that would be useful. Because the province is so diverse in terms of the needs and the social life of citizens, that would be useful.

I guess I would make the argument and ask if the department has considered the development of a more comprehensive set of indicators, and that would in no way detract or take away from the specific performance indicators. I think it might help formulate those indicators and put them into a context that would be useful as we try to consider the progress that we're making as a province.

I'd like to move, then, if I may, Mr. Chairman, to the matter of caseworkers. As I indicated before, the minister has announced some measures to get more people into the system, to help with the caseloads. Again, I have to confess my ignorance on the matter, but I wonder: are there minimum standards for case-related activities? I was looking at a set of such standards developed elsewhere and was really quite surprised that jurisdictions do have workload standards that caseworkers use as a guide and also the number of cases that a worker could be expected to address given the kinds of activities that they were engaged in.

Just for a couple of examples, one of the problems here has been the permanent placement of children and youth. Under the standards that are used at least in one American state, the monthly workload

for each of those cases is determined to be about two and a half hours or two and a quarter hours per case, and the maximum caseload for a worker who was exclusively working on placements would be 54 cases. That seems to me to be awfully high. I wonder: are there similar standards in our province? I compared that to the standard, for instance, for a worker who was screening or on a hot line or on intake activities, where they devoted about half an hour a month per case. They were expected to be able to handle 322 cases, which again is a little mind-boggling. My question is: are there similar standards in our province that are used for caseworkers? If there are, who determines those standards? Is it done by the profession, or is it done by agreement? How do they come about?

I've had, as we've all had, Mr. Chairman, information from caseworkers from across the province lamenting their inability in some cases to do the job as they see fit. Their concerns seem to be with more time: more time to do the job the way they would like to do it, more time for contact with families, more time for finding resources, more time for working with service providers, more time to properly prepare plans for court contests, more time for assessments of parent and child relationships, more time for face-to-face contact with clients, for training relatives as required to be foster parents, to facilitate parent/child visitations, for conducting case management in order to reduce placement moves for children, and adequately inputting information into the system itself. So a whole host of areas where they indicated they needed more time, and that wasn't all of it.

Those seemed to be the more important reasons for needing more time, but they also needed more time for documentation and for writing required reports, for conducting more thorough investigations than what they felt they were able to do. The collaboration with other agencies is a time-consuming activity, and they needed more time for preparing children for adoption, for working with parents, preparing children for separation, for reviewing client history, for educating adoptive parents, for co-ordinating with public health and other agencies, for working with long-term guardians. As you talk to or hear from caseworkers, the conclusion you come away with is that there's a very heavy, heavy workload, and many of them are feeling frustrated in their ability to deal with it.

With that, given that I have a one-minute signal, I'll conclude, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

4:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I understand I have only a few minutes left. I have a couple of quick questions.

I notice some anomalies in the budgets of some regional child and family services authorities, and I thought I'd just ask the minister to perhaps address that. I notice that on page 82 for the Metis settlements child and family services authority there is a very dramatic drop in the budget from last year to the year for which we are debating on the prevention of family violence. I looked at the other budgets in other authorities as well, and although the money budgeted last year in many cases was more than was in fact spent, the money budgeted for this coming year has not dropped so dramatically as is the case for this. So you might want to address that. On page 72 I compared it with the West Yellowhead case, for example, and there was no such serious drop there, so I wonder why it happened.

The second very specific question has to do with the board of governance budgets. For the Capital region the budget for governance is much, much smaller than the Calgary region authority budget for governance. The difference is almost three, four times.

Calgary is spending three, four times more on governance than is the Capital region, and I wonder if that is something that you can explain for the benefit of the House and for my benefit.

Thank you. These are the two specific questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time I have some specific questions for the hon. minister regarding child care in this province and in particular on the Cleland report. This report, as I understand it, is going to look at family income, is going to look at the number of children that are in child care that are under the age of seven and before grade 1. There is to be also a look at the number of hours of child care per child each month. Also, there is to be a study of special-needs children.

More importantly, I think we need to address the issue of compensation for child care workers, and hopefully this is going to be addressed in the Cleland report. Many of the staff that are involved in that industry in this province are living certainly below the low-income cutoff. Their compensation packages are a little bit more than \$1,000 a month, if that, and as a result of that, there's a high staff turnover rate. When we think of caring and nurturing and educating the young children of this province, it is perhaps the most important job, after parenting, that can be done to ensure that the next generation is well looked after while they're in their formative years.

We have money in this province for risk management funds. We have money for generous subsidies to industries. Certainly there is money somewhere to ensure that the child care workers of this province are adequately compensated for what they do so that there will be some stability in the workforce, so there won't be this high rate of transition, and so we can attract young Albertans into this very important field. Now, one only has to discuss this whole issue with the professionals at Grant MacEwan College to get a firm handle on exactly what needs to be done.

At this time I will conclude my remarks, and I will look forward to hearing about the Cleland report from the minister. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would the committee grant consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be remiss as the MLA for 27 schoolchildren that were in the Assembly earlier this afternoon, who came and went during question period, if I didn't make note that they were here so that I can send them a copy of *Hansard*. This afternoon we had 27 students from the Lacombe Christian school here with teacher Mr. Tim Van Doesburg and parent helpers Mr. Norm Noordhof, Mr. Henk Ryper, Mr. Henk Kassies, Mr. Otto Schermers, Mr. Henk Bos, Mrs. Gea Bos, Mr. Roger Young, Mr. Harvey Doornbos, Mrs. Karen Doornbos, and Mrs. Annette Wiersma. I thank them for coming. That was the Lacombe Christian school from Lacombe.

head: **Main Estimates 2001-2002**

Children's Services (*continued*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Children's Services to conclude debate.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I want to start by just thanking the hon. members opposite, all of them, for what I believe have been thoughtful, sometimes provocative comments and I think in many respects well-researched questions. I particularly want to cite the ministry critic, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who has a long and distinguished career in looking after the young people of this province. I value his opinions and his impressions, and I will certainly commit to doing my level best to getting all of the responses prior to any conclusion of our spring session that I have indicated previously, as well as, as much as we can, to provide a framework of response on those issues raised by the Children's Advocate report. So that would be my first comment.

The second comment. I'm not going to use the full privilege of five minutes, but I want to just provide some food for thought to all members in the House, and that is this. Yesterday I met with Dr. Fraser Mustard and discussed the issues that he very adequately expressed on brain development and the work he had done with Senator Margaret McCain. He suggested that far too frequently people who care for children are assumed to be baby-sitters and are assumed to be some sort of less than honoured, less than valued professionals.

5:00

I want to assure the hon. members opposite that I do value the people that care for children. It is the most important type of effort that we can make to ensure brain development and the full nurturing and development of the child, and wherever possible, when the child is not being parented or nurtured by their own family in an adequate fashion, we should do our level best to ensure that the most excellent people are in touch with that child. If we do not do that, we're going to pay as a society in the longer term, and pay and pay and pay. So we do have, I think, not only a trust but a duty to honour those people who work for and with children. I am happy that our government is working in that direction, albeit I will concede that we're not there yet, but we must collectively work to be there.

When the hon. members have cited these questions, I look forward to providing them a full written response without being dismissive with a cursory response, and I commit further to meeting with the minister's critic to discuss those responses at a later date.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Children's Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$643,866,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following department.

Children's Services: operating expense, \$643,866,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

Third Reading

(continued)

[The following bills were read a third time and passed]

5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 Nelson

6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001 Nelson

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the progress we have made today, I now move that we adjourn.

[At 5:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 14, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back. At the conclusion of today's prayer please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Hon. members and all of our visitors here today, please join us in the singing of our national anthem. We'll be led by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce a good friend and a former colleague. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly the hon. Gary Filmon, the former Premier of Manitoba. I would ask Gary to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you a very special guest that is sitting in your gallery this afternoon. She is a great athlete and a friend, and we have trained thousands of kilometres together. Yesterday in Ottawa Sandy Jacobson became the first Edmonton member of Team Canada for the Worlds to be held in this great city in August. She'll be running the marathon for our country. Sandy accomplished this great feat while doing a full-time job, being a good mother and a wife, as well as guest lecturing on sports psychology across this country for Running Room Canada. Sandy is certainly made of all the right stuff. Joining her today is her mother, Eloise Leckie. I would ask both of them to please rise and receive the warm congratulations and warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly members of the CCAF international fellowship program. The fellowship program is sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency and implemented in collaboration with the

office of the Auditor General of Canada, the office of the Auditor General of Quebec, and the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation.

Seated in the Speaker's gallery is Alberta's Auditor General, Peter Valentine, who is hosting the group as part of their visit to western Canada. Also hosting is Mrs. Donna Bigelow, program coordinator, international affairs, office of the Auditor General of Canada.

Joining them is Mr. Leonardo Etcheverry from Argentina; Leonardo is a supervisor in the office of the Auditor General of Argentina. Mr. Horacio Vieira from Brazil: the court of accounts in Brazil has nine ministries and three deputy ministries, and Horacio is the head of the office of one of the deputy ministries. Ms Ximena Mura Alvarez from Chile: Ximena supervises and participates in financial audits as well as audits of special projects financed by the World Bank and the Interamerican Development Bank in the sectors of education, health, economy, and environment. Mr. Bato Ali from the Philippines: Bato is a state auditor of the Philippine Commission on Audit. Ms Nafy Keita from Senegal: Nafy has worked for the government of Senegal for 20 years in various fields and positions; since 1998 she has worked as a senior inspector in the office of the inspector general. Mrs. Jaruwan Ruangswadipong from Thailand: Jaruwan is the director of the human resources development section in the office of the state auditor of Thailand.

Mr. Speaker, I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by 92 individuals living throughout Edmonton, Calgary, and Sherwood Park. They are petitioning the Legislative Assembly "to urge the Government of Alberta to put in a system of rent control."

Thank you.

Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented on Tuesday, May 8, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill 17

Insurance Amendment Act, 2001

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill amends the unproclaimed Insurance Act in two respects.

Firstly, it will amend the licensing requirement for staff adjusters in the Insurance Act, placing the onus on insurers to be legally responsible for the claims and settlement activities of their employees. It will also include a provision to enable the Finance minister to compel the attendance of witnesses to give evidence on hearings and appeals under the Insurance Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 17 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Bill 18 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill will allow us to resolve some technical issues which were raised during consultations with our stakeholders prior to proclamation of the act.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two letters, and I'm tabling copies of these letters in the House. They are both addressed to the Premier. The first one is from Mrs. Susan Higgs of Harvie Heights, Alberta, urging the Premier to not proceed with the Spray Lakes sawmills forestry management agreement signing in order to preserve the ecosystems in the area.

The second letter is from Mr. Dean Novak of Calgary, again addressed to the Premier, strongly urging him not to sign away Alberta's precious heritage to Spray Lakes sawmills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, today I have one tabling. It is a letter from Ms Janet Pringle of Calgary, concerned with poor working conditions of rehabilitation workers and the low level of AISH benefits rates.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling today the appropriate number of copies of TransAlta's corporate code of conduct policy, which requires that TransAlta employees avoid "real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have letters today from Mr. Lloyd Lohr of Erskine, Ms Karen Blumhagen of Tofield, and Ms Margaret Coutts on behalf of the Red Deer River Naturalists. They all want the government to designate the Bighorn wildland park as a protected area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today the appropriate number of copies of a presentation by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, who is one of the world's foremost experts in the field of human aggression and the roots of violence and violent crimes. He's also authored the book *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence*.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly here today 70 visitors, or thereabouts, from Blessed Kateri school, one of many fine schools in the area that I'm privileged to represent. They are here today visiting the Legislature and listening and learning about the legislative system, including participating in the mock Legislature system. They are accompanied today by some very hardworking teachers, including Ms Brigitte Berube, Ms Cathy Bereznicki, Mrs. Moira Lintz, and some equally hardworking parent helpers, Mrs. Dawn Finnigan, Mr. Len McMurrer, Mrs. Nancy Coco, Mr. Lou Caputo, and Ms Trish Burke-Dodds. I would ask all of them to please rise at this time and receive the very warm welcome from all members of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two former colleagues and friends from Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world. It's my opportunity today to introduce the deputy mayor of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, the largest municipality, geographically, 68,000 square kilometres. With us today we have Maggie Lent as well as the city and regional manager of the regional municipality, Mr. Dave Putz. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly today two very capable young people who are administering the constituency office of Calgary-West this summer. Keith Marlowe, who's a management student at the U of C, is my office assistant, applying his previous experience as a summer student at Calgary-Mountain View and, of course, with additional responsibilities. Zaria Hamer, my summer student, is a political science graduate from the University of Calgary who volunteered on my recent provincial campaign in Calgary-West and will be certainly learning about politics from the grassroots perspective. I'd like this Assembly to receive them and give them the usual warm welcome as they stand there right now. Keith and Zaria.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very special constituent from Edmonton-Glenora. She is the wife of

our hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. We are little able to accomplish anything in political life without the support and help of loving family, and I'd ask that Marcy Hutton please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Oral Question Period

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

Conflict of Interest Court Case

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Jaber case still raises many questions in Albertans' minds, and this government has done nothing to answer those questions. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Can the minister tell us how often an entire case is argued in court based purely on an agreed statement of facts?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not a usual occurrence, because in most cases before the criminal courts the facts are not agreed, and in fact one of the main purposes of the court, particularly at the provincial court level, is to prove the facts. However, it is a standard practice where facts are agreed, and in approximately 50 percent of the cases of this nature across the country agreed statements of facts are used. Two of those cases, including one involving a Senator, went to the Supreme Court of Canada on agreed statement of facts. It is an appropriate way to go in appropriate circumstances where facts are agreed.

I'd go on to say, Mr. Speaker, that we encourage our Crown prosecutors to save court time where possible, and in fact the courts admonish prosecutors from time to time to save time where possible by agreeing on facts where it is possible to do so rather than use the court time to prove them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that ministers of the Crown are referred to in the court documents and that thousands of dollars were paid to a senior government official and that continuing public unease surrounds this case, why is the government so reluctant to call a public inquiry to clear the air on the matters involved?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that a public inquiry has already been held. First of all, there was a complete and thorough police investigation of this particular case. The evidence was taken to the Crown prosecutor. Charges were laid. A preliminary hearing was held at which evidence was given ostensibly by the prosecution. Enough evidence was gleaned to have the judge send the accused to trial. There was an agreed statement of facts. There was a conviction and a fine of some \$161,000 levied. That, indeed, is tantamount to a public inquiry. There was a full investigation and an open and public court hearing relative to this particular case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. Don't you think the public deserves to know some of the answers to the questions that go beyond the strict legality of this case: how the government was involved, the degree to which they were involved, the frequency of this kind of activity within the government? These kinds of questions need to be asked.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat. If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition, the hon. member of the third party, or any other citizen in this province has any evidence or allegations that could be substantiated in any way, shape, or form or even deserve investigation, bring them forward, and I'm sure that the hon. Justice minister and Attorney General will make sure that these matters are thoroughly investigated by the police and that if charges are to be laid, appropriate action will be taken.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Access to Court Documents

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday a member of our staff made a routine inquiry at the courthouse for documents relating to the Jaber case. Within 40 minutes of being at the courthouse, our staff member received a call from an official at Alberta Justice who said: I understand you're looking for copies of court exhibits in the Jaber case. This individual had not been involved in any of our previous contacts with Justice or with the court system. My questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Is Alberta Justice alerted as a matter of course when requests are made for access to court documents?

MR. HANCOCK: No, Mr. Speaker. The hon. opposition leader will know that one of his own colleagues had requested by letter from our office copies of the transcripts, which I had previously indicated I would provide to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and they also requested exhibits. That request went to the department, and I presume that when the clerk's office made inquiries relative to what should be done with respect to the request for exhibits, those inquiries crossed paths.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Justice: why was Alberta Justice almost immediately alerted to the fact that one of our staff members made a routine request for documents in the Jaber case at the courthouse last Thursday when that individual had not been involved in the case and the call was to that person by name, individually?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, what happened in this particular case is that exhibits in preliminary inquiries are not routinely released without the consent of both the Crown and the defence counsel on a case. In this particular case, members of the media had been requesting copies of the exhibits to be released, and in fact there was consent given to release copies of the exhibit to members of the media. That being the case, when the inquiry came from the Official Opposition with respect to their being able to get copies of the exhibit, the person in question at the courthouse contacted the communications department of Justice to determine what to do in that circumstance, seeing as exhibits had already been released to the media under that request.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Justice: how many court cases are currently under watch by your ministry?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we watch of course, in fact

more than watch. We participate in all the criminal ones, and I presume we have a significant interest in a significant number of civil ones, but I wouldn't have the answer to that.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Conflict of Interest Guidelines

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Transportation. Can he confirm to the Assembly that no senior managers of his department are significant shareholders or have immediate family members who are significant shareholders in companies that contract with his department?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I trust that our senior officials in the Ministry of Transportation follow very closely the guidelines that are set forth by this government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Can he confirm to the Assembly that no senior managers of his department are significant shareholders or have immediate family members who are significant shareholders in companies that contract with his department?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are conflict of interest guidelines for all senior officials, and the officials in my department would be following those very closely.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that government guidelines typically would preclude this kind of event, can the minister of health explain to the Assembly why his department tolerates senior managers of the CRHA and their immediate family members being major shareholders in companies that contract to the CRHA?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is a very well worn path that leads exactly to nowhere. Health authorities are required to have conflict of interest bylaws that are based on those that apply to all MLAs, including the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. The Health Care Protection Act requires full ownership disclosure of all private facilities seeking a contract with a regional health authority, and reviewing that ownership information is part of the contract review process.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before I had the opportunity to review each and every one of these 34 contracts, including the one that the hon. member is asking about, the Auditor General of this province assessed our approval process and found it to be appropriate. An international company based out of British Columbia also reviewed our approval process and found it to be appropriate. The contracts were reviewed by an independent consultant in the province of British Columbia, and the policy and legal experts in my department also conducted their own review.

Mr. Speaker, this is a tiresome, tiresome line of questions, and it has been asked and answered on a number of occasions in this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. You have been recognized.

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The agreed statement of facts in the Jaber case alleges that Mr. Jaber did no lobbying in exchange for the \$200,000 which he received . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, will you please take your place behind your desk. I have no idea where you're going. If I see a twitch from the Sergeant-at-Arms – he carries a sword.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The agreed statement of facts in the Jaber case alleges that Mr. Jaber did no lobbying in exchange for the \$200,000 he received for that purpose from Mr. Naqvi. My question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. If Mr. Jaber took \$200,000 from Mr. Naqvi for the purposes of requesting that the ALCB approve his lease but did nothing for it, why was Mr. Jaber not charged with defrauding Mr. Naqvi?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the prosecutors are in the habit of working with the police to develop the most serious charges that they can and dealing with the serious charges of the public interest. If in fact there was a concern between Mr. Jaber and Mr. Naqvi as to whether or not anybody got value for money, that is their particular issue. What the Crown is interested in doing is making sure that ethical conduct by senior officials is held to the highest standard, and that's why they prosecuted on the most serious charge that they could, I presume, and achieved a conviction in the case.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, was the minister briefed on the decision as to which charges the government would proceed with against Mr. Jaber?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I was advised prior to the charges being laid that charges would be laid. I wasn't briefed on which charges would be laid or what counts would be laid but merely advised that charges were being laid and that they would be laid I believe it was within the next day or so.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, was the minister or any other member of the government involved in the decisions as to which charges would be brought against Mr. Jaber?

MR. HANCOCK: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Catholic School Board Boundaries

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. During this session the minister has talked about the establishment and the expansion of Catholic school boards. This is a topic of great interest to many school boards and especially our school boards in rural Alberta. Will the minister please clarify the position of the Alberta School Boards Association on the proposed changes?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the Alberta School Boards Association did was convene a committee roughly a year ago to take a look at the whole 4 by 4 process. They then asked

their school boards to have a vote on it and pass the vote on to me. What I must clarify today is that there was no commitment one way or the other to support or not to support. This was quite simply a vote by the member school boards of the Alberta School Boards Association.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. With the differing views between the school boards on this issue, what are the benefits of making the proposed changes? For example, would the expanded boundaries provide additional sparsity and distance and transportation funding?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've spoken in this Legislative Assembly before about the 4 by 4 process. It was put in in roughly 1900 or 1901. Quite simply, that process has become antiquated as a way to expand Catholic boundaries. In many situations the number of electors that would be required would be three or four or five.

Just to alert the Assembly as to the extent of this issue, during my term as Minister of Learning, which has been roughly two years, I have personally signed 80 different 4 by 4 proposals. Eighty different 4 by 4 proposals have been put in in the province of Alberta in the last two years. The legislation that is before this House will put an end to that. It will bring forward a solution to the expansion of Catholic boundaries, of separate school boundaries that will be a much better process. It will be a process that will involve consultations with everyone, not just the Catholic electorate. This is a proposal that has the support of the ACSTA.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the minister. Is it true, then, that with these changes a person of Catholic faith will not be able to serve as a member on the public school board?

2:00

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, as the system is today, that is exactly what happens. A member of the Catholic faith, where there is a Catholic school board, will not be able to serve on the board of a public school system. What will happen under this legislation is that a person will be able to elect whether or not he is a public supporter or a separate supporter. So you could have a Catholic who is a public supporter serve on a public school board, but on a separate school board the elector or the school board trustee must be Catholic.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Electricity Deregulation

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When discussing power deregulation with the *Edmonton Journal* editorial board in February of this year, the Premier looked up from his detailed briefing notes with a shrug and said, quote: I have no idea what all this means. End of quote. I hope the Premier can answer my questions regarding approval of electricity exports last fall for TransAlta Utilities. My first question this afternoon to the Premier is: while the Senior Petroleum Producers Association expressed concerns about export approvals coming while Albertans suffer through higher electricity costs, does the Premier not acknowledge that approvals for electricity exports may adversely impact Albertans

by committing them to an increasingly higher price for electricity in places like California?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, this hon. member wasn't in that editorial boardroom, so I don't know on what basis he makes the allegation that I looked from my detailed notes in bewilderment to the editorial board. He wasn't there. If he was there, then tell us how he got in. Or was he listening at the door? Was he eavesdropping? Did he sneak in? [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The Premier has the floor.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the export of electricity, certainly a number of the major power producers or at least the power producers who hope to bring on major megawatts of new power – and we're talking in excess of 500 megawatts – are looking at having an excess of power in this province. They're looking at the opportunity to export the surplus. But the rules are quite clear. First of all, power companies, as I understand it, must be committed to provide the needs of Albertans. Secondly, they must leave a certain amount of the surplus in this province. Then it is the surplus on the surplus that under certain conditions they can with prior approval export to other jurisdictions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how will the Premier respond to the submission made to the National Energy Board by the Industrial Power Consumers & Cogenerators Association of Alberta that noted a lack of confidence in the market surveillance administrator's function because of legislative deficiencies?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm unaware of any deficiencies relative to the function and the role and the job description for the market surveillance administrator. If the hon. Minister of Energy has any further information he might wish to share, I'll have him respond.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the department is doing an industry restructuring review. If there are times when we can make this market function better, this market function more effectively, then of course we will. Although I did note today at noon that power prices were down to \$95.90 per megawatt hour, so we're starting to see progress.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier please review legislative deficiencies especially concerning the possibility that the Competition Bureau cannot review some matters because of the existence of the market surveillance administrator?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would have to take it that there is an assumption of a deficiency in the legislation. Certainly we don't mind looking at the legislation to see if, in fact, what the hon. member says is true or if, in fact, there is a deficiency. I haven't examined in any detail whatsoever the legislation as it pertains to the market surveillance administrator. Perhaps, again, the hon. minister has more information he may wish to share.

MR. SMITH: We are examining, Mr. Speaker, the dynamics of the market. If there are legislative deficiencies or market deficiencies or something that has to be changed in the construct of a market, then certainly, with the full input of stakeholders and consumers and those involved in this business, we intend to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Drought Assistance

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of drought has been a hot topic in the news and in this House. I noted that many of my constituents are very concerned about the effect a drought would have on their livelihood. Programs like the recently announced emergency water pumping program have assisted some farmers in accessing water supplies to their livestock, but many of my constituents are prohibited by distance from benefiting from that program and have to haul water supplies of up to 2,000 to 3,000 gallons every second day. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister advise what the government is doing to assist farmers who have to haul water in from alternative sources in order to provide for their livestock?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as we have discussed in this House over the last weeks, this has been a particularly dry year. Alberta farmers are not strangers to drought conditions, but ordinarily it's a regional matter. Unfortunately, this year it seems to be widespread across the province. The member indicated correctly that we have the emergency water pumping program, but in fact many producers do not have a source from which to pump.

I've spent the last several days talking to farmers and ranchers trying to understand what indeed we could do to respond that would be appropriate for their situation. One of the things that we've talked about is solar pumping, but if they can identify a well in a lease, there may be a very high cost to bring power in. We have talked about the opportunity for more dugouts, but that's not going to help right now unless we have a very high rainfall. We're hoping that some of the \$10.29 an acre that we've got coming out to farmers will help them with those hauling costs, but we're going to continue to talk to them and try and find some way to respond in the very short term.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. There is the PFRA program to assist farmers, but my constituents say that it takes up to six months to get approval for projects. Does the minister have any plans to help farmers develop these projects sooner?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is an alternative, and we are having discussions between Alberta Environment, the PFRA, and Alberta Agriculture. Certainly I know that our field staff are there and are prepared to help any farmer or rancher with program forms. I think that probably more appropriately we're right now addressing options that can meet the emergency water requirements that producers are facing, and I expect to be able to report back on that very soon.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: No final question, sir.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Court Fines

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following on his '94-95 and '98-99 recommendations, the Auditor General in his '99-2000 report again stated that the Department of Justice should report the results and costs of the collection activities for court fines, which bring in about \$85 million a year. The Auditor General further stated:

In 1999, the Department advised us that an action plan would be developed to implement my recommendation. However, as at the end of August 2000, this plan has not . . . been produced.

To the Minister of Justice. My first question is very simple: what is taking so long? It's been six years.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, everything that deals with the question of tracking of payments and those sorts of things involves the redeployment and regeneration of technology. We have a number of priorities for the deployment of technology in the department, and we're systematically dealing with those issues. Maintenance enforcement was deemed to be of a greater priority, and we proceeded with technology in the maintenance enforcement area. We've proceeded with technology with respect to, for example, the JOIN project, which is a question of scheduling and sharing of information. So there are a number of very serious issues relative to information gathering and the use of technology which deploys information. Technology is of course expensive, so we have to prioritize those in the course of which ones we do first.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. At this time can the minister give us a date as to when he expects the recommendations of the Auditor General to in fact be implemented?

MR. HANCOCK: No, Mr. Speaker. We do take the Auditor General's recommendations very seriously, and we want to look at how we can best implement them, but we have to do that in the context of the whole need for technology within the department and how we deploy it and the full information technology plan for the department. I can't give an answer today as to what exact date we'll have the system in place to be able to collect the information necessary.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, with fines coming in as large as, for example, the \$160,000 from the Jaber case . . .

DR. TAFT: How much?

MS BLAKEMAN: A hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, let's proceed with the question.

MS BLAKEMAN: With no apparent controls or results or costs on all of these collections, has the minister considered that this program may be perceived as open to abuse?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, one must differentiate between the question of fine collection and how you track certain fine collections. There are default provisions in place so that if people don't pay major fines, they go to jail. Warrants are issued. There's not a

problem from that perspective. The area that the Auditor General was looking at is more the collection of the smaller fines, out-of-province fines, those sorts of things which are really on the periphery of the process, not the significant fines that are in the centre of the process. There's significant jail time attached to larger fines.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The softwood lumber agreement came to an end on March 31, 2001. Now, this has worried some in the industry including a large forestry products employer in my riding. I'm happy to say that currently business has not been adversely affected due to the booming Alberta economy and high Canadian demand. However, the economic forecast is not good if the U.S. restricts volume or adds costs to exported forestry products. My first question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister provide an update on U.S. actions against the province's softwood lumber industry and how long it will take to resolve this situation?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think it's first of all important to note that the complaints are brought by the softwood lumber industry of the United States. They bring these complaints to their government officials, and they examine them over a period of time. It is correct that on April 23 the U.S. regulatory authorities did decide that from their point of view there was the basis to initiate formal negotiations and investigations. These allegations are currently under examination. In Alberta the allegations are focused on our forestry practices, and of course we are defending that very rigorously, because we feel that we have sound forestry practices designed to provide for a sustainable harvest over the life of a particular forest.

I'd like to also note here, Mr. Speaker, that we've had some success in our debate thus far with the authorities in the United States, and a number of the contentions have been dropped. We expect the process will not be completed until the end of this calendar year. I think I should also point out to the member and members of the Assembly that there's also the possibility of a further appeal and a further process under the World Trade Organization structure. So the only specific date that I can give to the hon. member is the end of this year as far as the Canadian process is concerned. It could go on longer through international discussions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my next question, then, would be: who is involved in this process? There have been reports that special envoys may be appointed to resolve this dispute. Can the minister tell the House what the province's and Alberta lumber companies' roles may be in these appointments?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, through the federal government there has been proposed the idea of a special envoy or a special mediator being appointed as far as this particular dispute is concerned. Initially, as I understand it, the federal authorities in the United States were opposed almost automatically to that particular suggestion. However, I understand that there's been some change perhaps in the attitude towards such envoys, and we'll just have to see if this particular type of approach might be looked at more favourably.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you. My last question is to the same minister. What is the province's role in funding the softwood lumber defence?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the funding for the defence falls into two areas of responsibility. As far as the specific case, the specific practices of particular forest companies, they have to pay for their legal costs in that regard. When it comes to defending the overall policy, the regulations, the measures that the government takes, government at the federal level will be co-ordinating that and providing support.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

School Board Boundaries

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The new government policy with respect to the establishment of school districts continues to raise some questions. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Given that the minister has implied the support of the Alberta School Boards Association, will the minister table documents confirming that support in the Legislature?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I believe I clarified that position in an earlier question this period.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Given that Catholic minorities enjoy certain school rights, why are there not similar rights for Protestants when they are a minority in a community?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are under the Constitution rights for the minority religion to have a separate school board. Those rights would still be implied.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given a court decision to the contrary, how can a provincial law give minority-faith members the right to be recognized as supporters of the public system?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, under this legislation, as I stated earlier, a person who is of the minority faith can be a public supporter if he elects to or a separate supporter if he or she elects to. That is what is included in this, because that's what the people around Alberta asked me for.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Inland Cement Limited

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's decision in March to fast-track environmental approval of Inland Cement's application to burn coal rather than natural gas in its cement kilns at its northwest Edmonton plant means that there will not be a full environmental impact assessment done, nor will the project be reviewed by an impartial tribunal like the NRCB. Instead of a comprehensive review, the government is holding a public meeting tonight. Given that converting to coal at this plant will mean that 403 tonnes per day of additional greenhouse gases will go up the

stacks and that daily emissions of such toxic heavy metals as arsenic, chromium, and mercury will go up anywhere between 30 to 80 percent, how can the minister justify not holding a full environmental assessment, including public hearings?

2:20

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the assumption of his first question was that there's not a full public hearing. I can assure you and all members of the opposition that there will be a full public process. That process begins this evening with a public meeting. Once an application is received from Inland – and we do not yet have that – then there will be a full environmental review process, which also allows for public input.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, then, act on the public concerns raised by area residents about the Inland Cement proposal? Or is tonight's meeting designed to make it appear that the government is listening when in fact the decision to fast-track its approval is final?

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, there are about three or four questions in that one question, and I'm not quite sure which one to answer. We are going to the public meeting tonight to listen to the people. We will have several presentations there by people outside government – a scientist from the University of Alberta, a scientist from the Alberta Research Council – to provide input into this public process.

The idea of fast-tracking is totally inaccurate. An environmental review process is not a fast track. It is a total environmental review, just as it says.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, then, confirm that a fast track is not on?

DR. TAYLOR: Absolutely. We will go through a full environmental review process, Mr. Speaker, as I've already told the member opposite.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Climate Change Central

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The two major oil sands production plants now in operation in Alberta are reportedly the fourth largest source of carbon dioxide emissions in Canada now. With the National Energy Board predicting that 70 percent of Canada's total oil production will be coming from Alberta's oil sands deposits by the year 2025 and with an astounding \$38 billion worth of expansion plans already announced since 1996, it is clear that Alberta, which is already one of the major bull's-eyes on the world map for greenhouse gas criticism, will be coming under even more severe worldwide and federal government scrutiny and pressure in the near future, unless substantial success is achieved in reducing our CO₂ emissions. Last week a relatively new organization called Climate Change Central opened in Calgary, and my question is to the hon. Minister of Environment, who I understand co-chairs Climate Change Central. Given the significance of the whole climate change issue to our economy in Alberta, could the minister explain what is the primary mission of Climate Change Central?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify an initial statement there about Alberta being in the bull's-eye, Canada produces about 2 percent of the world's greenhouse gases, and Alberta produces 25 percent of that. Ontario produces more greenhouse gas than Alberta. But that does not mean that we can be inactive in Alberta.

Climate Change Central was established with the mandate of creating in Alberta a zero-emission society and making Albertans aware of zero emissions and what zero emissions mean. It is not just a government organization. It is an organization that consists of the private sector, it consists of NGOs, and it consists of government as well. In fact, the co-chair of the organization is Mr. David Tuer of PanCanadian. He's the senior executive at PanCanadian.

One other thing I would say is in regards to funding. The provincial government is committed to this organization. We have provided a total of \$7.5 million over the next two years to fund that organization. The private sector is committed as well, Mr. Speaker. For some of the projects that they're doing, their average is: for every \$1 of Climate Change Central money that comes from the provincial government, they have \$4 of private-sector money.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how does Climate Change Central intend to get their mission or plan off the drawing board and into action in a practical way in the province?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I appreciate the word "practical" there, Mr. Speaker, because this is a very practical organization. One has to recognize that the organization really just got under way. It did come out of a roundtable on climate change, and it will carry out the recommendations of that roundtable. The chief executive officer was just appointed last fall, and we just opened the office about three weeks ago, so they are on the way. They are just getting up and operational, and you are going to see great things coming out of Climate Change Central. In fact, I was recently at a ministers' meeting, and the rest of the country, including the federal Minister of the Environment, Mr. David Anderson, is excited about what Climate Change Central can do and is excited about Alberta being a leader in this area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given that, figuratively speaking, entrepreneurial vision usually consists of looking for and finding a silver lining in a dark cloud, is the minister confident that there is any real possibility of Albertans being able to turn the dark clouds of Kyoto into black gold instead; in other words, taking this problem we're faced with and turning it into an opportunity?

DR. TAYLOR: Oh, I think there's a huge opportunity. When we look at climate change, we already know it's happening, so we have to look at it from two perspectives. We have to look at it from the perspective of emissions. We also have to look at it from the perspective of adaptive technologies: what are some of the adaptations we can make? There are two quick projects I might refer the Speaker and the House to. One is the . . . [interjections] You know, Mr. Speaker, if the members opposite would like to hear what we're saying and hear some good news, they could be a little quiet.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister has been recognized. We're now five minutes into this exchange.

DR. TAYLOR: I'll give you just one, then, Mr. Speaker, one example of a project, and that's a CO₂ sequestration project. The biggest greenhouse gas we produce is CO₂. What do we do with the CO₂? There's considerable research being done on how we handle CO₂, how we can sequester it in underground storage capacity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In a Learning department study 70 percent of postsecondary students indicated that tuition is a major barrier, and many students believe that it is impossible financially to attend a college, institute, or university. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Will the government review the tuition policy that allows tuition to continue to rise in this province?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, what must be made accurate in what the hon. member said – yes, indeed, there were 70 percent of the people that thought tuition was too high. The other interesting point is that they thought the average tuition was \$5,800, when in actual fact it was \$3,800. So there actually is a perception issue there as it comes to the cost of adult education, the cost of postsecondary education.

I will be looking at the tuition policy not just because the hon. member has asked me that. As you know, the existing tuition policy has a cap of 30 percent on it. We have a couple of institutions in Alberta that have already reached that 30 percent cap, and that was not by raising tuition fees. It was by lowering expenses. The cap is there as an element of the amount of expenses. By lowering the expenses, they reach the cap earlier.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given that regardless of student perception, tuition costs still deter high school students, what will be done about the government's tuition policy?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe that I just answered that question. We are taking a look at the tuition policy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given that students with marks in the 65 to 80 percent range are ineligible for many scholarships, what tuition relief is available to them?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's almost impossible for me to answer on each individual student that is out there. There are student loans available if they so need it. Our student loan program is by far the richest in the country; it went up 22 percent this year.

On this line of questioning I must just say one thing because I feel it is imperative that I say it, and that is that on average around the province students pay 23 percent of the actual cost of university.

The other 77 percent is picked up by the government and other funding institutions.

2:30

Bottle Recycling

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I've been hearing from owners of bottle depots and many of my constituents in Calgary that they are being shortchanged on their deposit when they return some of their beer bottles and cans for recycling. I strongly support recycling, and I'm concerned that people will not continue to recycle if they don't get all of their money back. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Do beer bottles fall under the recycling regulation in the province, and if so, why are some people not receiving the full amount of their deposit when they return some of their bottles for recycling?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister. We're not looking for legal interpretations.

DR. TAYLOR: I see you want a short response, Mr. Speaker, so I'll give you one. As you know, in Alberta when you buy almost any drink product, you have to pay a recycling fee. In 1972 Alberta brewers were excluded from that fee. Voluntarily some pay. Some don't, and that cost to Albertans is overall about \$4 million a year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is again to the same minister. What, if anything, is Alberta Environment going to do about this situation?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're working to change the system in two ways. We're working to change it so that Alberta brewers will have to pay, like any other drink container manufacturers have to pay, and we're working to change it so that Albertans will get their full deposits back.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to hear that response.

My final supplementary question is for the same minister. When can Albertans expect to receive the appropriate deposit back, and I mean 100 percent back?

DR. TAYLOR: As I said, we're just working on this, and Albertans can expect to receive their full deposit back on their beer bottles within the next few months.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Driver Licensing

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of recent media attention regarding the impending implementation of graduated licensing in Alberta, a number of questions have arisen. While most people who have talked to me are pleased with the direction the government is taking, some, particularly professional truck drivers, are concerned that not enough attention is being paid to classifications of drivers. My questions today are to the Minister of Transportation. Was consideration ever given to reviewing the existing structure of licensing beyond the proposed changes for new drivers?

MR. STELMACH: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there was consideration given following a fairly complete survey and polling of Alberta residents. However, to do anything with this particular area would require a

change through neighbouring jurisdictions, and as a result we weren't able to proceed with it.

MR. RENNER: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why is it that additional road tests are required for truck drivers and not for drivers of large recreational vehicles such as motor homes and fifth wheel trailers?

MR. STELMACH: The hon. member raises a very good point. In consulting with various stakeholders across the province of Alberta, we know that we have very strict rules for class 5 drivers and up, especially those that are driving larger trucks in the province. The position taken by many of these people was that a person with a class 5 driving a small car can then, of course, buy a larger motor home and tow a boat or a car behind without any additional training or education. That has led to some degree of concern amongst the traveling Alberta public, especially during the summer season, when we have more of the motor homes on Alberta highways. We are working closely with the RV manufacturers and suppliers to see how we can come up with an education/training program and looking at reviewing how we can also put in better driver awareness, having them sit in a vehicle that could be in excess of 60 feet in length.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. My final question to the same minister. Given that restrictions are placed on probationary drivers under the graduated licensing, is the minister contemplating any restrictions on probationary drivers respecting the operation of large recreational vehicles?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, not at this time. Again, if we were to do something different from the neighbouring jurisdictions, it would mean that we would have a unique set of rules for our jurisdiction. As a result, we wouldn't have consistency and harmonization across all jurisdictions, meaning not only our neighbouring provinces but many of the neighbouring states in the United States, from where we have ever increasing numbers of travelers holidaying in the beautiful province of Alberta.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

SummerActive 2001

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize national Try It Day, which was launched on Friday, May 11, as part of the official SummerActive national program. Last Friday the Minister of Alberta Community Development joined with local schoolchildren, seniors, and others to launch this important campaign, which includes a number of physical and fun-oriented activities. SummerActive 2001, which runs May 11 to June 22, is a cross-government initiative to increase awareness and promote active living. Alberta joins with federal counterparts and local community partners in this campaign to encourage Canadians everywhere to become more physically active for the benefit of their own health.

The message throughout Alberta and Canada is simply to get active and get healthy. All it takes is 60 minutes of light activity accumulated throughout the day. Therefore, I encourage everyone to try it and to become more active, not only during this period but throughout the year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Vaisakhi Day

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize Vaisakhi Day. On March 29, 1699, Vaisakhi Day, the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, baptized five Sikhs belonging to different castes and created the Khalsa order. Immediately afterwards he asked those very Sikhs whom he had baptized to baptize him. By this act he at once removed the caste distinction among the Sikhs as well as the distinction between the Khalsa and the Guru.

The Khalsa completed 302 years of its creation on Vaisakhi Day, April 13, 2001. This is a very special and historic day for the Sikh nation, a nation which focuses on the values of equality, justice, peace, strength, and purity. This day is celebrated each year with a cultural program and youth award ceremony, held this year on May 5, and by a community parade, held on May 12. We would like to recognize the Sikh Federation and the Vaisakhi Celebrations Committee for their commitment and contribution in enriching Canadian culture.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Alberta College of Art and Design

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my Legislature colleagues to join me in congratulating the graduating class of 2001 of the Alberta College of Art and Design. In acknowledging the valuable support and encouragement from their families, my recognition also goes to the faculty members and board of governors of the college.

Their convocation this year was very exciting since the first-ever bachelor of design degrees from Alberta College of Art and Design were awarded. Out of the 155 graduates 36 were awarded the bachelor of design. The students have pioneered the program, one of only three in Canada and the first in Alberta. This year seven graduates received an award for their excellence from the board of governors, and one outstanding graduate received the award from the Governor General of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, during the convocation reception I met a number of graduates. It is a great feeling to witness the dynamic attitude and the confidence of Alberta students. Financial wealth is needed at times, but what lasts in human civilization is the wealth of culture and art.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Alberta Crime Prevention Week

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May 11 to 18 is Alberta Crime Prevention Week. Crime prevention needs to exist on many different levels: personal, household, community, and through civic, provincial, and federal governments. On Friday I attended along with the federal Minister of Justice, colleagues from the Assembly, and others a seminar sponsored by the Edmonton Police Service and featuring Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman. Lieutenant Colonel Grossman had an interesting perspective on preventing youth crime and, possibly, adult crime by suggesting that all of us, including the three levels of government, work together to reduce young people's exposure to violent movies, videos, and electronic games.

He feels strongly that this is the conditioning and where young folks are programmed to believe that violence against others is okay and, even more, to practise it through the games. He pointed out that we should be putting as much time and care into violence prevention

in schools as we do into fire prevention in schools. His three-point plan of educate, legislate, and litigate against offenders was a good kickoff to Alberta Crime Prevention Week.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

2:40

Stephen Gibbings

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to acknowledge this afternoon a great Albertan, an educator who has been awarded the province's highest teaching honour. Stephen Gibbings is one of 22 teachers in Alberta to receive a 2001 excellence in teaching award. Specifically, Mr. Gibbings is receiving the Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta's excellence in teaching mathematics and science award.

Mr. Gibbings has been teaching at Cardston high school in the constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner for the past four years and has been acknowledged by his colleagues as being committed to his students and to providing them with the best learning environment possible. He is married with two children and is an important member of his community, having been involved with both the scouting movement and the Alberta Summer Games. I would like to congratulate Mr. Gibbings on his prestigious award and thank him for his ongoing, selfless service to our youth.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, today is May 14, and you know, there are still two hockey teams in Alberta participating. So now for the first of the two hockey recognitions, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Red Deer Rebels

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased and proud to announce that the Red Deer Rebels of the Western Hockey League have won the President's Cup as the WHL champions. On Saturday, May 12, the Rebels, who were ranked number 1 in the Canadian Hockey League for the last 11 weeks of the regular season, were led by their owner, general manager, and head coach Brent Sutter to this championship.

The Western Hockey League champions earned the right to represent the WHL in this year's Memorial Cup by defeating the Lethbridge Hurricanes, the Calgary Hitmen, the Swift Current Broncos, and finally the Portland Winter Hawks. During the play-off season the Red Deer Rebels' goaltender, Shane Bendera, set a new Western Hockey League record for most shutouts in one play-off season, with four shutouts. Coached by one of the very best goaltending coaches in the WHL, Andy Nowicki, Shane is a very deserving winner of the most valuable player award of the WHL play-offs.

On Thursday the Red Deer Rebels will travel to Regina for the Memorial Cup tournament. They will battle with the host team, the Regina Pats, Val d'Or of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, and either Ottawa or Plymouth of the Ontario Hockey League.

Congratulations to the Red Deer Rebels. We wish them the very best of luck in representing all of Alberta and the WHL in the 2001 Memorial Cup.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Kodiaks

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Camrose

Kodiaks hockey team defeated Flin Flon Bombers 5-0 in the finals of the Royal Bank Cup national junior A championships in Flin Flon, Manitoba. The Kodiaks became the 2001 national junior A champions by going undefeated in all six games of the national tournament. This is an especially impressive achievement as the Kodiaks are only in their fourth season in the Alberta Junior Hockey League.

Special congratulations go out to all Kodiak players including Erik Lodge, Dan Day, Tyler Bullick, Matt Ponto, Richard Petiot, Mark Robinson, Greg Prusko, Kevin Croxton, Jason Kenyon, Dalyn Fallsheer, Brett Osness, Darrell Stoddard, Brad Wanchulak, James Willis, Craig Perry, Mark Masters, Taggart Desmet, Doug Auchenberg, Jordan Chomack, Mike Melnyk, Mark Szott, Rory Rawlyk, Ryan Edwards, Scott Galenza, Joel Williams, and to the Kodiak coaches and staff: Garry Van Hereweghe, Boris Rybalka, Steve Gotaas, Darrell Heck, Ken Miske, Angie Weddeburn, Dr. Greg Ninian, Jeff Mingo, Dalton Reum, Robert Bettger, Daryl Mills, and Colin Christenson. Our special thanks to all of them.

Congratulations to the Camrose Kodiaks, 2001 Canadian junior A champions.

Orders of the Day

Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good afternoon. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Lottery Fund Estimates 2001-02

THE CHAIRMAN: We are considering the lottery fund estimates, and we have a list of various departments that are receiving funds from this source. A reminder to all members that this is not governed by the House leaders' agreement of some weeks ago. It's governed by the regular process. The chair is in the hands of the committee as to whether we want to have various ministers going and have questions back and forth, or would you just like to start at the top and go through? Do we have any direction at all from either side?

MR. STEVENS: I thought I would make a few introductory remarks, if I might, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. So it's the Minister of Gaming that's rising. Yes, make your remarks.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks very much. I'm very pleased this afternoon to present the 2001-2002 estimates for the Alberta lottery fund. As you know, the Alberta lottery fund represents the government's total portion of revenue from slot machines, lottery tickets, and video lottery terminals. The Ministry of Gaming co-ordinates payments from the Alberta lottery fund and administers a number of lottery-funded programs. Each year revenue from the Alberta lottery fund is invested in Albertans and in their communities. The fund supports over 8,000 charitable, not-for-profit public and community-based initiatives. These funds help build hockey rinks, playgrounds, and community facilities. They also help fund various health initiatives, cultural events, and volunteer programs.

Through our web site, which can be found at www.gaming.gov.ab.ca, and various other means we inform Albertans of the good works of the lottery fund in an effort to create

awareness and a clear understanding of how lottery fund revenue is collected and distributed. We're achieving that goal through our commitment to openness, transparency, and disclosure.

Gaming revenue for 2001-2002 is forecast to be approximately \$1 billion, an increase of \$62.6 million from last year. Revenue for the 2001-2002 period is projected as follows: \$547 million in VLT revenue, \$308 million in slot revenue, \$154 million in ticket revenue, and \$6 million in interest revenue – once again, for a total of approximately \$1 billion.

Increased gaming revenue means a direct increase in dollars going to the Alberta lottery fund, which means a direct increase in dollars going to Albertans and into their communities. In keeping with the recommendation from the 1998 gaming summit, no gaming revenue was allocated to the general revenue fund. Instead, all gaming revenue continues to flow exclusively into the Alberta lottery fund.

2:50

In addition to supporting community-based projects and programs, the Alberta lottery fund also supports special projects and initiatives administered by the various government ministries. The Alberta lottery fund summary of payments outlines how lottery revenue is to be allocated. Funding for the 2001-2002 period includes: Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development, \$11.6 million; Children's Services, \$1.2 million; Community Development, \$108.5 million; Gaming, \$196.5 million; Health and Wellness, \$84.1 million. Now included in the Health and Wellness figure is the amount of \$45.7 million, which is an operating grant to AADAC, which includes \$3.7 million specifically for problem gambling programs and services. Infrastructure receives \$345 million; Innovation and Science, \$90.8 million; Learning, \$52.2 million; Municipal Affairs, \$12 million; Transportation, \$70 million; and Finance, \$44 million.

Lottery funding to individual ministries is over and above annual ministry budgets and is used for things such as infrastructure projects, school renewal and construction, community facility upgrades, strategic research, and health facility construction.

In addition to ministry allocations, a number of foundations and granting programs also receive their funding dollars from the Alberta lottery fund. Allocations for the 2001-2002 period include: community facility enhancement program, \$25 million; community lottery board program, \$53.3 million; Foundation for the Arts, \$21.1 million; Historical Resources Foundation, \$5.9 million; human rights, citizenship and multiculturalism, \$1.1 million; Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, \$15 million; and Wild Rose Foundation, \$6.6 million. These foundations and grant programs are directly responsible for the administration and granting decisions within their mandate.

The Ministry of Gaming is responsible for the community lottery board grant program, which is a program that provides funds for the lottery fund to enhance and enrich project-based community initiatives throughout the province through 88 local community lottery boards. The Ministry of Gaming is also responsible for the community facility enhancement program, which is a matching grant program that provides funds to enhance, expand, and upgrade various community-use facilities throughout the province.

Besides administering these two grant programs – once again, that is the community lottery board grant program and CFEP – Alberta Gaming also allocates lottery revenue to several other initiatives. Through Alberta Gaming the Alberta lottery fund provides funding to the Gaming Research Institute of \$1.5 million, which is overseen by the Gaming Research Council. The institute has numerous projects under way, including research into gambling and its relationship to addiction and personality, preventing relapse in former gamblers, and prevention of pathological gambling. The

institute's second grant application process is currently under way.

The Ministry of Gaming also allocates lottery fund revenue to major fairs and exhibitions of some \$2.7 million throughout Alberta. These events provide opportunities for agricultural and trade exhibits across the province. Edmonton Northlands and the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede also receive lottery funding to help support various community programs and events throughout the year. Each of those organizations receive \$7.1 million.

Alberta Gaming also allocates lottery revenue to support the racing industry renewal initiative in support of Alberta's horse racing industry in the sum of \$17.9 million. Horse racing is an important, agriculturally based industry in our province. It supports numerous small businesses throughout rural Alberta, and thousands of Albertans depend on a viable and competitive horse racing industry for their livelihood.

A portion of the lottery revenue is allocated to other initiatives, which enables government to support new initiatives or merging projects that are deemed to be community priorities. The amount of that particular item is \$11.1 million. Alberta Gaming also allocates lottery fund revenue to lottery operations, a necessary expenditure that represents the cost of managing lottery and gaming network and services throughout the province.

As you can see from the Alberta lottery fund summary of payments for the 2001-2002 period, we are continuing our commitment to maintaining a clear distinction between lottery revenue and other government revenue. Albertans can clearly see where their lottery revenue is invested: in our communities and on projects that enhance the quality of life for all Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks, and I look forward to the comments, questions, and insight of all members. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity this afternoon to review the lottery estimates. Our expectations for this afternoon are that we will have some questions for the ministers and that they will be responding to those questions at the end of the duration of the time that we'll be talking. We were asked to address agriculture and rural development first, so I will make some opening comments, and then we'll specifically ask questions of that minister.

So I begin. This is an interesting department. It's changed quite a bit over the years, Mr. Chairman. Certainly since the Lotteries Review Committee was undertaken back in 1995, we've seen a huge change in the way lottery dollars are administered in this province. Our concern with lottery revenue funding becoming a cornerstone of provincial funding is that it's gambling revenue and it's used now as a major revenue source for program funding for this province. That is, in fact, quite different from what the original mandate of this particular committee was.

You know, we've had Alberta Lotteries for many years; we've got records back on them from 1994 certainly. In the '95-96 year there was a review done. The Lotteries Review Committee was held in response to the increasing amount of lottery dollars that were being received by the province. The government sent out a committee where they did some fairly extensive consultation. What they had at that time was 462 presentations. They received over 18,500 written responses in the form of letters, discussion papers, and petitions. The government responded to those recommendations in December of 1995, Mr. Chairman, and what they did was confirm at that point in time a fundamental change in the way lotteries and gaming operated in Alberta and ensured that the primary beneficia-

ries of regulated gaming in Alberta would be charitable organizations. So that's the commitment they made back in December of 1995.

Have they kept that commitment, Mr. Chairman? We would say no. This is a discussion that we have every year, and in fact this department has moved a long ways away from their commitment of ensuring that the primary beneficiaries would be charitable organizations. In the '95-96 year the total revenues generated during that time period were, I believe, almost \$71 million. When we take a look at this current year, the fiscal year that we're discussing now, the 2001 year, what's being received now is a ministry revenue of almost \$1.5 billion, a lot of money, a significant increase since that '95 year. My first question to the minister is in fact: why have they moved away from the original mandate of the committee, and why are they ignoring the recommendations of those huge numbers of people who were consulted and felt that they had something to say? In fact the government confirmed that they would be doing what the majority of the people requested in that process. So that would be my first question of this minister.

3:00

The second question in relating to what goes on here ties into the business plans. When I try to relate what was talked about in the '95-96 year to the key strategies and goals of this year, I find that there is little commitment made to this original statement. If we take a look at core business 2 and the key strategies, the first key strategy is: "Review the disbursement of the Alberta Lottery Fund proceeds to ensure all funds are being allocated and expended according to policy and intended use." Yet we don't see laid out in these business plans an explicit policy unless I'm missing it. Could the minister point out where I see the exact policy and intended use laid out? They make general references. What this really appears to be, Mr. Chairman, is a slush fund. They feed whatever particular nonprofit organizations hit the list of the year, it appears, and then go to whatever ministries need or want money for whatever reasons and fund those.

So the question for me is: what is the original intended use of these funds? Is it to be a slush fund? That's not what was talked about as a result of the review that was done in the '95-96 year, yet it seems to be what has evolved in terms of how the lottery funds are allocated throughout this province. So if the Minister of Gaming could answer that for me.

Interestingly enough, too, in those years this department was operated quite differently from now. What we got were partners in Alberta lotteries back in those years, and it was really a division of economic development and tourism, a really small sidebar to that particular department. Now we have a Minister of Gaming. What's that about, Mr. Chairman? Why does the government feel that we need a whole ministry dedicated to slush-fund funding for this government? So if the minister could tell us exactly what his job description is and why the government deemed it necessary to set up a separate ministry with business plans and so on, I would appreciate having that information too.

You know, it says here in this minister's mission statement, Mr. Chairman:

To ensure integrity, transparency, disclosure, public consultation and accountability in Alberta's gaming and liquor industries to achieve the maximum benefit for Albertans.

Well, what we've seen unfold here in the House in question period and certainly in the Justice department over the last few weeks is quite a different story when we talk about gaming and what happened with the Liquor Control Board.

The way this department was designed and in fact acted out, there was a maximum benefit for a very select few people in this province, according to the court records, one for sure, possibly two, perhaps

three, and that seems to be where the maximum benefit is. Perhaps the minister could tell us in some detail what's happened since those years that he feels he can in fact carry out the mission of the department at this time. Integrity, transparency, and disclosure certainly don't seem to be the pillars that one would think they were when you talk about this particular ministry.

There's no integrity in backroom deals, in commissions paid out to a variety of people, in wheeling and dealing to get special preferential treatment. The only transparency in this situation is to the extent that the court documents allow transparency. We've been stonewalled by the Premier for the past two weeks when we talk about any kind of a public inquiry which would in fact give us both disclosure and transparency and to some degree some accountability. So far it seems like only one person's been held accountable in this department, and that person's paying a fine. It sure puts a cloud over the operations of this ministry and the government's operation. So perhaps the minister would like to enlighten us in terms of some of those concerns. It would be very helpful.

Particularly we'd like to know step by step what kinds of processes are in place now to ensure that this particular mission statement can be carried out, because what we've seen in the actual acting out of the ministry would appear to be something quite different, Mr. Chairman. So if he could address that, I would appreciate it. You know, it's a lot of money we're talking about here, over a billion dollars being disbursed in lottery payments, and that means that they have become a mainstream source of revenue for this government. So we have some concerns about that. Was it always the intention of the government to fund programming on gaming revenue? If the minister could answer that.

One other point from his opening comments I would like to address. He said that there was a \$62.6 million increase in revenues from the prior year to this year. That's nearly as much as the total revenue collected in the year that I talked about, the '95-96 year, when they did the public review. That's a huge increase. My question around that is: does the department do any particular studies to find out what kinds of choices people are making when they choose to put their dollars in lottery revenues? Is there any kind of social study or revenue choice study that this department is undertaking to find out the kinds of choices people are making? It seems to me that when I take a look at my constituency, the choices people make for putting gambling revenues on the table is the choice between basic necessities – food, clothing, shelter – for their kids.

We have heard many times from the different studies that we've seen throughout the province that for every dollar you collect in lottery revenue, you pay out three in social costs, be it through social services, through the justice system, through corrective programs for kids who then are disadvantaged at home because there isn't enough cash in the family to meet the basic necessities. My question is: are they doing any studies to track that?

With the significant increases that we're seeing year by year in lottery revenue funding, we know that there's only one taxpayer. We've heard the government talk about that a lot of times. Each taxpayer has one paycheck. That paycheck has to meet a number of requirements, and if they're choosing to take a large percentage of their revenue and apply it to lottery funding, then I'm thinking that the government, who is responsible for collecting this money, should be studying the impact of that.

I know the government in the past has talked about this being disposable income. If we take a look at the average taxpayer or the average citizen in Alberta, we're seeing a higher percentage of revenues being generated by this department than would seem possible from a disposable income perspective. This isn't a case where high wage earners are spending more money. This is an

across-the-board kind of case where more money is coming in lottery revenues.

So, number one, does the minister do any studies to find out which socioeconomic group the increases in yearly revenue funding are coming from and what impact that has on their lifestyles? What percentage of disposable income is being paid in lottery funding and what percentage of nondisposable income, that which ekes into the basic necessities of life? How much is going there?

We hear repeatedly from frontline workers, be they social workers or be they schoolteachers or be they church groups, that we are seeing an increasing number of kids that go to school without mitts, without boots, without lunches, without breakfasts. We see an increased social cost in terms of conflict in the family when the paycheque gets gambled away on Friday night and there's nothing left over to pay the rent.

3:10

I consider myself to be a frontline worker in this instance, because in our constituency office we are dealing with a number of issues and concerns from families who are in direct conflict within the family and within various organizations including school systems because of lack of funding, and a lot of that is directly related to gambling problems within the family. In my constituency there have been three suicides that I know about that have been directly linked to people with gambling addictions.

So while we heard the minister talk in his opening comments about increased funding to deal with addiction problems, I would like more information on that. I'd like to know what stats they have to indicate that the increased funding is necessary. I agree that increased funding is necessary, but what is he basing those decisions on in terms of concrete facts? If we could have that information, it would be very helpful to us.

We've seen a significant change, I think, in addictions over the past five or six years, perhaps 10 years, as gambling has become more prevalent and more accepted and more mainstream in our culture. Can the minister tell us a little bit about what AADAC or other studies have found in terms of the percentage of change, both in terms of the kinds of addiction problems and how much gambling has increased? There must be a percentage on that in comparison to drug and alcohol abuse.

Also, I would like a breakdown, a socioeconomic breakdown if we can, in terms of the dollars being spent but also in terms of age groups and gender. I've seen reports cross my desk in the past talking about the increased problem gambling as an addiction is for young men and how it becomes a bigger problem for women as they age. So if we could get the current information available on those issues, that would be beneficial. I'd certainly like to see that.

We've seen a consolidation of AADAC in the past perhaps two years I think it is. They have moved more of their facilities downtown. There were concerns in the past about that, Mr. Chairman, that a number of people who were using the excellent facilities of AADAC did not want to come downtown where they could be seen and recognized, that they wanted some degree of anonymity out in the communities. Does the minister have any direct information, feedback from people in the organization in terms of whether or not that has helped or hindered the participation levels? Did they see some people fall off in terms of participation? Did it fall off for a little while and then come back to general standards? Feedback on that information.

I don't see those AADAC reports coming across my desk to the same degree as what they used to in terms of some of the real key issues that were talked about and addressed, and I'm wondering why that is. It was good information, Mr. Chairman, and certainly I

appreciated it. So if the minister could respond to that, I would also appreciate that.

I know that the minister of agriculture and rural development had some other commitments, and I was hoping that we could address some of those issues first of all. Since that particular minister is getting some dollars from this program, in fact \$11.62 million, I would like to put those questions on the record while she's here and hopefully get a response to them this afternoon. I'm wondering if the minister can provide a more detailed breakdown of which initiatives and for what purposes these funds will be allocated. What we see here is a lump sum line item, and it doesn't really give us a great deal of detail in terms of what that money is going to be spent on. It just says agricultural initiatives, and we'd like to know the projects, how much money is assigned to each of those. That would all be helpful.

My second question with regard to that, Mr. Chairman, is: are these initiatives going to be in need of ongoing funding? It's a concern for us, when lotteries are deemed to be onetime funding, that there may be an ongoing need. If so, we would ask if it's not better to have these funds go through the general revenue fund rather than lottery funds.

Could the minister provide the criteria by which it's decided that particular programs should come from lottery funding rather than just the general revenue fund? We still don't grasp the way the government is making their decisions in terms of how these dollars are allocated, so it would be helpful if we had that kind of information. I'm sure the minister will be able to provide that information to me.

Thanks. I'll come back a little later with more questions.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I'd be pleased to just speak very briefly to the lottery fund estimates for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. As was indicated in the estimates, the ministry receives \$11.62 million. That figure is unchanged from last year, and it's divided into two elements: ag society operations and the ag initiatives program. The member asked more specifically about the ag initiatives program, but before I respond to that, I'd like to say that the bulk of this money, \$8.67 million, goes to ag societies, all ag societies that are in good standing. There are some 289 of those ag societies in the province.

The way they use the money is determined in their communities, and the guidelines are fairly flexible. They are allowed to use that money in a way that benefits or enhances rural life and projects that the ag societies themselves might support. The ag societies are certainly made up of local community people. I believe they have to have 50 members to register, if I remember correctly. So I don't think that there's much question about community involvement in how those dollars are used.

The ag initiatives program, which was more the subject of the hon. member's questions, is \$2.95 million. It's project based. It's a grant-matching program. It supports, I would say, agriculturally focused, not-for-profit organizations, and they receive both capital and operational assistance for programs and services that contribute to the improvement of agriculture and rural development. So that would be the broad base of the guidelines.

I'd be pleased to supply the hon. member with the grant criteria in its fullest. I'm surprised that that hasn't been made available to their offices.

The program has been very well received. You would not apply to that same program for the same project for ongoing years normally. The whole of this money can be used to support agricultural marketing, for promotions, extension programs, which are very important in rural areas. It can be used for livestock shows and

sales, demonstration plots, applied research. I'm giving very broad ways that it could be used here just to help the hon. member understand the breadth of the program. It can also be used to assist strong industry associations. It can be used for leadership development and training through support of 4-H and agricultural scholarships. It can be used for board and staff and volunteer training opportunities. So those are some of the areas I can speak to that I know it's used for, but I'd be pleased to give the hon. member more information. It is my understanding that at the end of the program year the lists of who received the money through that ag initiatives grant and what the program was for are available.

I think this is a small amount of support that goes a long way in rural communities so organizations can respond to the needs of the communities they serve. Most of all, all of those moneys, in my view, are dedicated to improvement of those communities.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll pass that information on, and I'll certainly review *Hansard* to see if there are any other questions that require an answer.

3:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister for her comments, and I appreciate, certainly, the information that she's going to be sharing with us.

Just a couple of quick follow-up questions on that. The ag societies and the approximate \$8 million: is that ongoing funding? Where did the money come from prior to it being funded through lotteries? On the project base, with the matching grants, where do the other dollars come from? Are they self-generated within the committees themselves?

So those are my questions for this minister, and then I'm looking forward to the Minister of Gaming responding to my other questions.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I would be pleased to do in writing how ag societies are funded, because they are funded by size and activity, so there is a variety of funding levels. It is an annual funding, and as long as the ag society is fulfilling its mandate in the community, they receive their funding.

On the matching grants I'm not sure I totally understood the question, mainly because I just didn't hear some of the words, but it is matching money. The community can use donated labour and equipment and so on, which helps a lot in some of these projects. I will review *Hansard* and make sure that the hon. member has all of the information required from her questions and probably a little more too.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

The chair would like to just ask a question here. Are we going to take these individual votes and vote them as the process goes along, or do you want to leave them open till the end? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It was not our expectation to vote them individually. It was our expectation to talk about them generally and to try and highlight some of the ministries first or later but then vote everything at 5:15.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Chairman, I can confirm that my understanding is the same, that there will be a vote at 5:15 this afternoon after a series of questions and answers.

With respect to some of the points that the hon. member has

raised, firstly, from my perspective the lottery estimates are constructed in accordance with the recommendations coming out of the '98 gaming summit. The recommendation was that the funds from gaming not go into the general revenue fund but go into the Alberta lottery fund – and that is in fact happening – that these moneys go into areas which are clearly above and beyond the basic budgets of departments and that they be spent on things which enhance our communities. Each of the ministers will this afternoon be able to address the specifics relating to their own ministry.

I'd like to just spend a moment going through the matters that specifically deal with the Ministry of Gaming. I think that all members are very familiar with the community lottery board grants. They've been in place for a while now and seem to be receiving some measure of success. The major fairs and exhibitions have been receiving these funds, once again, for some time, and the program has been very effective and has been well supported. I might add that when the hon. member talks about what has been going on over the last five or six years, the matters before 2001-2002, which are before the Assembly this afternoon, either are, in the case of 2000-2001, matters that can come before Public Accounts or, in the case of the years prior to that, are matters which have come before Public Accounts for inquiry by members of the Assembly and so have received scrutiny there. It seems to me also that as it relates to the lottery fund itself, these are matters which are audited by the Auditor General. In many cases there are programs of due diligence which require an explanation by the groups that receive the funds of how they in fact are spent.

Both the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede and Edmonton Northlands are significant in their own communities, and both receive these funds for programs and events on an unconditional basis. In the case of the \$7 million and in the case of the \$100,000 conditionally to support agricultural events throughout the year, there hasn't been any change with respect to those items in the budget.

The community facility enhancement program has been around since October of 1988, some 13 years. We are going into the third year of the fourth iteration of CFEP. This particular three-year program was approved at \$75 million in April of 1999 and has been working well. Most members of the community are supportive of it, and I'm sure the members are aware of the conditions that go along with CFEP funding. I note that in all cases the constituencies of all members of the Assembly are beneficiaries in some measure or another over the past year or two of CFEP grants. So I'm sure that each and every member in this Assembly has some personal experience with that.

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute and the Alberta Gaming Research Council once again go back to a commitment arising out of the '98 gaming summit to ensure that there is research into the social and economic aspects of gaming. This project started in 1999 and in general terms is fairly early on, with something just in excess of \$1.5 million having been placed in funding and with another \$1.5 million in funding going forward.

The line item with respect to Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission lottery operations relates to the core businesses of the AGLC. There are three core businesses: license and regulate liquor activities, license and regulate charitable gaming activities, and conduct and manage provincial gaming activities, which are VLTs, slots, and tickets. The lottery operations cost of \$70,689,000 supports the cost of the lottery and gaming operations and activities of the AGLC. It does not involve any funds towards the liquor side of the core businesses.

There are increases in the budget there of \$16.1 million to meet certain specific costs, and I'll share with the hon. members what

those are. There are electronic games, new ones, of \$6.3 million. These are gaming terminals. They're available by leasing and will replace existing owned equipment. There's other gaming equipment of \$0.9 million. There is \$4.3 million for operations, which means salaries and benefits, cost increases, and repair and maintenance of equipment.

The ticket lottery network and the system are receiving an additional \$2.8 million. The ticket lottery network and system upgrade was done in conjunction with the Western Canada Lottery Corporation, the WCLC, as all three provinces that are part of that particular corporation were involved in the upgrade of the system, which was completed last year.

There's also some additional funding for First Nations, anticipating that in fact there will be a successful application under the First Nations' gaming policy later this year once the gaming policy review has been completed and all of the rules are in place. Those additional funds are \$1.8 million for casino slots.

3:30

I think it's worth noting that the AGLC services and operations are fully integrated, and by that I mean that licensing, for example, deals with both gaming and liquor activities as do inspections, investigations, revenue, and so on and so forth.

There were a number of questions that the hon. member raised, and they were interesting and far reaching. Certainly I will review *Hansard* to determine what they are, and to the extent that they are relevant and within the scope of inquiry this afternoon, I will get back to you with written answers.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the minister for his further comments and appreciate that he is going to be providing further information for the questions that he didn't answer at this particular point in time. Specifically, I would like you to include in that some detail on what your policy is in terms of funding. I want to compare it to what the outcomes of that review were back in '95-96.

In your comments you made some reference to dollar amounts for prior years really being the purview of the Public Accounts Committee, which I know very well, Mr. Chairman, having sat on that committee for a long while. But the minister knows that these decisions are not made in isolation, that some of them are cumulative in nature, that we have certainly seen some gambling revenue creep over the past few years, and all of that is relevant to decisions that are made now. In fact, he referenced a series of years on CFEP grants. When we bring in information from prior years, particularly financial information, it's because it's relevant to what has happened over the course of the history of the ministry, and we would hope that they take those questions seriously and with that intent in mind when they answer them.

Those are my questions for the time being, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions about the Gaming estimates this afternoon. I wanted to start off, if I might, with some questions about something that hasn't been covered as far as I can tell in the estimates, and that's on-line gambling and the on-line casinos. I wondered: what information do we have about the impact of on-line gambling on Albertans? Is that part of the information that's gathered, or is it so new that that kind of information wouldn't yet

be factored in when we're looking at problem gamblers?

I noted that on-line wagers on the continent make up about \$13 billion worth of revenue, which is a sizable amount for a rather new industry. I was even further interested in trying to access some of the research on on-line gambling. The access to at least one research site has been hijacked by a casino. When you go onto the Internet to find a particular research study, instead of getting the research study, you get an advertisement for one of the on-line gambling casinos. So my question is: in terms of on-line gambling where is Alberta? Do we offer a licensing of on-line gamblers?

I'm not sure of the legal framework that governs on-line casinos, and I would appreciate any information the minister might have with respect to that. My information is that at least 25 countries offer on-line gambling licences. Again, is that a national or is that a provincial concern in terms of issuing licences? So just some information, if we might, about on-line gambling.

It seems to me that it's going to be very, very difficult to control underage gamblers in any kind of on-line system. I'm not sure how you would go about it. In fact, if there are any regulations governing on-line gambling, how would you go about enforcing them successfully? It seems to be an area that's fraught with difficulties. So I would be interested in receiving information about on-line gambling, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to ask just a couple of general questions, and then I wanted, if I might be given the opportunity, to address my questions specifically to the lottery funds that have been addressed to education with the minister having the opportunity to answer those questions. In terms of the ministry's office has the result of the creation of the ministry just been the addition of \$1,504,000 of administration to the tax bill? Is that the impact of this ministry in terms of creating a separate ministry and the minister's office? If that's not true, then where did the money come from to create the office?

Within the office itself there's \$192,000 budgeted for communications, and I'd like to know exactly what that communications budget includes. Communications is found throughout the budget estimates. I'm not sure what the total would be if we added them all up, Mr. Chairman, but it would be considerable. I'd be interested in how much replication there is in ministry offices. Is there any kind of co-ordination over all those communication groups, or just what is the status of a communications department or arm within a ministry?

The number of full-time equivalents has increased from 29 to 32: I guess some detail in terms of what is being bought with those additional employees. I've got a couple of other questions, but I can come back to them after, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to turn to the amounts in the estimates that are allocated to Learning specifically. I start with the Infrastructure program, where there's \$150 million set aside for school facilities and where for postsecondary facilities there's another \$60 million set aside. Those are under Infrastructure. In Learning there's a total of \$52,200,000 that's going to be spent on technology upgrading, some achievement scholarships, Learning Television, transportation subsidies, and high-speed networking. So a fairly substantial piece of money from the lottery fund is being allocated to education. I guess I would question the wisdom of education being funded out of lottery funds.

Looking at some of the research, as I indicated earlier, lottery funds are still a problem for government. The morality of lottery funds and using lottery funds has been problematic right from the beginning. A number of places have had great public debates before they went into the lottery business. I know there are still a number of American states considering entering the lottery field who are having some fairly heated discussions even at the present time.

3:40

One of the strategies used by governments and used by this government to take the heat out of the moral or ethical question is to earmark the funds. That's a strategy that's being used elsewhere and used here, but unlike elsewhere, the most common area that funds have been earmarked for is education. We see in our province that it's becoming increasingly the case that more and more education is being funded from the lottery funds. I find it alarming, and I wonder if we could have some indication from the government in terms of if it poses a similar concern for the government.

Studies elsewhere indicate that where lottery funding is used for education, there is seldom a net fiscal gain for schools. As lottery funds are used for education, nonlottery funds are diverted to other spending. In some states the amount of funding for education out of general revenues has actually dropped as the use of lottery funds has grown.

So it's a concern of mine in terms of relying increasingly on lottery funds for education. Are we setting up a situation where less and less of the budget will actually be allocated for education? That may not be a problem now while lottery funds are plentiful, but I think that, as has been indicated elsewhere, lottery funds are a poor fiscal instrument and tend to promote unsound public policies. I think it's agreed that it's really a poor choice for governments that are wrestling over budget choices.

Is there a concern within government with using lottery funds for education in particular? That would apply to a lesser extent to some of the other areas. I worry that tying school facilities and postsecondary facilities so tightly to lottery funds is going to cause some problems down the road. I know full well, having said that, that those funds are going to be welcomed by boards and universities and institutes that have been so cash strapped in the last number of years. Questioning that money may not be popular, but I think it's a wise thing to do at this point.

I go back to some of the research that indicates that those states that earmark funds out of lotteries for education – and I think there are close to 20 American states right now. It really has in the end not helped education. As I said before, it just frees up other tax dollars to be diverted to other programs, and when lottery funds decline, there's a reluctance on the part of taxpayers to pick up that difference and to adequately fund public education.

Using lotteries as a revenue source for education is being seen as an unstable source. It's also seen as an administratively inefficient way to get revenue, and it's also seen as a form of a regressive tax. So there are many objections to the use of lottery funds for educational purposes.

I'm not sure how that would be borne out in Canada, but certainly south of the border the states that don't have lotteries actually spend a greater percentage of their budget on education, and in those states that do have lotteries, the funding for education has actually decreased. A Saint Mary's College at Notre Dame study concluded:

Regardless of when or where the lottery operated, education spending declined once a state put a lottery into effect. This study indicates that states without lotteries actually maintain and increase their education spending more so than states with lotteries.

I think that's a fair warning to citizens who look at the lottery as relief for education funding in our province. They shouldn't be misled, and like the lotteries themselves, their odds at coming out ahead in this game are rather meagre.

I guess the other thing that happens is the misconception that is left with people that lottery funding looks after education and that the job has been done once those lottery dollars are available. That, again, leads to some difficulty should those lottery funds ever dry up or in any way be curtailed.

I had a number of other questions about the Gaming Commission itself and the control of lotteries. I watched some of the lottery ads, as we all have, I suspect, the odd time on television and not paid too close attention to them. My questions are: what control is exercised over lottery advertising? Is there control that's exercised? Again, the criticism of lottery advertising from elsewhere is that it overemphasizes the chance of winning, that people come away from those ads with the feeling that they actually have a chance, but they don't. The advertising is designed so as to disguise the real odds of winning in one of the lotteries, and they're left with the false notion that somehow or other there's skill involved in taking part in a lottery. I did see an ad to this effect, that somehow or other they'll regret not having played if their numbers come up. So there's this notion that you shouldn't miss playing because you're going to be unhappy if your numbers come up and you haven't placed your bet for that week or bought your lottery ticket.

There is a great deal of information about the impact of lotteries on different segments of our population, and we've had some of that information from the ministry and from AADAC and other agencies, but indications are that there's targeting – and aggressive targeting – to market lotteries to the poor. My question is: is there such targeting done here? The information is that some lotteries time their advertising, for instance, at the time when there are going to be social assistance cheques coming out, when there are going to be pension cheques distributed, or when it's going to be the end of a month or at a time when a number of employees are being paid, again, a specific targeting of lottery advertising to people who are experiencing living in poverty.

3:50

Maybe this is not the place to ask that question, but if it's not, I'd appreciate hearing from the minister in terms of where it should be asked. I think it's an important question, given the role that television plays in our lives.

[Ms Graham in the chair]

Just a couple of other questions, if I might, Madam Chairman. I wanted to go back to the Alberta Gaming Commission. The members of the commission are listed, but can I find out how appointments are made? How do you end up being on the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission? What are the legal requirements of appointees? What kinds of background, what kinds of rules and regulations govern their behaviour? There's been some discussion in the Legislature in the past week or 10 days about commission members, but I still don't think it's widely publicized in terms of who those are and how they become members and, in particular, the links with government. Is anyone precluded because of previous involvement with ministries, either as employees of the ministry or consultants to the ministry? So information on the appointment of the commission itself would be of interest.

I think that just about concludes what I had for this first round, Madam Chairman. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, and I thank the hon. member for his questions. I'll try and address some of those questions now if I might.

He started with a question with respect to on-line gaming or Internet gaming: where is Alberta on that particular issue? I can tell the hon. member and all hon. members that Internet gambling continues to be illegal in Canada under the Criminal Code of

Canada, although it's not specifically referred to. I understand that the sections of the Criminal Code that relate to that particular matter are sections 206(1)(a), 206(1)(c), and section 206(4), and obviously the enforcement of Criminal Code offences falls within the mandate of police agencies.

The hon. member is right that there are many such sites outside of Canada. The information I have is that it's estimated that there are more than 1,300 such web sites that offer some form of on-line wagering on the worldwide web, so it is something that is proliferating outside of Canada. It is illegal in this country. Internet gambling is an emerging issue for all provinces, and the AGLC is going to continue along with the Ministry of Gaming looking to the Gaming Research Institute, the Western Canada Lottery Corporation, and the Interprovincial Lottery Corporation to provide update information about the various aspects of Internet gaming. So that is something that this jurisdiction and other provincial jurisdictions in Canada are continuing to monitor and to continue to understand better. At this point in time it is illegal in Canada, so it does not exist.

There were some questions relative to the Ministry of Gaming with respect to communications and things of that nature. The Ministry of Gaming provided its estimates a week ago, and that would have been the appropriate time for those particular types of questions to be asked. I know that many were, and we're in the process of providing answers to those.

There was a series of comments and perhaps questions with respect to the issue of gaming continuing to have a moral aspect to it, and I think that's fair. We have a society that has mixed emotions about this; there's absolutely no doubt about that. But I think the one thing that sets Alberta apart from other jurisdictions in Canada is the fact that we use a charitable model for our gaming. We all know that in another province today there is a plebiscite going on, and in that province the revenue associated with gaming in its entirety goes into the general revenue fund of that province, whereas here that is not the case. All of the gaming proceeds that go to the government, in fact, go into the Alberta lottery fund.

I think what's also important to recognize as part of this is that not-for-profit charitable groups, in addition to the money that they receive pursuant to various grant programs under the Alberta lottery fund, are also the beneficiaries of some approximately \$160 million as a result of being recipients of licences for casinos or bingos or raffles. That is roughly the amount that we can anticipate some 8,000 or so charities receiving in addition to the moneys under the Alberta lottery fund.

The hon. member raised some questions with respect to lottery advertising, and I think there were references to potential problems of misleading advertising or advertising that is targeted to particular groups. I'll look into that further. I'm not aware of that. I haven't had a complaint about it. I believe that the majority if not all of the advertising relative to lotteries per se will be controlled through the Western Canada Lottery Corporation, which is responsible for lotteries in the three western provinces, and that would be Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. So it would be there that the advertising is found, and as I said, I will make some inquiry into that, but I'm not aware that that is an issue in this jurisdiction at this time.

With respect to appointments to the board of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, I can advise the hon. member that the appointments are done by order in council. The members of the commission are citizens at large of Alberta. They are not stakeholders or representatives of liquor or gaming or any aspect of liquor or gaming. They are what I would call normal Albertans, who bring their skill set and their experience to the table to do the business of the board.

With respect to the behaviour governance – and I use those words

because I think those are the words of the hon. member – there is a policy in place that deals with that. It's an extensive policy, and it is a policy that applies to all members of the AGLC and is something that I can provide some additional information on. There is a code of conduct and ethics for the ministry that is contained within the policies and procedures manual of the Ministry of Gaming. That particular document was last issued in its entirety in May of 1998. It has received amendments from time to time, and there was a form of it prior to that point in time. But it goes through a number of areas providing advice with respect to matters such as delegation of authority and general conduct, some instruction relative to sensitive matters like sexual harassment, and in particular it has a provision dealing with conflict of interest. That is very much a part of the rules of the AGLC.

It contains very strict provisions.

4:00

For example, you will find that one of the provisions is that employees must not accept gifts, favours or services which could be viewed as influencing a business or enforcement decision. This includes accepting gifts, travel, accommodations, [et cetera] from any supplier to the AGLC, licensee or agent.

So there is that kind of provision.

There's also a specific provision that says that employees who could be placed in a conflict of interest situation due to the nature of their duties and responsibilities and employees in the Executive Manager and Senior Manager classifications will be required to disclose their outside business interests and financial holdings, on a yearly basis, in writing on a form approved by the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer.

So there is an annual process that is in place and which has been followed relative to this issue.

The AGLC has established a very extensive code of conduct and ethics, and that code of conduct and ethics deals with a number of issues, including the issue of conflict of interest. All employees are made aware of this particular policy, and it is very much in place and operational at this point in time.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Yes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I was just going to ask if the Minister of Learning intended to respond at this time.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. I'd be pleased to respond at this particular time. First of all, with the lottery funds that we have before us, there are a couple of specific things that deal with Learning, Madam Chairman. First of all, what I would talk about are the scholarships. What we see is that this year the scholarships have increased from \$1.7 million to \$3.1 million. This is in keeping with the budget that was tabled previously. I feel and I'm sure the hon. member across the way feels that scholarships are an extremely important element. This one in specific, I believe, is the Jimmie Condon athletic scholarship, which was increased in value.

The second point that we are looking at is \$8.1 million for Learning Television. Madam Chairman, I think that you know and that everyone in this Legislative Assembly knows the great effect that this has had, going through Learning television, where we have actually been giving courses over the television and will continue to do so. Another important component is that we expand this, and this \$8.1 million will be to expand.

The third component of the \$52 million, Madam Chairman, is the roughly \$40 million that is a transportation subsidy. This is in keeping with transporting students around the province and, indeed,

taking them to school, where their learning can take place.

The last component is \$1 million for high-speed networking. This will pay for the high-speed lines that are going into each and every school in this province, according to the Supernet component. The \$1 million is the start-up amount on this and hopefully will be expanded over the next few years. What we plan to do with this \$1 million is that each school that has the Supernet will be funded to a capacity of 10 megabytes, Madam Chairman. This is what these dollars will be used for. Again, it's extremely important that these things occur.

In general, that's what the dollars will be used for from the Learning budget. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, and I thank the minister for his comments, but they weren't in response to my questions. So maybe after the minister has had an opportunity to review *Hansard*, some of those questions might be answered, Madam Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I have a few comments and observations and questions that I would like to put forward in our lottery fund estimates here today. I would like to start by looking at the ministry business plan summary. I see here where the vision is:

A province that strives to balance choice and responsibility in its gaming and liquor industries, uses revenue derived from these activities for the benefit of Albertans, and provides opportunity for competition and enhanced services in its liquor and gaming industries.

We look here particularly at core business 1: "Develop provincial gaming and liquor legislation and policy, and regulate the gaming and liquor industries in accordance with legislation and policy." So again I look under core business 1 and see that the goal is that "Alberta gaming and liquor policy achieves a balance between social responsibility and economic benefit to Albertans." I see that our first key strategy here is to "monitor the gaming and liquor industries to identify emerging issues and trends, such as potential growth, and develop policies to address these issues." When we start to talk about this particular key strategy and look at the vision, where we have "a balance," where does that balance occur? Does this balance occur in regards to the amount of dollars that we're taking away from the public in this type of a situation? Is it a percentage of, say, the average income of Albertans that we gauge this balance on? Just what is our determining factor where the balance does occur in the gaming and liquor industries?

When we look at potential growth here, again where is that growth coming from? Is it growth because we are currently in boom times in this province, that there is more money around, the fact that our population continues to expand each year? Or is this potential growth in certainly trying to expand on an individual basis the number of dollars spent per person in the gaming and liquor industries? So if we could have some more clarification as to what is meant here by balance.

Continuing along this line, I notice that we are looking at emerging issues and trends here. When we look at trends, one of my questions would certainly be: in the statistics gathered by the Gaming and Liquor Commission across this province, do they see any sort of trend in those southern communities which are very close

to the Alberta/Montana border, any difference in the amount that they are spending on gambling in Alberta as opposed to, say, communities farther away from any bordering state or province where gambling may occur, if in fact there is a difference there?

Now, as well, in moving along here and looking at performance measures, I see that one of first performance measures in core business 1 is the "percentage of Albertans surveyed who are satisfied with the conduct of the liquor business in Alberta." Again, what we see here are the results tabled in percentages. I also notice that the target for 2001-2002 is 70 percent and the target for 2002-2003 is 75 percent, or an increase of 5 percent, of Albertans who'd be satisfied with the conduct of the liquor business in Alberta. I was wondering what strategies the department is going to be employing in order to increase this satisfaction level. What are going to be the measures to do that, as to how that would be achieved?

4:10

Now, then, when we start using strictly percentages, it also invites many questions as to how this figure of 70 percent was arrived at and how the figure of 75 percent is going to be arrived at for the year 2002-2003. Some of my questions in regards to the use of percentages, whether it be in performance measure 1 or whether we look at performance measure 2, "percentage of Albertans surveyed who are satisfied with the conduct of legal gaming entertainment in Alberta" – again we do see that percentages are used in the second performance measure and also that we do have an increase of 5 percent for the year 2002-2003 over the current year, 2001-2002.

So when we are using these statistics – and the minister can certainly provide these in writing later – how big is the sample that was used in order to determine these percentages? Who was surveyed? What were the guidelines used? Like, did we make certain we had new gamblers or young gamblers and a balance of older gamblers and senior gamblers? What steps were taken to ensure that our sample was not a biased sample? In other words, how many people were interviewed? Where were these interviews taken? Was the sample widespread across the province? You know, how are we certain that this was a representative sample and not a biased sample?

So those are a few questions that I have in regards to core business 1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie certainly discussed core business 2, so I'd like to skip over here to core business 3, which is to "support leading-edge research on gaming and liquor issues in Alberta." In looking at core business 3, "the Ministry is a partner in leading-edge gaming and liquor research," I see their key strategies here are to "support research into, and inform Albertans of, the social and economic aspects of gaming" and also, in partnership with the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and the gaming and liquor industries, "ensure consumers of alcohol and gaming products are aware of prevention and treatment programs for problem gambling and alcohol abuse."

Again I see that there is a potential conflict when I look at this performance measure and I look at the key strategy in core business plan 1, where we are looking at such things as potential growth and developing policies to address these issues. So they don't seem to be compatible, these two performance measures, where we're looking at treatment in one case – in doing so, we are recognizing that there is a significant problem with those who are addicted either to the gaming or the liquor aspects – yet at the same time we are looking at seeing how this industry can potentially grow. So my question to the minister would be that in achieving balance between a growth industry and an industry that certainly realizes and looks at the problems some Albertans are having in these two areas, how is this balance achieved?

Also, I look here at both of the performance measures in core

business 3: “the percentage of partners who are satisfied with level of support and cooperation for research prevention and treatment programs”, and the second performance measure, the “percentage of Albertans surveyed who are aware of prevention and treatment programs for problem gambling and alcohol abuse.” We have in this province and have had just some tremendous work done by AADAC over the years. I would think that when we are looking at a target for 2001-2002 in both of these particular areas, we certainly would have been able to establish some type of a baseline and look at being able to establish from that baseline a performance measure which would increase over time and fulfill both of these performance measures.

Now, as well, a question that I think has to be asked at this particular time. There seems to be a great increase in attention being focused on a sport lottery in this province. At this particular time it's focusing, as we understand it, on our two professional hockey teams, the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames, realizing that both of these franchises do play against teams from the United States and certainly have to take into consideration the fact that they are paying their salaries in American dollars and collecting their moneys in Canadian dollars. There were indications in this House, from questions by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to the former Minister of Gaming, that indeed studies had been undertaken as to the possibility of there being a sport lottery in this province for the purposes that I have discussed. So what I would ask the minister is: if in fact there have been studies, when were those studies carried out?

A second question, of course, would have to be: if those studies have been in fact carried out, would it be possible for him to make those available to us? If in fact these sport lotteries are a serious consideration of this government, would the moneys that are derived from there be going just to the professional teams, or would they also be shared with amateur hockey programs in this province? Would they be shared with all amateur sports groups in this province? What would be some of the ways that the dollars from this would be disbursed?

As well, I have some general questions that I would like to ask the minister. We look at the gaming business plan on page 167, to “review the disbursement of Alberta Lottery Fund proceeds to ensure all funds are being allocated and expended according to policy and intended use.” So for the minister: could he please tell us exactly how this review takes place, what is done when funds are found not to have been allocated according to policy, and what sort of follow-up occurs to ensure that any infractions that have occurred don't occur again? Also to the same minister: can the minister tell us exactly how many funds in 2000-2001 were not “allocated and expended according to policy,” and what sorts of steps his department took to rectify this situation?

4:20

Now, as well, a general question. A number of community groups have certainly taken advantage of the program, the lottery dollars that have been available. Unfortunately, some of those groups have had moneys that members of the organization have stolen and spent. These community organizations have worked so hard for those dollars, and their volunteers certainly don't have the opportunity to get these dollars back easily. So with this seeming to be an ever increasing situation that nonprofit groups are encountering, what has the department done in order to assist these community nonprofit groups in handling their finances in such a manner that it makes the possibility of these funds being stolen much more difficult?

As well, other general questions that I do have for the minister. Will the minister provide a detailed breakdown of exactly how much

of the lottery funds for 2001-2002 are going to programs specifically for people with gambling addictions? Again, certainly a very critical area when we look at this whole issue of gaming, because these are the things that destroy families, that rip them apart, and for the people who do have the addictions, it certainly is a very, very destructive force on them too.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

As well, can the minister provide us with any reports or studies his department has done on the use of lottery funds in other jurisdictions? I see in the core business plan that certainly they have looked at other jurisdictions, and they “monitor gaming and liquor policies in other jurisdictions and develop and implement benchmarks and best practices” for that. So if he could please provide us with that.

Could the minister provide us with a listing of lottery fund grants and expenditures by town or city for the 2000-2001 fiscal year? Again, so many nonprofit groups do require these types of grants and expenditures to fund projects in their communities. Otherwise, they could not have any real hope of accomplishing that feat in a realistic period of time.

Another general question I'd like to ask the minister: what are the goals and performance measures with respect to the lottery fund and its administration? Are they simply those applied to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission with respect to collection, distribution, and efficiency, or are there other areas as well?

As well, can the minister explain what role the increasing lottery fund revenue this year, which is over a billion dollars for the first time, plays in his department's current review of licensing and regulations?

Finally, my last general question for this time is: can the minister explain what sort of performance measures are used in assessing the use of lottery fund money for government projects?

So, Mr. Chairman, with those questions I will take my seat, and if the minister wishes to respond to some of those at this time, that would be fine. I realize that some of the other questions might take some time, so thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if the committee would grant consent for a brief reversion to Introduction of Visitors.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Visitors (reversion)

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Chairman, I have great pleasure in introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly Her Excellency Ms Geetha de Silva, high commissioner for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is about one-third the size of Alberta and has a population of 16 million people. Sri Lanka means the land of wealth. Alberta is home to some 2,000 people whose origin or ancestry is from Sri Lanka. The first female ever to be elected to any parliament was from Sri Lanka, the former Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike. This is Her Excellency's first visit to our beautiful province. She attended the annual Sri Lanka banquet in Calgary on Saturday, May 12, and will be meeting with Edmontonians of Sri Lankan origin today. This morning she met with the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and has had courtesy visits with the hon. Speaker and the hon. Minister for International and Intergovernmental Relations. I request Her Excellency Ms Geetha de Silva to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Lottery Fund Estimates 2001-02

(continued)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the hon. member for his wide-ranging perspective on this matter. I think, like the previous member who was making comment, many of the questions may properly have been asked last week when the ministry plan was under consideration. Of course there were many questions asked at that time. Those answers are in the process of being addressed, and we will be responding in writing. I can tell the hon. member that those questions that are responsive to the matters before us today will be answered to the extent that I don't answer them verbally here.

With respect to the issue of growth, generally speaking the growth of revenue from gaming has kept pace with the growth of revenue in government, generally at 4 percent annually. The things that I note, without knowing what the details may be, are that our province's GDP has been growing annually and the number of people who have been coming to this province because of the Alberta advantage has been growing annually. So I would imagine it's a combination of those two factors in large measure, but we will give further consideration to that particular question of the hon. member.

In terms of a balance, I think that can be answered in a number of ways. But one can go back to the '98 gaming summit and the comments and recommendations that came out of that, and I think one has to have those present in their mind. The hon. member is undoubtedly aware that the AGLC is currently conducting a gaming licence policy review. That was basically announced, I believe, in late '99 and started in early 2000 and is ongoing. The fact is that that particular policy review is in large measure going on because Alberta's gaming industry has grown and matured, and there is without a doubt interest within our community at large in expanding gaming in this province, but there's also definitely an interest in assessing the social and economic costs and benefits of gaming.

So those are the kinds of things that one has to take into account in the context of balance when considering a gaming policy. This particular review is ongoing. It is anticipated that it will be completed sometime this summer. Obviously, matters are going to remain in status quo until we get that policy in place, and it will dictate where we go from here. It seems to me that a balance of the various interests within our community on this issue will be part of that process.

4:30

There was a comment and perhaps a question with respect to the proposal for a sports lottery or an NHL lottery. That is an issue that has been raised from time to time by the NHL teams that we have in this province, the Calgary Flames and the Edmonton Oilers. As the hon. member is aware, those are small-market teams. As you pointed out, they pay salaries in U.S. dollars, and the exchange rate is not favourable to us at this time or for some time. I believe both teams continue to lose money on an annual basis, notwithstanding what appears from the outside to be a prudent approach to managing their teams' budgets at the low end of the scale in the NHL hierarchy. So it's not like they're big spenders – I think they're at the other end of that particular scale – yet they're having difficulty.

This is a proposal that they put forward. It is something that we have said we will take a look at. We are looking at it as a work in progress, and it is something that accordingly is not finalized. We don't know what it may look like in the end result, other than the fact that what is under consideration at this point in time is something like a 50-50. The hon. member is undoubtedly aware that

those types of raffles are held at many sporting events, whether they're baseball or football or hockey. But this would be on a provincewide basis and would typically see the winner receiving half of the amount and the other half being available for distribution to the NHL teams and perhaps some aspect of amateur sport, net of expenses associated with this, and it would be done on, say, a weekly basis. It would be an ongoing thing.

The NHL teams in Alberta have indicated that they are looking to surviving in our marketplace for another three years, so they can get to the year 2004, when I understand the players' collective bargaining agreement comes up for renewal. At that point in time they will be able to address perhaps some of the fundamental issues which have created the situation they find themselves in. But it's a work in progress at this point in time, and when I know more about it, the hon. member will also.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was going to have the rest of my remarks relate to the Ministry of Health and Wellness. They'll be short remarks. I just want some more detail on the information that's provided for us here. So I'll go through them quickly, and if we can get the minister to respond, that would be excellent. We see a fair amount of money being dedicated to Health and Wellness. In this particular instance what I'm looking for is a bigger breakdown of the dollars that we have here.

There's a decrease in dollars to Alberta Wellnet this year, so if the minister could explain to us why the decrease when there's been fairly consistent funding from lottery funding over the past couple of years in that area.

In the health innovation fund we're seeing the funding cut in half, so if we could have some details on what the dollars are being spent on and the rationale for the decrease in funding there, it would be helpful.

In the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission we're seeing a significant leap in funding there. If the minister could provide a more detailed breakdown of the funds going to AADAC, specifically what we'd like to know is how much of the funds are being targeted towards initiatives and projects dealing with the effects of gambling addictions. So hopefully we can get that in writing at some point in the future, that degree of detail and the projects they're working on. That would be helpful.

Aboriginal health strategies. We see an increase in funding there. Once again, specifically what are those dollars for?

The wellness initiative significantly decreased over the prior year. Why? What's happening there?

The practitioner services is quite interesting too. That's an increase in funding there. Last year was the first year that funding came from lottery fundings there. So if we could get a breakdown of those dollars and if we could get some information on what the alternative compensation strategies are and how the funding breaks down for each one of those, that would be helpful.

Also, the federal nursing stations and seeing an increase there when in fact less dollars were spent than had been budgeted in the prior year. So more information on that. If he could give us a rough overview of that, that would be helpful at this point.

MR. MAR: Mr. Chairman, I will, as requested by the hon. member, review this and provide her with written responses to be able to provide the more detailed parts of my responses to her questions. In broad terms I can say that good money is being spent from lottery funds to provide good programs within the Department of Health and Wellness. I can outline some of them in broad terms.

For example, Mr. Chairman, on the issue of Alberta Wellnet some \$13 million is being allocated. The hon. member asked why that was a reduction from previous years, and of course the program is in a different stage of development right now. I can say that a key direction for the current fiscal year will be to continue to work on some things that have been initiated already, such as delivering information technology solutions that support the department and health system partners to improve effectiveness of population health programs such as newborn metabolic screening, breast cancer screening, cervical cancer screening, and pathology lab reports.

We are working on the preparation of a new strategic plan to fully integrate telehealth into the health system. Also, Mr. Chairman, we are piloting the pharmaceutical information network. That is to build active medication profiles for patients, and that will be piloted in selected physician clinics, pharmacies, and health facilities starting late in 2001.

On the issue of alternate compensation strategies, some \$12.35 million, those have been allocated to the alternate compensation plan for physicians. Those funds are provided to encourage physicians to develop and implement innovative and comprehensive multi- and interdisciplinary methods of delivering health services. Examples of this, Mr. Chairman, would include the Associate Medical Centre in Taber and the community-based women's health services for women at risk.

On aboriginal health strategies, Mr. Chairman, some \$3 million. Examples of projects that are being funded under the aboriginal health strategy project fund are the creation of a mobile urban street team to provide service and support to street people in downtown Lethbridge in addressing issues that affect their quality of life and also the continuation of an aboriginal liaison worker to work with RHA staff on such preventative initiatives as discharged patient follow-up, Head Start programs, and suicide prevention initiatives. Also, there is support for an aboriginal diabetes wellness program. This program is designed to offer the choice of traditional or western methods of wellness and provide information to help aboriginal people live and function well with diabetes. Also, annual funding of \$200,000 is provided for the aboriginal health careers bursary.

4:40

The federal nursing stations, Mr. Chairman. There are three stations, located at Hay Lakes, Fort Chipewyan, and Fox Lake. Lottery funds in the amount of \$2.66 million are provided to federally operated nursing stations. This program reflects the costs incurred by Albertans in receiving medical treatment at these nursing stations serving remote northern communities.

For the health innovation fund, Mr. Chairman, the total allotted for the fund in 2001-2002 is \$10.8 million, of which \$5 million is supported by lotteries. These funds are provided to health authorities and help other providers to seek new and innovative ways of maintaining the health of Albertans and in delivering health services in the most effective and efficient ways possible. To date I can report that there are some 48 projects that have received funding, and of this total the Capital health authority has been sponsored for 13 projects and the CRHA for eight projects.

Some of the projects for the innovation fund I think are notable. First of all, the formation of a child asthma network to improve the system of services available for children and their families affected by asthma. Also, the development of a partnership between public health nurses in the Calgary region and social workers from the Calgary Rocky View child and family services authority. Also, Mr. Chairman, a community-based project to provide physician-supervised, pharmacist-managed service to prevent blood-clotting disorders such as stroke. Also, a project to demonstrate the potential

in using companion animals in the treatment of individuals with mental illness. Another such project is the provision of outreach services to serve the needs of individuals with fetal alcohol syndrome, their families, and the communities in which they live. Finally, another example is a pilot project to provide prescription drugs and education at no cost to the homeless and working poor who have little or no access to prescription drugs.

The Alberta wellness initiative, Mr. Chairman, some \$1.85 million. These funds will be provided to regional health authorities for child health initiatives. The funds can be used within the following parameters: to enhance initiatives to improve the health of children and youth, and to support collaboration of partnerships relating to children and youth that the regional health authority or other organizations are already involved with. Examples include school health initiatives such as Safe and Caring Schools; initiatives to reduce adolescent risk behaviours with partners such as schools, municipalities, and AADAC; and prenatal and parenting programs such as partnerships with the Canadian prenatal nutrition program and the community action program for children.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, or AADAC. Some \$45.699 million of lottery funds in that amount are directed to support the operations of AADAC. AADAC is a nonprofit Crown agency that assists Albertans in achieving a life free from the abuse of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling through residential and nonresidential treatment and education/prevention services. I think the good work of AADAC is well known to members of this Assembly. Examples of the programs offered through AADAC include problem gaming programs, youth programs aimed at prevention and treatment of addictions, and intensive day-treatment programs. In 2001-2002 there will be an emphasis on youth and the development of innovative partnerships.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, I will review the *Hansard* for further detail that may be provided.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister. I've one follow-up question. Some very interesting programs and initiatives and strategies outlined there. I'm wondering if the minister could share with us what the criteria are for evaluating these strategies and initiatives and determining success or progress and whether or not funding would be ongoing in some of those areas.

MR. MAR: Well, I think that, in general terms, Mr. Chairman, we are always interested in results and not simply reporting on activities and programs. All such programs will be evaluated for their success, as are all programs provided by the Department of Health and Wellness. With respect to the specific measurements from various programs, I'll be happy to provide that by written response.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. I'm hoping that those progress reports or the criteria by which you evaluate them would individually be available after the fact. To the extent that you can share them with us, I would hope that we would see them being tabled or otherwise provided to members in the future. So those are my comments for Health and Wellness.

I'd like to move on to Transportation now, Mr. Chairman, if I could. Just a few questions here. We see in the water management infrastructure that the same number of dollars are being expended from lottery funding this year as last year. So if the minister could

explain to us how this \$20 million relates to the goal of the fund to support charitable, nonprofit public and community-based initiatives, we would be very grateful, because it doesn't seem to fit into that particular mandate. We'd like to see it funded better, I think through sustainable general revenue funds. So if he could comment on that, and particularly exactly what's being accomplished there would be important for us to know.

We see an original \$50 million coming from the Canada/Alberta infrastructure program. We'd like to know, once again, how this fits with the mandate of the organization and also exactly what's being done there. I'm sure the minister has some information that he'd share with us on that particular area.

Interestingly enough, there is no funding this year for the north/south trade corridor. If I'm correct, I don't think that's done yet. So how is it being funded? If the minister could share that information with us, which is also the case for the Alberta cities transportation partnerships. I didn't know that that was onetime funding being allocated last year. I must be incorrect in my assumption there, so if the minister could talk a little bit about that, it would be helpful to us.

Now I'd like to go to the Auditor General's report, Mr. Chairman, if I could, for some general comments on gaming. The Auditor General last year I think made an interesting comment and a significant comment in his report when he talked about this ministry facing "a number of significant risks" in terms of the balancing act that they have to do and the broad responsibilities facing them in terms of "monitoring compliance with liquor, gaming and tobacco laws and agreements." What he recommended was that

the Commission improve its administration of bingo, casino, and pull ticket licences [and that they] assess the effectiveness of its Gaming Licensing Division by linking business objectives to measurable targets and indicators. These recommendations were accepted and [his] staff continues to monitor the Commission's progress in this area.

So if the minister could comment for me in terms of the progress that they are making. Will we see this listed again as an area maybe not of concern but certainly of interest, necessitating review by the Auditor General? That would be helpful to us.

I want to spend just a couple of minutes on the racing industry renewal initiative and find out from the minister what progress has been made there. We see some interesting comments being made by the Auditor General last year when he talks about the responsibility the government has to regulate horse racing and how it "has been delegated to the Alberta Racing Corporation" and some concerns in terms of legislative noncompliance. He talks about the agreements under the casino gaming terminal program and "amounts paid to the Alberta Racing Corporation . . . and racetrack operators in excess of normal retailer commissions" and that these "do not comply with legislation." Has that been brought up to date? What in fact has been done to solve that issue for the future? Have any of those funds been recovered? I guess that's the extent of my questions there.

4:50

We do see that the Auditor General last year came up with a major recommendation, recommendation 15, where they recommended an appropriate accountability system to determine whether public resources provided to the horse racing industry have been spent for the intended purposes and have achieved their objectives.

That's a fairly significant recommendation and is certainly a reflection, I think, on how this particular industry spent their dollars and their lack, I would believe, of due diligence by the ministry in seeing that this industry actually spent the dollars in accordance with practices that were not in compliance. So could he comment on that and what's happened?

The AG goes on to talk about contractual framework not providing adequate accountability, that there wasn't a "clear agreement on the terms of the grant program," and that there are "several problems that the agreements to date have failed to prevent or rectify." So an update on that is important. Have they developed new agreements, and do they address previous weaknesses, Mr. Chairman? If he could talk about that.

There's another major recommendation in the AG's report, and that's number 16 where they talk about the ministry taking "appropriate steps to hold the Alberta Racing Corporation accountable for the performance of its delegated responsibilities." So, once again, pretty significant. He goes on to talk about: the accountability to the Assembly "is partially met through the filing of the Corporation's annual report." It's interesting that some of these other matters weren't met. There seems to be some conflict there in terms of the corporation resisting "attempts by the Ministry to direct how it should spend the resources." Have those been resolved? Could we have those detailed? Are there any issues still outstanding on that? Why is this corporation's business plan not public information when they're getting dollars from the government? Why isn't it updated annually for changing circumstances? We hope that that's not the case now, Mr. Chairman, and that the minister has undertaken and in fact has been successful in providing changes in that area.

We see also that the AG talks about their critical success factors not reported and that "key results are not presented in relation to measurable targets." That particular issue is not solely the mandate of this area. We see this same kind of problem in many of the ministries. Nevertheless, it's a big issue, and we would hope that that has been corrected and would expect an update from the minister on that.

Also, are the activities of the independent appeals tribunal now being reported? They weren't in the past, and the AG said that they should be.

So if the minister could address those accountability issues and we get some feedback on Transportation, I think that will conclude my questions for today, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the last series of questions relating to the Alberta Racing Corporation, I'd like to make a couple of comments at this time. The hon. member, as have other hon. members in asking questions about this matter, has referred to the Auditor General's report, and in particular they've referred to the comments that the Auditor General had regarding his concerns regarding the racing industry renewal initiative.

It is true that the Auditor General has made those statements in his report. What never seem to be included in the hon. members' comments are the full comments of the Auditor General which deal with the corrective action that was taken by the ministry. I would have thought that in being fair about this, hon. members would want to be more inclusive of their comments regarding what the Auditor General had to say, but they have not been. So I will take the opportunity at this time to correct the record, because as the hon. members often say, there are many people in Alberta who are listening to us as we speak here. Of course, there are those who don't get the opportunity to listen, who spend their evenings reading *Hansard* in detail, and I'm sure that they will have some good times reading this debate.

The Auditor General specifically had this to say in his 1999-2000 report at page 114. This, once again, is captioned: "The Commission has taken several steps to address my concerns." So it seems to me that this is pretty clear.

The Commission has since taken the following actions:

- Effective September 11, 2000, the agreements with the Alberta Racing Corporation and the racetrack operators were terminated.
- New agreements are being negotiated with the racetrack operators, providing them a commission rate of 15% consistent with the rate paid to all other operators of slot machines and video lottery terminals in the Province.
- Future payments to subsidize racetrack operating and capital costs and to supplement horse racing purses are to be made to racetrack operators from the Lottery Fund through an annual appropriation approved by the Legislature.

The Auditor General then goes on to say after making those very, very specific comments, and I think this is a very salient point that the Auditor General makes:

I am satisfied that these actions will bring future payments under the Racing Industry Renewal Initiative into compliance with the provisions of the Gaming and Liquor Act.

Those things were available to the hon. members if they had turned from page 113 to page 114 to see that in fact some things had been done.

With respect to accountability, I can advise the hon. member that in September of 2000 the agreements that were the subject of some concern were terminated, and new agreements were entered into. As a result of those new agreements, a new set of accountability with respect to the proceeds is in place. So accountability has very much been addressed. To my knowledge, the Auditor General and his staff are satisfied with what the commission is doing with respect to the concerns that have been raised regarding the racing industry renewal initiative. There were some other questions that the hon. member raised relative to this, and we will review *Hansard* and provide some response.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I'd start with taking exception to the comments of the minister about the work of the committee and in fact our work in the Legislature in the evenings. I think that most Albertans may not be listening to the debate or reading *Hansard*, but that doesn't in any way mean that they aren't interested or mean that they don't charge us with the task of scrutinizing these budgets and these estimates. I think we've heard this now from two ministers, the same kind of demeaning comments about the Legislature, and I think they're unworthy of a minister.

I'd like to, if I may, ask two questions specifically of the minister. One has to do with costs. Is there any estimate of the costs incurred by policing in the province with regards to the regulation and policing of lotteries, and are there costs that are incurred by the Attorney General's office that can be attributed to gaming or to the administration of lottery regulations and laws? We see the costs of the gaming control board here. Are there other costs that aren't being accounted for and could be attributed to the lotteries in the province? So that's one question.

5:00

The second one is the attention that is paid to underage adolescents as they are involved in the lottery business. I ask that question given, again, some information that has come out of the States showing that a high percentage of underage adolescents actually play lotteries and that lottery retailers in many American states are very relaxed in terms of enforcing age regulations. There was a case of an operation that saw a 16-year-old girl who was successful in purchasing lottery tickets from 49 of 50 Illinois lottery retailers. In Massachusetts there were minors as young as nine years of age that

were able to purchase lottery tickets, and that occurred 80 percent of the times that they tried it. A sting operation in Massachusetts found that 6 percent of minors were able to place bets on games there. One further one in Massachusetts, a study of 2,000 minors, found that 47 percent of seventh graders have already purchased lottery tickets.

I wonder if there is any monitoring of adolescents' involvement in lotteries and their purchase of tickets and if that information might serve as a need for education programs or some preventive work before it becomes a major problem. So those were sort of two questions addressed to the minister.

I have some specifics in terms of the Department of Innovation and Science, and I thought I'd like to ask those while the minister is available to answer. In particular, there's a line item under Innovation and Science that has \$8,588,000 going to the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute. I can understand why that's there, but why just the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute and not the Alberta Energy Research Institute or the Alberta Forestry Research Institute? Why is that specific institute drawing funds from the lottery fund at this time? Are they included under one of the other line items, the research investments program or the strategic research initiatives? If the minister could clarify that point, I'd be interested.

The \$50 million, of course, into the Alberta Supernet is a major investment. I've had, thanks to the minister's goodwill and kindness, a bit of a conversation in his office about this program and agree with the intent to try to wire the province as being a good project. But I wonder why it's being funded out of the lottery fund. Is it just because it's seen as a onetime spending item? Given the state of technology and communications technology, I can't believe that this isn't going to be an ongoing expense. Does it legitimately belong as a lottery fund disbursement?

Could we have, from the same minister, the look ahead in terms of the Alberta Supernet? I think we touched on this in a previous conversation. He was confident that what was being done was the right way to go. I think we talked briefly about wireless technology and where it may be taking us. Is the minister still confident that the investment in the Alberta Supernet is going to be a good investment five and 10 years down the road, or will the evergreening problem be one that we have to face?

There are a number of items that are listed: the strategic research initiatives and the research investments program. I wonder if we could have a bit of a description of what those two programs involve as far as lottery dollars are concerned.

So those are my questions about Innovation and Science and the lottery fund allocations to that department, Mr. Chairman.

I wondered if I might ask, then, some questions about the lottery funds allocated to the Learning department. The minister earlier this afternoon spoke briefly about the achievement scholarships and how worthy they are. I couldn't agree more that those scholarships, that money is needed and is of benefit to Albertans, but my concern again is having that fund, having those dollars set aside in a lottery fund as a onetime investment. The experience with other scholarship programs in the province like the heritage scholarships is that they are long-term investments, that they have to be well financed over a long period of time, and that they certainly don't fit the onetime funding category. So, again, I'm not questioning the money for the scholarships, but why in this part of the budget? By placing it here, does that relieve the department from putting those sums in their budget proper and on an ongoing basis?

The Learning Television money, the estimate before us, is for \$8.1 million, a good piece of money. Is this again seen as long-term funding that will come out of lottery funds? What are the projections down the road in terms of where Learning Television is going given the advancements in the Internet and other technologies? If

we could have some explanation of what the \$8 million buys. It's not a lot of money when we compare it to some of the other technology investments the government has in this budget.

The Transportation subsidies are rather interesting. The 2001-2002 estimate is \$40 million. The 2000-2001 preliminary actual was \$20 million, and the 2000-2001 estimate was \$20 million. I guess I seek some explanation as to why there's a 100 percent increase in funding from the lotteries over that time period. I guess I would wonder why there's such an increase. Again, what is it being used for in terms of transportation that warrants it or would support it being a onetime request of the lottery fund?

I have a couple of questions, Mr. Chairman, about Children's Services. There are two items there. There's a million dollars set aside for the fetal alcohol initiative. We've discussed this in the Legislature. It's been the subject of question period in previous years. It's money I think that's, again, well budgeted and sorely needed, but again the question remains: should it be here, or should it be budgeted out of the Children's Services budget proper?

The second item is the permanency planning for children in care. We had the Children's Services department estimates up last week, and there was a considerable amount of time spent on permanent placements for children in care and the criticisms from the Children's Advocate that indicated that this is an area that has been a constant problem: finding permanent, adequate placements for children in care. If it's been a problem that's perennial, why would we see this money here. Again, I'm not saying that the \$200,000 shouldn't be supported, but I do question financing it from a fund that is not supposed to be ongoing in terms of those projects. It's badly needed, if we're to believe the Children's Advocate that planning and the placement of those children is really extremely important. So I support it, but again I question why it's here.

I had one further comment, but I can't locate it in my notes right now. So with those comments I'll conclude. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

5:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to make a couple of comments. The hon. member raised a couple of issues with respect to what I would call the general issue of gaming integrity. I can tell all members that the AGLC has an active enforcement program and prosecutes all criminal activity at licensed gaming venues. In doing this, there is the involvement of others, and that is because illegal gaming activities at licensed gaming venues are the responsibility of the AGLC. Illegal gaming activities outside licensed gaming venues are the responsibility of the police. So illegal poker clubs, for example, Internet gaming, unlicensed raffles, and things of that nature are the responsibility of the police. The AGLC works in co-operation with the police to exchange information on illegal gaming. So there is that overlap with other organizations.

In fact, for example, you have a situation where the RCMP are also involved in some cases because the RCMP are responsible for enforcing the money laundering act. There are some rules relative to the purchase of \$10,000 or more of chips at a casino within 24 hours that brings in the application of that act, so there is a relationship between the investigation group at the AGLC and the RCMP. There is an overlap and there is close co-operation between those groups. I'm proud to say that the integrity of the Alberta gaming industry is without question on a very, very high level.

There was also a reference to youth and gaming problems. I noticed with interest that the hon. member referred to an American report. If the member has any information with respect to a problem

here in Alberta, I'd like to hear about that, because it has not been brought forward to my attention. We will provide some specifics relative to this issue in addressing that question more fully when we provide a written answer.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that the time is 5:15.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the proposed lottery estimates, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Okay.

Agreed to:	
Agriculture, Food and Rural Development	\$11,620,000
Children's Services	\$1,200,000
Community Development	\$108,544,000
Gaming	\$196,451,000
Health and Wellness	\$84,065,000
Infrastructure	\$345,000,000
Innovation and Science	\$90,838,000
Learning	\$52,200,000
Municipal Affairs	\$12,000,000
Transportation	\$70,000,000
Finance	\$44,031,000
Total Lottery Fund Payments	\$1,015,949,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, from the lottery fund for the following departments: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, \$11,620,000; Children's Services, \$1,200,000; Community Development, \$108,544,000; Finance, \$44,031,000; Gaming, \$196,451,000; Health and Wellness, \$84,065,000; Infrastructure, \$345,000,000; Innovation and Science, \$90,838,000; Learning \$52,200,000; Municipal Affairs, \$12,000,000; Transportation, \$70,000,000; Total Lottery Fund Payments, \$1,015,949,000.

5:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 o'clock p.m., at which time we reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn until 8 this evening and

that when we do meet again, we do so in Committee of Supply. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 14, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/14

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order. Would everyone please take your seats?

head: Main Estimates 2001-02

Finance

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to be here to present the Ministry of Finance's budget for 2001-2002.

Mr. Chairman, with us in the members' gallery we have some officials from the Ministry of Finance, and I'd like to introduce them, if I might, to committee members. We have our deputy minister, Peter Kruselnicki, who is with us. Many of you have met him through Public Accounts. We have Bonnie Lovelace, who's our senior financial officer. Richard Shelast is the director of budgets, along with my executive assistant, Tim Wade. I'd ask them to all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

I might say, Mr. Chairman, that if hon. members have questions throughout the course of the term, these are the people to contact to get answers on the financial structure not only within the ministry but questions of finance throughout the government. They work very hard across government departments and would certainly either get you information or be able to steer you in the right direction.

Mr. Chairman, Budget 2001-2002 reflects the split that has taken place from the former Treasury Department. Before we hear from the members opposite, I'd like to give the Assembly a brief fiscal overview.

If you'll refer to your budget documents, Alberta Finance's deficit for 2001-2002 is projected to be \$410 million, which represents a reduction of \$210 million, or 33.3 percent, from fiscal 2000-2001. Much of the improvement to the ministry's bottom line is attributed to the shrinking debt load. The reason for an operating deficit is because the Department of Finance is responsible for the debt servicing costs for the government's accumulated debt.

The department's 2001-2002 revenue is projected to be \$80 million, about 9 percent lower than 2000-2001 because of a reduction of \$122 million in the estimated contributions from the lottery fund and a \$49 million reduction in the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation investment income. This is partially offset by an \$87 million increase in investment income on surplus funds earmarked for debt retirement.

The 2001-2002 revenue has increased by \$104 million, or 15 percent, from the 2000-2001 budget primary numbers due to a \$107 million increase in debt retirement investment income and a \$37 million increase in net profit of Alberta Treasury Branches. This is partially offset by a \$45 million decrease in Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation's investment income.

The program expense for the Department of Finance is expected to decline by \$39 million, or 7.6 percent, from the 2000-2001 preliminary actuals. As a result, expenses are down \$290 million from the 2000-2001 preliminary actuals, primarily due to debt servicing costs. It should be noted, Mr. Chairman, that the \$290 million is partially offset by corresponding decreases in revenues.

The department's voted program expense has increased by \$1 million, or 5.1 percent, over 2000-2001. I ask hon. members to note that major Treasury revenues like taxes and the heritage trust fund have been moved to the Revenue ministry from this ministry. As a result, 2001-2002 revenue for the Department of Finance is projected to be \$80 million lower than 2000-2001 preliminary actuals. Also, ministry capital investment has increased by \$3.2 million over 2000-01 preliminary actuals.

I'd now like to outline some of the details of the estimates for the Department of Finance's 2001-2002 budget. Program 1 expense. The minister's office estimates increased by \$107,000. This is mainly due to the former Provincial Treasurer's office being divided equally between Finance and Revenue as part of government restructuring. The deputy minister's office estimates also increased by \$153,000. This reflects a lower comparable base budget resulting from the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer's office being divided between Finance and Revenue. The increased funding has been largely offset by a reduction in the department's capital budget.

Our corporate services operating expenses increased \$264,000 over 2000-2001 due to salary adjustments, upgrades to computers, and an increase in manpower costs due to the termination of the shared service agreement with Human Resources and Employment. Our capital investment of \$125,000 is for the purchase of two computer servers and system management development tools. The communications funding increase of \$75,000 is primarily due to the production of two budgets in one fiscal year.

Program 2 expense. The operating expense of the office of budget and management increased by \$9,000 over 2000-2001 but decreased by \$47,000 over 2000-2001 budget. Even though we have an increase in salary adjustments, we were offset by reductions in special projects and advertising for the new tax plan. The financial management operating expense increase of \$460,000 is largely due to salary adjustments. Capital investment of \$350,000 is for the development of a new pensions benefit information system and for network servers and software.

Overall the ministry has decreased its full-time equivalent employment by four.* After factoring out transfers of 32 full-time equivalents to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre, the Department of Finance alone has a reduction of six full-time equivalents. This is due to the termination of the shared service arrangement with Human Resources and Employment. Alberta Pensions Administration has increased its FTEs by nine in order to backfill for staff assigned to the development of their new pension administration system. The Alberta Insurance Council has an increase of one due to increasing appeals activities.

Mr. Chairman, this is really a very quick overview of Alberta Finance's budget estimates for the fiscal year 2001-2002. I do look forward to comments from the members opposite, and I will make the same commitment other ministers have, that if we don't get the opportunity to answer the questions this evening, we certainly will be back to you very quickly with full written explanations of your questions.

I welcome comments and questions from the opposition. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real pleasure and stand and address the issues of the Department of Finance. I guess the start of the discussion has to be focused on the issue of the division of Finance and Revenue: why that occurred and what efficiencies were being gained by doing that. We've read a lot about the expected benefits or the need for this kind of split. I guess what

*See page 561, right col., para. 7

I'd like to ask for is some degree of focus on the long-term, ongoing benefits of this kind of split in the context of how it'll contribute to government efficiency and government effectiveness and how it'll provide for a measure of sustainability in the development of policy and process that deals with the issue of the collection of revenue and the control of the budget in the context of how the government sees this kind of fitting together over the next, say, five to 10 years.

8:10

In my sense, it would be kind of advantageous for us to have, you know, the actual collection of the revenue and that associated with the same type of operation that gets involved in developing the policy and developing the legislation that outlines that collection process so that we don't have to have effectively an intermediary communication channel that goes on to deal with – like, now that we've made this decision, let's take it out. You've got an interdepartmental communication there that's necessary to make sure that those kinds of things actually get carried out. So that's kind of the justification I'd like to see there, because I didn't see – although, Mr. Chairman, it's obviously an outsider's view – a real lot of difficulty in the way it was operating before in the context of how we were getting our materials pulled together. So if we could just have that.

I want to spend a little time at the start talking as much about the business plan as anything. We want to look at how it relates to the defined set of goals that is outlined for the ministry. There are a couple of individual questions that come up with the line items, but I'll deal with those as we get there.

I guess the main thing that we want to look at in the context of the business plan and the performance indicator section is the fact that we don't see any kind of performance indicator or any kind of real measure, Mr. Chairman, that's going to deal with the accuracy or the effectiveness of both the projections and the development of the budgeting processes. We've been very fortunate in the past four or five years that our projections have always been a little bit under realized factors, especially on the revenue side. When the revenue goes up, we seem to have a creeping sensation that comes into the expenditures as well, but we want to make sure that maybe what we're doing is looking at some degree of measure that tells us, especially in the revenue areas, how we deal with those and how we deal with the issues of accuracy and explainability when we look at the differences.

The next item that comes under the mission statement deals with fostering "an effective accountability framework." Here, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to ask the minister to either document for us or explain some of the methods that they've got in place to deal with accountability and the direct performance indicators for some of the arm's-length institutions that operate kind of as extensions of the government. They file their own business plans; they undergo their own audit through the Auditor General. How do we deal with some kind of measure of their effectiveness?

In that context, we had some interesting discussions with a couple of these groups as I've traveled the province in the last little while. One case came up dealing with one of the children's services regions. They were talking about how within the region almost all of their expected performance measures had not been met, yet the CEO had received a very significant recognition of performance by getting a bonus at the end of the year. Is there some degree of monitoring that goes on between the ministry and these groups – the health authorities, the school boards, the children's authorities: all of these groups that work kind of at arm's length and have their own accountability processes built up – or even some degree of control that comes from the Ministry of Finance to deal with how those kinds of performance measures are actually a reflection of the

wishes of the government and the direction of the government when it looks at how things get measured and who gets rewards for it?

The business plan goes on to talk about the objective or the goal of being in a sustainable financial position. I would ask the minister to explain that a little bit, because when you look back at the performance indicators, I don't really see anything that talks about a measure of sustainability, where they're projecting, say, five or 10 years into the future. I know five- and 10-year plans are at best very rough approximations, and the further you get into the future, the less confidence you can put in that. But by having those kinds of projections, long-term estimates, you give analysts looking at the province's decision-making and people in general just a sense that the government knows where it's going or where it wants to go or where it would like to go. In essence, it sets a benchmark vision for Alberta to judge the actions of the government, but when we're dealing with, you know, basically three-year business plans, those are all within the framework of what is considered to be a very short-term, almost a crisis management type of policy framework as opposed to a long-term strategic plan, where we're looking at the factors that deal with the growth and the contribution of these kinds of activities to the well-being of the province.

Further down under the goals there's an issue where we talk about fostering "confidence in Alberta's registered pension plans." The question that comes up here – and I've had it raised by a number of individuals that are involved in some of these pension plans that are joint province and employee funded – is the idea of the unfunded liability that exists there. In looking through all of the government documents here, we don't really see that showing up as an obligation of the government. We see the interest and the annualized payments, but it would be interesting to see some kind of a net present value calculation or even, you know, a simple summed total obligation that we have to those. I know they're legislated and that they fit within the operational parameters of the budget, but when we look at it in the context of obligations that we have from the province, we need to at least have reported a measure of the total obligation that we as the people of the province owe to that particular aspect of our long-term financial plan.

The same thing comes up, Mr. Chairman, in the context of how we deal with the capital ventures that are out there in terms of the funding for schools and the funding for health care facilities, the other aspects that come under some of the municipal debenture programs so that we can look at it in the context of a real sense of where we fit and look at, then, also how it might work out in the future for us to be seriously looking at an ongoing capital asset investment expenditure rather than the idea of debenture funding for some of these kinds of investments.

The main point here that we want to look at is making sure that Albertans have a true sense of where we stand. As we go through and look at this, Mr. Chairman, the interesting thing is that I've checked out a few other provinces in the context of how they do their reporting, and they're basically following much the same pattern as we are here in Alberta. I think it would be an area where we could step out and make a difference in reporting, you know, the total financial obligation that's held or that's faced by the people of Alberta. We keep talking about our debt and how it has to be paid off, yet when we end up with the legislated payment schedule that we have for debt repayment, that's no different than the legislated payment schedule that we have for the pension funds or for the retirement of the capital debentures or bonds. You know, it would seem that what we would want to do is look at making sure that those measures are reported as well.

8:20

I guess the next thing that it goes through in the business plan is

the highlights. As we go back to the line item discussion, we'll get into more of that. The main thing here is that there's a very concise summary of the different line item expenditures. What would be useful in that area, Mr. Chairman, would be the expected relationship to the existing performance indicators we could look at to see whether or not the government is on track in the context of dealing with the particular line item issues that are there or the overall performance of the government.

You know, when we look at a lot of the line items, these are really administrative overheads that are associated with all of the issues of revenue and expenditure policy development and monitoring. It would be interesting to see something that would, say, measure these kinds of expenditures as a percentage of our total budget so that we could see how much goes to administration and how much effectively gets at least out of the Ministry of Finance as a frontline service provider.

The next thing that we wanted to look at was some of the major performance indicators and why they're reported. Again the thing that came to my attention when I first looked at this is that there's no real relationship other than the first one, which talked about the accumulated debt and the retirement of that debt. There's no real relationship here to the performance of the goals and the objectives of the ministry.

The taxation load is a reflection of the relative performance, I guess if you want to call it that, of our tax structure on Albertans as compared to other provinces. It would be interesting here to have a time series chart that looked at the change in tax burden over time. Are individuals paying more? Are they paying less? You know, one of the things that this would show very astutely right now would be the fact that in the last couple of years the tax burden faced by individual families has been going down. The thing we want to watch there is to make sure that we always have a stable or a declining tax burden being faced by the families of Alberta. The issues we see there in effect would be some good measures that would show some of the kinds of things that talk about the relative overheads in the departments to administer the service loads provided, how we'd deal with it. I've mentioned already that it would be useful to see some kind of a comparison within the ministry.

When we look at the performance measure on page 182, where it talks about public awareness, how much of this is useful in the context that a lot of that awareness, especially in the last few years, has been created by outside agencies that have talked about the financial position of Alberta, the fact that we were deficit free to start with? Now people have been monitoring our debt position. This, I think, is in itself a mechanism that has helped to make Albertans aware of the government's financial position. But what we want to do there is look at how our performance indicators respond relative to actual activities undertaken by the government, activities that will talk about or show the government's performance in a way that Albertans feel adequately and accurately reflects their well-being.

Mr. Chairman, I bring that up right now because, you know, one of the things that a lot of people have asked about this year in the context of the current budget is the sustainability issue, yet in our performance indicators here there's nothing that gives a sense of sustainability or an indication of whether or not Albertans even think the budget is sustainable. All it says in here is that they're aware of our financial performance, and the fact that we do have a balanced budget and that we are reducing our debt in itself is not, I guess, all that significant.

Mr. Chairman, just a couple of other points before I get finished here. As I looked through a lot of the budgets, I've kind of flicked through a number of the web sites that the departments have and that

the government has under the gov.ab.ca format, and in those web sites we see an awful lot of links or references to private-sector agents, private-sector information sources. As I've looked through here, in a lot of the departments where I've seen actual references to those outside the government links, we don't see any reporting revenues or any reporting documents that show how those are put in place and how departments refer to that.

What I'd like to ask the minister to do is to provide us with some information on, first of all, how many departments within the government actually do have external links associated with their web sites, how they go about identifying who gets the link and who doesn't. Is it a competitive bid process based on some information that needs to be provided or some supporting evidence or supporting documentation for a government policy? Are there revenues associated with these? If it's a matter of a commercial choice for someone looking at the government site, why is it that there isn't an open availability for anybody that wants to link into that site that provides that similar service? Just as an example, under Finance if you link out to one of the banks or one of the financial institutions, why don't you link to them all? If you do that, how are those links negotiated? How do they get put in place? What service is being provided to the government in return for that link, or is there a financial return?

So those are some of the questions that come up there, because, you know, we've got to make sure that as we deal with this, there's a degree of objectivity in the government.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll let someone else have a chance.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise this evening to participate in the debate on the Ministry of Finance budget estimates. I listened with interest to what my colleague the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East had to say. I understand that the major goals of the department are "a strong sustainable financial position" and "open and accountable government" and "a fair and competitive provincial tax system."

Off the top of my remarks the first thing I would like to encourage the minister to do – now, I'm sure this can be handed off to the Minister of Revenue. First off, I think the entire Treasury could be under one portfolio, and I'm quite confident that the hon. minister across the way could fulfill all the duties in that old portfolio. This notion that somehow it was necessary to have 24 cabinet ministers is another example to me of a family that is quite anxious to spend its inheritance. In this case, it is our natural resources and the short-term revenue that they're providing to the government.

8:30

To the Minister of Finance. I believe that the \$9.5 million that's collected annually in propane tax should be eliminated. The propane tax in this province of 6.5 cents a litre should be eliminated. I think she should do the right thing and eliminate that tax, particularly for the part of the trucking industry that's involved in the delivery of goods in the major cities. It would help air pollution. Whenever you think of a government that was so quick to spend \$800,000 from the risk management fund on the Stockwell Day defence, that's 10 percent of the revenue from propane fuel just in one expenditure.

So I think it can be done. I think they can find the money there somewhere, and I would encourage the minister to do that. Quebec eliminated its tax on propane as a fuel. I would really encourage the minister to have a look at this, and I would be quite willing to share with the department any of the research that I've done. I was very

disappointed, to say the least, to get a letter from the government indicating that this could not be done. I think it's good for the environment and it's good for the trucking industry. I can't understand for the life of me why in Alberta a person, whether they're driving a truck or a car or a half-ton, should be paying more for their propane than people in Toronto. It amazes me. In Toronto they were paying less for propane than in Edmonton-Gold Bar at the Mohawk. I just don't understand that.

Now, another goal of this department is to "foster confidence in Alberta-registered pension plans." Recently many hon. members of this Assembly probably heard of a private-sector pension plan that had some difficulties, and all this of course was public information as the result of a FOIP request. I would be very curious to know if there are similar pension plans in the department that are facing shortfalls. If the minister could share this information, because we certainly need to ensure that everyone has confidence in our registered pension plans.

Another goal is to "foster confidence in, and encourage the availability of comprehensive, reliable, and competitive financial products and services." That is, to say the least, a noble goal, and we would not know how successful the minister or the department is until there was a significant financial collapse in a company that does business in this province and consumers were left holding the shortfall, so to speak.

Now, we go through the usual listings here on N.A. Properties, the statement of operations, and we go through to Gainers. It's just a subtle reminder of past performances of this current government. When you think of what was spent, the list is endless. We can even think of Swan Hills. We can go to Northern Steel. We can go to the telephone. There's no end to this. To see this here, Gainers and N.A. Properties, is just a subtle reminder of a not-so-illustrious past. Hopefully we're going to learn from our mistakes, and this loss of tax dollars will not be repeated.

Now, I saw also over here the Alberta Treasury Branches. I understand that we're the only jurisdiction in North America with a state-owned bank.

MR. MASON: We like it.

MR. MacDONALD: Some people like it.

Under the Alberta Treasury Branches we have investment income. We have provision for credit losses. If the minister in due time could elaborate on the provision for credit losses, I would be very grateful.

Now it's time to have a look at the department here. There is a decrease this year in the operating and capital investment to be voted. There is a decrease this year, Mr. Chairman, of 8.6 percent, or a little over 9 and a half million dollars over last year's budget. There's also a decrease this year of 8 percent over last year's preliminary actual. Now, if we move further along, we see the same sort of trend in program expenses and also in debt servicing costs. In capital investment now there's a decrease. Can the minister explain why capital investment last year was roughly 72 percent, or \$809,000, below budget?

Now, the full-time equivalents, which the minister discussed earlier in the opening remarks. Could it be clarified? I could not hear. Is there a transfer of employees to the Alberta Corporate Service Centre? [interjection] Okay. That would be 38 employees or full-time equivalents.

Will the minister please explain why the Finance business plan does not provide a three-year expense profile by program and subprogram as last appeared in the 1995-1996 through to the 1997-98 Alberta Treasury business plan? Will the minister please assist

readers of the business plans and estimates books to compare gross operating expenses by program and subprogram vote within the ministry over a three-year time frame, 2001-02 to 2003-04, by providing a three-year spending profile of operating expenses and capital investment of the department by program area for the years 2002-03 and 2003-04? Also, it would be very useful for the opposition to have a breakdown of departmental expenses by object for 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 for the following: the salaries for permanent positions, the salaries for nonpermanent positions, salaries for the contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses.

Will the minister also please provide a breakdown of premiums, fees, and licences for 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04 by type of premium, fee, and licence? This is on page 161. Also, could the minister please provide a breakdown of other revenue for 2001-02, 2002-03, and 2003-04? Could the minister also explain why internal government transfers are increasing by 720 percent, from \$44 million to \$361 million? That's also on page 161 of the business plan.

8:40

Now, could the minister also explain why financing to local authorities is decreasing by a little over 14 percent, Mr. Chairman, from 350-plus million dollars in 2001-02 to \$305 million in 2003-04? I note here that this is a 30 percent decrease from 1999-2000 to 2003-04.

Will the minister please explain why the financial assistance to farmers and small businesses is decreasing by 50 percent, from \$1.6 million in 2001-02 to \$800,000 in 2003-04? This again is a significant decrease.

How many full-time equivalents are employed under program 1, ministry support services, in 2001-02? What is the breakdown by the five subprogram areas: minister's office, deputy minister's office, corporate services, communications, and standing policy committee on economic development and finance? What are the projections for full-time equivalents in 2002-03 and 2003-04? Could the minister please provide also a breakdown of ministry support services by subprograms for 2002-03 and 2003-04? What performance measures are being developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program service delivery of ministry support services that would justify a 9 percent increase in operating and capital expenses during the upcoming fiscal year? Can the minister explain the decrease of 59 percent, or \$180,000, in capital expenses this year over last year's preliminary actual? Will the minister please explain the discrepancy between the \$525,000 in capital investment budgeted for ministry support services in 2000-01 and the preliminary actual of \$305,000?

Now, can the minister explain why the minister's office budget is increasing, Mr. Chairman, by \$107,000, or 66 percent, this year over last year's budget estimates? Will the minister provide a breakdown, again in the office, of the \$270,000 in operating expenses by object for 2001-02 for the following: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, hosting expenses, and dry cleaning?

Will the minister explain what quality indicators and performance benchmarks have been established within her own office to measure outcomes? For example, the New Zealand Treasury business plans include performance measures of correspondence received from the public: the number satisfied and the number unsatisfied.

What benchmarks have been established for the number of replies to Legislative Assembly questions, ministerial correspondence, motions for returns, written questions, and reports to cabinet and the Treasury Board? What time frame or due date benchmarks have

been established for ministerial, MLA, and public correspondence? Again I would note that the New Zealand Treasury provides this information in their business plans.

The reason I would ask about dry cleaning from the minister's office is that I note that as you go inside the door to this room called the Confederation Room, there's this dry cleaning there to be picked up. On the rack there is all this dry cleaning to be picked up – [interjections] yes, it's true – I assume by various cabinet ministers. I've been watching this. I see the tags on it, and I think: is this coming from taxpayers' dollars? I'm curious to know. That's where I'm coming from with that.

Now the deputy minister's office. Can the minister explain why the deputy minister's office was over budget by 16.9 percent, or \$25,000, last year? Mr. Chairman, I certainly do not want the current government and any of the current ministers that are involved in it to just become obsessed with Cadillacs and champagne, and I'm afraid that's what might happen.

Mr. Chairman, can the minister also explain why this year's budget ...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the noise level is getting very high, and somebody is whistling. Could you please tone it down? The hon. member is speaking.

Hon. member, you may proceed now.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you.

Again, Mr. Chairman, can the minister explain why this year's budget is 88 percent, or \$153,000, higher than last year's preliminary actual? This would be the deputy minister's office again. Will the minister please provide a breakdown of the \$270,000 in operating expenses by object for 2001-02 for the following again: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, hosting expenses ...

MR. MAGNUS: And dry cleaning.

MR. MacDONALD: No. No dry cleaning, because I suspect they pay for their own.

What are the outputs and outcomes used to evaluate performance within the deputy minister's office?

Now, with corporate services there's an increase, and then on the next line there's a decrease. My questions for the minister. Please, will the minister describe the activities planned by corporate services to justify the 6.5 percent, or roughly \$220,000, increase over last year's preliminary actual? Will the minister provide a breakdown of the \$3.6 million in operating expenses, by object again, for 2001-02 for the following: salaries permanent positions, salaries nonpermanent positions, salaries contract positions, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses. Again, what outcomes, outputs, efficiency measures, and quality indicators have been established for corporate services in this fiscal year?

Will the minister please provide further information and the reasons for the \$125,000 capital investment planned under corporate services?

Okay, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for your patience.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I once again remind members: please, the noise level is getting high. Control yourselves. Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will be

briefier than the previous hon. member, and I will be speaking about more pressing matters than the dry cleaning.

Mr. Chairman, I don't know if we'll find any new wrinkles in the government's budget, but I certainly want to talk about just two things tonight. One is the additional costs caused by the splitting of the department. There are, as I do the arithmetic, at the ministerial and the deputy ministerial levels another \$470,000 of expenditures as a result of this. I realize that the budget has to accommodate essentially the decision made by the Premier after the election to redivide a number of ministries and create more ministries. This, incidentally, means that in the third party we each now have 12 ministries that we're responsible for instead of 10, so I have an interest now in smaller government, Mr. Chairman.

I think we should be applying to government expenditures the regular litmus test that the government is proud to talk about all the time. What is it that we get? What is it that the public and the taxpayers get for these additional expenditures? How does the government justify an additional nearly half-million dollars to create two departments where there once was one? What financial benefits or efficiencies or improved levels of service does the public get? I'd like the minister to please respond in as much detail as she can with respect to what the citizens and the taxpayers of this province receive in exchange for this additional half million dollars of expenditure for these two departments.

8:50

The second thing that I'd like to speak about, Mr. Chairman, is what appears to be a steadily declining level of financing to local authorities in the budget. This is on page 184 of the estimates. We've seen a decline over the past three years in financing to local authorities, and my question really is: why is this taking place? Are we not expanding the role of municipal government in this province? Is there not an increase in population? Are there not increased demands for capital projects on the part of municipal authorities? I find it curious that this would actually be declining in a period of such rapid growth, both economically and in terms of the population growth of the province. So I would appreciate it if the minister could provide us with details of the major expenditures made under this program in terms of the financing to municipal governments in this province for various capital projects. That's something that I find quite curious, and surely we should be increasing the level of expenditures at this time in the province's history.

The last point that I want to deal with, Mr. Chairman, has to do with the Alberta Treasury Branches. This is contained on page 192 of the estimates. I would like to commend the government for the fairly remarkable turnaround at Alberta Treasury Branches. It used to be a repository for very questionable loans to friends of the government, and the Treasury Branches have in fact turned that around and gone after some of these really questionable – well, I won't mention their political affiliation. But generally they've gone after some very high-profile recipients of government largesse through the Alberta Treasury Branches, and I hope that continues.

That, of course, makes the Treasury Branches more profitable, more desirable, and it raises the specter of the privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches. We believe on our side that this has been a very valuable asset to the province of Alberta, a very important institution for the people of this province notwithstanding some of the abuses that took place in the last few years. We would like to know what the government's plans are for the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and we hope that they haven't followed the standard pattern of having the taxpayers clean up all of the expenses, cost overruns, bad loans, and so on, only to make the thing a primary target for privatization.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat, and maybe there's another hon. member that will get a few minutes to make some comments.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Various kinds of comments this evening coming out of this. In the six goals that are presented for the Ministry of Finance, I'm particularly interested in the first four.

1. A strong sustainable financial position.
2. Open and accountable government.
3. A fair and competitive provincial tax system.
4. Minimize borrowing and financing costs subject to acceptable risk.

As I read those goals, goal 1, "a strong sustainable financial position," jumped out at me. I remain concerned, as I think all Albertans and the minister do – the minister and I discussed this briefly in Public Accounts – about the long-term sustainability of Alberta's economic development and the need for that goal to get particular attention, with a long-term view to our oil and gas production, revenue, exporting, and consumption. A concern I have, in fact, is that the gas bubble we're riding through the current boom is going to burst on us.

I'm also concerned and interested in goal 4 in particular, to "minimize borrowing and financing costs subject to acceptable risk." I think it would be worth examining a different way of putting that goal, which would be: to maximize our net worth as a provincial government. It's just a basic business premise that sometimes it's more fruitful and more lucrative to invest rather than pay down debt. I'm concerned that we haven't necessarily weighed out the full cost of rushing our debt pay-down and have not balanced that and done a sufficient business case analysis to compare paying down the debt in a hurry with investing that money in revenue-generating instruments. Those goals are very important. I'm sure they'll be followed and studied carefully, but I think they need to be thought through further.

Turning to a few comments from the Auditor General and something that's come up repeatedly in discussions with various people such as the minister of health. The Auditor General's opinion, with which I would concur, is that we need to include RHAs, school boards, and postsecondary institutions within the consolidated financial statements. They are, after all, largely dependent on provincial revenue and in some cases almost entirely dependent on provincial revenue for their survival. The fact is that if an RHA, for example, were to run a sizable debt, it's the provincial taxpayer who comes forward and covers it, as has happened in recent years.

I think if we are to have a full sense of where we stand provincially in terms of finance, we really do need to incorporate those kinds of organizations in our consolidated financial statements, and indeed I'd like that to be done with some detail. It would be interesting to know what impact consolidating those kinds of bodies would have on the consolidated surplus and the net debt of the province. Whether it would put it up or put it down, it would be interesting and important to know that if we want to have a full picture and live up to our goals.

Also, we're always careful about watching for how much gets spent on consultants and what consultants are hired to do and how much they're paid. It would be useful if the minister would provide a breakdown of any consultants retained by individual project and by the fees provided for each of these through this budget year and

through next budget year as well. [interjection] We could have a consultant registry; sure.

There are places with precedents, other jurisdictions where that kind of detail is provided, and it relates back to goal 2, I think it was, "open and accountable government." How much are we paying to consultants for what kind of work, and who are the consultants? [interjection] Yes. How is their work evaluated? That's right. How is it judged?

9:00

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands made some reference to Alberta Treasury Branches: a huge asset, a huge operation, very important to the financial functioning and welfare of the province and to the provincial government. I'm wondering if the minister has ever considered or would reconsider perhaps having the president and CEO of the Treasury Branches appear with her at the Public Accounts Committee so that ATB operations could be discussed at that time, again fitting in with the intention of having an open and accountable government. Certainly the Alberta Treasury Branches touch the lives of a large number of Albertans, and we want to ensure maximum accountability there.

Also in the Auditor General's comments is something to look for in the future, an assessment of tax expenditures, an assessment and more detail on the programs that are handled through adjusting tax collection or tax breaks: tax exemptions, tax credits, preferential rates, incentives. Those things can have a direct cost to us. If we give up revenue, it's very much the same as spending money. I haven't seen anything in the estimates for this year that addresses that, and it would be something that I would really encourage the minister to work towards in the next year. It would require, I'm sure, the full co-operation of cabinet, but undoubtedly she can arrange that.

Now, the kinds of things that could be listed if she were to take on such a project and perhaps hire one of those consultants to which I referred. The state of Oregon has a tax expenditures report that might be worth looking at as a precedent, including a list of expenditures, the statutory authority for each one, the estimated revenue loss for the current and upcoming year, whether the tax expenditure is the most fiscally sensible way of proceeding, and of course an evaluation of whether that tax expenditure achieved its purpose. So if there were some indication of that and the activities planned in this year's budget, I would be thrilled and delighted.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm glad to be able to get in in the last few minutes of this debate. Just a few questions that I wanted to raise with the minister. The first is from the government and lottery fund estimates, page 195. This is regarding Gainers. I'm wondering what the circumstances are in which there was no budgeted expense or revenue noted for Gainers, yet in fact it shows a revenue of \$523,000 and an expense of \$520,000. I note that there's a budgetary note underneath saying:

This entity is a commercial enterprise or Crown-controlled corporation. Accordingly, the entity's net revenue . . . appears on the ministry consolidated statement of operations as revenue only.

In fact, that's not the case here. We have both a revenue and an expense, so I'm wondering what happened.

When I look more specifically under revenue, it's saying that we have two choices, again, on the sale of real estate – no, that's not where the amount appears. It's under "other." What is this? Where

did this revenue come from? When I look under expense, in fact \$20,000 of it shows up under operations costs and expenses, and once again this is unbudgeted. Nothing was budgeted in this category, yet these are still showing up. I'm wondering what was so extraordinary that it wasn't anticipated by the minister. So under expense we've got \$20,000 under operations costs and expenses, and then we've got \$500,000 under income taxes.

Now, I'm sure the minister will correct me, but one government can't tax another government, so who was this tax paid to and by whom? Is this some sort of transfer back or a refund? What on earth is this? We end up with a net revenue out of all of this of \$3,000, which I note was then transferred to the general revenue fund, which is appropriate. Since this was entirely unexpected, I'm wondering: what are the specifics of that? I look forward to hearing from the minister on that.

The second point I wanted to make was around recommendation 44 from the Auditor General's report, which can be found on page 267. I'll just quote:

Ministries continue to be unable to provide the Ministry of Treasury with year-end information by the required deadline for the Province's consolidated financial statements. In my opinion, generally there has been no improvement in ongoing financial reporting processes compared to the prior year. This is troubling because quality reporting throughout the fiscal year is a key element of good financial controllership.

Good point, and it relates directly to goal 2 of the ministry, which is "open and accountable government," but more specifically "facilitate sound fiscal planning and decision making," which I admit would be a little difficult if you're not getting the figures in from the various departments that the minister is trying to oversee. So I'm wondering specifically what has been done or what is going to be done in this fiscal year to address this specific issue. I'm sure the minister has done something in the previous year to deal with this. What's happening in this year?

Finally, just a couple of points about performance measurements. I really have an issue with a performance measurement that is in some ways a survey of satisfaction. I don't find that is a helpful or realistic performance measurement which becomes a good management tool and from which good decisions can be made. This is really about a popularity contest, which I don't support as a management tool. To give the minister credit, a number of the performance measures and targets are in fact very good ones, but once again that nasty little word "satisfaction" keeps showing up.

I'm looking at her goal 2 on page 155 of the business plans. We've got "satisfaction of deputy heads with the government's accountability system; target: all satisfied or very satisfied." Oh, please. Then we have a number of performance measurements that are "to be developed." How can that possibly be? I mean, if it's a performance measurement, you're trying to measure something. How can you have something under goal 3 where you're going to develop the performance measure?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but your time has elapsed.

Does anyone else wish to speak before I recognize the hon. minister to close debate? The hon. minister to close debate.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do appreciate the comments from the members opposite. I probably won't go into details of answering a lot of them at this point.

Clearly, one of the ones I wanted to talk about was the splitting of the department and the benefit to it. As you'll notice, the revenue is recorded under the Revenue department. The Revenue department is not only charged with the collection of revenue but also with

looking at the investment of, in particular, the heritage trust fund, which is a very important part of the financial well-being and stability of this province. Tax policy issues and fiscal issues and economic issues and budgeting, of course, stay within the Ministry of Finance.

One of the things that's going to be beneficial as we move forward to a debt-free province is: what is the next step? One of the key aspects of the responsibilities under the Ministry of Revenue, of course, is to come forward with a framework on investment that can be presented at the Future Summit to talk about postdebt and what happens with our revenue base. It's going to be very key. I think it's also very important.

As you know, we've talked many times in this House about the difficulty of projecting revenues, and if you have a blended portfolio in which you include the heritage trust fund plus other secure investments, one of the things that gives you is almost a hedge on what your revenue forecast can be. It's a very important aspect within the fiscal framework so that you can have some certainty in projections.

9:10

I was a little bit surprised, I have to admit, by Edmonton-Gold Bar being concerned about why we didn't spend as much money in this budget as we did in the last budget. That's good. As the Finance ministry we encourage ministries to spend less, and that's good. We don't want ministries to spend more; we want them to spend less. In this department, quite frankly, one of the performance measures I have is that it's necessary to come in under budget, not over, because there's no room to go over. You must live within the fiscal framework or the minister probably gets a little annoyed. We like to keep within our budget. In fact, it's mandatory, particularly here. So don't be upset if we don't spend or budget for this year as much as what we did in the last one.

I know the Member for Edmonton-Centre asked about Gainers. Well, there weren't any revenues or expenses shown because we're presumably out of there. That's final. There is some litigation that is outstanding, but there won't be anything flowing through, so last year was the last year for that showing up on our financial statements. We do show the comparison so that you have consistency with financial presentation, but that's why there's nothing showing up in this year. [interjection] What was what? There's nothing there. Zero from zero is still zero, so it's not going to be there. We're finished with that. We do show the comparative between years to show how it's phased out, and you can see the decline in that, so we're not into that any longer.

The rest of the questions, Mr. Chairman, I think we'll pick up from the *Hansard*, and we will get back to the committee members opposite very shortly.

I did make an error in my opening presentation. I said that we had decreased our FTEs. We've actually increased them by four, not decreased them, so I do apologize to committee members for making that error.* I hope I haven't misled you on that. We did actually increase them.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I do commit that we will get back to members and answer their questions fully. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Finance, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

*See page 555, right col., para. 5

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$102,245,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$95,422,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Energy

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister to open debate.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know I can report that the active desk-thumping means that there is a great deal of attention being dedicated to the examination and study of these estimates and this budget.

I also know that it's actually desk-thumping in advance for the good comments and good questions that all members will ask as I see them poring assiduously through the estimates, whether it be a discussion about coal and the coal opportunity that exists in the constituency of West Yellowhead or the conventional oil and gas industry that sits in the constituency of the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar or the tremendous oil sands potential that sits in the constituency of the Member for Fort McMurray or the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake – although I know he has other pressing duties as deputy whip, he still finds time to support a very strong constituency – or even if it's the area of Pincher Creek and the areas down there that are home to vast amounts of wind power, that have absolutely no environmental impact at all other than perhaps the visual impact of new transmission lines to move that power out, or perhaps even the new methane opportunities that sit in the rich constituency of Brooks and the biomass potential that could power new fuels as well as, it has been rumoured, Mr. Chairman, some coal.

So we've seen power opportunities from places as large as perhaps the constituency that garnered the most votes for a Progressive Conservative in Alberta, Calgary-Shaw. We can take a look at the strong petrochemical complexes in Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan or in Red Deer or for the Member for Lacombe-Stettler. Knowing that these are important issues whether you are from Grande Prairie or from Paddle Prairie or Manyberries, these numbers are going to be important to you. Knowing that and knowing how diligently the opposition has worked to bring forward questions, I don't want to take any more valuable time of the House but to say that I will commit actively to respond orally, and if I can't answer the vast amount of questions that will be asked in the estimates time, I'll certainly be able to table a written response at a later time, Mr. Chairman. Knowing that members put this time to good use, I am going to sit back, and I'm going to listen carefully.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is a department that is certainly not without its controversies these days. Alberta consumers, whether they be residential consumers of electricity or natural gas or industrial consumers of electricity or natural gas, are keeping a very watchful eye on the minister and on the department because, of course, of the high cost of energy in this

province. It's startling that we have gone from a province with a well-regulated, well-managed electricity generation and distribution system and now have costs that – well, power prices are surging. When you think of the past history . . .

MR. SMITH: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Standing Order 23(i), on false motives. In fact, the Power Pool price has dropped today. It was \$95.90 at noon today. It's lower than it's been since January.

9:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. minister, the argument that you have presented does not constitute a point of order. It's a statement of facts. I hope that by clarifying that issue, it has been taken care of.

The hon. member to proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. I can recognize the sensitivity of the minister, but the reality is our electricity prices in this province. If we were to compare ourselves, for instance, to Montana – and whether it's unfortunate or fortunate that we don't have a tie-line to Montana, that would not be the question. Montana has had to lay off workers in one of its primary industries, and that's the industry that deals with mineral exploration and exploitation and eventual sale. It's one of the largest industries in Montana outside of ranching and farming. At the beginning of the year 2000 one mine in particular was paying about \$26 a megawatt hour. That was up from \$19 the year before. Last year a megawatt hour cost this company \$320.

Now, at nearly the same time a deregulation bill, the Electricity Utility Industry Restructuring and Consumer Choice Act, was introduced, a year before this Assembly dealt with Bill 27. When the legislative session was over, lawmakers, most of them farmers and ranchers and businessmen, approved it hastily. Mr. Chairman, in this Assembly we used closure. This member in particular was accused of wasting taxpayers' dollars by wanting to debate Bill 27, and now we know what sort of waste has resulted in this deregulation scheme. Prices have gone higher and higher, and they spiked for Montana consumers at \$680 American and then have settled back down to the \$200 to \$400 range. This has had a significant impact on the consumers of Montana. Montana is one of our neighbours, and if we understand what's going on in the neighbourhood, we'll have a good idea of what's going on in our own home.

Now, we get to the end of this article. This is an article that appeared in Sunday's *New York Times*. I'm quoting here:

"Montana held the four aces of cheap power," said former United States Representative Pat Williams, a prominent critic of deregulation. "And a corporate-lackey legislature demanded a new deck of cards."

That is the story in Montana, and we have to be very, very careful that this does not happen here.

You look at this department, and hopefully the minister is going to put to good use the course that I understand was taken and completed in London two summers ago. There's going to be a need for an able display of management in this department to ensure that campgrounds, homes, businesses of all sorts will have an electricity supply that is not too much of a burden.

Now, there's a lot to say on this issue, and unfortunately there's

very little time. I would like to know if the ministry has had any studies done on solution gas. Solution gas is gas that's produced in oil batteries. Have there been any studies done to see if this could be harnessed in a way to produce electricity in an environmentally friendly manner? If these studies have been done, could the minister please share them with Albertans?

Now, I think that's where the solutions lie. We have to look at sources of electricity generation other than subsidizing natural gas fired generators. Time and time again in this province we have heard this figure of 33 percent of our electricity-generating capacity coming from natural gas. I just can't understand how that number is that high. If the minister could clarify that 80 percent of Alberta's electricity supply comes from coal-fired generation, 15 percent from natural gas, and the remainder from hydro and other sources.

The minister also, in relation to coal, talked about coal as a wonderful source of electricity generation. Has the department had any studies done on the clean-coal technologies? My studies on this issue indicate that the technology so far has been inconclusive. [interjection] That is true. Are studies to prove their economic viability? There's no denying that they exist, but the viability of them economically has yet to be proven. If the minister is sitting again on any secret reports regarding this, I would be very, very grateful because all Albertans would benefit from the diligent research that has been conducted by the department or that perhaps has been done by the department of science and technology, I believe it's called.

The coal royalty is \$3 million less, roughly, in estimates than it was last year, and I understand that there's going to be more coal used. Is there a reduction in the royalty?

Now, the synthetic crude oil. There is a significant reduction in the amount of money that the hon. minister is going to receive through the department from that. I believe there's a 1 percent royalty, Mr. Chairman, taken on the production of synthetic crude. Then after that – and this is off the top of my head – there is another 25 percent after capital costs are retired. If synthetic crude oil production is increasing dramatically, why is there a decrease in the amount of royalty that's been collected? If the minister could answer that, again I would be very grateful.

Also, the key performance measures. I'm going to go back to the key performance measure, the percentage of industry compliance with established standards. The target is to be developed.

The EUB will review HVP (High Vapor Pressure) pipeline safety and integrity with external stakeholders, then identify and incorporate measures into the EUB's regulatory framework that assures public safety by April

of next spring. Now, is there a significant public safety factor here with pipelines that are, let's say, 20 years and older? In a lot of situations these pipelines, these gathering systems may have changed corporate hands, and they are maybe being used for another purpose.

I'm wondering also if there is a detailed study regarding this that the department could share with all Albertans and particularly landowners in rural Alberta. I certainly wouldn't want to have, say, a sweet gas line adjacent to my property that was being used for a high-pressure sour gas line. I certainly hope that this sort of activity is not going on. There was a dispute in central Alberta, west of highway 2, in regards to this matter, and I'm sure that this is what this performance measure target "to be developed" is concerning.

9:30

Now, staff retention. We certainly know that the EUB – and it was an amazing example of peoplespeak. It was described in terms similar to this, Mr. Chairman, as regrettable staff turnover: the EUB had a number of regrettable staff turnover years. I read that, and I was astonished. But there are efforts being made to increase the number of staff in the EUB. The majority of the staff, I think, would

have significant qualifications, and if it's like anything else, the minister's department, the EUB, or the headhunter will have to work very diligently to find those people and to have compensation packages that are suitable to attract people, because private industry certainly would be active in recruiting individuals with those technical backgrounds. I certainly wish the minister and the department the very best in their pursuit of these individuals, because in light of the current work that the EUB is doing and will have to do in the future, a stable workforce is of great importance.

Now, I have other questions here. This goes back to what I believe is a fundamental policy flaw of this current government. The introduction in the business plan summary: "Albertans own their oil, gas, and mineral resources." That statement comes as a surprise to me, because as much as we have developed economically in the last decade in this province – and it is a significant achievement – I don't feel that the current government is the steward of the resources that they should be.

I look at ethane. I have expressed reservations about the export of our ethane in the Alliance pipeline. I have no problem with exporting natural gas, no problem with that. But we have to be very careful that there is ethane so that the town of Fort Saskatchewan can grow and prosper. I want to see that prosperity continue. I'm sorry; with the major policy shortcoming in regards to ethane I don't see how that is going to be possible over the long term.

Ethane is going to get so high in price that we're going to have to compete with naphtha gas. There are facilities in the Gulf coast that can change over to naphtha gas, but I do not believe, for instance, that Dow can do that without a major capital expense. These are issues of long-term planning that I'm afraid have been neglected. It is paramount that the government stand up and protect these resources not only for this generation but for the future generations that are going to hopefully reside and prosper in this province.

The issue of Bill 1. The EUB would not have any say in this, but certainly the minister and the cabinet would. In the newspaper over the weekend there was a discussion of a possible . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Coup?

MR. MacDONALD: No, not a coup. Worse than that: bid rigging going on the eastern border of California, where natural gas prices were in some cases 3000 percent higher than they should have been.

This was to fuel, again, natural gas fired electricity stations. How could this be? I thought to myself: here we are in this province with billions of dollars of subsidies for our own consumers – and our consumers have to be protected – but who is watching? We're tied into this continental market, which sets the price, and I'm beginning to wonder if market forces are setting that price. It's fine if it is to be just exclusive market forces, but what is going on when we're hearing that prices for this gas have just gone up 3000 percent? Is that competition, or is it collusion?

When we're looking at our own price here, I think we would be much better served if the government were to devise a plan and stick by it. We have a two-tiered system with electricity prices. Why we can't have one with natural gas is beyond me. We do have a two-tiered system with electricity prices. There's no doubt about that. We have to have long-term planning, and we have to ensure that the resources are for Albertans.

We look no further than the Viking and Kinsella areas. I understand that this is before the EUB. Now, I'm not going to comment on something that's before the EUB. I'll leave that for others. We're selling the gas field in a part of Alberta which has seen its production rates of natural gas decline significantly in the last decade, and I just don't think it's prudent at this time for that gas field to be sold, particularly in that area of the province where there

has been a production decline. Now, others may have different views, and that's fine.

Also, we see in Brooks that Fording Coal, I believe, was going to have a significant investment in a coal-fired generating station. Coal-fired generating stations are not eligible for any of these location-based credits, these subsidies to locate power generators in Calgary or in Lloydminster or in Grande Prairie. There is a lot of talk about whether subsidies should be provided by the government, because we all were told that the government was out of the business of being in business.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

This whole idea that perhaps in the calculation of these location-based credits a portion of the formula is going to deal with natural gas prices – now, the minister is in a much better position to know the fine details of this than I, but I certainly hope that we're not going to be subsidizing the natural gas feedstock that's going into these power stations. It would be just a complete reversal of everything the government has said about getting out of the business of being in business, Mr. Chairman. We need to ensure that there is a level playing field.

This gets back to the Fording Coal power plant in Brooks. The coal-fired generators feel left out by the Department of Energy here, because these subsidies or whatever you want to call them are just to the natural gas fired generators and not to the coal-fired plants. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm sorry, but I hope to get an opportunity a little later, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

9:40

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Just briefly I want to raise some concerns about the performance measurements that are shown in the department's business plans from page 119 on.

Sorry. Before I start that, I just had a question about core business 1: "Secure Albertans' share and benefits from energy and mineral resource development." I'm wondering if the government has considered at all a plan or a scheme similar to the Alaska permanent fund, whereby they are paying dividends directly to their citizens. It's different than what we're doing, but I'm wondering if there's been any evaluation of it as far as equity or fairness. It strikes me that given what we're looking at in Bill 1, in which nothing is outlined in the actual bill about how revenue would be rebated or refunded to citizens, it's not clear whether that bill is building on a concept of equity: the resources are owned by all Albertans; therefore all Albertans would be gaining or would be involved in a rebate. This Alaska permanent fund is developed with that concept, so if the minister or the department could comment on that one for me, please.

Under core business 2, "Ensure the competitiveness of Alberta's energy and mineral resources," could the government please elaborate on one of their key strategies, which is:

Work with Aboriginal communities, resource developers, stakeholders and other levels of government to create opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate equitably in the resource economy of Alberta.

Now, this is a cross-government initiative, but I'd like to see some details on what this particular department is anticipating implementing in this fiscal year.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I'd ask the hon. members to be quiet, please.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks.

Now, to get specific on the performance measures, I am shocked and appalled, yes, indeed, because as I go through looking not only at the department's performance measures but even at the agencies that report, there's a real problem with performance measures. In almost every goal there are performance measures that are saying: well, we'll develop it. How can you expect a year from now when you're trying to evaluate your performance in this year we're considering, when you in fact have no target, no performance measurement against which to measure – and indeed, when you're two years out and you go back to see whether you are progressing in your three-year plan, you don't have anything to measure yourself against for year 1 of your three-year plan, which actually means that year 2, if you actually get around to developing it, is the first time you have a target against which to measure yourself.

Frankly, it's appalling, and the Auditor General has commented generally, not specifically to this department but generally, on this lackadaisical approach to performance measurements, where it's sort of: well, we'll develop it when we get there; yeah, we're working on it. This is not good enough, especially since this is one of our more important departments in all of government and certainly both a revenue source and a point of pride for all Albertans.

I look at goal 2: "Advocate for the removal of barriers to the development of energy and mineral resources in Alberta." How are we going to measure that? Well, "approval of mineral development strategy" by the end of the fiscal year we're examining. "Further performance measures will be explored for the next business plan." What? How are you supposed to measure against that in years to come? "Well, we'll figure it out as we go." That's not the point of a performance measurement.

Let's look at goal 3: "Advance the competitiveness of Alberta's energy and mineral resources." Performance measurement? We'll "complete competitive commodity analysis" by the end of the fiscal year we're examining here. Well, that'll be really helpful. I mean, it's a valuable tool, but that should have been completed before now. You're going into a three-year business cycle. You shouldn't be deciding one-third of your way into the business cycle what your measurement is going to be.

What's the other performance measurement that's listed here? "Subsequent performance measures to be developed." Why don't you just put TBA under all of this because that's what you . . . [interjection]

Okay. Let's look at goal 4, "Provide strategic research direction to achieve long term energy and mineral development goals." And what are your performance measurements? "Priority areas identified by Department of Energy" by the end of the fiscal year. Excuse me. "Further performance measures will be explored." You don't have performance measurements for any of your goals here.

What else have we got? "Leveraged research funding from industry and federal stakeholders." Okay. This is the beginning of a performance measurement, but how much? How are you going to measure yourself against this? What's your target? How much are you looking to leverage in research funding? What percentage? Are you comparing yourself to other provinces or other countries? Have you had resource funding from industry and federal stakeholders in the past? Can you measure yourself against that?

You know, you've got to get specific on this stuff or it's not a useful management tool. When this government talks about being a good manager, I'm sorry but I have to laugh. I mean, this is the poorest business planning I've seen in a long time, and I've been around five years now, so you guys are hitting a record here.

MR. MAR: So did you.

MS BLAKEMAN: I did indeed. Thank you so much; I'm very proud of my record.

Now, let's look at core business 3, goal 5. [interjection] I'm sure if the Minister of Health and Wellness is truly interested in participating, the chairman can arrange for an opportunity for him to speak.

Goal 5, "Prepare a long term energy outlook for Alberta that secures supply and benefits and positions Alberta within a broader North American energy marketplace." Okay. How does that relate to the core business of "develop and communicate energy and mineral resource policies"? Could I get the minister and his staff to outline how they see this as a linkage or how one flows from the other?

Let's look at the performance measurements that have been put up. Well, they'd like a "consultation completed, energy policy developed for the Minister's consideration by the end of 2001-02." Well, you can't measure against that. What are you going to measure yourself with here, that you got the consultation completed? That's going to be enough to be using as a management technique? What are the other performance measurements listed here? "Subsequent performance measures to be developed once policy approved." You could go three years and never get this. What is going on in this department? Where is the fiscal management? Where is the measurement?

AN HON. MEMBER: Where is the minister?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, yeah. That's another story.

Goal 6: "Inform Albertans about the opportunities for a continuing supply of Alberta's energy and mineral resources from conventional and non-conventional sources." Under the key strategy it's talking about:

Enable public awareness of resource extraction management practices (e.g., sour gas, clean burning coal, etc.) and the importance and economic significance of the energy and mineral sector.

Could we have some elaboration and some detail on that please? Exactly what is being anticipated? In implementing that, what are the specific strategies flowing from that?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MS BLAKEMAN: I look at the performance measurement target: "To increase their understanding by 2003-04." Well, okay. That's the end of your three-year plan here. How are you planning to do that? Well, look. In the fiscal year we're examining, we're going to establish the baseline. So once again you don't have a target to be measuring yourself against for this first year, which means you in fact are not able to do any useful measurement or have a useful management tool until the end of your second year out of a three-year plan.

All right. Let's look at your target, then, for the second year of this plan. Well, we're going to increase over time. What? There's no percentage here. There's no target amount that you're trying to hit. There's no number of Albertans. There's no real measurement of what you're trying to do here. This is appalling. I mean a first-year business student could do better than this. This department has millions of dollars worth of resources and staff underneath it to be able to develop these. Is this so that we can't judge this? How does that fit into open and accountable government if this department in particular can't even judge its performance because it hasn't established anything to judge itself by? I guess it can just keep going: aren't we fabulous; aren't we wonderful. We'll just have to take your word for it. But then again you've got a huge communication budget plus you've got the public affairs department

to be going out there and doing all of your spin control for you, because there's nothing in here that's giving any real management tools for you to use.

9:50

Performance measurement for goal 7, "Performance measures on gas and electricity price to be developed." Okay. Well, let's look at goal 8 performance measurement target then: "80% by 2003." Well, this is interesting, because when I look at what you're trying to do here, you've got a survey year of '98 and again in '99 in which the increase in satisfaction went up by 4 percent, from 75 to 79 percent. So one year, 4 percent increase. When I look at your target for 2003, which is four years' difference from your baseline if you're going from '99, you've got a 1 percent increase. So you had a 4 percent rise in one year, and you're only expecting 1 percent in four years? Have you perhaps inverted the figures here by mistake? Is this some sort of typo?

Well, let me look at the EUB then. I'm hopeful that perhaps as a Crown agency or somewhat independent from the department they might be doing better, and in fact they are a little better in their targets. They're actually specific. When I look at things like goal 3, "Timely and efficient application and hearing process," they've actually got things like "% of decisions issued in less than 90 days from the end of the hearing." They're looking at 90 percent, 95 percent, 100 percent. Okay. "Application Turnaround Time – Target: 3-3.5 working days (average) for routine facility applications." Okay. That's something you can measure against. Were you actually able to accomplish that? How far were you off? If your average was five days, then you've got something to work with here.

But then, no. I'm to be disappointed again. I look at some of the other ones. Performance measurement under goal 1. We're going to "improve the percentage of objections resolved." Well, by 80 percent to 85. You know, what are the specifics under that? We've got, "Percent of Incidents Resolved Related to Existing Facilities – Target: 87%." Then we've got, "% of incidents resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant." Again, this is essentially a survey. It's a popularity contest when you are using a subjective survey like satisfaction. Well, in comparison, satisfaction to what? If they didn't get anything resolved the previous time, they're going to be a bit more satisfied that something got resolved at all, even if the end result wasn't what they wanted. So this department has got to move away from these sort of nonexistent, we'll get there, we'll develop it, uh huh, sort of performance measurements.

Goal 2, "Further performance measures are being developed." Goal 4 under the EUB: "The Percentage of Industry Compliance with Established Standards – Target: To be developed . . . The Adequacy of Emergency Response Plans: – Target: To be developed."

It just goes on and on. I mean, I don't need to take any more time. I think I've made my point here. I'm glad some of the members opposite are recognizing that this is a critical point, that this department in fact has not given itself anything by which it can evaluate its performance, nor can the public evaluate its performance. Yet that is a stated goal of this department: to have better public understanding of what it's doing and how well it's doing. Based on what we've got here, nobody can tell, not even the department.

I know that others are anxiously awaiting to speak, and I will make way so that they are able to raise some additional points as well. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased

to speak to the estimates of the Department of Energy, which is in my view probably one of the most critical departments in the government and certainly a department that has more impact and more influence on the economic prosperity of the province in the short term and in the long run than any other department. It's clear that energy in this province is the motor of the economy. When it's running well, when everything is going well and there are high prices, the whole economy is affected very dramatically. In a way it has an impact that no other sector of the economy has, so it's of critical importance.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman, as it is the motor of our economic prosperity, it is probably the most chronically mismanaged department policywise of any in the government. I don't single out this minister. I think that this mismanagement goes back decades in the Alberta government.

I'd like to use the analogy of a car with a great big powerful motor. People are very happy that it can go 60 miles an hour, or 100 kilometres an hour, on the highway, and they don't stop to check whether that motor could be producing dramatically more power and dramatically less fuel consumption than it is. They don't ask the question whether or not the oil needs to be changed and whether or not that motor is going to be good for a long time to come or whether or not it's going to fall apart within a month or two. Those are really the kinds of issues that I think we're faced with in this province through our energy policy.

Now, the first thing that I want to talk about is the issue of natural gas. I want to talk a little bit not so much about prices – it might surprise some members – but about our supplies and about our reserves. I'm looking at a graph here which shows the supply of natural gas. It takes into account both the level of production and the discovery of new reserves. Back in 1983 we had proven reserves for 31 years. As of 1999, two years ago, there had been a steady and dramatic decline to the point where there were only proven reserves for eight and a half years. Now, if that trend continued in the last two years, for which I don't have the figures, we're probably at the point of six or seven years of proven reserves.

The fact of the matter is that we've been able to sustain high economic output through this industry precisely because we are playing against the future of the province. We are spending faster than we are taking in money, if you want to look at that way of looking at the reserves, and we are exporting and consuming energy, particularly in the natural gas area, far faster than we are able to find new reserves. The result is that within this generation Alberta will virtually be depleted of natural gas, and the money that is being brought in now will be reinvested all over the world and may or may not provide any long-term benefit to the citizens of Alberta.

Now, I want to talk a little bit also about the question of ethane. It used to be the policy in Alberta that valuable by-products of natural gas such as ethane would be retained here in the province because these are the building blocks of a petrochemical industry, the building blocks of a pharmaceutical industry, and it really is a source of jobs. The government has changed the policy, particularly with the development of the Alliance pipeline. We now send, according to an article on Dow Chemical, which is entitled Dow Chemical's Alberta Advantage Disappearing, in the May 9 issue of the *Edmonton Journal* – it says that 1.3 billion cubic feet of raw gas are shipped daily to Chicago, where they strip out the ethane there instead of here in Alberta. So they can build a petrochemical industry based on Alberta natural gas in Chicago. This policy amounts to nothing more than the export of Alberta jobs into the United States, and it needs to be changed. It's absolutely not in the interests of the people who own the resources.

10:00

I want to come next to the question of price, because by creating now a North American market for Alberta natural gas, they've ensured the profits of the producers – that's for sure – and there is certainly an indirect benefit to many, not all, people in Alberta as some of those profits are reinvested in Alberta. But there's no guarantee that those profits will be invested in Alberta if there's a better opportunity somewhere else, and it has meant higher natural gas prices for all consumers in Alberta because we are now, of course, competing with the American market for our own natural gas. The benefits Albertans receive are diminished as a result of that, because we are seeing a dramatic increase in the export of natural gas outside this province and outside this country. The result is that we are benefiting in the short term but we are sacrificing the interests of our children and our grandchildren in the long run.

I'd like to come to the question of royalties in the same spirit, Mr. Chairman, because the overall rate of royalties paid for both natural gas and oil in Alberta are amongst the lowest in the world. Even in comparable American markets they charge higher royalties for their natural gas and their oil, and it really leads me to wonder if we value our own natural resources the way other people do. I see again in the estimates that the royalty tax credit is continued, and I would like to ask the minister to specifically identify what benefit Albertans receive from the royalty tax credit. That is, in our view, something that is simply unnecessary and simply a drain on the revenues of the province and is a gift to oil companies for which nothing is received by the people of Alberta in exchange. So I would like to request a detailed report from the minister on the royalties that are charged in Alberta and a comparison with comparable jurisdictions in Canada and the United States. They might want to take a look at places like Alaska, for example, with respect to that.

Now I want to talk a little bit about the EUB. We've been quite critical of the EUB and consider it to be no longer a tiger protecting Albertans but a toothless tiger that is more interested in facilitating the development of oil and gas in this province than in protecting consumers or landowners. I'll give one example: the approval of the sale of the Viking-Kinsella field, which will result in a substantial increase in rates for natural gas paid by consumers in northern Alberta because it's sold off, of course, to an American company. They'll be able to increase production, but its overall impact will be to increase the prices in northern Alberta and to take away the advantage northern consumers have had because there has been some ownership of natural gas fields and supplies by the gas company itself.

I've dealt with a number of cases of people coming to me because they feel that their property rights have been overrun by drilling activity and they haven't got any help from the EUB, cases where water, the strata, has been contaminated as a result of drilling and there doesn't seem to be very much the EUB is doing about that.

I'd like to also talk a little bit about power supply and power rates in this province. One of the things that has become apparent to me in my research of why deregulation of electricity does not work is that you never can achieve sufficient competition on the side of generation. There always is an element of monopoly or of oligopoly. The players simply have too much market power, and they can, and have, jack up the rates by reducing supply. It's very easy in that system, and it's why we say that electricity production remains really a monopoly and should be a regulated monopoly as opposed to trying to enforce competition in a sector where it doesn't really work.

So the question I have – and we've certainly asked questions in the House about why there's a shortage of supply of electricity. Always on the other side amongst all the various reasons that are

given for this is that, well, you know, there are power units down. Right now – and the Premier said it three or four times in the House – there's this unit down or there's that unit down. So my question, really, to the minister is: how can we ensure that power companies have not increased the amount of time that major units are down as a way of increasing prices in the province? I know it couldn't happen here or it shouldn't happen here, but it has happened in other places. I'd like some assurance that the government is making sure that the rates with generation being down have not increased since we've entered the deregulation universe.

The other point I'd like to make relative to this is the lack of commitment by the government to reducing consumption as a primary strategy to deal with the shortage of supply in this province. All the focus seems to be on getting new plants, coal-fired or otherwise, on stream in order to meet the increasing demand for energy, but there seems to be little emphasis, if any, on reducing the amount of energy that's consumed. A number of years ago – I believe it was 1993 – the government eliminated the energy efficiency branch, and I would like to see that restored. I'd like the minister to please respond as to whether or not they've looked at restoring the energy efficiency branch and what opportunities exist in this province to reduce the consumption of electricity, because a kilowatt-hour saved is the cheapest way to generate new power. If you save that from some other use, it can be used by someone else, and it doesn't have an increased impact on the environment. So it's certainly the best way to go.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to talk a little bit about a North American market for power because I've heard some mention of that lately. I'm actually quite horrified by the talk from some members of the government about creating a North American energy market, because if you look at what happened to natural gas prices when a North American market was created for gas, we had a four or five times increase in our natural gas rates. Now, if they're going to propose burning coal here in order to export power to the United States, I think they're making a very, very serious mistake. The result will be not only higher levels of CO₂ but, in fact, permanent high prices in electricity rates in this province. If the government is heading down that path, then Albertans need to know that permanent high electricity prices are the price they're going to have to pay as a result of that government's policy.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to talk about Mr. Bush, south of the border, and the energy policy they're expecting to announce soon. We have in our offices over in the Annex a headline from one of the newspapers saying that Bush has a plan to keep Canadian natural gas flowing into the United States. My question is: why was the government so prepared to fight against Ottawa and eastern Canada when they tried to get hold of our natural resources, yet when the Americans are doing it, they're being welcomed with open arms?

10:10

MR. OUELLETTE: Because they're willing to pay for it.

MR. MASON: Well, they're willing to pay for it, but the fact of the matter is that it's going to deplete the reserves of particularly natural gas in Alberta and leave future generations with no natural gas. I believe and we believe that a continental energy policy is not in the best interests of Albertans. It certainly may be in the best short-term interests of energy producers, but it is not in the best interests of the world's environment or the future economic prosperity of generations to come here in Alberta.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat, and maybe someone else would like to speak.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll begin with just a comment in reaction to the minister's interjections earlier on the pool price. I've been checking on the web the hour-by-hour price, and he was right: it's stuck right at \$95. It's been there for it looks like hours.

MR. SMITH: What is it now?

DR. TAFT: It clicked over. It's still at \$95.

One of the things to note though. I also did a little checking, and that power four years ago probably would have sold at this time of day at about \$15. It's selling in Saskatchewan at about – well, what's happening here is about two and a half times what's happening in Saskatchewan. So it all is a matter of perspective, isn't it?

One of my reactions to the way the material is presented from the Department of Energy is that it's a mistake to combine so many different kinds of energy into one category called "energy." Electricity is so fundamentally different from the fossil fuel sources of energy that when we talk about goals and businesses and so on and simply use one sweeping term "energy," it makes it almost meaningless because it is so general. The issues and concerns we have around electricity are so different from those around, say, conventional oil that when I read through the material and just see the word "energy" used, it reduces all meaning from it.

For example, a core business is to "ensure the competitiveness of Alberta's energy and mineral resources." It's so general, sweeps so many things into one category that I can't really interpret what it's intended to do. "Ensure Alberta consumers have a choice of reliable and affordable energy": well, that could be everything from choosing from different gas stations to choosing electrical retailers. Certainly we're seeing very, very different patterns in those two areas. So I would encourage in the future the estimates to be presented with more detail, breaking out in particular issues relating to electricity from issues relating to fossil fuel or to other energy sources.

I again will hop around a bit. Because of the fine work of my colleagues, my opportunity to speak is rather limited, but I do note that the expenditures, as I read it, for the Energy and Utilities Board are jumping dramatically, something like a 57 percent increase, which I assume is a result of having to hire more staff, which is a kind of irony given that if they are involved in regulation, which I imagine many of them are, in a deregulated system we're ending up with more regulators.

That does get me to one of the questions I had. I would like to know from the ministry the trend from this year and back three years on the number of regulatory agencies involved in the electricity industry. We have the market surveillance administrator and we have the Power Pool and we have a whole list of bodies. It would be interesting to see how that number compares to what there was, say, four years ago. As part of that, how many people are actually involved in regulating it? Now, I have a concern, which undoubtedly the minister would share, that we may have backed ourselves into more regulation than we used to have. Certainly that's a comment I've heard from senior officials in the industry.

The core business that says: "Ensure Alberta consumers have a choice of reliable and affordable energy". Certainly many of us get frustrated when we go to fill up our gas tanks. It seems there's very little meaningful choice, and we'd like more choice there. At least there is very little meaningful choice in terms of price because the prices sometimes don't vary much. At the same time, I heard very, very little consumer demand for more choice when it came to

sources of electricity. Now, the one exception to that would be the big industrial consumers who were looking for more choice, and look where it got them. In terms of the number of ordinary consumers, residential and small business consumers, who were demanding more choice in terms of power suppliers, I wasn't hearing it. I remember talking to one extremely well-informed specialist in the area who said that the number of consumers demanding more choice in Alberta could be fit into a phone booth. So if there is evidence that consumers were really driving this demand for choice, I would like to see that.

I'm also noticing under key performance measures: "Stable, affordable energy for Albertans." I'm on page 143 of the estimates, at the bottom of the page. I think the target is, we would all agree, essential: "to increase investment in new power generation in Alberta." In some of the reading I've done, historically the most volatile resource commodity traded has been natural gas. In the last year or two the most volatile commodity traded now is electricity. In fact, we see that played out every day, where the price of electricity in Alberta might go up and down easily 400 percent. It's a highly volatile commodity. So it will be interesting to see how the department intends to achieve stable, affordable energy for Albertans when, in having deregulated, we're dealing with I think the most volatile commodity that you can actually trade in. There are some examples of how to deal with that. In fact Medicine Hat might be one, yes.

I'm going to run out of time here. The last thing I would like – I would really encourage this for all of us – is as complete a picture as possible made as widely available to Albertans as possible of our oil, gas, and natural gas, conventional and nonconventional oil reserves and production, giving Albertans as complete a picture as they can have of the nest egg or the resource wealth that we have in this province, where it's been and where it's going.

So with those comments I will take my chair. I think the time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. minister to close debate, is there anybody else who wishes to speak?

The hon. Minister of Energy to close debate.

10:20

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think, again, the avid desk-thumping is for the quality of attentive listening by members of government who talk to me on a daily basis and ask keen and quite insightful questions. Their days of the estimates are 365 a year. They're on the job 24/7, and for their diligence I'm much humbler and also much more informed.

In fact, I would turn to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands and ask him to perhaps have a coffee with the Minister of Innovation and Science or the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, who chaired an important ethane committee and can talk widely and with great knowledge about ethane in Alberta, one of the true building blocks of a strong petrochemical industry.

I do want to comment to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands that it sounded to me, Mr. Chairman, like he was making statements nearing the allegation level of suppliers of power who jack up prices by reducing supply. If he has evidence of that, that's very important information. We are looking into it 24/7. We're looking into it every day. If he can gain any of that knowledge, I'd be more than willing to work hard with him to root out any type of gaming or anticompetitive behaviour that occurs in the wholesale energy market today.

I do want to just comment on the wise and sage remarks from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. When talking about putting together the basket of energy, Mr. Chairman, in fact more and more people in the energy industry today are talking about convergence,

where natural gas is linked to electricity prices and so on and so forth. So I think the department has made the right commitment in its organizational structure.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I do want to thank the official critic from the opposition, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I do accept his best wishes. It's kind of him to put those forward in the House. I know that we will be working hard to get the information he needs out to him on a timely basis and an ongoing basis. We certainly welcome his comments informally as well as in the confines of the House. In fact, perhaps the Member for Edmonton-Riverview might want to chat with the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, who talked about the regrettable man-years in the EUB. And the Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about the increased expenditure at the EUB. Well, of course that is exactly what it's for: to continue to get good, qualified people working in those areas.

Mr. Chairman, as much as there is excitement from my colleagues to continue on in the department that is a custodian and a steward of the resource since 1930, when Premier Brownlee moved it through, I will undertake to answer these questions in writing, in detail and with completeness.

I'd now ask to move the estimates of the Department of Energy.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Energy, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$103,416,000
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THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

Finance: operating expense and capital investment, \$102,245,000;
nonbudgetary disbursements, \$95,422,000.

Energy: operating expense and capital investment, \$103,416,000.
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THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 15, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Representative Max Black of the Idaho House of Representatives and president of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, of which Alberta is a member. Accompanying him here today are Representative Jeff Morris of the Washington state House of Representatives, the vice-president of PNWER, and Mr. Matt Morrison, executive director of PNWER. They are seated in your gallery.

They have come to Edmonton today to meet with Alberta's PNWER representatives and discuss the upcoming Pacific Northwest Economic Region meeting to be held in Whistler, British Columbia, this coming July. This will be a joint meeting with the Council of State Governments – West, which Alberta joined last year. PNWER's commitment to promote regional collaboration and to remove trade and transportation barriers provides Alberta with a valuable forum for strengthening our transboundary relations. I would ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Mr. Stanley Soko, director general of the province of Mpumalanga, South Africa. I would like to welcome Mr. Soko and his colleagues: Mr. Dube, head of the Mpumalanga finance department; Mr. Tshoba, chief director of macropolicy in the office of the Premier; and Mr. Ben Nkambule, director of intergovernmental relations and chief of protocol. Our friends from our sister province in South Africa are visiting Alberta on their first official visit under phase 2 of the CIDA-funded South Africa/Canada provincial twinning program. This project encourages the development of democratic governmental institutions in South Africa, and Alberta is working with Mpumalanga to build capacity in the areas of business planning, financial management, and performance management. Mr. Speaker, I would now ask our honoured guests, who are seated in your gallery, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 3.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for

returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's a letter from Ms Jeanette Smith, board chair of the Parkland school division. The school board has concerns regarding some sections of the School Amendment Act.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies, being five, of a letter from the board of trustees of Sturgeon school division No. 24 opposed to some of the provisions of Bill 16.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a booklet written by Miranda Ringma commemorating the efforts of the Edmonton December 6th committee in commissioning and erecting a statue on the 10th anniversary of the Montreal massacre.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies of a letter from the Sherwood school Parents Advisory Council in Edmonton to Premier Klein outlining their concerns for education in the areas of infrastructure, resources, and parent fund-raising.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of all Members of the Legislative Assembly copies of Alberta's market surveillance administrator's 2000 annual report to the Alberta Minister of Energy. This was submitted by the Power Pool Council.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings today. The first one is a letter from Mr. Ray Welsh of Vegreville in which he expresses deep concern about the government's indifference towards public education and hostility towards teachers.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, summarizes the findings of a Canadian Teachers' Federation survey taken recently which indicates that teachers on the average in Canada contribute out of pocket close to \$600 per teacher because of underfunding of education across Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a

letter from Mr. Malcolm McIlroy of Red Deer addressed to the Premier expressing his opposition to Bill 205, the Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act. He has two serious concerns, that it is intended to benefit a small number of Lacombe-Stettler constituents rather than all Albertans and that Alberta Agriculture, being the promoter of the bill, is in a conflict of interest situation and cannot be relied upon to provide accurate and unbiased information.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly two gentlemen who are seated in the members' gallery and who are very involved in promoting the aviation industry in the capital region and indeed throughout the province. Visiting the Assembly today are Scott Clements, CEO and president of the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, and John Craig, who is the director of real estate services with the airports. Scott and John are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask all members to offer them the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and my honour, as this is the first school from my riding to visit during question period, to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly 29 students from Thorsby high school. They are in the grade 10 class, and they are chaperoned by one teacher, Mr. Al Bratland. Al has assured me that even though his last name is Bratland, the environment in which he teaches is nothing of the sort. I would ask if the students would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 17 guests from the Devon Christian school. They are 15 students from grades 4 to 9, accompanied by teachers and group leaders Mrs. Margaret Sloan and Mr. Brian Wallace. I would ask them to rise and extend to them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

1:40 **Conflict of Interest Court Case**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in the scrum the Premier asked for reasons to call for a public inquiry into the Jaber affair. My questions are to the Premier. According to the court documents, Mr. Jaber was also involved in the relocation of a liquor store to Westmount Village mall in 1991. Why not call a public inquiry to answer the question of what Mr. Jaber's involvement was in this move?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll repeat what I've been saying all along. If there are specific allegations related to this or any other incident involving this particular gentleman, then I would ask the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition to bring those matters, those

allegations to the attention of the Justice minister and Attorney General, and I'm sure that he will take whatever action he deems necessary to have these matters fully investigated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why not call a public inquiry to answer the question of whether or not Mr. Jaber was involved in any other government deals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again this is a fishing trip, nothing more than the opposition asking for this government to go on a fishing trip. If there are any specific allegations and any evidence of any wrongdoing, then bring the evidence forward, and it will be dealt with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why not call a public inquiry to give an answer to what other activities Mr. Jaber was involved in that would lead Mr. Naqvi to believe that Mr. Jaber could help him?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question is the same.

MS CARLSON: No, it isn't.

MR. KLEIN: Well, it's almost the same. I just heard from across the way that it isn't the same question. I believe it is the same question. Notwithstanding what the question is, the answer is the same. If there are specific allegations or evidence of any wrongdoing, bring it to the proper authorities, and it will be investigated.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, why not call an inquiry to give an answer as to whether or not any other government officials have been approached on this issue?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the answer is the same. If there are allegations that are specific or evidence that is specific to any incidents or any suspicion of wrongdoing, bring the information to the proper authority, in this case the Justice minister and Attorney General, and I'm sure he'll take whatever action is deemed to be appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, why not call a public inquiry to allow Albertans to hear from Mr. Jaber himself?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there was one incident in which Mr. Jaber indeed was heard. Well, maybe two incidents. One was the preliminary hearing, and I don't know the facts of the preliminary hearing, whether he was called to give evidence or not, but certainly he signed an agreed statement of facts relative to the trial. That was all made public. Relative to that incident, as I've said earlier, this case proves that the system does indeed work. A complaint was investigated, charges were laid, a conviction obtained, punishment rendered, and it was all done in public. All the documentation associated with the trial and the conviction, all of that information is public information. It was done in an open courtroom.

You know, Mr. Speaker, people can raise questions all they want, but the fact is that all aspects of this case have been investigated by the police and charges have been laid where warranted. The proceedings of the case are available for public scrutiny, so there has been nothing concealed in this matter. It is all there for the public to see.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Premier, the issues that I've just raised, are these not more than enough so that a public inquiry can be provided so Albertans can understand what happened?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, sir, again if the hon. member has specific allegations, if he has anything specific, any allegations or any evidence of wrongdoing, please, please, I beg of him to bring these matters to the proper authority, in this case the Justice minister and Attorney General, and they will be properly investigated.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Premier's Flight to Prince Rupert

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last July there was a public outcry over Edmonton city councillors accepting a flight to Calgary on ATCO's corporate jet for which they did not pay. The Premier was quoted in newspapers as disapproving of this, explaining:

You're in the area of optics. Often, I've been offered the opportunity to go golfing or to go fishing, but unless it's to my own lodge, it's dangerous to do those kind of things (for business purposes). For pleasure, it's doubly risky.

Last fall the Premier's office confirmed that the day before making these comments, the Premier returned from his private fishing lodge north of Prince Rupert on the Syncrude corporate jet. His office also indicated that the Premier paid for this flight. To the Premier: can the Premier tell Albertans how he made his arrangements to fly on the Syncrude jet?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I didn't make any arrangements to fly on the Syncrude jet. They were probably made through my executive assistant. Payment was made, and it was made quite appropriately to Syncrude. We have a policy that if we go on a private plane – and this wasn't even on private business. Well, yes, it was on private business; it was my private business. The lodge is a business, my private business. There are ways of dealing with this kind of business. I wasn't on government business. I was on my business.

If the hon. member wants to pay the price, he is welcome to come up to the lodge. It's about \$3,000 for three nights and about \$3,500 for four nights, exclusive of airfare. If he wants to add in the airfare, he's certainly welcome to do that, and I'll make the arrangements for him to come up.

DR. TAFT: I appreciate the Premier's generosity.

Did the Premier pay for this flight with personal funds or with government funds?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this was paid for with personal funds. Now, I am paid by the government; right? The party keeps a small account for me, as I'm sure they do for the Leader of the Official Opposition, if they have any money left. So, yes, it is my money. I have an interest in a business which is my business.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier table the receipt for his payment, a canceled cheque or a credit card stub, in the Assembly before question period tomorrow?

Speaker's Ruling Allegations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: If the hon. member has a charge or an allegation he chooses or wishes to make against another hon. member, he should make that charge in this Assembly, and this Assembly has procedures for dealing with that. But if it's going to be a suggestion that reeks of innuendo and a series of other things, well, I don't think that that's the purpose of this question period. I don't think that deals with the decorum of this Assembly, nor do I believe that it deals with the rules of this Assembly. If the hon. member – and I repeat – wishes to make a charge against another hon. member, make the charge.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier in comments in the House was heard asking why Mr. Naqvi, the briber, wasn't charged, and he later said in response to questions: I said that if you have a bribee, you must have a briber, so why weren't charges laid? My question is to the Premier. Is the Premier standing behind the implication he left yesterday in this House when he offhandedly accused a private citizen of bribery in a case in which he was never charged?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I didn't accuse anyone. I said that if there is a bribee, one has to assume there's a briber. You know, I'm wondering why no questions have been asked in this regard. Now, if the hon. member wants to ask the question in this regard, feel free.

1:50

MR. MASON: In a moment, Mr. Speaker.

Why did the Premier say that a deal had been made in exchange for not charging Mr. Naqvi when the preliminary hearing transcript clearly states that there was no deal?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, perhaps "deal" was unfortunate. I've since consulted with the Attorney General. As I understand it, an arrangement was made.

MR. MASON: Enlightening, Mr. Speaker.

Given the Premier's eagerness to ask the questions rather than answer them, my question to the Premier is this: why wasn't Mr. Naqvi charged?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. You know, it was a gratuitous remark across the hall, not on the formal record in any way, shape, or form. I'm curious and I'm sure that members of the opposition are curious. All I'm saying is that if a bribee has been convicted of accepting a bribe, one has to assume that there is a briber. If there wasn't, well, I guess there wasn't.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, *Beauchesne* 411 says:

Some further limitations seem to be generally understood. A question may not:

- (1) [seek] a solution of a legal question, such as the interpretation of a statute.

Beauchesne 410 clearly states that a question “should not seek a legal opinion or inquire as to what legal advice a Minister has received.”

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Sex Offender Registry

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans are horrified and saddened by the recent tragic events in Lethbridge and other similar incidents that have occurred in the past. Children are Alberta's most precious resource, and we have to do everything we can to protect them. There is a point when we have to say: no more. One idea that has been proposed is a sex offender registry. My question is to the hon. Solicitor General. What steps are being taken to develop a provincial sex offender registry in Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, on behalf of the government of Alberta I want to clearly state that this government is committed to protecting children and to keeping Alberta's communities a safe place to live and raise our families.

Mr. Speaker, today I have met with officials from my department to discuss the provincial sex offender registry. Since 1998 the Alberta government has lobbied the federal government to establish a national sex offender registry. Sex offenders move from place to place, and we believe a national tracking system would be the most effective. While that's our first preference, a provincial registry would go a long way towards helping track these predators.

Mr. Speaker, with that in mind, my department has already begun to move forward on a provincial registry. My department is in the process of setting up a working committee made up of representatives of the police service, Alberta Justice, and my department. I'll be reporting back to cabinet in two weeks. The Premier has already committed to raise the issue at the upcoming Western Premiers' Conference this month and at the annual Premiers' Conference later this summer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the hon. Solicitor General: what are the benefits of a sex offender registry in the province of Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister. If it's not an opinion.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, a registry will allow police services to track the movement of sex offenders in Alberta as they move from place to place and to warn communities that these people may pose a danger. It will add another mechanism to those already in place. For example, in Alberta the public is notified when an offender is released into the community if the chief of police or the head of the RCMP K Division feels the public is at risk of significant harm.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario has put in place legislation, and B.C. is in the process of establishing a similar system. By moving ahead with the registry in Alberta, I believe we will be putting additional pressure on the federal government to put in place a national registry. We want to send a clear message to sex offenders in Alberta: do not touch our children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Solicitor General: who would be able to access a sex offender registry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The registry would primarily be another tool for police agencies. It will give police firsthand knowledge of the principal residence of a sex offender. The registry would not be intended for public use. In other words, if someone has suspicions about their next-door neighbour, they would not be able to contact the registry to find out about the person's criminal record. However, the intent is that organizations that involve children interacting with adults would be able to access the registry through the police.

Surplus Land Sale

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, we have another issue for this government that does not pass the smell test. The province deemed greenbelt land on 10th Avenue as surplus and conveniently forgot to follow due process in notifying the city that it was available for sale. This circumvented the only process local residents had to be notified that the province intended to sell land committed to agricultural and recreational use. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. When I requested the information on this issue, why did the minister state in his reply of January 25, 2001, that the city had received proper notification of this current land sale?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, as far as I recall in reading the briefing – of course, this was on January 25 – it's my understanding that the city was notified.

MS CARLSON: Not the case.

To the same minister: why did the province lift the restrictions on caveats on this land so that adjacent landowners would not have to be notified of impending sales?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is the common practice that we first notify the jurisdiction in which the land is situated, and then it is advertised. If they do not want the land or have no use for it, then in fact it is put on the market in a wide-open process through the real estate.

MS CARLSON: Not what happened in this case, Mr. Speaker.

What is the minister's justification for selling this piece of land in a sweetheart deal which included a record-breaking closing time, below market pricing, and lack of proper notification to the city and local residents?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that there was anything done that was not following procedure. Certainly the property, it is my understanding, was advertised for some length of time, and it is not common practice to notify everybody locally. There's certainly the opportunity for people to become aware of land that is for sale when it's listed with a real estate agency, and that, in my understanding, is what happened.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Canada/Alberta Farm Income Assistance Program

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Canada/Alberta farm income assistance program, which has been

very well received by producers of agricultural products in Alberta, I have subsequently had a number of comments expressed to me about the misunderstanding or possible confusion on the application form. My questions today are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Madam Minister, could you please tell myself, the Assembly, and constituents why a simple photocopy process like was used last year in the permit books wasn't used in this particular program?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of reasons why the permit book wasn't used this year. The first one is that it probably would have delayed payment to the farmers. Secondly, the permit book information is often outdated. In fact, about 40 percent of the information that we got off the permit books for the first farm income assistance program was wrong. We think that the current permit book would be more accurate, thanks to the last program. However, it is still a factor. The other thing is that that permit book information is not broken down in many cases into quarters so that specific land can be identified. It doesn't always include the full 160 acres.

Mr. Speaker, it was our feeling that the important part of this program was the immediate need of farmers, the ability to get those cheques in farmers' hands as quickly as possible. We expect the first cheques to start flowing either late this week or the first of next week – my staff will hear that, I'm sure – and allow them to be processed as quickly as possible. So that is the reason: the permit book information was not accurate, we couldn't be assured that it was accurate, and we did not want to delay payments to farmers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the landowner who rents on a crop-share or a cash-rent basis does have a financial interest in the land, I think we need an explanation why the guide itself specifically states that landlords who have no financial interest in the year 2000 crops are not eligible. Could you please respond?

2:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we made it very clear when we announced this program that this program and the intent of this program is to compensate the producer, not the landowner. The program defines the producer as the person who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the farm. This responsibility would include input costs and working the land. A landlord whose only interest in the crop is that of ownership of land is not affected by the changes of the price of commodities or input costs. So if these landlords are compensated by a set cash payment, they would not have, in our opinion, a further financial interest in the land in the way of input costs or working the land. Again, I will repeat that this program was clearly outlined, was clearly stated that it was intended to help the producer, the person who is working the land.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the case where there's no written reference to government programs in a rental contract, who will resolve or decide the allocation of the funds on the per acre assistance basis to the renter or to the landlord?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that could occur in a crop-share rental agreement. That is correct. Again, I'll repeat that the intent of this program is to provide assistance to the producer. We

encourage applicants on a crop-share basis to have a discussion with their landlord, if you wish, to negotiate a fair sharing. However, if the parties are unable to resolve their dispute, they can submit their information to the program administration and a review committee will make that decision for them.

Surplus Land Sale (continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Mr. Speaker, in March surplus land from the Solicitor General's college in southwest Edmonton was sold to a developer. Adjacent residents who expected it to remain a park are left wondering what happened. My first question is to the Solicitor General. What process did the Solicitor General's department follow to sell off the surplus land?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to pass that on to the minister responsible, the Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, when a department has land that is excess to its needs, the Department of Infrastructure handles the sale of that property. The answer to this question would be very similar to the ones that we had just a moment ago. The due process is followed, and it's unfortunate if people thought that there was going to be a park there, because that was not the case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. To the Minister of Infrastructure: will the minister confirm that this 10-lot piece of land was offered to the developer for approximately \$58,000 in exchange for the developer building an adjacent road?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, that is a very detailed question, and I don't have those numbers at my fingertips. I would urge the hon. member to put it on the Order Paper as a written question, which is the normal process for questions that are in that kind of detail.

MS BLAKEMAN: My final question to the Minister of Infrastructure: why are developers allowed to buy government-owned land at prices far below market value for residential lots?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, that is not the case. If that member has information that this is happening, I would ask her to talk to our department, and if it's necessary, we will take the appropriate action. Clearly, under the act the land has to be sold at not less than market value, and it's put on the market as an upset price.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Motor Vehicle Safety

MR. LORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly appreciated the earlier comments about children being our most precious resource. Those comments are very appropriate because May 18 to May 24 is National Road Safety Week, and collisions are the leading cause of hospitalization for injuries and the leading cause of death and injury for children in this province and across Canada. In fact, it's been reported that the average 400 traffic fatalities, 20,000 injuries, and 70,000 property-damage collisions caused by traffic accidents in Alberta each year are estimated to cost Albertans directly and indirectly upwards of \$3.5 billion annually. It is said that if you have a dangerous road, you can either fix the road or build more hospitals. Thus my question to the hon. minister of

health: is there information available or collected by your department about the cost to society and to our health care system due to vehicle collisions and the resulting injuries and fatalities?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can provide a partial answer to the question being asked by the hon. member. In 1996 an amendment was made to the Hospitals Act that allows the province to recover health care costs arising from the result of motor vehicle accidents. That recovery is done through an annual direct payment by insurers to the province, and the insurers in that industry find this to be a much simpler and less expensive way of dealing with it than through individual claims.

In 1997 the automobile insurers negotiated with Alberta Health, at that time, and agreed to pay Alberta Treasury some \$35 million for estimated health care costs, and this amount was based upon adjustments that were made annually. For the year 2000 the estimated costs are in the range of \$50 million.

The portion of the question that I cannot answer, Mr. Speaker, relates to the exact costs to the overall health system and society as a whole. It has been estimated by the Alberta Motor Association that the societal cost to Albertans is in the range of \$3.8 billion, but I cannot verify that myself.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in light of the large number of injuries and costs to our health care system as a result of collisions, are there any preventative strategies that the province is involved in?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are involved in a number of strategies, and perhaps the Minister of Transportation may wish to supplement. The main strategy that the Department of Health and Wellness is involved in is the funding for the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, which is funded by the Department of Health and Wellness and operated out of the University of Alberta. That centre works towards reducing injury rates in the province through initiatives that involve research, surveillance, evaluation, and information-sharing and education. Also, the province does provide funding for a program called the Alberta occupant restraint program, which tickets drivers for not having their children properly buckled up in vehicles. Drivers are given the option of paying a fine or attending an education program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Transportation. I'm wondering what initiatives your department is involved in to ensure that the very best road design standards and practices and the very best technology available are being used in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the collision experts, 90 percent of accidents in the province are due to driver error. As a result, we are focusing on driver safety programs and some of the traffic safety initiative awareness programs and education programs.

With respect to leading-edge technology, the hon. member represents a constituency in Calgary, and I'm quite sure he drives up and down highway 2 on a regular basis. We have introduced in Alberta an intelligent transportation system. These are the signs

across the highway that will send messages in terms of conditions of the road, advising people as to some perils ahead, maybe slower traffic. We also introduced in Alberta rumble strips on the edge of the highway to ensure that if people are dozing off, they'd be awakened by the sound. We've also implemented some rumble strips on the centre line of the highway. As a result, that has provided additional safety for our traveling motoring public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:10

Electricity Exports

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When discussing power deregulation with the *Edmonton Journal* editorial board in February of this year, the Premier looked up from his detailed briefing notes with a shrug and said, quote: I have no idea what all this means. End of quote. My first question today is to the Premier. Does the Premier acknowledge that electricity exports out of Alberta are impacting the pool price and therefore adding to what Albertans pay for their electricity?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how it affects the pool price. I do know, as I said yesterday, that certainly the producers of major power – and I would say in excess of 500 megawatts – are looking for export licences and the means to transport that electricity, but as I explained yesterday, the rules are very clear. The needs of Albertans must be satisfied and, I would assume, at a reasonable rate. There has to be a certain amount of surplus power left in Alberta, and as I understand it, only the surplus on the surplus can be exported and again probably under very strict conditions, but I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister?

The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: does the Premier agree with the Power Pool of Alberta when it states in a recent discussion paper that exporting Alberta generation will impact the Alberta pool price, which, in turn, affects what Albertans, whether they be a residential consumer or industrial, pay for their electricity?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the question period deals with government policy, not opinion.

Hon. Premier, if you want to talk about government policy, that's fine but not an opinion.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you took the words right out of my mouth. The hon. member is asking me to make some assumptions, and I can't assume how it will affect the Power Pool, but perhaps the hon. minister can shed some light on it.

THE SPEAKER: The same applies.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it's absolutely an excellent opportunity to indicate that new exports, exports over time, once the Alberta situation comes into balance – we're again seeing a drop in the pool price today: 9 and a half cents a kilowatt-hour. So what we're starting to see is a balancing occurring in Alberta, but if you want to encourage more generation and you want to increase a larger market

and you want to make those moves, then in fact future exports may have the impact of driving the price down.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Energy. While the Premier yesterday would not answer, will the minister please explain his department's concern and what policy direction they're going to take concerning the issues that have been proposed by the Senior Petroleum Producers Association, which indicates that they have a great deal of concern about the impact of electricity exports on domestic prices, especially considering Alberta's own Power Pool now has that same concern as the petroleum producers?

Thank you.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I think the best response would be the fullness of time. In the fullness of time we will see what will unfold with respect to lower power prices in Alberta, lower power prices that we've seen today and we saw yesterday, the fact that there is new generation coming on, the fact that the oil sands development leads itself to natural cogeneration opportunities, the fact that in Alberta you can start any electrical facility today and you have a built-in customer to sell it to. In fact, you can talk about oil sands, conventional oil and gas, the pulp and paper industry all presenting energy-producing, electricity-producing activities in a deregulated market with a customer that will buy it at the Power Pool. We're going to see more power, we're going to see lower prices, and we're going to see ourselves ahead of the situation that exists in North America today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Inland Cement Limited

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night the minister of environmental protection tried to turn a big public meeting, called to hear the concerns of citizens with regard to Inland Cement's application, into a carefully stage-managed public relations exercise with no less than five government MLAs and 20 departmental staff present. However, the minister failed to convince those present at the meeting that he was not fast-tracking the approval process. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier please stop the Minister of Environment from fast-tracking this important decision?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environment is not fast-tracking the process. I think that he answered the question fully and honestly yesterday relative to the process that will unfold relative to this particular application. I take offence to the assertion of the leader of the third party that this was nothing more than a PR exercise on the part of the minister. I saw the minister on television last night. I thought he did an outstanding job. I also saw the leader of the third party. I can't say as much for him; I'll tell you that much.

Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, a series of public meetings are being held so that the public, the people directly affected, especially can ask questions of Environment officials, can ask questions of the officials from Inland Cement, and can of course hear the opposition registered by the NDs – I don't know if the Liberals have any to register – and anyone else, for that matter, and can take those concerns into account as this application proceeds.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier seems to be

rather oversensitive about the questions, I mean seriously, to ask him to intervene. Will the Premier order a full environmental impact assessment as opposed to what the minister is offering, which is environmental review only?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I need to know what the hon. member means by a full-blown environmental assessment. You know, there are different processes to assess the environmental worthiness of a project. Certainly some by legislation are required – absolutely required – to go through a full public hearing either through the AEUB, the NRCB, perhaps the environmental assessment review process relative to the federal government, or a joint process of all three, depending on the nature and magnitude of the project.

Other projects, Mr. Speaker, could be the subject of less formal public open houses, less formal public hearings. All processes have to have an environmental impact statement; in other words, a document showing what the impact on the environment is going to be.

So, Mr. Speaker, it was deemed that this project, which is a conversion from gas to coal, should undergo a certain process. If at the end of the day, as I understand it, the people are not satisfied, they still have a very open and very public process, and that is an appeal to the Environmental Appeal Board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Premier. Will the Premier guarantee Albertans and Edmontonians that public hearings will be ordered so that presenters can be cross-examined when they present evidence, scientific and other, to the hearings?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I assume the process to which the hon. member alludes is a full-blown environmental impact assessment, involving hearings before the Natural Resources Conservation Board. The legislation is quite clear relative to the kinds of projects and the magnitude of projects that are subjected to NRCB and/or AEUB hearings. This obviously is a project that is deemed not to be significant enough to be subjected to that kind of review. However, the minister has said that he will make sure that the public has ample opportunity for input into this process and that indeed appropriate and proper environmental impact statements will have to be prepared and that the appeal process through the Environmental Appeal Board is available to any person who has an objection or has grounds to launch an appeal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

2:20

Maintenance Enforcement Program

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My office continues to be very, very busy with calls regarding maintenance enforcement. I realize that you've had that issue in the Legislature on a number of occasions previously, but I also know through my discussions with the hon. Minister of Justice that we have approximately 43,000 cases of maintenance enforcement ongoing in our province at any one time. Quite frankly, I continue to believe that we need to acknowledge the sensitivities of all family members when maintenance enforcement becomes necessary in their lives, which is why my question today is to the hon. Minister of Justice. What is the minister doing to assist children and family members who are

affected by debtors that refuse to pay spousal taxes that have been ordered in their court-ordered maintenance?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to have the question because the maintenance enforcement program is indeed a success story. The maintenance enforcement program is there to assist children in Alberta and to assist families to get the maintenance which they deserve and which is ordered by the courts. There's been a very real improvement in that program over the course of the last year. Since the program was launched in November of 1986, monthly collection rates have increased significantly, and the program is now collecting \$11.5 million per month.

During the two years since the Maintenance Enforcement Act was amended in 1999, the ability of the maintenance enforcement program to make collections has been dramatically improved. They've been given much-needed teeth to take a wide variety of enforcement actions including the ability to cancel drivers' licences, the right to report defaulting debtors to the credit bureau, and the ability to go after moneys transferred to third parties. I'm pleased to report that the program collected more than \$138 million last year on behalf of Alberta's families and children. That's an increase of \$11 million over the previous year.

A couple of other minor items, Mr. Speaker, but not so minor to the people who access the program. The delay in people getting access over the phone has been reduced from a 15-minute holding time to less than five minutes. That's a significant improvement in service, and we're continuing to try and improve that service to the Alberta public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the same minister: what is the program doing to accommodate debtors, who are primarily men, that cannot afford to pay?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are always two sides to every story. There are many people who are registered with the program and are in situations where they can't pay or haven't been able to pay. While we make every effort to collect on behalf of those who are entitled to receive payment and the maintenance enforcement goes through a series of processes including default hearings and where we can't find people or can't get satisfaction any other way, by posting pictures on the web site, the program is not without a heart. If somebody cannot pay, if their financial circumstances are such that they can't make the payments, they can meet with program personnel to discuss the problem. The program cannot vary a court-ordered payment, so they will advise people to go back to court and get the payment varied, if that's appropriate. They can make arrangements with respect to the amount to be paid on arrears, and they will do that in appropriate circumstances.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's also my understanding that the court-ordered obligations are enforced through the Internet and, as well, through state-of-the-art phone systems, and I'm interested in hearing from the hon. minister what the results of that enforcement are.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, we have two processes involving the special investigations unit, that was set up in the past year and a half, and also a compliance unit.

The special investigations unit has collected more than \$5.7

million on about a thousand files. Those are files in which money was not previously being collected, so it's a significant improvement to the program and to the people in particular who are awaiting their maintenance payments. The compliance unit was created to bring files to default hearings more quickly and to deal with the challenge that was faced by many families – and in some cases is still being faced – in terms of getting to a default hearing on a timely basis. Docket courts have been set up in Edmonton and Calgary to handle the process, and as a result the wait for a hearing has dropped from more than seven months to three months.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise the House that there has been significant improvement. There can always be more improvements made. We're certainly working to make sure that in a very, very tough job our maintenance enforcement people are always polite with the public and deal with the public in a reasonable manner. The program is working very well for Alberta families.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Meadowlark.

Water and Wastewater Grants

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans get ready to head to cabins and summer villages, water quality and quantity is on everybody's mind. My questions are to the Minister of Transportation. Will the minister table copies of any studies or reports his department has on the adequacy of water and wastewater infrastructure in summer villages?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, our department is always open with any kind of reports and studies that we do in co-operation with the various municipalities, including summer villages, in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the same minister: what is the status of the waiting list for funding under the water and wastewater grants?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered this question a couple of weeks ago to the same hon. member.

The budget will cover all of those applications where the water quality and supply are at risk. We're working with other applications that are coming forward, but they're rated according to need, and we will look after the most urgent needs in the province of Alberta to ensure the safest quality of water for those residents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the same minister. Planning for water and wastewater infrastructure must be done with significant lead time. Will the minister table a copy of the specific projects being funded this year under water and wastewater grants?

MR. STELMACH: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Gasoline Pricing

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the price of gasoline at the pumps rose to 72 and a half cents per litre, a price increase of 9 cents a litre over a two-day period. My question is to

the Minister of Energy. My constituents would like an explanation for this rapid rise in gasoline prices.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, in a province where the most pickup trucks in Canada are sold each year and for good reason, it's an important question. The price of gasoline is affected by a variety of factors. For example, the cost of crude oil, retail marketing, transportation, distribution costs, taxes, local market conditions, and seasonal considerations all play in this. However, world markets also play a part in crude oil prices.

Now, what happens from a seasonal perspective, Mr. Speaker, is that during the winter supplies of gasoline are drawn down and then replenished in the springtime in storage facilities. The demand for gasoline at the pumps in the spring often starts to increase before these inventories can be replenished. So as soon as springtime demand and increased supply start to match up, we do see a bit of a return to normal levels.

However, I can report to the member that today in Edmonton – and I would direct members to web sites using computer technology available right here in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker. The lowest price of gas in Edmonton happens to be two blocks from the Legislature; on Monday at 2 in the afternoon it was 68.9 cents. A high price of 72.5 cents. This compares to a price of 75.8 cents at the Pioneer station at Wellington and Dufferin in Aurora, Ontario, and a high of 78.9 cents at a station at Ravenshoe and Woodbine in Keswick. So we're still much cheaper than what we see in other jurisdictions.

2:30

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, my first supplementary question is to the Minister of Finance. Can the minister indicate whether the province benefits from the higher retail prices of gasoline?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta charges 9 cents a litre on fuel at the pump no matter what the pump price is. So the higher spike in the price at the pump does not directly benefit the provincial coffers that we look at. However, just so hon. members will know, the federal government also charges 10 cents a litre at the pump no matter what the pump price is and, in addition to that, charges Canadians 7 percent GST. So as the price at the pump goes up, the one government jurisdiction that benefits is the kissin' cousins of those guys in Ottawa.

MR. MASKELL: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Energy. Can the minister indicate whether the province has any plans to alleviate the sudden rise in gas prices?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province, as everyone in the House knows, does not interfere with the marketplace and has no part in setting retail gasoline prices, although I would say that in Alberta there is a bit of a golden fleece in the cloud in that every time the price of oil moves up a dollar, the royalty bank, the royalty pool, increases by up to \$153 million. That money, again, is distributed throughout Alberta on a reasonable basis through the Assembly in estimates, which we're covering now.

I also just want to mention before I sit down, Mr. Speaker, that the last installment of the \$300 energy tax rebate, the onetime refund of \$300 that was paid in two equal installments, is arriving and has been arriving, and I think this can also help with gasoline costs in the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure as chairman of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee to announce that this week marks the 25th anniversary of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. On May 19, 1976, the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act was given royal assent. The heritage fund was created because oil and gas prices were at an all-time high and the government was collecting record amounts of nonrenewable resource revenue. The government set up the heritage trust fund from a portion of oil and gas revenues to be used as an investment fund.

The heritage fund has benefited Albertans very well. In the late '70s and '80s the fund was used to invest in capital projects such as irrigation rehabilitation and expansion, renewable energy research, Pine Ridge Forest Nursery enhancement, Alberta Family Life and Substance Abuse Foundation, applied cancer research, and much, much more. These projects provided lasting benefits to Albertans.

This government surveyed Albertans in 1995 about the future of the heritage fund. Albertans told us not to use the fund for capital projects but to focus on providing greater returns for long-term investments and to use the income that the fund generates to help pay for the current priorities, Mr. Speaker. With the new focus the government brought in changes to strengthen the accountability of the fund in 1997. Now the heritage fund is worth \$12.3 billion and has earned about \$1 billion a year for the past three years.

The heritage fund will be a huge benefit for future generations of Albertans. Alberta is a very different place than it was 25 years ago, Mr. Speaker, and the future of the heritage trust fund will be discussed again at the province's upcoming Future Summit this fall.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Town of Raymond

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The town of Raymond is pleased to celebrate its 100th birthday on July 1, 2001. Raymond has risen from the vision of Utah industrialist Jesse Knight to a thriving community of 3,500 people. It has an agricultural background; farming and ranching have been the basis for its economic growth. Light industry has assumed a major role within the community in recent years. Raymond has long claimed the honour of being home of the first stampede, in 1902, conceived and implemented by Jesse's son, Raymond Knight, for whom the town was named.

The town of Raymond has played a major part in the development of irrigation in southern Alberta and is a community noted for its strong work ethic and sense of fair play. Family, education, religion, and sports have played a big part in the daily life of Raymond's citizens. It has been said that Raymond's major export has been our young people seeking to make a contribution to the world's larger stage. These youth have excelled in science, medicine, education, business, cultural arts, and many other areas. Wherever you go, you find someone from Raymond. They are proud of their heritage and look forward to returning to their roots.

In this year of their centennial the town of Raymond invites everyone to come home and celebrate with them, remember the past, be a part of the present, and look forward to the future as we share the great pioneer heritage that we enjoy and of which we are so

proud. Mr. Speaker, I offer congratulations to the town of Raymond and its people on their 100th birthday.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Social Assistance Rates

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is far too comfortable for many to express the notion in their comments on increasing welfare allowances that welfare has produced dependency, unwillingness to find employment, drug abuse, and crime.

Today I urge the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to immediately increase the allowances to the approximately 30,000 Albertans, mostly women and children, to reflect the real cost of living. The Ministry of Children's Services recently reported a relationship between income levels, including families in receipt of SFI, and the growing number of children in care with the government as their legal parent.

Have we forgotten Alberta's children when we adopt the attitude that welfare is a program of last resort? To ensure that recipients are not better off than other low-income Albertans is to ignore the well-being of many children and their immediate families.

The Alberta College of Social Workers has stated that, quote, another consequence of the principle of least eligibility is that Alberta Human Resources and Employment claws back other funding received by Albertans receiving welfare. For instance, while the federal government has taken the step of introducing the national child benefit as its contribution to help reduce child poverty, Alberta Human Resources and Employment eagerly claws back the full amount of this federal benefit targeted to help infants and children of parents on SFI. Directly or indirectly these federal funds intended for the poorest and the youngest of our fellow citizens become part of Alberta's annual budgetary surplus. End of quote.

In Alberta a single parent with one child under the age of 11 years receives a standard allowance for two persons from the government amounting to \$305 a month. This allowance amounts to \$4.92 per day for the child. Each of us in this Chamber receives \$100 per day when we travel this province on official business. I urge the minister to increase SFI allowances immediately in order to reflect the current cost of living in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Glendale Elementary School

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, April 24, 2001, I was very honoured to attend and speak to a special assembly of students and staff and parents at Glendale elementary school in Calgary-West, special in that the student body proudly honoured their principal, Lori Pamplin, winner of a 2001 PanCanadian students' choice award.

During the past three years, Mr. Speaker, with Lori Pamplin's leadership Glendale elementary school's students, parents, and staff have together developed a truly remarkable sense of pride in their achievements. The enthusiasm that day was truly infectious. Lori has been a very effective and highly involved administrator in the LEAP process in Calgary. Also, Glendale is the first school in the Calgary board of education to be working with the Galileo Educational Network, and it is working so well for the children.

2:40

At this special school assembly, Mr. Speaker, I heard many words,

spoken and in songs, expressing appreciation which are important to share with this Assembly today. All students actively participated from ECS to grade 6, including many with special needs and handicapped students. Their love for Lori as a friend and leader was expressed many times over. Lori was described as absolutely exceptional and fair-minded. Lori was credited with creating a wonderful learning environment, and there were the ultimate tears of happiness, especially from Lori, as predicted.

Mr. Speaker, I highly commend PanCanadian Petroleum Limited for their students' choice awards program. One of the goals is to encourage educators to continue to learn and improve as a result of positive recognition and professional development funding. The program, as I observed, truly works in that it encourages students to notice the helpfulness of their educators and to express appreciation for their insight, dedication, and skill.

I congratulate Lori Pamplin and Glendale elementary school's students, parents, and staff on their achievements and wish them continued success as they continue to work together to reach their goals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, prior to going to Orders of the Day, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure to introduce school groups when they come, particularly, almost a six-hour drive from the breathtaking constituency of Livingstone-Macleod. I would like to introduce 17 students and parent helpers from the Rocky View Christian school in Pincher Creek. They are led today by Mr. Don Esau, who is accompanied by parents and helpers Mr. Galen Unruh, Mr. Merle Unruh, Mr. Ron Boese, Mrs. Lola Boese, Mr. Jerry Toews, Mrs. Wilma Esau, Mrs. Lorraine Unruh, and Mrs. Wendy Toews. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. LOUGHEED: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a couple of young ladies, one visiting from Vancouver for a few days and the other back in the area from her summer work placement. They are my daughters, Allison and Kimberly. I'd ask them to rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 205

**Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection)
Amendment Act, 2001**

[Adjourned debate May 9: Mr. Stevens]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and a special thank you to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler for bringing forward

Bill 205. This is an incredibly important issue in Alberta right now, one that many in fact are totally unaware of.

Here in Alberta, in a province that prides itself on being business friendly, we find ourselves losing business to other provinces. And not just any business, Mr. Speaker, but value-added agribusiness. Particularly now, with high input costs and low grain costs, one would think that the higher end value-added would be incredibly important to us. It is not that many years ago that agriculture was the number one business in this province, and while it no longer holds that esteemed position, it is still one of the top three industries in our province, with over 115,000 people in Alberta employed directly or indirectly in agriculture from both the primary production and further up the food chain to the food processing and value-added areas.

Over \$22 billion in our gross domestic product is because of agriculture. Our farmers can and do compete with anyone in the world, and when we say Alberta Best, everyone here knows what we are talking about. Even from my understanding of an article in the newspaper this week, they know what it means in New York, too, when they talk about Alberta Best and the best beef that they can sell. It's a major attraction in New York restaurants now. Alberta beef, our poultry, our pork, our wheat for pasta, some of the finest in the world, our potatoes for our plants down in southern Alberta. We have sugar beets. We have vegetables, rye for whiskey, and malt barley for beer. We have value-added crops like canola, flax, and oats for cereal, as well as some of the finest oats in the world, that are shipped out to Venezuela where they know that for their racehorses these are the best oats anywhere in the world.

We can do all of this, yet we rarely think about it until someone wants to raise some more hogs or some more cattle or some more poultry. All of a sudden we're willing to say: "Well, gee, wouldn't you like to do that someplace else, you know, maybe like a thousand miles from here, maybe in Saskatchewan or Manitoba? We really don't want any more intensive livestock in Alberta."

One of our major exports is beef. I believe it was somewhere around \$5 billion worth last year, yet we don't want to let any more feedlots be developed. In some cases it doesn't seem to matter if they meet all the requirements of the scientific community or not. We seem somehow to find ways to change rules or find ways to just simply delay the project in the hopes that it will go away. This is a situation where rural and urban are not seeing eye to eye on process. I would like to remind this Assembly that much of Alberta's wealth is generated in rural Alberta, and we have to guard against putting the brakes on development and industry in rural Alberta. Agriculture, industry, even our oil and gas are sometimes in question because we've decided to do other things with rural Alberta. It is something that seems to be occurring with greater and greater frequency.

We have many areas of our province that are being subdivided into acreage developments. Now, I think everyone understands why people would want to move out into the country. I mean, it's beautiful. It gives everyone a greater appreciation of our desire to have our own little piece of heaven, and it's right here in Alberta, just on our back step. However, when we do that, we have to remember that industry, development, agriculture still need to be able to carry on creating the goods and products that we all depend upon, in fact that we all derive our income from. We depend on our farmers and our ranchers to produce the very goods that sustain us. We want them to be of high quality and at reasonable prices, yet we are making it more and more difficult for them to do that.

One company here in Alberta has purchased land only to find after they met all – all, Mr. Speaker – all of the requirements for a hog operation, that the MD changed the rules on them. It's three years

now and millions of dollars later, and still no hog operation is being allowed. Surely this is not how we do business here. We have to find a solution to this situation, and the Member for Lacombe-Stettler has presented her version of what needs to be done.

However, Mr. Speaker, we do have an intensive livestock committee working on a report that may also have some solutions. I really think at this time we should be waiting for that report to move through our process and have the opportunity to review it, to finish whatever consultation needs to be done, and change the legislation to be able to ensure that intensive livestock operations can operate here and help us to further develop our value-added goals.

So, Mr. Speaker, on that basis I would like to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 205, Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001, be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 205, Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now have filed copies of that motion with the Clerk.

THE SPEAKER: The Assembly now has before it an amendment. The amendment is very clear in terms of what the hon. member indicated, and such an amendment is debatable.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the amendment before me yet, but I'd like to make a few comments. When we see the government bring forward hoist amendments on private members' bills, it doesn't seem to be an appropriate thing to do. The appropriate manner to handle a bill like this is to . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, for clarification, the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View moved the amendment, and my understanding is that the hon. member is not a member of the government. She is a private member as well.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The appropriate thing to do on a bill like this is to put it before all the members of the Assembly to vote on, either to support it or to not support it and defeat the bill. To hoist it six months hence I don't think is in the spirit in which the bill was brought forward, and I wouldn't mind hearing from the sponsor of the bill on this particular amendment.

THE SPEAKER: There is a question before the House at the moment. I gather no other additional members want to participate.

[Motion on amendment carried]

2:50

Bill 206

Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. Yes, on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East I would like to start the discussions on Bill 206, which is the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. We have a number of concerns about conflicts of interest legislation in this Assembly, and certainly it isn't just limited to RHAs, but that is particularly what we would like to be able to discuss in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Regional health authorities have changed in format over the last few years, and we are particularly concerned that matters are brought

before them that have issues of conflict involved in them. We have a number of concerns that talk about them.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Here we have what we believe is an undermining of the public health care system that we'd like to talk about. In general we'd like to talk about reducing public confidence in the health care system when conflicts arise. We've seen a number of those instances occur in this Legislature over the past few years, certainly during my experience in this Legislature. We have concerns that conflict of interest in the public health care system doesn't correspond with accepted practices in the private sector or even in parts of the public sector. Once again, we've seen several references to that occur in the past few weeks here in this Legislature.

We could state that it's the most important service that government provides: health care. We need to ensure that it is crystal clear in terms of the mode of delivery in this province. Albertans need to know beyond a shadow of a doubt, Mr. Speaker, that conflicting interests play no part in the health care delivery system. We see that with a lack of uniform conflicts of interest legislation before us in this province, certainly applicable to all RHAs, we have very grave concerns about the ability to monitor and deal with conflicts, potential or otherwise.

It will be interesting to hear, Mr. Speaker, what other members of this House have to say on this bill. I'll take my seat at this time.

[Dr. Nicol rose]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you will have your moment to close debate. Under *Beauchesne* you'd be the last speaker to close the debate.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak to Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. Let me just preface by saying that I applaud the intent of this bill. Crystal-clear regulations on potential conflicts of interest and a systematic mechanism to enforce these regulations are essential to the smooth functioning of any government-related authority. Government authorities, appointed or elected, are bestowed with a unique trust, the trust of the people of this province. When there is a failure in this trust, the damage is not just in terms of lost dollars or in terms of forfeited efficiency. Rather, the damage from a conflict of interest in government-related authorities is a betrayal of Albertans. It is a trust forsaken, that cannot easily or potentially ever be rebuilt.

Building up a strong trust of the people of this province is especially crucial in the field of health care. Health care makes up the single largest area of expenditures for this province with a budget expected to approach \$7 billion this year. Health care often involves decision-making on a daily basis by professionals with information that only experts can understand, and these decisions have immense impact on the lives of Albertans. Most importantly, health care decisions are very often made for people when they are ill or otherwise vulnerable. For all these reasons the standard that the government sets to eliminate conflict of interest must be raised to its absolute highest in the case of health care.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, I am not at all opposed to the intent of this bill. Instead, I am deeply concerned about the process implied by this bill. I wish to bring forth this afternoon two reasons why this legislation is unnecessary and potentially a danger to its intended cause of ensuring high quality of health care in this province.

First, Mr. Speaker, I will reaffirm that current legislation and guidelines to deal with conflict of interest problems in the health care field are thoughtfully designed and tested. I will emphasize that current legislation is comprehensive, systematic, transparent: all the standards necessary to be appropriate and efficient.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I will demonstrate that Bill 206, for all its good intentions, has the potential to do harm to the very cause it purports to seek improvement with: the delivery of quality health care in this province. It will take away valuable resources from critical health care areas and place them in areas where they are likely redundant. Moreover, the structured system of checks and balances as it exists today with clear accountability and authority may become a bungled mess. Overlaps, inefficiencies, and abdication of responsibility could ultimately lower the standard of conflict of interest regulations in this province.

Let me begin by explaining a bit about how current conflict of interest guidelines in health care work in this province, how the system as it stands is systematic, offering an unambiguous mechanism for resolving conflict of interest disputes, how it's comprehensive, complete with legislation for all participants in the health care field, how it is transparent, open to a reasonable level of scrutiny, and how it is understandable such that all those affected by the regulations are aware of their obligations.

The most direct legislation that deals with conflict of interest regulation in health authorities in this province is the Regional Health Authorities Act. As members of this Legislature we are well aware that the Regional Health Authorities Act, which came into effect in 1994, divided Alberta into 17 health authorities, each endowed with the responsibility of budgeting and delivering health care in their respective geographic regions. Section 6.1(1) of this act clearly states:

A regional health authority shall make by-laws governing conflict of interest in respect of members of the authority, agents of the authority and senior officers and employees of the authority.

It further states that each of these sets of bylaws must be "approved in writing by the Minister" of Health and Wellness. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, each and every one of Alberta's 17 health authorities has completed these guidelines or is in the process of completing them.

The Calgary regional health authority, for example, has adopted what it terms a conflict of interest bylaw. In it you will find reference to regulations governing members of the authority and agents of the authority. In it you will find reference to abusing the public role and the full disclosure of private interests. These are phrases and concepts that are literally duplicated in sections of Bill 206. These bylaws already exist and have the reach and the depth that Bill 206 claims it will introduce into Alberta. The regulations suggested by Bill 206 are already in place.

A second measure by which conflict of interest is currently regulated is through the Health and Wellness department itself. Yes, each of the separate authorities has a distinct code of ethics, but ultimately each and every board member and each and every employee of the regional authority is responsible to the Minister of Health and Wellness. The Calgary regional health authority's conflict of interest bylaw, for instance, concludes by noting that this bylaw does not preclude the minister from making such decisions and taking steps to enforce conflict of interest procedures.

So, Mr. Speaker, a second layer of enforcement prevails. Not only has each regional health authority written up a set of regulations, but the Minister of Health and Wellness continues to take ultimate responsibility for whatever actions are taken by the authorities. The minister is, of course, subject to the already existing Conflicts of Interest Act. This means that all aspects of the Health and Wellness ministry, including the regional health authorities, are already subject to a very thorough set of regulations.

3:00

This also means that regional health authorities are subject to the scrutiny of the Alberta Ethics Commissioner. I note this point because Bill 206 places quite an emphasis on utilizing the Ethics Commissioner to enforce conflict of interest regulations. By virtue of the way this government has structured regional health authorities to be accountable to the minister, the Ethics Commissioner already plays a role.

A particular point raised in Bill 206 is in regulating conflicts of health authority board members. This fall, as I am sure all members of this Assembly are aware, Albertans will be going to the polls for the first time to elect two-thirds of the members of their respective health authorities. The remaining one-third of the positions will continue to be appointed by the Minister of Health and Wellness. I can see why this change might cause special concern. Indeed, I would hope all members would be interested in the new challenges this system will present to conflict of interest guidelines in health care.

Vastly more people are now going to have a say and an influence in the process to make up regional authority membership. There will be different groups of health professionals, companies that provide health services, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals seeking to have their concerns addressed by candidates and implemented by the various authorities.

This conclusion of a wide body of interests and groups in composing health authority membership is by no means necessarily detrimental to health care delivery in this province. Indeed, this level of involvement is a part of how democracy works. It will help make health care providers more responsible on a local level, which was the intention of this government. Yet in allowing more people into the process of the health authority composition, the scrutiny that can be placed on each and every person involved is inherently diluted. The resources that were previously used in a very focused method when regional health authority board members were chosen by a method of selection must now be spread across a wider spectrum. This means that conflict of interest guidelines need to be especially comprehensive, and they need to be especially well understood. The absolute necessity that proper ethics be followed is heightened once again.

These new challenges presented with the election of regional health authority boards, Mr. Speaker, are partly why this government tabled Bill 7 this session. This government has considered the new challenges posed by elected health authorities and has extended and tightened up conflict of interest regulations in this area to pre-empt any potential flaws at this time. Once the amendment is enacted, specific guidelines in matters of conflicts of interest will be applied to the election process for regional health authorities. Rules for disclosure of contributions will be more specific, rules for candidate finances will become more firm, and rules for relationship between candidates and employees of the regional health authority will be clarified. In other words, yet another level of accountability will be introduced into the effort to enforce a strong conflict of interest policy.

Mr. Speaker, there are more regulations still. Doctors and nurses are subject to stringent conflict of interest guidelines governed by their respective professional bodies. These guidelines not only place strict limitations and stern punishment on matters of money but also in matters relating to the ethics of being a health professional, a career that involves a very unique relationship with patients. There is an enormous amount of responsibility falling into the hands of the caregiver and an enormous amount of faith on behalf of patients. Self-regulation inside the profession ensures that the strictest standards are maintained.

So, Mr. Speaker, you can see that there already exists an elaborate and elegantly designed framework for regulation of conflict of interest. There are the regulations that each of the 17 regional authorities are writing up as stipulated by the Regional Health Authorities Act. There is the ultimate responsibility of the Health and Wellness minister and the involvement of the Ethics Commissioner in overseeing all services provided by the provincial government, including health care. There's internal monitoring provided by the professional bodies that many people in the health care community belong to.

I have established, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 206 is redundant. I also wish to point out that excessive legislation can be dangerous, and in the case of Bill 206 the potential of danger is great. First, the enforcement of this new legislation could be costly in terms of time and money. For instance, if the Ethics Commissioner is expected to fulfill a wider range of duties, then the resources and effectiveness of this office will be stretched beyond its current capacity. Almost certainly more resources will have to be allocated to the office of the commissioner. These are resources that could've been placed in a number of areas including the delivery of health care.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, overlapping legislation causes harm because it confuses responsibility and confuses honest efforts at fulfilling duties. With the new layer of governance that would be implied with Bill 206, which code is of the highest authority? My concern is that people might not know the answer to this question, and that accountability would be compromised.

Mr. Speaker, I understand and strongly agree with the goal of making watertight conflict of interest legislation governing health care provisions in this province. We need a mechanism that is systematic, comprehensive, transparent, and understandable. I will not pretend for a moment that the system we currently have is perfect, but I disagree that passing this bill will bring us any closer to achieving that perfection. In fact, by creating duplicate legislation, it will undermine the efficiency of the current system. Governance over conflict of interest in Alberta health delivery already exists. There is a framework of legislation emanating from the health care authorities act, and there is the discipline imposed by professional organizations involved in health care.

I urge all members this afternoon to vote against Bill 206. In doing this, Mr. Speaker, members will be recognizing that our government has a clear plan with respect to health care delivery in this province and that we have been especially stringent and proactive with respect to conflict of interest legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise and join the debate on Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. Over the last 50 years this province has experienced a successful evolution of health care governance. The Department of Health and Wellness and this government have implemented years of comprehensive planning to ensure that ours is the best possible health care system.

Health care is very important to Albertans. Health-related issues will continue to arise as Alberta's population ages. One important way we are proactively increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of our health care system is by removing a layer between RHAs and the electorate. The move to electing two-thirds of our regional health authority board members has been a long and complex process and one that I feel has already dealt with the concerns brought forward in Bill 206.

The 17 health authorities will continue to operate under the Department of Health and Wellness, and the board members will continue to work under a stringent system of checks and balances. Along with answering to the Minister of Health and Wellness, most members of the 17 health authorities will also answer to the electorate.

Mr. Speaker, conflicts of interest will not be a problem under our new system. I'm confident that our RHAs will operate with conviction while maintaining focus and achieving their goals. I am confident that the best decisions will be made for setting a vision and direction for their region. Board members and senior staff will work together to develop a large vision for as many services as possible. I'm confident that the best decisions will be made for developing a business plan, including making the tough budget decisions, and I'm confident that the RHA board members will be talking to community leaders, families, and individuals about health issues in their region. Those who are elected from the people and by the people will be accountable to the people.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, people have asked: why elect two-thirds of our RHAs? Why elect 126 members and appoint 63? Well, the idea of combining elected and appointed RHA boards comes as a result of years of planning and numerous meetings with all stakeholders.

In 1995 this government released *Selecting Regional Health Authority Members*, a discussion paper and survey. Feedback from constituents told us to create a framework to elect members for Alberta's 17 health regions while maintaining accountability to a broader vision of health services for the entire province. An election gives people living in the region a direct role in selecting members but also encourages constituents to voice concerns and supply feedback to help their RHAs make the best decisions possible.

One weakness of the current situation of appointments is the perceived bias that exists in the selection process. Elected members will add a unique voice and fresh ideas for the future of health in this province. An election process encourages Albertans to get involved. More Albertans involved will mean more diversity. More diversity will mean more ideas. More ideas will create better solutions to issues relating to health service delivery.

We had very specific reasons for retaining a portion of appointed members. Feedback from stakeholders including health professional associations and health providers advised this government to appoint members, allowing them to focus strictly on health issues rather than on constituent concerns. Stakeholders were concerned about maintaining a balance among the board members such that boards would be accountable to the whole region, accountable to all demographic groups, and accountable to the province. Appointing members prevents the threat of turf protection and encourages co-operation between regions. Also, through appointments the Minister of Health and Wellness can ensure that each board has the expertise to successfully initiate health proposals and business plans.

Health providers were concerned about elected board members' ability to make controversial and essential decisions, especially regarding policy and budget issues. Other stakeholders agreed that appointments reduce the chances for single-interest candidates and their possible inability to work as a team with other board members.

As we move toward our new system of elected RHAs, this government has reduced the very possibility of conflicts of interest. This is why I cannot support Bill 206.

I also question the use of the office of the Ethics Commissioner to monitor RHA boards, which is another thrust of Bill 206. The Ethics Commissioner already monitors MLAs, including the Minister of Health and Wellness. I fail to see sufficient benefit for

regional health authority members to answer to him as well. I'm worried about extending the responsibilities of the Ethics Commissioner. Each region has unique issues that are best resolved at the local or regional level. The commissioner will have limited resources to monitor the more than 200 RHA board members scattered throughout the province. Therefore, Bill 206 is advocating either one of two things, either an increased bureaucracy or a remarkably less effective office of the Ethics Commissioner. I find either option undesirable.

I'm worried that the availability of the office or person of the Ethics Commissioner could deteriorate for MLAs or government officials. Up until now the office of the Ethics Commissioner has been exclusively used by members of this Assembly and senior government officials. We cannot add to his responsibilities without either increasing the resources available to his office or even increasing the number of commissioners.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you a humorous analogy. Our Ethics Commissioner is a shepherd of a group of sheep. The shepherd makes sure that the sheep eat the right kinds of grass and do not play near cliffs or near the dark woods where the wolves lurk. What Bill 206 proposes is that the shepherd be responsible now for a much larger field, leaving a portion of his flock of sheep to fend for themselves. Members of this Legislature and senior government officials rely on the guidance of our shepherd, the Ethics Commissioner. To restrict or to remove or to dilute his availability to this government would be nearsighted and ill advised.

The RHAs are separate, smaller flocks protected by the steep mountain ranges called RHA codes of conduct and bylaws. Why would we want to extend our shepherd to already regulated flocks which have no need of the Ethics Commissioner, only to leave the sheep here in this field unprotected?

Well, let's keep this issue in perspective. The Minister of Health and Wellness has the final say and the final approval for RHA decisions. Each RHA's responsibility includes managing their region's resources and allocating funds, but they are ultimately accountable to the minister. He in turn is already accountable to the Ethics Commissioner. This is the system we have in place, and this is the system that works. I have confidence that our board members will be responsible and ethical while acting under the framework of existing codes of conduct and bylaws.

This government continues to improve our health care system and to improve our conflict of interest guidelines for our regional health authorities. I would like to point out that Bill 7, the *Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act*, 2001, which sets the RHA election process in motion, requires disclosure of all records relating to election finances, and it ensures that the rules set out for regional health authority candidates are the same as the rules for MLA candidates.

Another amendment from Bill 7 gives government the authority to make regulations regarding who makes contributions, the timing and manner of making contributions, the maximum amount of contributions, and penalties for violation. Mr. Speaker, these are very thorough amendments that specifically preclude conflicts of interest and ensure fair, efficient RHA election financing.

Bill 206 would not adequately improve regulations and principles for regional health authority members to justify the expense and the duplication that it would entail.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I agree in principle with the intent. Conflicts of interest are completely unacceptable, especially in health care. However, I cannot support Bill 206 as it stands. To include RHA board members as an additional responsibility of the Ethics Commissioner would reduce the availability of his office and person to MLAs and senior government officials. Also, the potential

for regional health authority board members to be in a conflict of interest situation is, by the nature of the division of responsibilities of the authorities and the Minister of Health and Wellness, limited. The Conflicts of Interest Act already governs the Minister of Health and Wellness, who in turn is ultimately responsible for the regional health authorities.

So I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against Bill 206. Although it has the best of intentions, it duplicates existing guidelines and dilutes the office of our Ethics Commissioner.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to be able to speak to the first of the Official Opposition's private members' bills being introduced in this spring session of 2001. Specifically, that's Bill 206, Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act.

Now, this legislation applies comprehensive and uniform conflict of interest rules to all regional health authorities, board members, and employees, as well as to the contractors and independent health service providers that have a contractual relationship with a regional health authority. I think this legislation is important for a number of reasons, firstly because it addresses current and future conflicts of interest outlined by providing a conflict of interest definition and a mechanism by which conflicts of interest can be investigated. The bill also requires that reoccurring or ongoing conflicts must result in either the termination of the relationship with the RHA or the divestiture of the asset causing the conflict. We certainly have examples, which I'll come back to later, that give rise to the need for that.

Secondly, we're looking at Bill 206 applying a uniform standard. A number of the other members have commented on how there are two or three or four or five different ways already in place where conflict of interest could be perceived. But that is two or three or four or five different methods in different levels of government, different agencies in the community where someone is supposed to fumble around and figure out which one applies to them, or maybe they can just pick the one they like the best and decide that it applies to them.

3:20

Bill 206 is providing a uniform standard of conflict of interest rules for all regional health authorities, and that's an important point because right now we have checkerboarding in place. Each regional health authority can decide on its own conflict of interest regulations. So if you're in one area and you don't like the conflict of interest rules, well, go to another one, because the next-door RHA may well have a set of conflict of interest rules that you like better, which really allows people to sort of shop around, go conflict of interest shopping to find which one you like best.

I think it's important with something as vital to Albertans as the delivery of health care services that we have legislation that overrides them all. We don't have a health act that in fact is 17 different health acts. We have one health act that's overriding for provision of health care throughout Alberta. Ideally, you are attempting to provide the same kind of health care in any outlet for it. That's not, strictly speaking, always possible. Obviously in a full service hospital you get different things than in a walk-in med clinic. But the idea is there, that we have one overriding goal and legislation to provide health care services in Alberta, and I think we need to have one overriding conflict of interest act that covers all regional health authorities in the province.

So the first is that it does provide a definition of conflict of interest and a mechanism by which this can be investigated. Two, it provides a uniform standard for all regional health authorities. Three is about restoring public confidence in Alberta's health care system. Any kind of perceived inequity I think is going to be damaging to the health care providers, certainly to the regional health authorities, even to the legislators. It damages all of us if there is a weakening of belief in the system, and conflict of interest I think is quite integral to Albertans' belief in our system.

A number of members who've spoken previously have mentioned that there were already these various other levels of conflict of interest regulations in place. I think it's important to point out that none of those is as strong as what's being proposed in Bill 206. They're addressing different components of it, but even together, even if you took all different levels and put them together, we would not be successful in making it as strong as what's being put forward in Bill 206.

One of the members did bring up – and I think it's important to underline it – that we need to get these conflict of interest regulations in place prior to the elections of regional health authority members in conjunction with the October municipal elections. I think it's important that people that are considering running for these positions know what they're getting into before the fact.

There's one particular incident that was before the courts, is now completed by the courts, and has been discussed in this House a number of times, which is the Jaber case. That's involving conflict of interest, and it keeps coming up. Constituents keep asking about it. People are really concerned when they perceive that there is a conflict of interest out there. So it's important that we put this in context and try and provide the very best that we can for Albertans.

Now, I find it interesting why there is such resistance on the part of government and government backbenchers to doing something that's better than what we have. But that seems to be what's going on: no, no, no; we like our sort of patchwork; we like our different multilevel ones. Why the resistance to doing something right, to doing something well, to setting the bar high? I thought that as Albertans we wanted the best, so why on earth wouldn't we want the best conflict of interest legislation possible? But no, no, no. What I'm hearing is no, no, no; we don't want the best conflict of interest legislation possible; please, no, we don't want to go there. So why the insistence on the status quo? I find that really interesting, and I invite those other members that are, I'm sure, going to be speaking to this bill to explain that to me, why there's an insistence on being second or third best here. I'd be interested in hearing that.

The government finds questions on conflict regarding the Calgary RHA as tiresome, but I don't think Albertans regard it that way. I think that for Albertans perception and actuality of fairness is really important. They want to know that nobody is getting a better deal or getting something that is not available to others because of that first person's position, and that's what we are trying to address in Bill 206.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Albertans also don't like overregulation. You know, there are these interesting sort of Orwellian flips that this government gets involved in, where they will stand up with one piece of legislation and talk about, "Well, we want to simplify things; we want to sweep away everything else and just have one set of rules here," and then they get up and protest a bill that's proposing to do exactly that, to put forward one clear set of conflict of interest rules which overrides all of these other various levels in various divisions that are in existence now. So here's an example of where the government is

struggling mightily to maintain a multilayered, fractured set of conflict of interest regulations that frankly are very difficult to wade through and confusing. I mean, I heard government members list at least three different schemes by which conflict of interest could be determined. Why don't we make that simpler? Let's make it one, and let's make it the best. Let's set the bar absolutely high and do the best we can here on behalf of all Albertans.

I was interested also to hear about how we should be delegating the obligation for conflict of interest to the professional organizations. Well, we don't do that in any other area. Why on earth would we choose the health industry, that most precious of our public social programs, to do a test-drive on this one? What the professional organizations' codes of ethics are about is their members' conduct in relation to patients. So if we're talking about the nurses, the doctors, other health care workers, it's about their conduct with their patients. It is not about delivery of the system as a whole. So why on earth would the government decide they're going to throw that one into the pot too?

Now we'll have 17 individual RHAs' conflict of interest rules. We'll have some conflict of interest rules from the department itself. Let's throw in the minister's ability to make regulations through cabinet, to make additional rules that people – oh, wait. Let's throw in the professional organizations too. Let's make them do it as well without even looking at what is the real purpose of that professional organization. So talk about interfering in the way other people do business; that's a prime example of that one.

Now, I think with conflict of interest what we are most interested in is that the rules need to have three parts to it. One is the legal principles of the fiduciary trust; two, the rule of law; and three, fairness. Fiduciary trust is referring to the responsibility of public officials to act on behalf of and in the best interests of the public. The rule of law argues that democratic society needs unbiased judges and administrators who provide impartial decisions. If public officials exercise . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business on this day has expired.

3:30

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Electricity Deregulation

503. Dr. Nicol moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to prepare annually a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills on all classes of customers in Alberta which must be released to the public.

[Debate adjourned May 8: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on Motion 503, as proposed by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. Before speaking specifically about the motion itself, I want to emphasize that the whole idea or the principle of deregulation is about finding the natural dynamic balance between supply and demand.

Going back to the motion as proposed, an annual cost-benefit analysis of the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills of all Albertans, being a fan of economic studies, I commend the hon. member for the notion of a cost-benefit analysis. This sort of analysis can be very helpful when considering certain issues.

However, I do not think this sort of a report would really capture what is happening with deregulation across Alberta.

What Motion 503 basically proposes is taking a once a year snapshot of the entire ongoing process of deregulation and then comparing that to a series of guesses of what might have happened in the same time frame in the regulated system. Mr. Speaker, would this analysis be able to show the advantage to the marketplace with increased choice for consumers? Would it demonstrate the impact of improved services as a result of competition, or would it show the benefits of increased usage of alternative energy sources? What about the increased use of environmentally friendly generation like wind and solar power? Can it really calculate the benefit to our environment? I don't think it would.

I'm concerned that such an annual analysis based on a series of assumptions would also miss the big picture of the entire deregulation process. The big picture is that Alberta's utilities market is still in a period of transition from being closed and regulated to being open and competitive. New players are entering the market. Current players are retooling operations and repositioning to compete more effectively and efficiently, and consumers are preparing to weigh their options over which provider might be best suited to meet their particular needs.

An annual cost-benefit analysis could not capture this momentous shift, Mr. Speaker. It could not give a proper account of the metamorphosis and all the intangible aspects of deregulation. This report could not show Albertans how deregulation is gradually reshaping the province's utilities, industries, and marketplace.

When this government first introduced the Electric Utilities Act in 1985, it marked the province's departure down the open road to a competitive utility market. The act was not meant to have an overnight impact on Alberta's utility market. The act was a long-term strategy to eventually achieve a market-driven utility industry. This system brings the benefits of competition to customers by providing them with choice over their retail supplier of power, the types of services they receive, and how they participate in the market. As more suppliers come on-line, competition for consumers will increase, and that will work to bring prices down over the long term. This is the process that began with the Electric Utilities Act and was furthered with the introduction of the Electric Utilities Amendment Act.

As I said before, competitive marketplaces do not unfold overnight. Mr. Speaker, the one that will benefit Albertans is emerging even as we speak. It is this new and open setting that will become more and more competitive, and that will mean more choices for Albertans. That is the long-term goal of this government.

There are other benefits to deregulation, Mr. Speaker. The new electric industry structure will help open up markets for green power and renewable energy sources. Wind power, small hydro, landfill gas, and biomass sources will have an equal opportunity in the new generation market. Consumers will have the chance to choose from a green power package that includes power from solar-powered wind generation.

In addition, the new deregulated electrical industry structure is expected to bring other environmental benefits to the province. The new structure encourages cogeneration at industrial plants, and this tends to reduce the overall amount of fossil fuels that are burned to generate electricity throughout Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, by reducing our use of fossil fuels, we are also reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and providing Albertans with cleaner air to breathe. This kind of power is very much the way of the future. The deregulation of the utilities market in Alberta is encouraging that growth of green power. As more providers of green power enter the marketplace, they will be among the cutting

edge of environmentally friendly power generation. Alberta entrepreneurs who have learned the ropes of competing in an open market with green power in Alberta will be ideally positioned to compete in a steady stream of jurisdictions across Canada and around the world that are moving towards deregulation.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, in my Calgary constituency an electricity consumer can subscribe with utility suppliers to buy green power. There are environmentally conscious consumers who do just that happily, even at a higher premium rate. Albertans are very smart. I disagree with any notion that underestimates Albertans' knowledge and understanding. When it comes to their quality of life and benefits, Albertans do not just focus on a dollar-and-cents comparison of their utility bills.

This government has made a commitment to preserving our environment for future generations of Albertans. Deregulation not only benefits the provincial consumer, but it encourages the development of generation of more environmentally friendly power. Giving green power producers a foothold in this new market shows the government's commitment to preserving our beautiful province's environment. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker, that this government will continue to promote the use of green power to the benefit of all Albertans.

There is one thing that a cost-benefit analysis would reveal to be the same in a regulated and deregulated Alberta. Regulations still exist in regards to transmission of power and the utility companies that own the high-voltage lines that bind the grid together. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, as new generation comes on-line, our existing grid will have to have the transmission capacity to deal with it. The government will work with the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board and the utility companies to ensure that Albertans receive the power they require.

Mr. Speaker, the yearly cost-benefit analysis proposed by Motion 503 would not do justice to the ongoing evolution of Alberta's utility market. Such an analysis would provide a shortsighted view of the impact on the industry and on Albertans. Deregulation is an evolving process that cannot be revealed by a yearly snapshot for comparison.

3:40

But my question is about the comparison itself. To compare what with what and what for? Scientifically speaking, we can only compare reliably one existing thing with another existing thing in the same environmental condition. Economically a comparison without the capability to make change is a resource-consuming and wasteful exercise. I do not want to exaggerate here, but I wonder if this kind of comparison is like an exercise to compare the ways of the dinosaurs with the ways of the nimble creatures of today.

I acknowledge the good intention of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. However, considering the practicality and the usefulness, I urge all members of this Assembly to vote against Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 lost]

Prosperity Dividend

504. Mr. Yankowsky moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to investigate the possibility of creating a prosperity dividend payable to all Alberta residents that is similar to the Alaska permanent fund dividend program.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to rise to introduce Motion 504 this afternoon, which advocates that the government consider a sound option in managing surplus revenue responsibly. Motion 504 urges the government to explore the possibility of implementing a dividend fund similar to the Alaska permanent fund. Learning from Alaska's successes and errors in managing their surplus revenue will help us manage our funds wisely in the emerging era of prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, the state of Alaska has implemented a fund of surplus resource revenue which pays direct dividends to all its residents. Their fund, the Alaska permanent fund, or APF, has been very successful and holds assets of more than \$42 billion Canadian. Every year the fund distributes earnings from its diverse investments, and just last year each Alaskan received more than \$3,000 Canadian.

The dividend can be collected by anyone declaring their primary residence to be Alaska, demonstrating residency, and not having served a criminal sentence over the year of application. Children, with the sponsorship of their parent or guardian, can also apply and receive the same dividend as permanent Alaska residents.

The resource revenue placed into the principal of the fund cannot be withdrawn without the consent of the majority of voters, and none of the resource revenue placed into the fund is paid out in dividends. All of the money paid to Alaskans comes from earnings on investments purchased with resource revenues on an ongoing basis.

In this way, growth of the fund is sustainable and quite amazing really. It is no wonder that Alaskans are so proud. The sound investment of resource revenue has achieved and maintained for Alaskans a sustainable return on their investment. Because the Alaska permanent fund was established in 1976 and allowed to grow and prosper through the good times, the fund continues to serve all Alaskans in spite of their declining resource revenues. By sending dividends straight to all Alaskans, including children of all ages, the program is not only a way to fairly distribute resource earnings to current and future generations. It will act as a source of income long after revenues from oil and gas are exhausted.

There are several advantages to the APF. The fund achieves its three goals of providing an annual dividend to Alaskans, providing revenue for program spending, and achieving constant growth. It is a distinct advantage of the APF that it is designed to only pay out half of its yearly earnings on the principal. When the interest from each year is allowed to continually compound itself, along with the annual contributions from the oil and gas revenue the fund can grow at an amazing rate.

Another advantage of the Alaskan model is that it pays dividends to all of its residents. Alaskans take great pride in their fund, and this income raises everyone's standard of living. Even the children are given the dividend through a parent or guardian, as we all know that raising children can be very costly. This equitable distribution enables families to grow and prosper in Alaska regardless of their background or income aside from the dividend.

Along with paying dividends, the fund also contributes to Alaska's general revenue. This income has allowed the state Legislature to eliminate several taxes. This is done through an appropriation of undistributed earnings. Last year alone \$1.23 billion of surplus earnings were spent on government programs and services. When we consider that the population of Alaska is less than that of Calgary, it is truly amazing that they have built a fund of such strength and potential.

This fund has served Alaskans extremely well. Although the current payment is relatively modest, just over \$3,000 Canadian, that dividend will continue to grow regardless of future resource revenue being put into the fund. The dividend paid out to Alaskans has grown fivefold since 1986 mostly due to resource revenues added

annually but also because of outstanding returns on investment. On average over the past five years the dividend has grown by 9 percent each year. According to that growth rate the dividend doubles every eight years. If this rate of growth is maintained, the fund will be able to supplant the average income of an Alaskan before the year 2040. That, Mr. Speaker, is a very conservative estimate that accommodates for inflation. The fund has a value of just over \$35,000 per Alaskan resident and has earned over \$20 billion over the life of the fund.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta would have equally good fortune through implementing a dividend fund. Alberta has a proven track record in the sound and productive management of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and it goes to reason that we would experience similar success with a dividend type of fund. For the sake of future generations we must consider setting aside resource revenue and providing Albertans with an asset that will do much more for them than depreciate or require maintenance, as would a building, a bridge, or a road.

The Alberta heritage savings trust fund was founded in 1976 as it was determined by the government of that day that some amount of oil revenue should be set aside for future generations. We have profited greatly from the fiscal prudence. The Alberta heritage savings trust fund has provided over \$20 billion to scholarships and research grants as well as to government programs and services. This contribution is a legacy of the assets saved in the wealthy days of the 1970s energy crisis when oil was more than \$40 per barrel. It is important to note that \$40 is in nominal terms; inflation adjusted, we would be looking at \$180 a barrel oil in today's dollars.

3:50

Although oil is not nearly as valuable today, we again find ourselves flush with resource revenue. Clearly this is because of the fiscal discretion of this government, but in any case, a standard and stable mechanism of returning resource royalties back to their rightful owners, Albertans, is the next logical step.

There are many benefits to a prosperity dividend, and I think it's extremely important that the government consider the Alaska permanent fund as a model of investing surplus revenue. Through a permanent fund we would be investing in the infrastructure of the future and in the lives of future generations of Albertans. Revenue must be spent very wisely indeed, or we will be abandoning the trust which Albertans have in us. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that it is possible through a permanent fund to both reduce taxes and provide a dividend to all Albertans in a sustainable fashion.

I support the commitment we have shown in promoting the growth of the provincial economy through lowering personal and corporate income tax. These actions have brought new investment as well as new talent into the province. However, Mr. Speaker, investment into the economy of today should be balanced with consideration for the future. The Alaska fund model would provide a sustainable solution and ensure that our surplus in future years is not squandered on spending that is not cost-effective.

I certainly want to leave a legacy to my grandchildren and their grandchildren, as everyone would like to leave a legacy to their grandchildren and to their grandchildren. While our governments in this country and abroad are burdening their future generations through deficit budgeting, I would propose that this government do the very opposite. Setting aside resource revenue into a fund that will work for Albertans and not fade away would establish a legacy for all the people of Alberta to take great pride of ownership in. I know that it is an initiative that Albertans will fully support.

Alberta is a leading economy in Canada and all of North America and has grown at a pace of 4.6 percent per year over the past five

years. This growth is truly staggering. If we can maintain our growth on average at just 4 percent per year, the size of our economy will double in 18 years. If the prices of gas and oil stay high, it is a strong possibility that the size of our economy will double in just 15 years. With such outstanding prospects for continued prosperity in Alberta we should form a sound and responsible way to manage our surplus revenues after we retire our debt.

The strongest point in favour of a permanent dividend fund for Alberta is that it allows us to take our time in evaluating the direction of the province. Instead of spending excess revenue just because it's there, we can save the money until a time when it is needed. This government has held the firm policy that spending should not be for the sake of itself but rather to answer an express need. A dividend fund would be a method of saving unexpected revenue for the future, providing income to the province for programs and services, and then providing resource dividends to Albertans.

The Alaska permanent fund does have some drawbacks, and these should be considered if Alberta is going to construct a similar dividend fund. Motion 504 does not propose that we investigate the possibility of creating an exact duplicate of the Alaskan model but that we create a made-in-Alberta solution to manage our prosperity. Mr. Speaker, what I am suggesting is that we establish a dividend fund so that we can manage Alberta's growth and prosperity with stability and a greater degree of predictability.

In closing, I want to say that resources will run out. They are by definition nonrenewable. Motion 504 proposes that we at least consider the possibility that a portion of our current revenues be converted into assets that are renewable and will continue to provide the province with prosperity for many years to come.

I urge everyone in this Assembly to support Motion 504.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take this opportunity to speak to this motion, an Alberta fiscal dividend program. I listened intently to what the sponsor of the motion had to say and was quite interested to see that he brought forward a motion that is a sit-on-the-fence motion, and he supported that with his remarks. What this motion does is simply "urge the government to investigate the possibility of creating." It doesn't actually advocate or push for one.

In the first part of his comments he talked about pushing for a model like the Alaska model, but in the last half of his comments he stated that he also wanted to support lower taxes. It's a little tough to have both, Mr. Speaker, so it would be nice to know exactly where this member sits on this issue.

Of course, the major downfall with the Alaska model is that with dwindling oil revenues, the amount of the dividend gets reduced. When we take a look at Alberta, where dwindling oil revenues are also the case, then we see a potential problem in terms of cash flow. Certainly we support any possibility of how we can better manage our funds and resources, and we've brought forward some options here.

It's our position that if the Alberta heritage savings trust fund were bolstered with excess oil and gas revenues and not dividended out at this time and not syphoned off into general revenue funds, as it's currently being done, if we built that fund up to about \$30 billion, which wouldn't take very much time at the current rate of production, then we would be in a position where we truly could do what this member says he wants, which is to protect future generations. That would be by completely eliminating personal income tax in this province. You can build the fund up to an amount of money where the interest revenue off that could go into the general revenue

fund, and we could completely eliminate personal taxes, which is really the best stimulator to the economy and the best rebate back to Albertans, not for just this generation and the next one but for many decades to come. The best way to do that is to immediately stop syphoning funds off the heritage savings trust fund, to not go to any kind of a dividend plan but to take the surplus revenues we have, while we have them, and build that fund up.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments we will not be supporting this motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. How many people and how many Legislatures in the world would love to be debating something like this? I mean, can you imagine? It's not every day that Legislatures are debating: what do we do when we've got our debt paid off? How do we go about investing or divesting ourselves of the excess funds in our Treasury without creating some of the problems that people with excess funds are bound to have, like jealousy, like overheating local markets, like overspending, setting up a legacy of spending that can't be sustained? We all know that sooner or later the well is going to run dry and we're not going to have these windfall profits, which we have been blessed with through some good management but mostly good luck. I think we all recognize that.

Certainly, I'm sure the majority of the members in this Legislature recognize the fact that we have a responsibility to future generations and that we have to carefully consider the decisions that are made. Although it is a nice problem to have, it's still a problem. When the debt is paid and when we have the opportunity to reinvest the profits that come from our resource well, we're going to have to be very, very careful, Mr. Speaker. We don't want to create a honey pot that's going to attract every fly in the world. We don't want to create a honey pot that's going to create and attract the enmity of other levels of government that might be tempted to take their hands from their pockets and put them in our pockets. [interjections] I hear other members saying: who would do that? Well, I think the who that would do that are probably located about 1,700 kilometres east of here, and we would be wise to keep that in mind.

4:00

Part of the debate in the Future Summit is going to be: what do we do, and how do we reinvest our resources? As members know, the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the anniversary of which is being celebrated this year, was our attempt in 1976 to address essentially the same problem. The Alberta heritage savings trust fund, as I recall, did provide for the Legislature to have a fund that we could put excess revenues into. It also, as members will recall, had the very negative effect of making Alberta a target of other orders of government. I think that probably led to the national energy program, and it led to a real schism in the relationship between Alberta and the central government. So we've got a difficult management problem ahead of us, a nice management problem but still a difficult management problem.

The intent of this motion is to say: well, if we're fortunate enough to have these resources, the bulk of the money should be dispersed to Albertans to be invested by Albertans individually. I think underlying that premise is the fact that most people assume that individuals are able to invest or to utilize money more efficiently and more effectively and more pragmatically than governments are able to do on their behalf. I think also underlying the premise of this motion is that we philosophically – and when I say “we philosophi-

cally,” I'm speaking of those of us on this side of the House – believe that government should have as little to do with managing the economy as possible, and that includes managing the excess resources, that we should give that responsibility to individual citizens, who should be able to make those decisions wisely in their own interest, understanding that a good portion of it as well stays in the common pot for the common good down the road.

It's a combination of trying to get the best of both worlds and at the same time not having a situation where we in Alberta are disproportionately better off than other Canadians, which then could have the potential to create divisions and enmity, that we just don't want to see and don't want to see again. So the underlying premise of this motion I think is very laudable, and I would recommend that others join in this debate to give their considered opinion as to how and what we should do with this resource wealth that we're blessed with.

The Future Summit to begin next fall certainly is going to centre on this issue, but we don't want to get to the Future Summit without having given some thought to a position to bring to the table. To my knowledge this is the first real effort that has been made to deal with the resource revenue that will be available to Albertans and to governments of Alberta after the debt has been paid off.

Now, the motion as presented is:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to investigate the possibility of creating a prosperity dividend payable to all Alberta residents that is similar to the Alaska permanent fund dividend program.

Alaska's permanent fund dividend has had some comment here already today, and there are pros and cons to that fund. Over the last 25 years or so that it has been in effect we've had the opportunity to learn from what they have done right and what perhaps what they have done wrong. I would like to move an amendment to the motion so as to make it less closely attached to the Alaska permanent fund dividend. So, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to make the following amendment.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do we have copies?

MR. McCLELLAND: I have the amendment, but we do not yet have the copies. Just a second. I'll ask the page to make copies. Mr. Speaker, may I have your guidance on this. We need five copies?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We theoretically need 83 and then five for the office, including the original signed one. Normally if you had enough to give everyone a copy, that would be okay, but we still need five for the table, including the original signed one.

MR. McCLELLAND: All right.

Mr. Speaker, your guidance again. So I sign the amendment, get the copies made and distribute the signed copies, and then give the chair the original. Is that correct?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Essentially. When I say signed, it's not only the mover that signed it, but also Parliamentary Counsel has signed it, presumably.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your bearing with me here.

We'll make the amendment as soon as we get the necessary copies to distribute, which does, then, give me a bit more time to extol the virtues of this very timely and worthy private member's motion.

For those that are listening in on the web, I do want to draw the distinction between a private member's motion and a private

member's bill. A motion doesn't hold the government to a specific course of action, and that's what this is. It's a motion which merely asks the government to consider. Once the provincial debt is eliminated, if oil and gas prices remain high, there could be an opportunity to return a portion of resource revenue to Albertans. A dividend fund similar to the Alaska permanent fund would allow Alberta to invest surplus resource revenue and distribute the fund's earnings to Albertans in times of high and low resource prices and production.

I point out that it is our intention to move an amendment to strike out that which indicates that it would be similar to the Alaska permanent fund. Just for further clarification, all we want to do is to get the debate on the floor.

In recent years Alberta's provincial debt has been substantially reduced by applying larger than expected oil and gas revenues. In the 1998-1999 fiscal year the government surplus equaled \$1.103 billion, and in the 1999-2000 fiscal year the government surplus equaled \$2.802 billion. The record debt repayment of \$4.5 billion in 2000-2001 reduced the debt to \$8 billion. That's the accumulated debt, and coincidentally the \$8 billion is the approximate value of this year's projected surplus, which provides the possibility of Alberta being debt free by the beginning of the 2002 fiscal year.

4:10

There are, of course, considerations on the other side of the table, because there are those who feel that it may not be best to establish a fund such as this. It may not be in the best interests of the province, especially if it were modeled exactly after the Alaska permanent fund, because the Alaska permanent fund is inflexible, as earnings from the fund can only be used for dividend payments. It can't be drawn down to finance expenditures on people's priority programs like health care or education. [interjection] Well, we just can't do it. We want more flexibility.

Investing Albertans' money on their behalf for future consideration distorts the free market economy, and it takes away individuals' rights to manage their finances and risk.

I've been informed that the amendments are here. They're being distributed. I'll need one to move the amendment, so I'll just wait until it gets distributed to me.

The strength, of course, is that by creating a prosperity dividend fund now while resource revenues are high, as is assumed under Motion 504, that would supply Albertans direct and lasting benefit independent of future resource prices. Motion 504 would maximize the value of Alberta's resource revenues through prudent long-term investment and produce income to the benefit of all generations of Albertans. A savings fund acts as a hedge against the boom and bust cycle of the energy industry.

So these are all considerations that need to be brought to the table, need to be considered, and this certainly is the forum to do so so that when we arrive at the growth summit, we will have a firm foundation in this area from which to proceed.

So, Mr. Speaker, now, hopefully, we've done this correctly, and I move the following amendment, that the original motion be amended, the original motion which reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to investigate the possibility of creating a prosperity dividend payable to all Alberta residents that is similar to the Alaska permanent fund dividend program.

I move that that motion be amended by striking out all of the words that follow "Alberta residents," being "that is similar to Alaska's permanent fund dividend."

Mr. Speaker, I will seek the guidance of the chair once again. The notice of amendment which has been circulated includes the words "that is," and the amendment was to strike out the words following

"Alberta residents" but don't include "that is." So I would ask the advice of the chair.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The advice of the chair would be that if that's your intent in your motion, "that is similar to the Alaska" is removed there, and what you have at the end of the present Motion 504 is "to all Alberta residents."

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. All right. So then I have made that motion, and with that, I would invite others to join the debate on the amendment.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 as amended carried]

THE CLERK: Motions Other than Government Motions. Motion 505. Mr. Herard.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the Assembly willing to give unanimous consent to move to the next item of business?

[Unanimous consent denied]

Palliative Care

506. Ms Kryczka moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify palliative care as a core service in each regional health authority to ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services for end-of-life care with access to palliative community services (palliative home and hospice care), acute care, consultation services for physicians, staff, and patients, and tertiary care.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak today to my motion on palliative care. As I don't have any formal documentation in front of me, I will do my best to speak to the topic. Actually, in preparation for this motion, which has been described by a board member from one of the regional health authorities as not being a sexy topic, such as cardiovascular surgery is, I would like to start off my speech today by saying that we should all be interested in palliative care because we will all die. Not all of us will be impacted by heart problems, but end-of-life issues are what this motion is all about and the role of the Alberta government in this issue.

I'm very proud to say that in the health care system that we have today, we've certainly given due attention to beginning-of-life issues, and that is very important. This government has and is very recently addressing the need for proper continuum of care for the aging population, and that is certainly not an easy task. I feel that since I've been in the Legislature, since 1997, definite progress has been made, but I think that what we really have to keep in mind with many decisions that government makes now and in the future is the fact that we do have an aging population.

4:20

The implications of an aging population are many. To start with, we know that the numbers are going to increase. For people who like to work with numbers and facts, I would like you to just focus for a moment on the fact that 10 percent of Alberta's population now are seniors, and in 20 to 30 years it'll be anywhere from 20 to 25 percent of our population. That is very much of a significant increase.

For me and the work I have been doing and I hope will continue to do certainly in this term, it will be to urge the government to move in the direction of accommodating so many more seniors in the future. I think that if we definitely take the position of planning toward the future, there will be some things happening in this next term and, I hope, in future terms that will advance us so we are ready when, for instance, 20 to 25 percent of our population are seniors.

It is easy for us to put off today and say: well, you know, that's tomorrow. I mean, we do that in our lives all the time; right? Procrastination is easy to do, and this is not really staring us hard in the face today. But, I will recall, for instance, 10 years ago – I can hardly believe it was 10 years ago – when I met my present husband.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: You're lucky you remember.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes, and I am lucky that I do remember those days. My time may come when I may not remember those days.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Well, then you'll need palliative care.

MS KRYCZKA: The hon. Member for Leduc is trying to suggest that I'll need palliative care, but I hope that I will have many more years of remembering and healthy living before I will need palliative care. Now I must be serious about this topic because my message is really a very serious one.

In the time that I have, I would like to really summarize what my research has found to date. Actually, palliative care has been addressed and defined as a core service back to 1993 in the Department of Health and Wellness. I would urge the minister, though, to actively support the government taking the leadership role in what is already evolving in the province as core service but to embellish the definition of what core service really means, an active definition, an updated one. Although the document that I did read back in 1993 is an excellent document – and many people from regional health authorities agree that it is – my suggestion would be that this is not really a today, living document, since we have really defined the urgency of looking after our aging population especially into their longer, frailer years.

What I'm going to try and describe to you as best I can is what I have found in my active research with regional health authorities. The larger regional health authorities, meaning the Calgary regional health authority and Capital health authority – and there are others that are smaller – are really to be commended for playing within each region a leadership role in envisioning what palliative care looks like. They are moving in a direction, and they have got what I would like to repeat is a vision. The smaller regions actually are coming aboard and being part of this vision, but if you live in a rural community and you find that geographically your health care resources are very sparse, the vision has to be more than just regional, and there has to be a team approach.

Definitely one of the key pluses in doing research is that the regional health authorities are talking to each other in this whole area of palliative care, and there are certain levels of agreement. We talk about team work, and again I'm pleased to see that it's happening. I thought there was more of perhaps a territorialism that existed between the regional health authorities but certainly not evidenced at all in this area.

With the movement to community care, we know that people are definitely saying that they want to age in place, in their own home, whether that be a house on a residential street or it be in a long-term care centre or it may be anything in between in terms of types of

living models. Actually, more and more people are saying they really would prefer not to spend their remaining time in a long-term care facility. They want to be at home with caregivers, with home care support, but it's not as easy to implement these wishes.

So what's happening, as I found out, if I were to quote from either Edmonton or Calgary regional health authorities: there is a real team situation that exists where there are many specialists that are trained in geriatric care, and their job is to go out and first of all train and then offer support to GPs that are out at the community level, to nurses at that level, to families. So it's really more of a holistic direction that we're headed into. I guess what I would say is that I would have to give them a huge amount of credit for the work they have done to date. I've said they have a vision. They have a goal. It is not only these two large authorities that have taken the initiative.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair]

In a way it's an easy job for government to just come in and acknowledge what is there, but we need to work with them saying: you know, as government we support this. Maybe in terms of dollars they will come ultimately and ask for support, but I don't think that is really all that is necessary. I think acknowledgment first of all of what is happening. That can happen through individual MLAs; that can happen through the minister of health. I would look first to the minister of health to become more involved and knowledgeable in what is going on. As I said earlier at the beginning of my comments today, it is not . . .

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. I hate to interrupt, but the time allocation for this matter of business has now left us.

4:30

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move second reading of Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill implements reductions to corporate income tax rates and the elimination of the capital tax on financial institutions as announced last fall in response to recommendations made by the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee. These are the first steps in this government's aggressive business tax reduction plan. The bill also incorporates the amendments contained in Bill 22, which was introduced into the Legislature last year but not passed, and some technical amendments resulting from changes made to the federal Income Tax Act.

The specific changes to corporate income tax rates effective April 1, 2001, are that the general rate is reduced from 15.5 percent to 13.5 percent, the manufacturing and processing rate is reduced from 14.5 to 13.5 percent, the small business rate is reduced to 5 percent, the amount of income eligible for the small business deduction is increased from \$200,000 to \$300,000, the capital tax on financial institutions is eliminated, and the capital taxes paid to other provinces are not deductible for taxation years beginning after April 1, 2001. The business tax plan also announced further tax reduction steps. These will be implemented in future years in future bills, based on affordability.

The main components of amendments introduced as Bill 22 last year and being reintroduced in this bill are the introduction of rules

to prevent tax avoidance transactions, some elaborate scheme called the Quebec shuffle, and again amendments which result from paralleling changes made to the federal act, which we generally try to keep in sync with, a course of action which benefits taxpayers and our tax administration by keeping things as simple as taxes can be kept simple.

Planned amendments to the Alberta royalty tax credit program, the ARTC program, will not proceed at this time. I will be bringing in an amendment during Committee of the Whole to address this.

Finally, there are a number of sections meant to close a tax avoidance loophole. The loophole results from the ability to elect differing amounts for Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and federal tax purposes because the three provinces administer their own corporate income tax. The scheme is quite complex but basically involves using relieving provisions intended to permit a tax deferral to completely eliminate provincial capital gains tax. Ontario and Quebec have fixed their legislation, and we're now doing ours.

Again, Mr. Speaker, this bill is mostly about cutting corporate taxes. When our plan is fully implemented, businesses large and small will pay about half the tax they do today. I see members of the New Democratic and the Liberal parties raising their arms in glee.

MS CARLSON: No.

MR. McCLELLAND: That is not glee? That is angst? I'm sorry. I thought it was glee.

Bill 8 will help ensure Alberta businesses remain in a strong position not only nationally but also on the world stage. Making it easier for businesses to invest and operate in the province helps strengthen our economy, create jobs, and make Alberta attractive to outside investors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to have a chance to respond at second reading to Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001. In general, we support this particular bill. It looks to me like mostly housekeeping, bringing in line recommendations made by the Alberta Tax Review Committee, the Alberta royalty tax credit program. We see some issues related to the tax-deferred disposition of property, eliminating capital tax, and paralleling some amendments with federal legislation.

We do have a few concerns, so we'd like to put those on the record. Hopefully, we can get the questions answered when it gets to committee so that we can see a fairly speedy passage of this bill.

We believe that in general right now corporate tax rates and the manufacturing and processing rate are competitive with other provinces. We feel that it's more important for the business sector at this time to stabilize electricity and natural gas prices in the province so that businesses can operate profitably. There are lots of ways to ensure profitability that have nothing to do with tax cuts, as small businesses who often don't make any money know very well. They would like to have the opportunity to share in tax cuts, but first they have to be profitable, and increased electricity and natural gas prices are eating into those profits considerably. So we're seeing with this a decrease in taxes on the corporate side but on the personal side a shifting of more of the tax burden onto middle-income Albertans through the flat-tax scheme and also through user-fee charges. We continue to be concerned about those.

We support the decision to reduce the small business tax from 6 to ultimately 3 percent. It's been our position for many years. We've called for that reduction since 1994. In fact, it was one of the

very first policies that I worked on and asked to have implemented. It's taken this government over six years to act on our recommendation, but they did act on it, so we would like to thank them for that, Mr. Speaker. According to the CFIB, of the people employed in Alberta during 1998, 74 percent of businesses employed less than five people. So small businesses are a big deal, and we're happy to see some support for them.

In terms of the legislation that parallels changes to the Income Tax Act as set out under federal bills C-28 and C-72 with respect to the transfer pricing and the cost of tax shelter investments, the assessment and reassessment, and penalties there, it's good to see those parallel changes are going to be made.

We see here in this legislation that loopholes are closed that allow corporations to avoid paying provincial taxes by transferring assets to another province before disposing of the property. I think that's a small issue, but it's been a pretty significant loophole, so we're happy to see that happen.

Changes to the ARTC program result certainly in a more focused and effective program targeted at small and medium-sized producers. We've been a strong supporter of the ARTC because we realize that it offers significant tax policy stability to many sectors, to the energy sector, particularly small producers, so that's good. But we would like the minister to explain how these changes to the ARTC as outlined in Bill 8 will assist in addressing the concerns of the Auditor General about the government's failure to state specific goals, expected results, and the development of performance measures to evaluate the ARTC. So if they could address that. That would be the AG's report '91-92, pages 32 to 33.

We think that one way to measure the effectiveness would be to tie the credit to the level of reinvestment. Perhaps the minister could indicate whether the department's audit functions have the ability to do this. I think that's an excellent question that would be well addressed in committee.

We've asked for studies conducted on behalf of the government relative to the ARTC's impact on job creation and increased drilling activity. Perhaps the minister would now be willing to release those studies that benchmark the effectiveness of the ARTC.

We've been supporters forever of greater co-ordination in the area of tax collection in order to reduce the paperwork burden on the private sector and the elimination of duplication and overlap in the area of tax administration. Bill 8 goes some way in doing this. It's designed to reflect this objective with the federal amendments. We were not supporters of the province collecting their own tax and having separate tax returns there. We continue to reflect those concerns. Streamlining is a big deal, and cutting down on paperwork for a small business is also a very big deal, so we'd like to have that once again put on the record. I think we'd also like to know if the minister could indicate whether there are any plans to further harmonize the collection of corporate taxes as a means of reducing the compliance costs for industry.

With those questions, Mr. Speaker, we will rest our concerns on second reading.

4:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 8, which makes a number of changes to the corporate income tax regime in this province. Some of these changes are those that we can support, and others are those that we must oppose.

The first change that is supported by the New Democrats involves a reduction in the tax rate of small businesses and an increase in the

threshold at which businesses qualify for the small business rate. The first installment of a three-year plan to reduce the small business tax rate from 6 to 3 percent and to double the income threshold qualifying for the small business tax rate from \$200,000 to \$400,000 is something that we think may have a positive impact on small businesses.

We're pleased to support small business in this province. We are quite aware of the role of small business in the creation of jobs in this province. Most jobs that are created in this province are created by small business, and they also provide a means of making a living for a very significant number of Albertans who are the owners of small businesses. We think that these changes will be particularly helpful to smaller start-up businesses. The threshold to qualify for the lower rate has not been increased for many years, and even with the increase proposed, it's not at what we would consider a reasonable level.

There are some troubling aspects of the bill, to be sure, and those involve the major corporate tax changes which are being sought through Bill 8. It looks like the New Democrats will be the only party at this stage opposing this direction, and I think that's too bad. The government is proposing in this act a reduction on profitable large corporations from the current 15 and a half percent to 8 percent, virtually cutting their taxes in half. I know that's being cheered on the opposite side, but we wonder if the government has actually done any detailed evaluation of this in terms of what it will produce in terms of new investment, what it will produce in terms of new jobs, and what it will do to the province's finances in the long term, particularly if resource revenues do not remain at the same levels they are today.

We are concerned that the government is significantly eroding the tax base with which it has to meet the needs of Albertans, and they're doing so at a time of fiscal euphoria caused by high prices for natural gas.

MR. NORRIS: Caused by good management. Caused by outstanding management.

MR. MASON: Well, the hon. minister over there would like to take credit for the high oil prices that exist in this province. He would like to take credit for the high natural gas prices in this province in the same way that previous governments believed that the oil and gas was put in the ground for the benefit of Social Credit. Well, it just isn't so, Mr. Speaker. It's easy to be good managers in these kinds of conditions, and the government has not shown that they are good managers of the . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, right now recognized for participation in the Assembly is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I would only be too happy to call on other hon. members to participate once the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has concluded his remarks. So I look forward to a long speaking list.

Debate Continued

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I know that my views don't accord with the hon. minister's. We've seen that. Nevertheless, my views do represent the view of a number of Albertans, and I appreciate the opportunity to put them forward here. The difficulty is that if the high energy prices are not sustained, this province could find itself in the unenviable situation of having to continue with its planned deep cuts in corporate taxes

and to make up the shortfall by increasing personal taxes or to cut spending further on important programs.

Corporations will benefit immensely from a healthy and well-educated workforce as well as from spending on public infrastructure like roads and highways. Asking them to pay their fair share towards sustaining these important programs is only fair and reasonable.

My final concern about Bill 8 involves the changes made to the Alberta royalty tax credit program. While a government news release issued upon first reading of Bill 8 claims that it is implementing the recommendations of the Alberta business tax review, it's not really accurate when it comes to the royalty tax credit program. The Business Tax Review Committee recommended that the royalty tax credit program be phased out. It doesn't involve the kind of tinkering around the edges that is being done through Bill 8.

The Business Tax Review Committee quite rightly points out that the royalty tax credit is a selective program and provides benefits to a specific industry, conventional oil and gas production. The program runs counter to the general approach of supporting broad-based low tax rates for all industries rather than targeted tax credits or other forms of government assistance: these aren't my words, Mr. Speaker. They're the words of the Business Tax Review Committee, which was commissioned by this government.

At a time of record high oil and gas prices there can no longer be any justification for keeping this corporate welfare holdover from the 1980s on the books. Let's simplify the corporate tax system and axe the royalty tax credit. On balance the changes to the corporate tax system contained, in our view, more bad elements than good elements. That's why the New Democrat opposition will not be supporting this bill at second reading. We believe that the long-term interests of the province are not served by massive tax cuts for the wealthiest corporations in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

Bill 11

Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure and honour to move second reading of Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

On February 7, 2001, the maternity and parental leave regulation came into force. It provides parents whose children were born or adopted on or after December 31, 2000, with up to one year of job-protected leave from the workplace. For many Alberta families this was great news. These changes were done by regulation because the government wanted to ensure that parents could inform their employers that they intended to access the new federal employment insurance benefits that also came into effect on December 31, 2000.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 does one thing and one thing only. It transfers Alberta's maternity and parental leave provisions from a regulation into the Employment Standards Code. Right now if Albertans look at the Employment Standards Code for the province's maternity and parental leave provisions, they cannot find them. Including these provisions in the code will give all Albertans greater clarity and assurance that their rights in the workplace are being protected.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share with the Assembly some of the work that went into developing the maternity and parental leave regulation. Last December the minister struck a committee to

consult with Alberta employers, employees, unions, social advocacy groups, and parents. The committee heard from over 5,000 Albertans and held a one-day symposium before developing the eight recommendations designed to strike a balance between meeting the needs of families and meeting the needs of Alberta's employers. All of the committee's recommendations were accepted by the government and form the basis of the maternity and parental leave regulation and will now be enshrined in legislation through Bill 11.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 gives parents up to 37 weeks of parental leave. For birth mothers this means they are able to take up to 52 weeks of unpaid leave from work, made up of 15 weeks of maternity leave and up to 37 weeks of parental leave. Fathers may now share in parental leave. The 37 weeks of leave may be taken entirely by one of the parents or shared between them. Adoptive parents can also take up to 37 weeks of parental leave. Adoptive parents can take parental leave regardless of the age of their adopted child. This change recognizes that adopted children, whether they are newborns or school aged, need time to bond with their parents.

Maternity leave can begin at any time within 12 weeks of the estimated date of delivery. Parental leave can begin at any time after the birth or adoption of the child and must be completed within 52 weeks of that date.

Mr. Speaker, the government recognizes that these extended leave provisions present a challenge for employers in terms of finding and training replacement workers. Bill 11 contains the strictest notice requirements in the country for employees going on and returning from maternity or parental leave. This will give employers the time they need to recruit and train replacement workers.

The changes to notice requirements are significant for two reasons. First, they extend the amount of notice an employee must provide before taking employment leave. Second, they spell out clear consequences should an employee not provide the required amount of notice.

Employees going on maternity or parental leave must give their employers six weeks' notice, up from the previous two-week notice period. Birth mothers who are unable to give the required notice will still have to provide a medical certificate within two weeks of stopping work. Parents who are unable to give the required notice for medical or custodial reasons will have to provide written notice as soon as possible. Employees now have to provide at least four weeks' written notice to their employers to either return to work or change their return date, and employees are required to provide at least four weeks' written notice if they do not intend to return to work when their leave ends. These provisions give employers greater certainty in scheduling necessary staffing changes, and employers are under no obligation to reinstate an employee who does not provide the required notice to return to work.

Employees, whether they are full-time or part-time, must have worked for their employers for 52 continuous weeks before they are eligible for this maternity and/or parental leave provision.

Bill 11 gives legislative force to the province's maternity and parental leave regulation and further demonstrates our commitment to working parents and our children. It is an honour to move second reading of Bill 11. I encourage all members to join me in supporting this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I thought I'd seen it all, but I haven't been in this House long enough I guess. We're now moving legislation to verify regulations. I never thought I'd see the day.

MS CARLSON: They're going to repeat it again in Bill 14.

MS BLAKEMAN: I guess so.

The member started with the reminder that in February of this year in fact the government of Alberta had announced a regulation that was extending unpaid maternity or parental leave from its position of 18 weeks, and Mr. Speaker, such backslapping, such self-congratulation. I can hear the popping of champagne corks, and I can just imagine in my mind's eye the blue and pink streamers cascading from the ceiling. Such excitement everyone has over this bill.

AN HON. MEMBER: Blue and orange.

MS BLAKEMAN: Blue and pink. Oh, blue and orange. I suppose that would be more . . . yeah, yeah. Okay.

I think: well, my goodness, all this over something that Alberta is one of the last two provinces to do. My goodness, what would it be like if they were actually a leader in this? Boy, that would really be a party.

In fact, after the federal government increased their parental leave to 50 weeks at the end of 2000, all of the other provinces except for Alberta and Saskatchewan came along right away quick, but we did manage to get a regulation out of Alberta in February. Now in May we're all warm and fuzzy because we're getting around to passing the legislation that reaffirms the regulation. But it's nice to see this happen.

So is this a good bill? Yes, of course. I mean, lots of people have given input. We've heard lots from this government about how important it is to keep families together. Yes, indeed. Do I support this? Of course I do. I would have supported it if the government had done it six months ago, when they should have done it, when it really would have been leadership, rather than late and behind everyone else, but I'm happy to support it now.

One of the things that is curious to me, though, is why the government continues to discriminate, to differentiate between different kinds of parents and between the genders. As we move towards understanding that we want both parents to be equally involved, barring the actual physical necessity involved in some of this, we wanted parental leave to be available in an equal number of weeks, and that's not what's happening here. In fact, the pregnant employee could qualify for 52 weeks because they're getting the 15 weeks of, strictly speaking, maternity leave plus the 37 of parental leave. In the case of the nonpregnant parent they only get 37 consecutive weeks within 52 weeks of the child's birth. Why aren't we being a bit more equal about this?

Worse, I think, is only 37 weeks for adoptive parents, and that is too bad, because once again, we're making a difference here. At a time when we need to be moving towards an understanding that parenting is parenting, that we're not distinguishing between birth children and adoptive children, what does this government do? Yuck. It takes one huge giant leap backwards about two decades.

Well, I still have hope. The legislation is being brought forward, but I really had hoped that the government was able to move beyond this distinguishing and doling out of different amounts of time to people. I would have thought that they could have moved beyond that, but that's not the case. [interjection] Well, probably. There's a suggestion that there might be an amendment through miscellaneous statutes in the next session. I'd certainly be willing to look at that if it came forward. I'd be in support of that then because I'm in support of it now, and I would have been in support of it six months ago. Nonetheless, the government has actually come through in verifying their regulation with legislation.

You know, I thought when I got elected that the legislation came first and then the regulations fell underneath the legislation. But no, not in Alberta. In Alberta we're going to do the regulations first, and then we're going to pass the legislation for it. It truly is an Orwellian experience here. We do have three bills drawn up that way. We've got bills 1, 14, and 11. All three bills are sort of after-the-fact, better get it in quick legislation.

So I'm happy to support this bill. I'll certainly be encouraging by colleagues to support this bill. It would be nice if we could see an amendment brought forward that would straighten out some of the discrimination. I don't know why this government feels it needs to discriminate between people, but it really seems to be a visceral urge. Gotta, gotta make everybody different and treat them different. But overall I'm glad to see this.

There's been a process followed for this. It in fact did start in the fall session of 2000, brought forward as a private member's bill. At that time I spoke in favour of it and thought it was going to pass, but fall sessions in Alberta are very short lived. Boy, you've got to really move those bills through, or bingo, two weeks and we're out of here, and it just didn't make it in the cut. [interjection] The Minister of Finance is saying that life is tough, and that's certainly the way it is in the Alberta Legislature. You've got to move fast or you're out of here. Two weeks for a fall session, three weeks for a spring session. Boy, on we go.

5:00

There was consultation. An invitation for consultation was issued at the beginning of the year. There was consultation with a number of different labour groups, nonprofit agencies, government departments, and I think if you were really quick, members of the public could have been involved with this as well.

So it's a fine thing. Its time is long past. I'm glad to see it, and I'm more than willing to support it. I look forward to the further debate. I'm sure there are many members of the government who are just raring to get up and debate on this. [interjection] Right, and I'm sure that's going to happen another day.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I would like to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 14 Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 14, being the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, this bill provides the legislative authority for the Alberta energy tax refund and makes a minor technical change with the foreign tax credit and the overseas employment tax credit.

The Alberta energy tax refund program was announced September 6, 2000, to help relieve the pressures of higher than normal energy costs, including home heating costs and higher prices at the gas pumps. This program was possible because of higher than expected resource revenues, and it returns over \$690 million to the pockets of more than 2 million Albertans. Highlights of the bill related to the energy tax refund include establishing program eligibility and refund amounts, ensuring the refund meets the criteria of an overpayment of provincial income tax so as not to be taxable at the federal level, and establishing criteria to redirect money to creditors, in particular in the case of maintenance enforcement debts. It also is ensuring that the province can recover amounts paid to individuals who are later found to be ineligible.

Mr. Speaker, while this program was put in place while this legislation was coming forward – it was introduced earlier – our commitment as a government, however, is to deal with the reality and make sure that we care for Albertans. While this bill is coming after the fact, it is still an important element.

The technical component of the amendment, Mr. Speaker, will ensure that Albertans who worked overseas in the year 2000 and earlier years are eligible to claim the overseas employment tax credit and the foreign tax credit. This change will ensure that affected Albertans receive that full benefit, as was always intended. This deficiency was rectified for the year 2001 and subsequent years in the new Alberta Personal Income Tax Act.

Those are the very basic principles of the bill, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to debate but move second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 14 in second reading, the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001.

An interesting bill once again. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked about, this is a bill where we see the legislation coming before the Assembly after the regulations have been put in place and in fact, in this case, after the money has been spent.

This is a companion bill, I think, to Bill 1, and it's an interesting process and an interesting precedent that the government of this province has established in this particular year. We heard some nice motherhood and apple pie statements from the minister in introducing the bill, and that was a very clever way to talk about putting the cart before the horse. We have issues with the way that that is done. We'd like to see the legislation brought forward in the Assembly and have it debated, put out to Albertans for review, and then come back and be passed.

MRS. NELSON: Yeah, and then we would have frozen to death.

MS CARLSON: Well, the minister says that we could have frozen to death. Mr. Speaker, in fact if the government had had the foresight to see what was coming, which pretty well all of industry and most Albertans did, they would have anticipated the issues and I think been able to bring forward legislation in a timely fashion. We certainly think that something needed to be done, no doubt, but this wasn't something that happened overnight. We all saw it coming, so it's too bad that it happened in the way it did.

We'll be supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker. It's sort of silly not to when the money is already spent, but we have some points that we feel are important to be made. I'm happy to have the opportunity to make them when we're speaking to the principle of bringing in legislation that is really shielding legislation and really is minor, of a technical nature.

We think that the \$300 rebate under the Alberta energy tax refund program is helpful to Alberta consumers as a onetime measure, Mr. Speaker. It still was a crisis-based reaction by the government to the impact of higher energy prices. Not rocket science to figure out where prices were going and not rocket science to be able to figure out what their participation was in this. So it's too bad they decided to close the barn door after the horse had left.

In fact, it's one step, but we want to know what the next steps are, Mr. Speaker. Albertans really need a realistic plan to shield them from the sustained impact of energy prices over the medium term. This was clearly designed to shield the government's mismanagement of energy deregulation we think, not necessarily to shield

Albertans from the impact of higher energy prices, and we've had some of those discussions and debates in Bill 1. Certainly they've been followed up through question period, the media has had ahold of the issue, and lots of people have had lots to say about it. It's nice to know that the government did react fast enough to do some damage control. That's a good step, but they shouldn't be in a position where when they have the information available to them, damage control is where we go. They should have had some process in place for sustained shielding, which didn't happen.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We saw this government, Mr. Speaker, attempting to introduce a long-term plan for providing Albertans with relief from the high natural gas prices with the introduction of Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, but this bill really was a blank cheque bill. It had no details, certainly lacks substance, and leaves every major decision regarding the government's plan for price protection to regulation.

So we're really no further ahead now than we were when the government first introduced its energy rebates. We still don't see any sustainable plans to shield the impact of energy prices, and we're still in the dark in terms of what this government's plans are. We're hoping that we see that. Maybe one of the reasons why the government wants out of session so quickly this particular spring is so they'll have an opportunity, over what remains of the spring and over the summer, to talk to Albertans and figure out where they're going and what kind of sustained shielding we can see in the future, because once again it isn't rocket science to figure out that prices aren't coming down, Mr. Speaker. They're going to be staying up there very high in the medium term and certainly higher than what we saw in the past in the long term, so I think it's important that the government talk about how we can be industry leaders in providing low-cost energy sources to Albertans and to worldwide consumers, hopefully, in the long run.

5:10

I think there are lots of options that we could be taking a look at, lots of developments happening on the research and technology side. Certainly there are options available in terms of solar power, wind power. I'm not sure that energy cells are going to be that productive in the long run, but work is being done. One good idea leads to another, and I'm sure that we have some excellent solutions to this problem on the near horizon. We need to see government supporting them in a substantive way. When they underwrite energy costs like they have with this kind of a bill, they put up barriers to supporting other alternatives and they put up barriers to existing energy companies finding innovative new solutions and better ways to deliver the product at lower costs.

So we're looking forward to seeing where the province is going to go in terms of support on those kinds of issues, and certainly we hope that there's going to be some good news coming up in the future. Certainly there may be some outcomes out of the Future Summit, that we're going to see in the fall. We'll be able to discuss those, I'm hoping, when we get into the fall sitting and talk about the kind of direction that this government is going in.

But before that, it would be helpful to industry to have some information on what kind of support they can see from this government on alternate sources. Also, for consumers there are lots of options that are very doable in the very short term and would be quite accepted, certainly by the Official Opposition, for them to move forward on. One of those is retrofits, Mr. Speaker. We could certainly support the government in assisting individuals and

companies and organizations looking at retrofits of their existing buildings to make them more energy efficient. That isn't an alternative energy source, but it's certainly a short-term kind of measure in terms of doing two things: lowering the cost to people and business but also being more efficient in the way that we consume energy. It's much more environmentally friendly to take a look at that.

What are some of the ways that this government could take a look at in terms of supporting retrofits? There are two that are being widely talked about right now throughout the province. One of those is providing grants to people up to a certain level to provide the retrofits. I don't think that goes along very well with this government's philosophy, although the payback to the government through lower energy costs, lower consumption, and a greater spending ability by taxpayers would be significant and I think would be worth looking at. It doesn't seem to follow this particular government's philosophy, but what we could take a look at is loans to consumers for retrofits that were tax free that the government could in fact set up.

It would be a great initiative for the new Minister of Economic Development to take a look at because it would be a great stimulant to companies throughout the province who would provide the services for the retrofits. It would lower average costs to consumers so they would have more disposable income to get out there and spend, spend, spend, and it would be looked on very favourably by people who were able to access this. It provides a real incentive for lower income Albertans or middle-income Albertans to take a look at something that they may think is not possible right now in terms of costs. Evaluations for average retrofits for a bare, basic kind of system are running somewhere around \$1,500. More significant ones average around \$3,000, \$4,500, up to \$15,000, so out of the realm of possibility for many families.

I would encourage the Minister of Economic Development to take a look at that as an option, something that he could bring forward to his cabinet meetings and really be seen as a leader and perhaps develop a protocol that other provinces would be willing to support. So we look forward to further information on that and hope that we can see some announcements coming forward prior to the fall session.

Now, we have some concerns, Mr. Speaker, on how this government shows a lack of respect for the legislative process when the government introduces a bill authorizing a plan which they announced over eight months ago and have already finished implementing. It's thumbing their nose at the democratic system, and it's a concern for us in terms of the process that this happened. It looks like cheque cutting to cover up some of the bungling that happened on electricity deregulation, and we have serious concerns about that. We would like those to be addressed.

Yes, I hear the murmurs from the other side. It isn't completely the government's fault, Mr. Speaker, but certainly there is an aspect of this that has to do with the lack of planning that came in with deregulation, and that responsibility falls solely on the shoulders of this government. They need to fess up, own up to their responsibility in this and tell Albertans what role they had. They had some role in this. They're certainly not responsible for global prices. I never indicated that they were, but certainly they have a responsibility to anticipate where prices are going in a global marketplace and do what they can to provide other alternatives for Albertans. In terms of the aspect of this, it's the responsibility of deregulation that falls solely on their shoulders, and they need to be tagged with this particular issue.

So now let's talk about these refunds themselves. They said that the first refund would be provided in November of 2000, would not

be applied to existing debts. Well, we know there have been all kinds of problems with the streamlining of that. In fact, people aren't getting their money. We're hearing that in the constituencies. We know that government private members have had those issues. They've been brought up here in question period. So not exactly a smooth process. That's what happens when you plan on the run: problems are encountered. So that's an issue.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are some people who still didn't get their cheques. I've got a couple of young people in my constituency who filed their returns prior to November of 2000 and haven't received the first or the second cheque. So some issues still around that. Perhaps if they don't come by the end of this month, I'll be taking it up with the minister's office to find out what the problems are, because they should have got them I think by this time.

Also a timing problem with the way the cheques came, Mr. Speaker. If they're to shield average costs on a monthly basis, when you get two lump sum cheques – and the second one, particularly, after most of the costs have been incurred – I think there's an issue with that. Not for, I don't think, middle-income earners, who have the flexibility within their budgets to absorb those costs, but certainly for lower income people. We heard untold kinds of problems with people having to make serious choices about how they spent their money and not being able to meet the basic needs in some cases or having to delay the payment of other bills and having to pay penalties. So that's a concern.

We see, I think, in the information we have that the average residential consumer was entitled to a nearly \$500 rebate in the past year to shield them from the impact of higher gasoline and natural gas prices, but the Alberta energy tax refund proposes to return just \$300 on average for Alberta taxpayers. That \$300 rebate represents

just 61 percent of the money that Albertans are rightfully owed in 2000 because of the impact of higher home-heating fuel costs and gasoline prices.

5:20

That's the general outline of the concerns that we had with this bill. We want to put them on the record. Having said that, I believe I'll be supporting this bill, at least in second reading, and we'll see if we get any negative feedback from taxpayers when we get to committee. But it seems to me that while people have reservations, they're quite happy to hold their nose and put their hand out for the cheque, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a second time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Given the good progress that we've made since 4:30, I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion proposed by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 15, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/15

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. Again we keep the usual rules: only one person standing at a time and speaking. For this evening we're back to the agreement between House leaders that was explained some time ago; that is, a 10-minute, a 60-minute, and a five-minute at the end.

head: Main Estimates 2001-2002

Executive Council

THE CHAIRMAN: For this evening we'll begin with the hon. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Chairman, hon. members, thank you. I am pleased to appear before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council to discuss the 2001-2004 business plan and of course the current budget.

There are two main programs in Executive Council. One of course is the office of the Premier and general administration, which provides support to cabinet and the deputy minister's office as well as the office of the Lieutenant Governor and the protocol office, and the Public Affairs Bureau, which is responsible for providing two-way communications with Albertans about government programs and various government services.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to begin my remarks this evening by making some general remarks about the Executive Council business plan. One of the key responsibilities of Executive Council is to co-ordinate the government's overall goals and strategies and to ensure that all ministries are working together toward the achievement of those goals. As always, the path set out for government to follow is strongly rooted in the needs and priorities of Albertans. The government's 2001-2004 business plan recognizes that fact, stating that the province's success has been based on the strong values Albertans hold. The job of government is to ensure that those values continue to be reflected in its programs and in its services. Mr. Chairman, Executive Council will ensure that the values behind Alberta's success, values such as independence, innovation, people, and fiscal responsibility, are all reflected in the work government does on behalf of all Albertans.

Ensuring effective communications between Albertans and the government has always been an important part of the process. With that in mind, Mr. Chairman, I'd like now to turn to a brief overview of the 2001-2004 business plan goals and strategies of the Public Affairs Bureau. The Public Affairs Bureau's business plan identifies four main goals.

- Goal 1. Increase communications with Albertans in the areas they identify as top priorities . . .
- Goal 2. Make government information more accessible to Albertans . . .
- Goal 3. Improve the efficiency and coordination of communications across government . . .
- Goal 4. Deliver products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customers' needs . . .

One business plan strategy that will have an important impact on the achievement of those goals is the plan to increase the public's awareness and use of Alberta Connects information resources. Alberta Connects is a program that gives Albertans the opportunity to find out about major government programs and initiatives. It

allows them to ask questions and provide feedback through a provincewide toll-free phone line and e-mail site on the government home page. I should point out that efforts to make Albertans more aware of Alberta Connects are already showing marked success.

For example, good progress has been made in incorporating Alberta Connects contact points into the various communications activities and initiatives that take place across government. In fact, Mr. Chairman – and you'll find this interesting – the toll-free line logged more than 160,000 calls in the 2000-2001 fiscal year. Not all of them were complimentary calls; nonetheless, we received 160,000 calls. The total for the previous fiscal year was some 18,000, so that's a remarkable increase.

We're also seeing an increase in the number of Albertans using the Alberta Connects e-mail site on the Internet. By the way, it's a brand-new site. It's been updated to provide even easier access to Albertans who wish to seek information on the various government departments, with the total number of questions and comments received over the year increasing to approximately 10,000 on the Net. That's up from some 5,000 last year: double. Efforts will certainly continue over the coming year to build Alberta Connects into communications programs in order to ensure that Albertans are aware of Alberta Connects as a convenient and effective way to access government information and to ensure that indeed their opinions and their views and their thoughts are heard.

Another key initiative for the bureau this year is the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project. This is a project that has been in the works for a number of years, and I'm sure that those members of the committee who are also members of the legal community will agree with me when I say that the project is a welcome one. Under the current business plan it's projected that the *Revised Statutes* should be completed and on the market by the end of this year.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to conclude my remarks to the committee by giving a brief overview of the projected spending for Executive Council under the 2001-2004 business plan. Projections show nominal increases in the Executive Council budget to accommodate a number of items.

The first item is the transfer of the Alberta order of excellence program from Community Development to Executive Council. Executive Council is both pleased and honoured to assume responsibility for a program that strives to recognize Albertans who have made a difference to their province and to their fellow Albertans. I ask the committee members to note that the structure and process associated with the awards will continue as in the past, with the Alberta Order of Excellence Council overseeing nominations and the hon. Lieutenant Governor serving as chancellor for the awards.

A modest increase has also been budgeted to accommodate increased demands on the protocol office surrounding the World Championships in Athletics, coming to Edmonton this August. Indeed, having had some experience in this area with the 1988 Olympic Winter Games in Calgary, I know that the function of protocol is indeed a very significant one. The Worlds are an exceptional opportunity for the province to be a focus via a projected worldwide television audience of as many as 4 billion people, who will experience the championships through the 2,500 international media and the estimated 3,000 athletes and officials expected to attend, not to mention the thousands and thousands of spectators. The increase in protocol spending will ensure that the proper arrangements are made, particularly as it relates to the attendance of various senior international officials and dignitaries.

I would also like to explain the increase in the budget of the office of the Lieutenant Governor. This increase is to accommodate Her Honour's increased activities and presence throughout the province. Mr. Chairman, we very seldom get an opportunity to talk about our

Lieutenant Governor, but I can tell you without hesitation that Albertans are very, very pleased indeed that Her Honour has made such efforts to meet people in all corners of this province. Believe me; she brings distinction to herself and her office wherever she goes.

8:10

Another budget item of note is the \$1 million in spending for the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project. I mentioned that project earlier. This is an item that has been discussed by the committee in the review of previous business plans. As a matter of fact, I think it goes back about two years. As I have mentioned during previous reviews, revenues from the sale of the product through the Queen's Printer bookstore are expected to more than cover expenditures.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my introductory remarks on Executive Council's business plan for 2001-2004. I'd be pleased now to listen to the questions that the opposition parties might have.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to review Executive Council this evening as part of the budget review process and certainly would like to thank the Premier for taking time out of his busy schedule to be here and make himself available not only to hear what we have to say but to answer the questions. In addition to that, I'd like to thank the staff for being here. I know you guys do a good job. He gets a lot more media coverage than we do, so obviously you're doing what you're supposed to be doing.

We do have a few comments and concerns about this particular department that I would like to review, and initially I'll start, I think, with the business plan as it's outlined in the 2001-2004 goals and strategies for Executive Council.

Just before I get there, I'd like to echo the comments the Premier made about the Lieutenant Governor. No doubt she's a real asset to this province, and we support the extended budget that she has. Certainly she's making a huge effort to be visible, to promote Alberta, to promote all corners of this province, and we support the direction she has taken the office in and certainly think there is a role for people in this province to understand the significance and the history behind the protocol of that particular office and the functions that it carries out at a variety of levels. So I'd like to thank the Premier for the attention that area is being given, and the additional dollars that are being spent there I think are dollars that are very well spent from a variety of perspectives.

First of all, I'd like to talk about some of the opening comments that the Premier made. The 160,000 calls as compared to the prior year's 18,000 calls gives rise to a few comments, I think, Mr. Chairman. One of the comments that I did make was that we see in the introductory comments in the business plan the office of the Premier, general administration. The statement is that they "will continue to provide responsive support to the Premier, while maintaining open communication between the Office and Albertans." It's been brought to our attention not once but many times that people will often call through to the Premier's office and cannot get through. Part of that explanation is in the volume of calls that the Premier has talked about here, the huge increase. I would expect that the office is making some sort of move towards being able to handle that increased volume of calls. So we would like to know what's happening there.

In good times and in bad it's very important that the office be open and accessible to people. When they get put on hold or when

they can't get through at all, people become very frustrated. Those calls trickle down certainly to the constituency offices and for sure to the Official Opposition. While we're happy to call the Premier to account when we think he isn't doing his job, certainly being responsive in terms of just answering the phone is of fundamental importance. We hope to hear what kinds of changes are being made to the system so that the additional volume of calls can be answered.

Then the question comes up: why would there be such a significant increase? You know, that's hugely different in terms of number of calls, so we believe that that primarily would have been Bill 11 calls, people that were not very satisfied. I know a lot of those calls were in areas to do with environment. I think in terms of being open and accountable, it would be excellent if the Premier could provide a yearly tally in terms of when the calls came and what specific areas they related to. It would be good to hear the kind of feedback that the Premier is getting, those for and against. I think that's valuable information not only for the Premier and his office but for all backbenchers, and I include opposition members in that, Mr. Chairman.

So I would like him to entertain the thought that we could get some feedback on what those calls are, both in terms of volume per month and issue related and for and against on specific issues. If we could get information like that, I think that information could be shared with Albertans and made public. There are lots of different avenues to pursue that would be valuable feedback not only for legislators but Albertans in general and would help towards maintaining the open communication that the Premier talks about in his opening comments. So if he could address that for me, I would certainly appreciate it.

When we talk about the core businesses, it's important, we think, that the government put their best foot forward, no doubt, and that they supply professionals, co-ordinated efforts, writing services, editing services, and purchasing of communications support services, including advertising, printing, and graphic design. All of that is quite important in terms of a co-ordinated effort and an overall image that the government is trying to portray.

But the flip side of that is Orwellian control, Mr. Chairman. The communications department, the Public Affairs Bureau, now controls so much of what the ministries do that it begins to become a concern, an area where we start to believe through what we see and what we hear in terms of feedback from people that there is very little ability for our ministries to operate with any kind of arm's-length ability, that things, issues, and ideas have to be vetted through the Public Affairs Bureau. The concern, then, is that that control creeps even beyond ministries into areas that would be normally at arm's length. We saw an example of that this week in question period, when the law courts office called the Justice department for permission and a communications officer is the person who called back, a communications officer who works for the department, all in a very short time period.

Those are concerns in terms of the kinds of tentacles that the Public Affairs Bureau now has throughout the ministries and perhaps reaching even beyond those ministries. So if the Premier could either in his closing comments or in writing at some point in the future talk about that for us and give us some feedback in terms of: where's the dividing line? Where's the autonomy for the ministries? How do they feed into the overarching umbrella coverage that the Public Affairs Bureau gives, and how do they make those calls? It seems to me that we don't want a government that is run through the Public Affairs Bureau. I don't think that that's in the best interests of Albertans, and it seems that's the appearance, that the optics are that that's where that's going. I'd be quite happy to have clarification on that. I'm grounded in fact, Mr. Chairman, but perception is

a great deal of politics, and certainly that perception is out there, not just within our caucus but in other areas. So if we could get some feedback on that. That was dealing with core business 1, to “help government ministries communicate with Albertans.”

8:20

Now I'd like to talk for a moment about number 2, to “provide Albertans with two-way access to government.” The RITE telephone system is a great system to give Albertans toll-free access to government. Fairly extensive coverage in terms of advertising the fact that that's available. That's good. It still seems like there are a lot of Albertans who aren't aware of that service, so I'm hoping that what you're doing in that area in terms of letting people know how to use this system, how to access it and so on, is going to be ongoing in nature and perhaps given a little more focus.

Managing “the two-way flow of information through the Alberta Government Internet Home Page and Alberta Connects” is great. Nice to see that there's twice the amount of feedback through e-mail as there was in the year prior. Certainly not the increase that there was in phone calls, so that tells me that there are still a lot of Albertans who aren't connected or who don't feel comfortable using that system. I think that's important to keep in mind as decisions are made in other areas, like Supernet. In terms of access and training I think we've got a long way to go in this province. Supernet gets it to the doorway, but the question that we have heard throughout, Mr. Chairman, has been: who gets it over the doorway?

“Manage the province-wide distribution of news releases and provide technical support for major government news conferences and announcements.” Excellent. No doubt. I have a problem when that also includes promoting business interests, which I believe is what we saw happen this week, as an example, with the Minister of Environment in terms of what's happening with additional coal-fired generation here in the city. [interjection] Don't be complaining to me about that. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of what could be deemed to be interference by the government department in promoting business interests. [interjections] Open and accountable when the minister and his staff provide support to businesses?

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance, Mr. Chairman.

MS CARLSON: Stand up on a point of order if you don't like it.

In fact, if you take a look at . . . [interjection] Well, stand up on a point of order if you don't like it.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, it's not necessary to engage others in lively debate who are not responsible for these estimates.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The point is on . . . Excuse me. I'm going to have to take my chair. I'm losing my voice. I'll be back.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am quite anxious to participate in the debate or the exchange this evening on the estimates of public affairs. Again, I would like to join my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie in thanking the Premier for being present in the Assembly. We all realize that the Premier has a very, very busy schedule.

Now, I am always interested in the activities of the Public Affairs Bureau. Certainly, for whatever reason, I feel that as an opposition member I should be entitled to the same services from the Public Affairs Bureau that they provide to the Premier's office and to all different members of Executive Council.

Mr. Chairman, I'm very, very I guess the word would be jealous of the professionals that members of Executive Council have at their fingertips. In fact, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and I were discussing this afternoon after question period the luxury of having a detailed communications plan. The hon. member was describing to me the researcher and himself sitting down at 8 o'clock in the morning and getting a press release out by 10 o'clock in the forenoon. We were assuming that with the communications staff that the Premier would have at his fingertips, there would be perhaps a three- or four-day window to get together with key messages and discussion points and talking points. The luxury of this – well, I felt jealous of this staff that the Premier and other members of Executive Council would have at their fingertips. [interjection] Yes, but the province is also a democracy.

Computers. In fact, at one point we were having difficulty with amendments to some legislation. Whenever we would propose it to legal counsel, the letters and the words wouldn't come together on the computer. The computer wouldn't print them out. Now, the public service . . . [interjections] How old are these computers? We had one word, “legal,” and the “al” at the end of it would not join the rest of it. Now, I don't know whether that's reflective of the whole province, Mr. Chairman, and I don't want to go there. But we had “leg al.” We worked and we worked and we worked on this. So this is some of the equipment we're working with. There are two researchers to an office. Things are different, but we will manage.

You know, when you look at this Public Affairs Bureau, the work they do, it is amazing just what can be accomplished. We think of public relations. Many people stop me on the street in Edmonton-Gold Bar, and they say to me – Mr. Chairman, with all due respect to the Premier, they don't call the Premier the Premier in Safeway. They call him Ralph. They say: what's he like? And I say it's like the television newscasts. The projection, the communication, the image that's communicated is warm and it's fuzzy. And they say: is it really like that? And I say: the strong part of this government is public relations. Everyone is talking me about natural gas prices; they're talking to me about electricity prices. It's strong on public relations and not so strong on consumer relations. This is the discussion in Safeway.

You think of the importance of public relations, particularly in a government. I saw it for myself firsthand, up-close, pretty well on a daily basis. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry and I would go down, and the communications that were displayed by the Premier and staff during the Bill 11 debate is an example. And I'm going to get to this a little later. The resources that were available and the resources that were available to the Friends of Medicare out on the steps – the difference was amazing.

My first question to the Premier this evening would be this: is the entire budget of the Public Affairs Bureau dedicated exclusively, or do other departments chip in? Do they chip in with staff, or are they movable from one department of the government to the other depending upon what issues they may want to work on? Are members of the Public Affairs Bureau full-time equivalents of the government, or do they get contract positions? “Are they contractors or are they government employees?” is the synopsis of that question.

What steps will be taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during the three-year planning period to better respond to Albertans' request for information about health care, education, infrastructure, and fiscal priorities? Again to the Premier: what steps will the Public Affairs Bureau be taking over the next three years to further develop the navigation and design elements of the Alberta government Internet home page to give Albertans improved information access and feedback? Now, I hope the public is going to have a better record of having access to information to the government than I, because I'm

really getting disappointed with the FOIP requests that I have initiated and the information that I'm receiving back. I've often thought of FOIPing the Public Affairs Bureau, and I think it's going to be one of my projects over the summer.

8:30

MS CARLSON: How much is it going to cost, and who's going to pay?

MR. MacDONALD: I hope it doesn't cost what it's cost me for Alberta Human Resources and Employment; there was a \$54,000 figure there. Alberta Environment relating to the Husky truck stop in Hinton: thousands of dollars there. The bid-rigging scandal: that's in Alberta Environment as well. That's in the thousands upon thousands upon thousands of dollars.

This information is vital. It's in the public interest, because with this softwood lumber dispute that's going on between us and the Americans now, I would certainly hope that we were not through lax enforcement of our timber disbursements giving some sort of economic advantage to Canadian timber harvesters that the Americans would like to know. But this is getting further into the forest and away from the Public Affairs Bureau. I think we should get back to the Public Affairs Bureau.

Will the Premier elaborate on the Public Affairs goal of making "government information more accessible to Albertans," to all Albertans, including this member of the Official Opposition? Will the Premier provide additional information on the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau to "improve the efficiency and coordination of communications across government." Now, this is getting back to what I talked about earlier. The Premier can correct me if I'm wrong, but this vision I have is that the Public Affairs Bureau is the nerve centre of the entire government of the province of Alberta. It's like they're always taking the pulse of Albertans. Again, I'm disappointed that they don't share that information with the opposition.

What types of training programs are used to train staff as consultants? Perhaps the Premier will share that information with members of the opposition. What criteria are used by the administration working in conjunction with branch managers to adjust resources to ensure that the communication staffing levels meet the requirements of client departments? How many employment opportunities are expected to be filled in this fiscal year in the Public Affairs Bureau? As I said before, issues of consumer relations, issues of confidence in our health care system, confidence in our public education system: as confidence changes – and I'm sure that's being measured at least on a monthly basis by the bureau – there's probably need for more employees as issues come about.

What actions are now being taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during this fiscal year to increase satisfaction levels in the areas of supervisor feedback and leadership recognition and workload levels? Are the members of the Public Affairs Bureau members of a professional association? Are they salaried? [interjection] I can't imagine that they're members of the AUPE. I don't think so. If they're working overtime, perhaps they have an interest in joining the AUPE. That would be an interesting organization drive.

What type of management and leadership training programs are being established to help managers better meet the needs of their staff? What is the staff turnover rate in the Public Affairs Bureau? I've met a couple of people from that department.

MS CARLSON: Are they on contract or staff?

MR. MacDONALD: I asked the question earlier if they're on contract or whether they're staff.

Again to the Premier: what steps are being taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during 2001-2002 to improve satisfaction with training programs such as technology training? Has a professional certification program for public affairs officers been established, and if so, what are the criteria? What are the strategies behind the development of a human resource plan for the bureau including a plan and initiatives to improve staff training and recognition?

Now communications, which we so admire. Communications services, reference line 2.0.2.

MS CARLSON: Just lend them to us for six months, and let's see what we can do.

MR. MacDONALD: We could have a coup.

What strategies has the Public Affairs Bureau developed to support government communications surrounding the 2005 Alberta centennial celebrations? Earlier in the Premier's opening remarks, Mr. Chairman, there was a discussion around the track and field event which is to occur later on this summer in Edmonton. Again, for the Alberta centennial celebrations, what role will the Public Affairs Bureau play in that?

What strategies have been developed by the Public Affairs Bureau to work with the PAO, the personnel administration office, to build recognition of the Alberta public service as an employer? That would be a strategy that hopefully can be developed. I think that the Alberta public service is going to be actively recruiting personnel to join the public service. There has been a perception in the past: oh, it's the bureaucracy. The easiest for anyone, whether it's consumers or whether it's media personalities or whether it's any frustrated citizen, is to express their frustrations through the public service.

We need a stable public service. We need to attract young people into the public service who are entering the workforce for the first time. One of the main attractions is the stability that they can have perhaps for 30 years and get a pension and retire. But we've seen in the last eight years that confidence in a public service job or taking your profession and applying yourself within the Alberta public service is no longer what it used to be. To restore confidence in that would be a big job, and I would encourage the Premier to have a development of this nature with the Public Affairs Bureau.

Now, what is the process used by areas of the Public Affairs Bureau to develop business plans to ensure that the organization is contributing to the goals of government and client departments? One of those issues that I could think of that would be relevant to that process, again, would be the Department of Energy. We have this ongoing concern about electricity deregulation in this province. It's a problem. We were discussing last night in Energy estimates the problems that have occurred in Montana, our neighbour to the south, which deregulated its electricity generation and distribution system a year before this province introduced Bill 27, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act. Nothing but problems: high costs, shortage of supply, industry shutting down.

How will the Public Affairs Bureau deal with the business plans of the Department of Energy? Is the Department of Energy just simply going to change the business plan? How will this deregulation initiative be communicated to Albertans? They're going to have their work cut out for them on that.

8:40

Again to the Premier: what criteria are used by the Public Affairs Bureau to determine which agency is contracted for media buying for client departments? Another question is: how much money would be spent?

Now, again to the Premier: why does public satisfaction with

government information continue to be consistently below the target of 75 percent, and how is the 75 percent target for 2001-02 going to be achieved? This is on page 148 of the business plan.

What role is communications services playing in assisting the Ministry of Health and Wellness in communicating the government's policy statement and legislation on the delivery of surgical services to Albertans? Now, that's again, I believe, a public relations discussion. How much of the \$5 million budget under communications in 2001-2002 has been allotted to communicate the government's policy statement and legislation on the delivery of surgical services to Albertans?

Again, how much of last year's preliminary of a little over \$5 million was used to communicate the government's position on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act? That was a public relations exercise that I don't think, Mr. Chairman, any province in this country has seen anything like. There was an amazing list of issues to be dealt with in Bill 11, and I'm sure there was daily contact between the Public Affairs Bureau and the Ministry of Health and Wellness. There just had to be. Here again we're back to the warm and fuzzy: the Health Care Protection Act. This is what the people in the Capilano Safeway notice about the enormous communications skill the current Premier displays, but they're not convinced with the Health Care Protection Act. I don't know how much of this \$5 million budget was used, but when we think . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hear the minister of health wants me to continue, as he interrupted me before.

MR. MAR: You can always defer to your hon. colleague, you know.

MS CARLSON: Yeah, I know. I have a sore throat, and sometimes it gives out on me. Although I'm sure government members wish that was a permanent condition at least during the duration of budget debate, it isn't.

MR. MAR: I wish you good health; I assure you.

MS CARLSON: Yes. Thank you.

I want to continue with the comments that I had started to make before there was some degree of heckling involved, and that was on core business 2, "provide Albertans with two-way access to government," and specifically "manage the province-wide distribution of news releases and provide technical support for major government news conferences and announcements." I was suggesting, Mr. Chairman, that that should also include providing key support on industry initiatives, because we've seen that happen increasingly, it seems to me although I may just be more aware of it, over the last couple of years.

Like the public meeting that just happened the other night. We see a great deal of stage managing, I would suggest, of some of these public meetings. The question for the Premier on this issue is . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: I didn't see you there, Debby.

MS CARLSON: I wasn't at that particular meeting, but I have been at many that both of you have been involved in where there has been a significant . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Address the chair.

MS CARLSON: I am addressing the chair.

Mr. Chairman, there has been a significant involvement . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Ignore the comments from the side, if you could. Just stay with it.

MS CARLSON: It's very tough, Mr. Chairman. I'm trying to, but they're very persistent.

THE CHAIRMAN: But they're going to be good from now on.

MS CARLSON: I hope they will or else perhaps engage in debate at the end of the hour. That would also be welcome.

So the question I have for the Premier on this issue is: is the role of the Public Affairs Bureau and the government as an enabler in these areas? It could well be seen as the role in promoting economic development or other interests. Is its primary function as an enabler in these situations? Or is the government's role more global in perspective, a monitoring role, more of a grassroots collecting of information and looking over the global kind of public good? If the role of government is the public good in general, then I don't think there's a role for them to be an enabler in terms of organizing public meetings. I think that's in direct conflict. So I would like to hear the Premier's comments. [interjection] Mr. Chairman, I'm being provoked, and I'm going to be responding here in a second.

The question is: should they be enabling in those kinds of instances, or is there a more global role for government? This becomes increasingly an issue as we deal with competing interests in the province and conflicts in a variety of areas. I would like the Premier to address that if he could, because I think it is an important distinction that needs to be made. The government has a long history of supporting business initiatives. [interjections] They do in terms of organizing public meetings, and we have all been there where there have been staff from the Public Affairs Bureau directly involved in the organization of the meetings. My question is: is their role there as an enabler, or is there a more global function? I think that's a legitimate question. I think it's fair for Albertans to have the answer to that question.

I will move on to goal 4 now, where the Premier talks in the business plan about delivering "products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customers' needs." My concern with that statement is the term "customers." I don't think all Albertans are customers, Mr. Chairman, in terms of the context of their relationship with their government. I think they are citizens first and foremost and that citizens deserve to have their basic needs met and sometimes exceeded.

So I would like the Premier to tell us on what basis he uses the term "customers" over "citizens." I think that's a legitimate question to be asking here. There are many people in this province who would not view themselves as customers, and we are not always all customers in all areas in terms of what we expect or need from delivery. Semantics are important when you're talking about these kinds of issues, and I think that definitions are also very important. The kinds of filters that the government uses to make decisions that decide the future of Albertans are very important. These are issues that need to be discussed and need to be debated, and we'd be happy to see private members from the government side participate in this debate if they wish to do so on the record. It would be a nice role for that particular member to participate in for a change. If we could have that kind of feedback, it would be appreciated, Mr. Chairman.

The Premier talked about the review that they're doing of the *Statutes of Alberta*, and I'd like to thank him for that. I think it's excellent that that review is being undertaken. He doesn't know

perhaps that we use those statutes quite often, and to have them revised and updated would definitely be an asset to the kind of work that we do.

I'd like to turn the page and go to page 148 now and talk about some of the public satisfaction surveys that the government does. The first one that I'm looking at in particular is "public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas." We see them starting in the 1999-2000 years and projecting targets into the future. We'd like some information on how those surveys are conducted: who they talk to, how the evaluations are done, whether the feedback on the public surveys is anonymous or whether there are some potential tiebacks to the people. We know that that can skew the information that comes forward and what the targets are. The criteria used to develop them, who they're asking, and what are the questions: that kind of data I think is relevant and is able to help us evaluate the effectiveness of the satisfaction.

8:50

Is it global or is it specific in nature? What are the kinds of questions that are being asked there? I think to just put the survey down there and say that 66 percent of the public satisfaction with government communications in priority areas is what was recorded in the '99-2000 year is not very useful if we don't have any of this background information in terms of how the numbers were established or where they came from or who participated in the survey. Those questions relate to all of the surveys that we have in here. So if we could get that kind of background information on each of the five surveys that are listed in these business plans, that would be helpful to us.

I think that's the extent of the first round of questions that I have. I will leave the floor open now for the rest of my colleagues. I've got a secondary round of questions that I hopefully will have a chance to get to a little later in the evening, but for now that's the extent of my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, I want to thank the Premier for being here this evening and giving us some insights into the ministry business plans for Executive Council. The goals that are established here on page 169 of the government and lottery funds are certainly lofty goals and certainly are goals that will serve Albertans well if we can achieve them.

In moving along as time is of the essence here and looking at key performance measures, again, I see that the key performance measures here are given in percentages with certainly no explanation as to how these were arrived at, how many people were surveyed, how these results were gathered, and you know, certainly no explanation when we see, for example, that we increased the public satisfaction with government information. From 1999 to 2000 it went from 66 percent to 75 percent as a target. How are we going to be determining whether that target was reached? Again, we'd like some hard-core statistics here, not just straight percentages.

I look down as well to "public satisfaction with RITE and Queen's Printer bookstores," again very, very worthwhile services provided to Albertans, particularly when we look at the RITE line. In my role for the last four years of being the critic for WCB, I saw certainly how well this line is used by Albertans all across this province and how frequently it was used by injured workers to phone and express their dissatisfaction with the progress that was being made in the settlement of their claims. It is certainly a service that I know is well appreciated, and without it many of these people wouldn't have any voice at all in voicing their dissatisfaction.

In moving along here, I notice as well that the operating estimate for program 1, the office of the Premier/general administration is increasing by \$250,000 over last year's budget. In looking at line 1.0.1 of the lottery fund estimates, I have a few specific questions here for the Premier. He can certainly respond to these in writing if he wishes.

My first question then: will the Premier provide the projections for gross operating expenses for line 1.0.1, office of the Premier/general administration for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004?

My next question to the Premier: what is the level of full-time equivalents projected for the office of the Premier/general administration for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004?

Again to the Premier: will he provide a breakdown of the gross operating expenses of \$4.663 million in 2001-2002 for the office of the Premier as well as for general administration? In other words, how much of the \$4.663 million is for the office of the Premier? How much of this amount is being allocated to general administration?

Would the Premier please explain why there is a 4.9 percent, or \$218,000, increase in the office of the Premier and general administration budget for 2001-2002 over last year's preliminary actual? Will the Premier also indicate how many of the full-time equivalents under this vote are employed by the office of the Premier and general administration respectively? Will the Premier provide a breakdown of the \$4.663 million in gross expenses for 2000-2001 for the office of the Premier and for general administration by object; in other words, a breakdown in salaries, travel expenses, wages, advertising, telephone and communications, contract services including professional, technical, and labour services, data-processing services, hosting, and other purchased services?

Will the Premier indicate what the gross expense was for the Premier's southern office in 2000-2001 and the projected gross expense for the Premier's southern office in 2001-2002 and also for the years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004?

Also, will the Premier indicate what objectives, strategies, and performance measures and benchmarks have been established for 2001-2002 for the office of the Premier and general administration? What types of weekly and monthly reports are prepared by the office of the Premier and general administration in tracking the views of Albertans on such issues as public health care, the government's private clinics and private hospitals policy, public education, and tax reform for those Albertans who correspond with the office of the Premier?

Also, along the same lines, could the Premier indicate what steps are taken by his office to follow up on or respond to concerns expressed by Albertans through these monthly and weekly reports? How much of the \$4.663 million in gross expenses of the office of the Premier and general administration in 2001-2002 will be allocated to policy co-ordination and business planning?

Now, as well, I thought the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie covered the office of the Lieutenant Governor very well. I would certainly echo her praises for the great work that the Lieutenant Governor does in featuring this most important office in the province and what a fabulous job she does in getting out and meeting Albertans of all ages. Certainly she is an Albertan that we all can be very, very proud of.

Now, as well, Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had many questions on the Public Affairs Bureau, and certainly we wish to continue with a few questions that could be covered here with this particular section. What we see here for an operating estimate for the year 2001-2002 is 10 and a quarter million dollars. Now, this is 10 and a quarter million dollars to make the government look good. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold

Bar actually said, he's quite jealous that opposition members certainly don't have access to this ministry as well. Perhaps it's a good thing. We might not be on the opposition side if we had access to that department.

9:00

We do have a few questions here, though, that we would like to ask. My first question would be under the area of public affairs. Why is the budget for public affairs increasing by 12.6 percent, or \$1.144 million, over last year's budget?

Can the Premier provide a more detailed breakdown of the dedicated revenue for 2000-2001? Also, can the Premier explain why dedicated revenue is estimated to increase by 47 percent, or \$800,000, over last year? If the Premier could also give us a breakdown of the \$10.25 million budget for the Public Affairs Bureau in 2001-2002 by object: salaries and wages, travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, data processing services, hosting, and contracts to outside vendors.

Will the Premier provide a breakdown of the gross operating expenses of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram for 2002-2003, which I see is \$9.946 million, and for 2003-2004, which is pegged at \$10.158 million?

Also, if the Premier could give us a breakdown of the 130 full-time equivalents of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram. These would be under the headings of administrative services, communications services, communications technologies, Queen's Printer bookstores, publishing services, and the RITE telephone system. Also, what are the projected number of full-time equivalents in the Public Affairs Bureau in 2002-2003 and in 2003-2004?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also asked a number of questions on communications services, and I have just a few more here if the Premier could please answer those for me. What initiatives are planned by communications services in 2001-2002 to improve speech writing services and improve the government's internal communication with employees? How much of the communications services budget in 2001-2002 is allocated to subscriptions to Angus Reid, Environics, and other polling and marketing research? How much of the communications services budget is allocated to focus group research on such issues as health care and education?

As well, if we are going to be having a summit this fall, which I understand could be announced any day – and this is about how Albertans would deal with the surplus once the debt is paid off – how many dollars would be allocated from this department to promote or spread the news of this particular summit? As well, how much of the communications services budget for 2001-2002 will be allocated to advertising services?

Just a few more questions here before I cede the floor to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. How much of the advertising budget is allocated to Highwood Communications, Calder Bateman, Hill & Knowlton, and Palmer Jarvis? What types of projects are worked on by such firms during the course of the fiscal year? Will they be working on communication of government policy statements and legislation on surgical services to Albertans?

Finally, my last set of questions to the Premier. Will the Premier provide a status report on the specialized communications training programs for departmental staff in regional offices? Which departments are involved in receiving training for communications, planning, writing and editing print and graphic design, and advertising?

Mr. Chairman, with those questions, I will be ceding the floor here to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I thank you very much for this opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time I don't know what else I can say about any more questions I have for the Premier regarding the Public Affairs Bureau. The only question I can think of currently is: does the Governor of Florida have a public affairs bureau? I'm just curious, Mr. Chairman.

Now, I have some questions for the Premier regarding communications technologies, line 2.0.3. What further initiatives will be undertaken by communications technologies in 2001-2002 to upgrade the Alberta government Internet home page to increase the relevance and timeliness of posted information? Earlier in my remarks I heard an hon. member instruct me to just visit the home page and I could get all the information on the government that I wished. Unfortunately, that's not true. The Internet home page would certainly provide me and the research staff access to government information if it were made available there. Certainly I find the EUB site worthwhile.

What strategies are being developed to provide information technology support to Executive Council as part of the shared services initiative? What cost savings have been achieved through the shared information technology services initiative between Executive Council and central bureau offices? I can see that the hon. Premier and members of his Executive Council are already diligently trying to provide me with information regarding the Internet.

Now the Queen's Printer bookstore. Long before I came to this Assembly, I used to drive up to Kingsway Avenue to seek statutes that were relevant to my workplace. I believe sometimes this information should be provided for free to those who walk in, but I know that's not going to be the way. There are other people who say that all library memberships should be free as well, but this is not the time nor place. What initiatives are planned by the Queen's Printer bookstore in 2001-2002 to improve its inventory system, including printing-on-demand service for clients and computerized operations, for the Calgary and Edmonton bookstores? What strategies have been developed in 2001-02 to expand electronic commerce – QP online, QP CD-ROM, QP source professional Internet – to allow the Queen's Printer bookstore customers to purchase products through the Internet? What additional partnerships with the private sector are planned by the Queen's Printer with respect to the production of new value-added publications? Why is the dedicated revenue of the Queen's Printer bookstores increasing by \$800,000, or 47 percent?

9:10

The RITE telephone system: in the time I have left I have a few questions about that. What steps are being taken to develop a more user-friendly RITE directory? What are the total number of calls to the RITE system in 2000-2001, and what are the projections for 2001-2002? Are action requests put through from the RITE system to the Public Affairs Bureau to the various departments of government, including the Premier's Office? What initiates the AR, the action request, in the provincial government of Alberta?

I'm very disappointed that our time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call on the hon. Premier for five minutes.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I'd like to thank members of the opposition for their questions, at least for the reasonable questions that were well posed and can be reasonably answered by the officials who are sitting in the gallery this evening.

I would like to take this time to comment on some of the comments, the questions such as: can you provide a detailed breakdown

of the 160,000 telephone calls? I mean, does the opposition think that, you know, we have nothing else to do? We have a government to run. I was flattered, absolutely flattered to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar say he is jealous. Well, he should be jealous. He is outnumbered by more than 10 to 1, and he should be jealous because the people of this province elected us to govern. As they make all of these demands on government for information, I have to remind the opposition time and time again: the opposition is not the government. These people over here and all these people here are the government.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also alluded to Bill 11, and he alluded to the Public Affairs Bureau conducting a public relations campaign. Well, we had to conduct a public relations campaign. We had to. You know, this is old history. I would remind the opposition that the sky hasn't fallen, that really nothing has changed other than that rules and regulations have been put around the contracting out by RHAs to surgical facilities that do minor procedures, rules and regulations that never existed before. I would remind the Official Opposition that the Health Care Protection Act has as its preamble an absolute commitment to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act, something they opposed.

But we had to conduct a public relations campaign, Mr. Chairman, because of the vicious misinformation. The way that bill was being misrepresented was reprehensible. They talk about how much the government spent. You know, they tabled a flimsy amount of money that in no way, shape, or form reflects the amount of money that was spent by the unions, the Friends of Medicare, and everyone else to spread the misinformation about that bill. I would estimate it was in the millions of dollars. So, yes, we had to mount a public relations campaign to get the truth out, because it certainly wasn't coming out of their mouths; I'll tell you that for sure.

But I would like to thank the hon. members for their participation in this evening's meeting to review the 2001 to 2004 business plan for Executive Council, because that's what it's all about. Open discussions such as this are an important part of the government's commitment to remaining open and accountable to Albertans. Indeed, that is reflected in the business plan of the Public Affairs Bureau. One of the cornerstones of this government has been listening to Albertans and reflecting their needs and priorities and the decisions, actions, and priorities of the government. Mr. Chairman, precisely, that is why we are the government and they are not.

Having said that, all feedback is valuable when it's offered up in the best interests of the province and the people we are here to serve. So I would like to thank all members of the committee for the time and thought they put into the process and for their feedback, and we will provide the answers to the reasonably posed questions.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Executive Council, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$15,169,000
Nonbudgetary Disbursements	\$1,000,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Government Services

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd call on the hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and committee members. Good evening. It's my pleasure to present the business plan and the estimates for Alberta Government Services.

I'd like to introduce some folks in the members' gallery tonight that have helped me put this together. I'm taking them in order, they are our deputy minister, Roger Jackson; Susan Bohachuk, our chief financial officer; Laurie Beveridge, our assistant deputy minister in charge of registries; and Dave Keto, my executive assistant in my office here.

I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with an overview of our business and financial plans and upcoming initiatives. Following my overview I will be pleased to accept questions and respond in written form.

Alberta Government Service's vision quite simply is to provide Albertans with "secure access to government information and services and a fair marketplace." While this past year has been filled with many successes, we are now looking ahead to new opportunities to further improving the services we provide to Albertans.

Our five core businesses are described on page 227 of the estimates, and briefly they include supporting a fair and effective marketplace, which has a twofold mandate. A fair and effective marketplace ensures a thriving entrepreneurial economy, but it also protects consumers from unethical operators. By continuing to promote and enforce Alberta's award winning Fair Trading Act, we will educate and protect consumers and provide a level playing field for all businesses. Key legislation for the upcoming year includes the Internet sales contract regulation and various other regulations pertaining to real estate, debtors' assistance, travel clubs, cemeteries, and personal property.

Consumer complaints will continue to be investigated. Last year over 1,600 investigations were completed, which recovered more than \$700,000 for Albertans. Twenty-one percent of our budget, or \$10.8 million, is dedicated to this core business.

Our second core business is to provide secure, timely, and high-quality licensing, registration, and information services.

MRS. NELSON: And you do a great job.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you.

These services account for 12 million transactions provided each year through Alberta registries. These services range from registering vehicles, registering land and land-related documents, and licensing businesses to securing loans. A further 6 million transactions support government programs such as maintenance enforcement, farm fuel, and transportation and safety, and over 14 million transactions are conducted for local municipalities and law enforcement agencies, amounting to a total of over 32 million transactions per year. These transactions take up 68 percent of our resources, or \$34 million. In return, these services generate revenues in excess of \$245 million for the general revenue fund.

9:20

The third core business is leading the cross-government, one-window initiative to provide Albertans with easier, faster, and more direct access to government services in a secure environment. In effect, Albertans will be able to access whatever services they

require through whatever method they choose, that being telephone, Internet, fax, mail, or in person. Long-term resources have not been identified for this initiative, so as an interim measure we have deployed funds from other programs. These funds represent 4 percent, or \$1.9 million, of our budget.

The fourth core business is to co-ordinate Alberta's regulatory review process and administer the governmentwide records management function and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. These services comprise about 7 percent, or \$3.5 million, of our budget.

Finally, the fifth core business is to deliver economical and efficient support services to all government departments through the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. ACSC provides transactional services in the areas of finance, human resources, information technology, and administration. Its net budget is \$129.6 million, and all costs are recovered by charge-backs to the 24 ministries. As a result, the net expenditure is actually zero, as shown on page 226.

In order to remain effective and efficient, we continued to look for better ways to operate. Our performance measures, shown on page 230, are one tool we use to monitor how well we're doing. Many of the measures relate to client satisfaction, where we have set most of our targets at 85 percent. We far exceeded this target, for example, when it came to Alberta's satisfaction level with registry services. About 94 percent of Albertans who used our registry services indicated that they were satisfied, and maintaining this kind of customer service record has become a significant priority.

Other measures set targets for reducing telemarketing fraud, for competitive fees, and for timely service provisions. In the year 2000 Alberta saw a 47 percent reduction in telemarketing fraud. Fees for licensing and registration transactions continued to be far below the national average. As well, we will be collecting baseline data and setting targets for some new performance measures so that we can continue to provide quality services and maintain our high performance levels.

Changes in expenditures. I would like to give an overview of changes to our budget. You will note on page 219 of the estimates that our operating budget has significantly increased from last year. We account for this increase largely through nearly \$130 million that was designated for ACSC, which was recently added to the ministry. These funds will be fully recovered through charges back to various ministries, so for the overall government of Alberta budget these expenditures and charge-backs will net out. Our ministry's share of these charge-backs is \$9.1 million, as shown on page 222, shared services. To avoid double counting, this amount is excluded from ACSC's budget, outlined on page 226.

Returning to page 222, the ministry support services budget increased overall because many of the components listed here are consolidated for efficiency rather than including separate program budgets. This explains, for example, the reduced budget for licensing, registry, and consumer services programs on page 223. Also within this program it is noted that the amortization declined as a result of reduced capital expenditures. As well, resources were reallocated to help provide a base level of funding for the one-window program, and we will continue to seek out partnerships from across government to supplement our contribution.

Finally, turning to page 225, the government support services budget shows a decrease due to a small net reduction in staffing in the information management and privacy area.

I'd like to shift gears for just a moment to discuss the revenue side of our budget, as reflected on page 232. Of the \$385 million, \$129.6 million represents the recovery of ACSC's costs from ministries as dedicated revenue. The remaining \$225 million relates to various fees and licences, the bulk of which are for motor vehicle services.

It is in this area that we anticipate most of our revenue increase as the demand for commercial and passenger vehicle registration grows. Forecasting a revenue increase seems unlikely given the estimate of \$54 million in savings passed out to Albertans following the registry fee reductions of last year. However, the revenue growth is due to the higher transaction volumes that are linked to a thriving economy, where the demand for services is increasing.

I mentioned earlier that the revenue generated from our service goes into general revenues. As a result, the funds needed to offset the additional costs of keeping up with higher service volumes must instead come out of our base budget. One example of this is that we have reduced our capital funds and diverted them towards operational requirements. Our capital requirements, however, have not been diminished.

One significant challenge for our ministry is the need to redevelop our Legacy systems, which were built in the 1980s and will soon require new technology to continue to deliver these services. Again, we will seek out partnerships from across government to help address this need.

I want to thank everyone for the few moments I had to introduce our budget, and I will now turn the floor over to you, Mr. Chairman, to accept any questions that may come from the committee.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Minister of Government Services for his overview of his department.

Now, this is again, Mr. Chairman, a major department of the government. It's so important because it has the capability to investigate and enforce consumer protection legislation, use enforcement mechanisms to deter dishonest business practices, license and bond regulated businesses, encourage more consumer awareness and self-reliance, and provide regulatory framework.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

Now, recently there have been some higher profile cases in the media of a minister that is willing to enforce, Mr. Chairman, the statutes that are available to protect consumers, and I would encourage the minister to continue this trend and rigorously enforce the legislation. For the longest time, in my view, in this province consumer protection has taken a backseat to public relations, contrary to what other people may think. I look no further than the issue of pine shakes.

I at this time would encourage the minister to look into these complaints that I'm getting, all of them, of course, from Calgary. I don't know why they're phoning Edmonton-Gold Bar, but they are. These are prospective home buyers who are asking me, "What's with these pine shakes?" I would encourage the minister to check this out. They're being told, "Oh, pine shakes don't rot in Calgary, and if they do rot, you only have to replace one or two on the entire roof and the problem is solved." I don't think that is accurate, and I'm astonished at this sort of behaviour.

Now, maybe these phone calls are not coming through on the RITE line, because they're not indicating what phone calls they're getting on the RITE line and what issues are being discussed. Perhaps they don't have the technology to do that. If they had the technology to do that, these phone calls could go right from the RITE line to the Ministry of Government Services.

Now, certainly, to say the least, that is dishonest, because everyone in this Assembly knows that the pine shake rots, and it rots in seven or eight years. This year may be a little drier year. There

may not be as much rain, and the fungus won't grow as quickly, but it will. We need to encourage more consumer awareness. That is one of the most important aspects of this department, and again I would encourage the minister to use all members of his department to ensure that consumers are protected.

9:30

We look at the whole issue of gas, and I'm certainly hoping, Mr. Chairman, that somewhere in this budget is money to protect natural gas consumers. This whole idea of exit fees: I want the minister to show strong leadership and indicate to all consumers of gas, particularly ATCO customers, that if there are to be any exit fees at all to be charged to a natural gas consumer by a natural gas provider, then the amount of those exit fees if you decide to leave, if you were to have the choice and you were to go to another gas provider – I believe very strongly that in the minister's department regulations exist so that the minister can tell the gas companies to inform the consumers right on the bill that there will be a \$40 or a \$60 or an \$80 exit fee or, if you're an industrial consumer and it's going to be based on the volume of gas used, what that exit fee will be. If we're going to be encouraging consumer choice in this province, the consumers have to have all the information before they make the choice.

As I understand this whole idea of exit fees, ATCO Gas has been given permission by the EUB to charge an exit fee. I think it should be right on the bill so that consumers can have that information so they can make a choice. Again, had consumers had that information in the past, there's not a consumer in this province, if they had known that the pine shake was not thoroughly tested before it was authorized and promoted by the current government, who would have brought that product. No one in the community of Leduc, no one in the community of Cochrane, no one in the community of Edson, no one would have bought that.

Now, we need to have a strong and competitive marketplace in Alberta with confident consumers, but we also need, as I said, adequate information. The legislation under the command of the hon. minister is there, and it is up to the department and the minister to utilize it. There's still much that could be done to inform and protect Alberta consumers and businesses, but I think the hon. minister is off to, as they say in southern Alberta, a real good start.

There's also the issue of plain language, and all legislation should be written and presented in a way that is understandable to all Albertans.

Should all legislation and regulations be tabled and published for public and stakeholder comment to ensure that Albertans are aware of changes prior to passage and enactment into law? [interjection] Now, I just heard the comment from another hon. member that they do that at the federal level. This used to be the occasion in this Assembly, and I'm going back to 1974. When a Progressive Conservative government instituted the Natural Gas Rebates Act, I read in *Hansard*, Mr. Chairman, that incredibly all the regulations concerning the Natural Gas Rebates Act were circulated to the members of the Assembly – and there was quite a sizable opposition of Social Credit members at that time – so they could have a look at them before they were presented, and I thought: wow.

Earlier this evening we heard the Premier in his remarks concerning Executive Council describe old history. Well, Mr. Chairman, that wasn't even old history, but it's the history of this province. I would encourage regulations to be routinely published for public and stakeholder comment, not set aside in the Legislature Library downstairs.

Now, consumer legislation should be created that includes government services and not just private goods and services.

I'd also like at this time to talk a little bit about registries. Registries, of course, include registrations of birth, marriage, and death, land title transfers, registration of corporations, vehicles, liens, et cetera. The former Member for Calgary-Buffalo was very, very concerned about the protection of personal information, and I certainly hope that the department is vigilant in the protection of personal information, that in these private/government partnerships there isn't a breakdown in the system. There were, as I understand it, over 12 million transactions in the year 2000. There are 220 registry outlets across the province, and for that information to fall into the wrong hands would be very, very disappointing. Applying and enforcing the FOIP Act to private registries and their employees is of great concern to the minister, I'm sure.

There's a Regulatory Review Secretariat, and it's like everything else in this government. Allegedly it's at arm's length, and it's an initiative to reduce, simplify, and eliminate regulations. Well, which regulations are going to be eliminated? Are they safety regulations?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I need to interrupt you for a moment.

Hon. minister, no exhibits.

Carry on.

MR. MacDONALD: Now, regulations for safety. We've already seen in the last eight years this concept of voluntary compliance with occupational health and safety, and we saw injury rates and accident rates and WCB files opened at a far greater rate than the expansion of the workforce. At that time, it was fashionable for legislators to think that any regulation or legislation was bad, that it was just an impediment to business.

Now, we look at the environmental regulations and we look at consumer protection and safety. I can look at the three of those, Mr. Chairman, and the immediate event that comes to mind is Hub Oil. After all these regulations were downsized or removed, we saw with the issue of public safety, we saw with the issue of environmental protection for the southeast area of Calgary that no attention was paid. Consumer protection would apply in this case as well, because the oil that was left over at Hub Oil was being sold to asphalt plants throughout the province. Once again, I'm glad I wasn't a worker at one of those asphalt plants, and sometimes as I drive up and down the road, I wonder just exactly what is in that asphalt. I would encourage all hon. members of the Assembly to have a close look at the explosion at Hub Oil and the events that led up to it. We need strong regulations, and we need them enforced. We don't need to eliminate them.

We look at the first Bush administration in America, and the Vice-President at the time, Mr. Quayle, chaired a commission that behind closed doors eliminated thousands of regulations that businesses didn't like, including workplace safety, environmental protection, consumer protection. A favourite ideological initiative of conservatives, no matter where you go, is to unshackle business, and revived by the current occupant in the White House, I hope this is not the model that Alberta is going to follow, because there have to be regulations and legislation and the will to enforce them.

9:40

I'm pleased that the current Minister of Human Resources and Employment recognizes this. The minister through his actions recognizes that voluntary compliance does not work and has made initiatives to hire more inspectors. Also, the call centre that was initiated hopefully is going to reduce accidents, and people are going to be able to understand the regulations better.

I don't know how the call centre works there, Mr. Chairman, but

I would be interested to know if the minister is considering expanding the call centre for consumer protection and also to inform consumers of the Fair Trading Act and their rights under the Fair Trading Act. Is there going to be a better or an increased public awareness or information system regarding the Fair Trading Act? I was present in this Assembly when the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake introduced that legislation, and I can say at this time that I'm pleased that there's at least an attempt to enforce it.

Now, FOIP. The FOIP Act supposedly enhances access to information, and the Premier earlier in remarks regarding Executive Council talked about openness and accountability. But I have to repeat this again, Mr. Chairman: isn't it true that the opposition is entitled to that information as well? Now, there have been month-long delays, in some cases over a calendar year, and high fees have been charged to myself and other members in the Alberta Liberal caucus, over \$50,000 in three cases. Fifty thousand dollars: gosh, I could have fund-raisers at a fishing lodge and I couldn't come up with that kind of money.

On a pine shake timber permit request, \$624,000 for that alone, and that's still being discussed as we speak. These fees are excessive, and in my view they're just a veiled attempt to keep public information from members of the opposition. I'm sorry; this has gone on and on. I can remember when I was first elected the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo explaining to me in a seminar about FOIP and FOIPing. I must say that the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo was absolutely right, and I'm glad I attended his seminar that day.

Regardless of whether it's information on the Canada/Alberta labour market agreement, whether it's concerning timber permits, whether it's concerning pine shakes – concerning the pine shakes, a week after the election I received 175 documents that mysteriously appeared. They're very interesting documents because they indicate that in 1994 there was – now, there are several cabinet ministers present here tonight and they would know better than I, but whenever there's a ministerial review of an issue, I think that's of high-level status. Now, I don't know whether they have one- through to five-level status ministerial reviews, but there was a ministerial review conducted on the certification of pine shakes. This information didn't come to light until a week after the election. The minister of labour at that time – it used to be the old department of labour – was none other than Mr. Stockwell Day, who has gone onto bigger and better things in the nation's capital.

Now, the one-window initiative under Ministry Challenges on page 177 is described as this, Mr. Chairman: "This implementation represents a significant time and resource commitment from both the government and private sectors." What is the expected expenditure in this in the next five years on the part of government and of the private sector?

Further on in the challenges there's a discussion on technology, information, and application architectures that must be defined and aligned across departments. Again to the minister: what is the expected expenditure in this in the next five years by the department to develop and set standards in order to implement this?

As I understand it, here also there are "significant pressures on our computer systems that support the land titles, motor vehicles, and personal property registries. Re-investment is necessary." Well, I'd encourage the minister to come to our caucus and see the computers that our researchers are working with if they think there are significant pressures in their systems. But, again, Mr. Chairman, how much reinvestment is required and over what time frame?

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Now, there is a discussion on the need to explore creative ways to secure resources, Mr. Chairman. To the minister: what is meant by that, and what creative ways are being considered or are already planned?

The Alberta shared . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'll maybe get some time later. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to participate in the second set of estimates this evening, this time talking about Government Services.

Government Services, Mr. Chairman, to my way of thinking, is really the ministry of user fees. When we take a look at the funding that comes in here and where this ministry goes in terms of being a new ministry and the responsibilities that it's assuming, it's really user fees that we're addressing. That is a regressive tax, in our opinion, and something that we don't support.

This is a ministry that in essence we don't support in terms of that kind of a mandate. We supported the manner in which various organizations and areas that this ministry deals with were handled before by government. I thought that they were quite efficient. I'm a strong believer that there are some things that government does better than private industry. I think that in many instances what's covered now in this ministry falls within that purview.

I just want to spend a moment or two adding some comments to those of my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar when he talked about some of the issues that are before this ministry. He talked about legislation and regulations that should be tabled and published for public and stakeholder comment to ensure that Albertans are aware of changes prior to passage and enactment in law. This isn't a new idea, Mr. Chairman. I'd certainly like the minister's feedback in this particular area. No doubt this province used to have some version of that in the past. Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about that.

Certainly the federal government still participates in what is really a very open and accountable and I believe progressive system when it comes to regulations. What they do is come forward with their regulations and immediately consult key stakeholder groups. Those would be people directly affected by the regulations, any groups who may be asking for their regulations to be enacted, and all parties in Parliament, Mr. Chairman. I think that that is a progressive way of getting some of the very best regulations in place.

I think that nobody wants more rules, but there are some times when rules need to be updated or conditions change and rules need to be implemented or put forward, particularly in a world where we're seeing such vast changes in technology and the way we deal with global markets. We need to make sure that we're on top of this particular issue. This is a government that doesn't support regulations of any kind. A former minister here, Steve West, was a strong supporter of zero regulations and reducing all. Well, that's fine. We don't want more paperwork where it's unnecessary, but sometimes it is necessary. So how do we get to the process where we ensure that regulations being brought are timely and necessary and useful?

9:50

The process that the federal government has with its different layers of review prior to those regulations being published for additional review is good. Sending out to stakeholders, involving all parties in the review is good. Then what happens is the regulations are gazetted, and there's a further opportunity for people to take a look at them and review them. In fact, who are the first keen observers of those gazetted regulations? Well, Mr. Chairman, wouldn't you know? For the most part it's those companies who

have registered with the lobby registrations legislation at the federal level, because they are in many cases the eyes and ears of key industry players and stakeholders throughout this country.

So two really good ideas that the federal government has, not that were enacted by a Liberal federal government but have been in place for a long time, supported by the Progressive Conservative government, too, in the past. This is a good process, Mr. Chairman, and we would encourage this minister, who I know is open to good ideas, to review and to report back to the Assembly in terms of progress that we could make in this area.

What we're looking for here is a process that is most accountable to the people. I think that the process they have at the federal level works very well. We would like to see some form of that enacted here and see that as an excellent challenge for this minister to undertake throughout his mandate, to bring forward a system that is going to, I think, better provide for the needs of Albertans and be more inclusive in its implementation.

The next step from that is something that I'm not asking the minister to undertake, because I know it certainly isn't at this stage on the horizon of issues that his party wants to deal with. That would be all-party committees for decision-making. I want to put it on the floor for discussion. I would be interested in hearing what his feedback is on it, but I think it's perhaps a discussion better held with the Government House Leader. It's something we're going to continue to push for during this particular Legislature, the 25th Legislature. I think that it is a progressive way for governments to govern, and it is certainly something that could be tested here in terms of the regulations. Anyway, if the minister would consider that, that would be helpful.

Just one comment on registries before I move on to the Auditor General's report, and that is that I'm beginning to be lobbied by registry owners to increase the fees, Mr. Chairman. I would like some feedback from the minister on that. Is that on the table for discussion? Is his ministry being lobbied in this same regard? What would the process be for a review of that fee structure? When can we expect some sort of public reference to this? I think that that would be good information.

We see from the budget documents that costs have significantly increased in this area. I missed the minister's opening comments on the reasons for that. I don't know if it's because of additional volume or what. So if he could just review that for me again, I would appreciate it. It seemed significant when I took a look at the numbers when I was reviewing this particular ministry. Yes, the gross expenses were 12 and a half million dollars up from \$10.8 million, it looks like. So some information on that. It's an increase but not all that significant. Is it just volume that we're talking about there? If you could give me that information on registry services, 2.0.2, that would be helpful.

Okay. Now I want to spend a little bit of time talking about the Auditor General's report with regard to Government Services. The Auditor General did have some comments, and we would like to know what the minister has done in terms of addressing those. He talked about the responsibilities for this ministry and talked about the core businesses being registries and consumer affairs and the financial results, but he had reservations on the financial statements.

I'm always concerned when the Auditor General has reservations on financial statements, because it generally means that there are some significant shortcomings in what's happening here. Even in a new ministry I just don't see that there's room for that kind of an issue. With the kind of support services available to ministries through the executive committee and the public services bureau and the wealth of expertise available in the ministries themselves and the flexibility of the support workers, it's hard to believe that the

Auditor General could come up with reservations, but in fact that is what happened here.

The one that he talks about here is that additional work is needed on the key performance measures in terms of applying specific audit procedures. So if the minister could tell us what has happened in that regard and what his reservations were there, how they have specifically been addressed. Will we see a similar reference to that in the next year's report?

The Auditor General goes on to talk about the joint audit of Alberta Registries and that most of the recommendations have been implemented. That's excellent. Happy to see that. But five of the recommendations haven't been implemented; more time was needed for them. Those were in terms of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, applying that "to the motor vehicles registry services or adopting fair information practices equivalent to the FOIP Act." So could we get an update on what's happening there?

The training of private registry agents. Certainly I think that that is an issue, Mr. Chairman. This is the kind of business that's easy for people to enter into with little training. I know there have been investigations in terms of the operations of some registries, and some of that may be in terms of training, and some of it may be in terms of manipulation of information or the potential for manipulation of information. I would like to know how the minister handles complaints and inquiries particularly with regards to registries. Who does the investigations? How are they initiated? At what point would they be turned over to police services? What would the process be for that? How many of those kinds of inquiries were there in the past year? Did any of those result in actual charges being laid? So if we could have some information on that, it would be helpful.

One of the other recommendations was the "elimination of deficiencies in control procedures at the service bureau responsible for the operation of the motor vehicles and driver licensing systems." So what were the deficiencies and have they been addressed?

Another one was that assurance was "needed annually on the control procedures of the service bureau responsible for the registries' computer systems." You know, this questions also the confidentiality of the information recorded in those computer systems. So if we could get some feedback on that.

Then monitoring of the private registry agents. That probably ties into my questions with regard to how those are policed, but if he could comment on that I would appreciate it.

10:00

Another discussion the AG had was in terms of the current status of recommendations not implemented. They've developed new standards within the ministry, which is good, to identify who can have access to motor vehicle information and a plan for implementing these standards. Very critical information, Mr. Chairman, in terms of protection of privacy. So we'll be happy to hear the update. We'd like to monitor the status of those in addition to what the Auditor General is doing. Those are my comments with regard to that.

I will go back to questions on the business plans. Maybe I'll pick up where my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar left off. He was about to talk about the ACSC when his time expired. I think he was going to talk about this in terms of it being a new initiative. It's been discussed as being a new initiative that maybe requires several years to reach its full potential. Could we find out? Could we get some feedback from the minister on why it will take several years? The question I think is: how carefully has the government looked at the real costs and real benefits of this new outsourcing scheme? Are

we seeing some benefits for it, or is it going to be one of those trial balloons floated that ultimately pops? I think of what happened in tourism as an experiment that didn't work very well, perhaps because of lack of planning or perhaps because of the lack of ability of the people to have the skills to implement it. I'm hoping this won't be the case here.

If we could have some information on what we can see as the real cost savings and benefits of this program. Is it really going to save taxpayers' dollars in the long run? What are the reasons, the justifications the department has for that expectation? Does it expect to reach the target of a 10 percent saving in this budget year and 20 percent in the next? We'd need, I think, more than just token assurances on that. If you have some data to back that information up that you could share with us, that would be excellent.

I'd like to go to the goals and key results for core businesses on page 180 if we can. The key result is the "elimination of unnecessary regulations." Can you define "unnecessary" for us and give us some examples of the regulations that have been eliminated? Who exactly is making those decisions? That would be a question I wouldn't mind being answered.

Another one is that "Alberta businesses are prepared for private sector privacy legislation." Were you referencing federal legislation here? If not, is there similar legislation being prepared in Alberta? That would be an interesting question. If it is, when will it be introduced? If it's not, then if we could find out why it isn't, that would be excellent. So those were under regulatory review on page 180 in *The Future* book.

Then going to the ACSC, the key result is innovative and economical delivery of all those services defined there. Has the outsourcing commenced? How many positions will be eliminated of the 1,100 employees that have been brought together across the ministries? How many more employees do we expect to be transferred to the ACSC this year? Is there a projection for each of the next five years? That's a question I have there.

Now, when we take a look at the issues management process, there seem to be so many discrepancies between departmental needs and the services provided. This process has to be set up. So my question is: why is the customer buy-in and approval only sought and not obtained prior to implementation? I think that's a legitimate question that needs to be asked here in view of what's been happening. It seems very strange to have the discrepancies between service needs and provision. There should be a better correlation or tie-in with those.

Can we have the information on how many cases proceed where there is a discrepancy, given that only exceptional cases where special or significant discrepancies occur go to the CEO's review or to the department minister's counsel? This looks like it could be a huge mess. If we could have some clarification on that, that would be very helpful. How many exceptional cases have there been? Maybe the question also is: how many cases in total? I think that's a fair question. There just seems to be all kinds of problems with the ACSC, and it doesn't look like it's been proceeding smoothly at all. So we really need to know how this is an improvement over the previous practice.

What measures have been taken to address the negative impact on public service morale? Certainly there's got to be some concern about uncertainty and fear of job loss as a result of this process, and there's got to be, I would expect, general dissatisfaction within the department in terms of what's going on there. Nobody wants to go to work and be involved in messes and in an inability to provide needs for people, to have discrepancies pointed out all the time. I think that could be a huge problem. What's the turnover been with this staff that are supporting this particular initiative? It would seem to me that there are probably some concerns around there.

Those are my questions at this stage. Perhaps I'll have an opportunity to ask a few more. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to make a few comments and a few observations here and ask the minister a few questions and, at the same time, thank him and his department for being here tonight to field our questions on Government Services.

Certainly in looking over the business plan and line items here, it is quite an interesting ministry, certainly one that is changing rapidly and one that does have some great pressures placed on the ministry and on the minister himself in order to stay current in an ever changing and rapidly changing world. I had the opportunity here a few years ago to listen to a futurist by the name of Frank Ogden. Frank was analyzing some of the technological equipment that was available at that time, and he ran a statistic by us that still amazes me today. I would think that perhaps this statistic is no longer current, that things are changing even quicker. He was telling us at that time – and this was only maybe five, six years ago – that any new piece of electronic equipment that arrived on the shelves of stores in Tokyo had a shelf life of 90 days because at that point something new had come on-line that was certainly more advanced and could do the job better.

This seems to be the whole idea in our technological services, whether it happens to be here at the Legislature or whether it happens to be in schools or business or wherever it is. It can be a black hole. It can eat up so much of our budgets, and again, by the time we get it implemented, there's already something better out there. So there has to be some prudent planning. There has to be, certainly, an eye to the future as to what is going to serve our short-term needs in the next three to five years and, as well, what sort of course of action we're going to take over this time to stay current and be able to serve the public and also serve business, because we know that so many of them are keeping up with this.

10:10

I was quite impressed here just the other day. My son is heading to Seattle this weekend to watch the Yankees and the Mariners, and he ended up with a couple of extra tickets, so he put them on eBay and certainly sold them to people down in Seattle in a matter of hours. That's something we would have never dreamed of even five years ago. So certainly there are significant challenges when we look at this area of technology.

Now, then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar certainly did cover this area fairly well on technology, so what I would like to do is keep moving on here. I see that the Alberta Corporate Service Centre is a new initiative that may require several years to reach its full potential. I see here that there are clearly defined and understood service level agreements. These will be the key to success in working through the change process. Again, if the minister could please outline some of the reasons why it will take several years to work through the change process. Are these strictly financial matters? Is it the harmonizing of different levels of technology? Is it trained staff that we require to operate these systems? Just why is it that it will take several years in order to implement this?

Again, what I would also like to ask the minister is: how carefully has the government looked at the real costs and real benefits of this new outsourcing scheme? Will it save taxpayers' dollars in the long run? I think that's really the one question all Albertans would like to know. I certainly know that those people that are looking at technologies and whatever certainly don't only want to be well

served by new technologies. They also want them to be cost-effective.

Also to the minister: will the Alberta Corporate Service Centre really reach its target of a 10 percent savings in this budget year and 20 percent the next? Again, that's a very lofty goal and certainly one we sincerely hope he will reach.

Now, then, looking at goals and key results for core businesses on page 180. I'm looking at number 4, the regulatory review. The key result here is the "elimination of unnecessary regulations." Again, this brings to mind many different parts of our population. I guess the first question I would want to ask on this key result is: what is defined as an unnecessary regulation, and who is it unnecessary to? Is it unnecessary to bureaucrats? Is it unnecessary to business? Is it unnecessary to the general population? These are questions that I would like more clarification on. As well, if the minister could even provide some examples of regulations that have been eliminated because they were unnecessary.

As well, a key result under regulatory review is that "Alberta businesses are prepared for private sector privacy legislation." This refers to federal legislation. Is similar legislation being prepared in Alberta? If not, why not? If this is being prepared, when will it be introduced here in the Legislature?

Now, moving right along and looking under goals and key results for core businesses, number 5, for the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. A key result under number 5 is "innovative and economical delivery of financial, administration, human resources and information technology services that are responsive to the needs of departments." According to the Customer Reference Guide published by the ACSC, approximately 1,100 employees have been brought together from across the ministries, and here I'm referring back a few pages. Has outsourcing commenced for this particular ACSC? How many of the 1,100 positions will be eliminated when this particular service centre has been introduced? Another question I would like as well on this key result is: how many more employees will be transferred to the ACSC this year and in each of the next five years?

The issues management process on page 24 of the Customer Reference Guide is what I'm going to refer to next. Apparently, many discrepancies between departmental needs and the services provided have occurred, that this process had to be set up. Why is consumer buy-in and approval only sought and not obtained prior to implementation? How many cases proceed when there is a discrepancy given that only exceptional cases, where special, significant discrepancies occur, are escalated to the ACSC chief executive's office review or to the Deputy Ministers' Council? How many exceptional cases have there been to date? As well, it appears that the ACSC has not been proceeding smoothly at all. How is it an improvement over the previous practice? What measures have been taken to address the negative impact on public service morale of the uncertainty and fear of job loss as a result of this process?

Continuing along under strategies on page 181, I see that there is to be consultation with stakeholders "to review and amend the tenancies legislation." Who are the stakeholders of this legislation, and what is the goal and expected outcome of the review? Which legislation would be co-ordinated with other jurisdictions under the agreement on international trade? Again, I think this is critical when we start looking at international trade, particularly at our ever increasing north/south development of the trade corridor as well as with our huge increases in trading with the United States and particularly Mexico as a new player that's coming on-line.

Now, then, as well under strategies on page 181, one strategy is the "periodic inspections of regulated businesses". If the minister could please provide us with how many inspections were conducted this year. Do they have any sort of target amounts set as to how

many they would like last year? If he could also, in looking at these two, provide us with a percentage of the businesses that can be expected to be inspected this year. That's quite a mouthful, particularly at this late hour.

As well, on strategies, under the second point here, does the department have enough resources to conduct sufficient inspections to effectively protect Alberta consumers? Again this is an issue where the speed at which and the variety of ways that consumers in the province have to get products certainly is increasing and becoming more and more complex and certainly harder to track. So again a huge challenge for the ministry.

The provincial investigative strategy to focus on the most serious violations. If the minister could please tell us what violations would be defined as serious and what will they be doing with these violators when they are deemed to be caught. I'd also wonder if the department is restricting its efforts to only the most serious violations. Or does it have sufficient resources to properly protect Albertans?

10:20

Now, as well, I see that the department is developing "a framework for exemption requests from foreign controlled corporations for intensive livestock and agri-forestry operations." If the minister could please provide us with: what is the goal of this framework? Is it to facilitate an increased number of ILOs or to restrict or to set regulations? Exactly what is the framework? Certainly this here is a major issue. I know that when the Minister of Municipal Affairs was at the AAMD and C conference, this was a huge issue for all those rural people, particularly the fact that they're very, very concerned about the water quality and the air quality in this province. This was certainly before our latest scare from North Battleford.

As well, when it comes to the intensive livestock operations, certainly the various counties in the province wanted to have some control as to what was being built in their particular counties, yet they also wanted a set of guidelines that would be provincewide. Again the whole question of intensive livestock operations in this province continues to be of great interest and concern to many Albertans.

Now, on page 182 I noticed under strategies that the department is going to "analyze our costs of providing services and ensure our fees are appropriate." This certainly is another one of the pieces of legislation that we did pass in this Legislature, that fees would remain reasonable. What sorts of safeguards do Albertans have that any increase in fees is going to be equal to the cost of the service and certainly isn't going to be just another way to enhance revenue? It's certainly something we want protection for. You know, we want to say often that we are the lowest taxed province in the country, but at the same time they don't want our lower taxes augmented by a great number of user fees. So again a very, very big concern for Albertans.

Now, as well under strategies on page 182, I see that we are going "to develop legislation that will permit the creation of limited liability companies." How would this creation of the new limited liability companies differ from current limited liability corporations governed by the Business Corporations Act? Again, our whole focus here as legislators is to keep away from cumbersome legislation, from the overlapping of various acts that all do the same thing. It's quite interesting at this time, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has pointed out, that really our flagship bill this year, Bill 1, we don't have any need for because of – which act is it?

MR. MacDONALD: The Natural Gas Rebates Act.

MR. BONNER: Yes, the Natural Gas Rebates Act, that we currently have in this province. [interjection] Yes, there are many different acts that already control the distribution and rates of natural gas in this province.

So this again is not a case where we want to see more cumbersome and burdensome legislation that also crosses different ministries. Certainly I know the minister will be taking a very close look at this particular issue.

Now, on page 183, goal 3, I see under Strategies: a one-window gateway. A question here is: what is the expected cost of establishing and operating on an annual basis the program management office for the one-window gateway? Along the same lines, what is the expected model and cost of the proposed public/private partnership service delivery model? Also, what percentage of the cost will be covered by government and the private sector respectively?

With those comments, I think my time is almost up, unfortunately, and I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar also has some comments that he would like to make at this time. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: No, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar will not be making comments. That was the time for the whole hour.

We now call upon the Minister of Government Services to make his five-minute concluding remarks.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the members opposite for their interest and their questions. We'll be providing them with written responses in the very near future.

I just wanted to briefly say that this is a system where the infrastructure is handling a tremendous load. You know, the revenue for the fees and the licences, as Edmonton-Ellerslie said: how do you justify that? Increases are based on projections of a good economy rather than population growth. Particularly, motor vehicles, commercial vehicles, and passenger vehicles have increased, and that's again an increase to the economic viability of Alberta. As well, land titles: up \$3 million, which is 11 percent. That's due to the growth of our province and escalating property values.

So we're faced with some challenges. We will continue to explore any opportunities to ensure that we deliver the high quality of service that Albertans have come to rely on from Government Services, and I thank you very much for your participation this evening.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and

proposed estimates for the Department of Government Services, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$181,335,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes. Mr. Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

10:30

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

Executive Council: operating expense, \$15,169,000; nonbudgetary disbursements, \$1,000,000.

Government Services: operating expense and capital investment, \$181,335,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:31 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 16, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Though we as legislators of this great province and its people are taken from the common people and selected by You to be architects of our history, give us wisdom and understanding to do Your will in all we do. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the members of the Assembly several members of the Camrose Kodiaks junior hockey team. Obviously most members realize that last weekend they won the Canadian junior hockey championship. They're visiting the Legislature today, and just a few minutes ago they were guests of the Minister of Community Development and myself, and many of my colleagues here in the Legislature were also present, so I want to thank them for that. Many of them have left, of course, for the summer, but many of them decided to come to the Legislature to view what's going on before leaving for the summer. It's my pleasure at this time to introduce them. Of course they're sitting in the Speaker's gallery.

First of all, Erik Lodge from Red Deer, Dan Day from Consort, Tyler Bullick from Coronation, Matt Ponto from Galahad, Richard Petiot from Daysland, Mark Robinson from Okotoks, Greg Prusko from Camrose, Jason Kenyon from Coaldale, Brett Osness from Calgary, Darrell Stoddard from Red Deer, Brad Wanchulak from Edson, James Willis from Paradise Valley, Craig Perry from Elnora, Mark Masters from Leduc, Mark Szott from Camrose, Ryan Edwards from Ponoka, Scott Galenza from Camrose, and Joel Williams from Grande Prairie. Accompanying the group is the general manager and coach, Boris Rybalka, and the past president of the Camrose Sport Development Society, Lorne Broen, and my summer student constituency assistant, Anthony Leoni. I know that we will extend our usual warm welcome and along with that our congratulations as well.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I am presenting a petition on behalf of 95 Alberta residents who respectfully request that the attached petition be considered. It's all about the grizzly bear hunt in the spring and orphan grizzly cubs. They would like to suspend the hunting of female grizzlies in the spring.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I have a tabling of a letter from the Chinook's Edge school division, and I have the copies here.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to tabled five copies of the Conference Board of Canada report and news release as well as copies of two newspaper articles on the report's finding. The Conference Board reports that "Alberta's growth rate will outpace all other Canadian provinces this year," thanks to a number of positive factors including our tax cuts. The report states that Alberta is in a class of its own, with both the goods and services industries absolutely thriving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to be able to table seven copies of Making Sure It's Safe. It's a brochure on Alberta's drinking water. In light of Walkerton, North Battleford, and some other instances we feel it's necessary to put this out to the public. Every MLA will receive 100 copies of this in their offices either today or tomorrow. It answers important questions like: "Is it OK for hikers and backpackers to drink water from streams or lakes?" "Is it okay to use hot water for cooking?"

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table for the benefit of all Members of the Legislative Assembly a discussion paper entitled Imports/ Exports – Issues and Options. It's dated May 8, this year, and it is produced by the Power Pool of Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table today five copies of the program from the DARE graduation at Our Lady of Victories school last night in Edmonton. It was delightfully done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. It's the Backgrounder, an analysis done by the Alberta Teachers' Association on the provincial budget relative to education. In part it states that "the Alberta government's assertion that Alberta teachers will be the highest paid teachers in Canada does not hold up to even minimal scrutiny."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling. It is a letter from Mrs. Shirley Ramsay, the reeve of Lacombe county, addressed to the Premier, encouraging him and his colleagues to defeat – and I assume hoist is an alternative – Bill 205.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to

table five copies of a brochure produced by the Elder Advocates of Alberta entitled What is Elder Abuse?

Thank you very much.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce two good friends. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Don Hyde, a chartered accountant from Calgary and my chief financial officer during the past election. With Don is Peter Graham, a self-proclaimed fresh air inspector from Ottawa, which he says there isn't a lot of there. I would ask Don and Peter to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 35 members of St. Gabriel Cyber school in St. Albert. There are 35 in the group today: two teachers and 15 students, who are accompanied by several of their parents. The teachers are Miss Kara Zutz and Mr. Bernie Hryciw. They are seated in the gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 11 really keen and inquisitive students from the social 10 class at NorQuest College. They are seated in the members' gallery today, and they're accompanied by their instructor, Ms Elaine Nichols. I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 46 people who have made the trip up from Duchess, Alberta. There are 30 grade 6ers, accompanied by 13 parents and three teachers. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

1:40

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Sex Offender Programs

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by commending the government for undertaking to establish the sex offender registry. Such a registry not only tracks the aftermath of an offence, where there's already been a victim, but prevention must also be considered. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier also commit to increased funding to preventative programs across the province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we aren't making any commitments yet. I do appreciate, however, the suggestions of the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. We will await the report of the Solicitor General, and at that time we'll decide as a government what course of action to take. But I do appreciate the valid and constructive advice of the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also commit to supporting programs like MarCon Associates in Lethbridge, who used to provide psychological treatment services to offenders but have stopped because of lack of funding?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know what is in place right now on a provincial level and what is being done in other correctional institutions, but I will have the hon. minister respond if she has anything further to add.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. These are all things that we will be looking at and considering within the next couple of weeks. Again, I acknowledge his support of the program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also take steps to move beyond tracking offenders and empower programs in Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, and across the province who are helping to educate the public and children on the awareness and identification of potential offenders?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has hit one of the nails squarely on the head. It's important to remember that a pedophile registry is only another police tool. It doesn't guarantee the security of children nor does it replace commonsense safety precautions. Certainly, education relative to the avoidance of the tragedy that occurred in Lethbridge is an important component of the total program.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Water Quality Monitoring

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent tests on Bellshill Lake by Hardisty show that water in this lake is not fit for human or animal consumption. The total coliform count was too numerous to even count. The total dissolved solids were almost double the allowance for cattle consumption and three and a half times the limit for human consumption. This lake feeds into the Battle River. My question is to the minister of agriculture. Does your department identify and monitor agricultural point-source pollution, considering that's the easiest way that we can look at water pollution and identify those points and control it when it gets into our water supply?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we have taken, I think, a very proactive role in this by initiating a groundwater study in southern Alberta where we were concerned about the level of possible leaching into groundwater and consequently also into our streams from livestock operations.

On the issue of the testing of our lakes, I would ask that the hon. Minister of Environment fill you in because we work very closely on the testing of water bodies and the possible contamination from agricultural sites.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Safe drinking water and safe water generally is a very important topic to all Albertans, and we do constantly monitor drinking water sources. We just had meetings in my office this morning about the monitoring of a particular source and how we monitor it. We will continue to improve our monitoring and toughen our standards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment then. He talked about monitoring and dealing with the issue of drinking water sources in Alberta. These are basically open bodies of water where people do frequent. How much monitoring goes on, and what level of public knowledge and information is provided so that they can be aware of the quality of water in these kinds of bodies, which may not necessarily be drinking sources?

DR. TAYLOR: Obviously, public education is a very important issue that we're involved with. The pamphlet I tabled in the House today is one step in public education that indicates what we're doing and where we're going with this. Certainly where there are algae blooms and different things in lakes, we are prepared, as we're aware of these issues, to indicate to the public by notification of no swimming, that you shouldn't swim there, and to put on swimming bans and so on.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we need to do is get out the information on these point sources. How is the minister dealing with that kind of thing when there is actually a documented case above the human consumption safety levels? Are you advertising that? How do you get it out that these places are no longer safe for human consumption?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, certainly I'm personally not aware of the particular case he referred to, but the general procedure is to notify the public of unsafe conditions. We would take an ad in the newspaper perhaps or do some radio advertising. But it's our general practice to notify the public in appropriate ways.

MRS. McCLELLAN: I just wanted to offer a little bit of supplementary information from Agriculture's point of view on the water quality monitoring and inform the hon. member that we are currently monitoring 23 sites in the province that are influenced by agricultural practices. If he would like to have some more information on that program – it is ongoing – I'd be pleased to share it with him.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Conflict of Interest Legislation

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public trust should be an open trust. In the next two years the Conflicts of Interest Act comes up for review. My first question to the Premier: will the government commit to a full and open examination of the role of third-party expense and income funds for MLAs in its review of the Conflicts of Interest Act?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether that will be looked at relative to the Conflicts of Interest Act. Really it's a party matter. You know, members' disclosure statements that are required

by the Ethics Commissioner clearly indicate and are available for all to see. Relative to my disclosure statement it says: the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, leader's expense. Under the statement filed by the former leader of the Liberal Party, Mrs. MacBeth – she filed a disclosure statement as of April 15, 2000 – under leader's expenses it says: Alberta Liberal Party expenses. Exactly as it says in my disclosure statement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then will the government commit to ensuring that the Conflicts of Interest Act is revised to require that details be disclosed on the size of such funds?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is a private fund. It has nothing to do with government. It has absolutely nothing to do with government. We are not asking the Liberals to disclose any details of a Liberal leader's expense, if indeed one exists today. I understand the party is broke and they have no money. It could very well be that this leader does not have a leader's expense, but I can assure you that the former leader did have and disclosed so in her disclosure statement. This is a party matter. Party matters have no place in this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the government commit to ensuring that third-party funds for expenses and third-party funds for income are reported separately?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it is a requirement under the members' disclosure statement rules to disclose income from all sources. Relative to my own disclosure statement and I'm sure relative to the hon. member's disclosure statement, he is disclosing, I would hope, all income from all sources. I don't know if he's still getting an income from the University of Alberta or whether he's drawing a pension, but if he is, I would assume that he is disclosing that, as required by law. There already is a law in place to require all Members of the Legislative Assembly to disclose income from all sources. I have done so, and I assume the hon. member has done so. I hope he has anyway.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

1:50

Teachers' Salaries

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has chosen to embark on a path that's a recipe for labour strife with the province's teachers. In so doing, the government has set up an unwanted fight between teachers and school boards by forcing boards to choose between improving teachers' salaries and improving classroom conditions. My question is to the Premier. How can the government justify launching an aggressive public relations campaign which incorrectly claims that Alberta's teachers will be the highest paid in the country when in fact at least four Ontario school boards already have settlements which will see their teachers earn \$3,000 to \$4,000 more than the projected maximum in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly do want to achieve having our teachers be at least amongst the best paid in the country. Relative to where we are and where we might be going, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about the Alberta teachers being the highest paid in Canada, we are talking about a weighted average. I don't believe that it's fair to cherry-pick four boards from Toronto. Indeed, when you take the average across the country, what you soon find out is that our teachers will be the highest paid with the 6 percent.

The hon. member also made a point about us pitting the teachers against the school boards and having to choose. Mr. Speaker, for the last 60 years or 70 years or perhaps indeed 100 years that there have been school boards in existence in Alberta and that they have been receiving funding from the provincial government, those are the decisions that have been forced to be made by the school boards. They would receive a per student grant, and out of that per student grant they would have to decide: should we give money to teachers for teachers' salaries, or should we put money in the classroom? This has been there for the last 80 or 100 years. This is nothing new.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier again: what's the point of including a budget line for teachers' salaries if not to push them towards provincewide bargaining? Is that what's being intended?

MR. KLEIN: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, that is not being contemplated, at least not at this time, and I don't know if it will be in the future. It's in the budget as a line item simply because we want to give the teachers some assurance that the least they can get is 6 percent. There's also another line in the budget that clearly indicates or implies that school boards will have the flexibility to negotiate higher if they deem that that is the appropriate place for the money to go.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier: how can the government's apparent decision to impose provincewide bargaining on teachers be interpreted except as an attempt to provoke teachers into mounting a provincewide response?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the statement is not correct in any way, shape, or form. This government is not contemplating now provincewide bargaining for teachers, and I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. OBERG: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We are not looking at provincewide bargaining. Basically what we're saying is that we value teachers. During the election campaign every member of this Assembly heard a lot about class size issues. What we heard about was class size. We also wanted to ensure that our teachers were fairly compensated and got a minimum raise, and included in this budget is a minimum raise of 6 percent. Each school board has its priorities. They are entitled to negotiate with the teachers, which is why this is not provincial bargaining. They are entitled to negotiate with the teachers on the other 3 and a half percent. I value the school board's authority, I value the school board's flexibility, and I value their ability to determine what the priorities are for their particular school jurisdiction. That is what we have done in this budget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Seniors' Health Care

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people in the province

of Alberta are indeed very fortunate to have had the services and dedication of so many productive citizens over the last few decades. Our quality of life today reflects the hard work and unselfish commitment of these people, many of whom are today Alberta's seniors. My question to the Minister of Seniors: why do we appear to discriminate against some seniors by requiring them to pay Alberta health care premiums, given that all of them contributed so much to our success?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First let me explain that the seniors' benefit program was introduced in 1994. It was based on the principle that those who can pay should pay towards the costs of programs and services. The program also provides for a cash benefit for people who are in need.

With respect to the premiums specifically, any single senior with an annual income of \$23,000 or less does not pay any health care premiums. There's a partial premium up until they make some \$25,700. Above that, they pay the full premium. With respect to senior couples, Mr. Speaker, senior couples that earn \$37,100 or less do not pay any health care premium. Between \$37,000 and \$42,000 they pay a partial premium.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, some 60 percent of the seniors in this province receive some support or total support for health care premiums.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, the second question to the same minister: can the minister reveal the dollar amount that Alberta seniors contribute to health care premiums?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have the exact amount, but I believe it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$60 million plus. That money, I might point out, does not come into the Seniors ministry but goes directly into general revenue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Again to the same minister: will this government consider a program to allow seniors' health care premiums to be optional, allowing those that can afford to pay if they choose?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, we have been doing reviews of all the seniors' programs, and I do thank the member for this current suggestion. With respect to premiums, I've just had one good idea. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Inland Cement Limited

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were told in this past recent election that if they voted Conservative, they would get representation and have their voices heard. Now the Environment minister is lining up with industry and saying: trust us; burning more coal won't hurt you and your family. That doesn't sound like real representation to me. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. In the Department of Environment's 2001-2004 business plan one of the desired results is for approval services to maintain high client satisfaction. Mr. Minister, who are the clients here: corporate interests or public health?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the clients in Alberta are all Albertans, including the member of the opposition that just asked the question. It includes all Albertans. It includes companies. It includes individual citizens.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that the Inland coal conversion project will lead to higher dust and fly ash fallout, how does the minister know that public health won't be impacted if he doesn't do an EIA?

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, the assumption in the question is wrong. The project will in all likelihood, as was pointed out by some independent scientists the other night at a meeting, lead to lower dust.

2:00

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, his assumptions are incorrect. Why won't this minister call a full environmental impact study, get all of the data open and accountable so Albertans can review this particular project? What is he afraid of? Just call an EIA.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, she has a misunderstanding of what an EIA is. An EIA is not a decision-making process. An EIA is an information gathering process, and before any of it starts, we have a screening process that is an information gathering process. After the screening process we can go do an EIA or an environmental review, and an environmental review is also an information gathering process. We will use the appropriate information gathering process to get all the information we need and protect her health and all the public's health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Cottonwood Campground

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Foster Parent Association is an active and dedicated volunteer-driven group that provides special services for children in care. The activities undertaken include everything from social skill development to recreational gatherings and camping experiences. Recently, however, the AFPA was notified that their lease agreement regarding Cottonwood campground was being terminated. My questions are to the Minister of Community Development. Can the minister tell us about the agreement that is or was in place for the campground operated by the Alberta Foster Parent Association?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I can. In 1997-98 we did try to find a private facility operator for the Dickson Dam-Cottonwood PRA. Unfortunately, none were forthcoming, so that particular campground and PRA were offered to the county of Red Deer. They were unable to take up the offer, so the Alberta Foster Parent Association stepped up and said that they were looking for a summer campground to operate. We entered into a one-year lease agreement with them in 1999 on the understanding that it would be renewed on an annual basis if possible, and they were well aware of that. Subsequently it was renewed one additional year in the year 2000, and after that the agreement would lapse, within a few weeks in fact. So that's the history of the agreement itself.

MR. OUELLETTE: Can the minister tell us the specifics that resulted in the decision regarding the renewal?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, the area that we're talking about is actually what you might refer to as a potential floodplain, so part of the specifics that were included in that agreement was a cautionary note with respect to that eventuality of possible flooding in the area, which is why we review that lease agreement on an annual basis – at least we have done so in the past – to ensure that the level of the Gleniffer Lake reservoir isn't at a dangerous level. We will continue to put in that proviso. In fact, we will do it under the special permit that we've just issued them to go ahead with their awareness day weekend, which is coming up in a few days.

MR. OUELLETTE: So this situation leaves the Foster Parent Association without a site to provide a very appreciated facility. Will the minister reconsider the needs of the Alberta Foster Parent Association?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly very sensitive to the needs of a wonderful group like the Alberta Foster Parent Association, and I have spoken with the Minister of Children's Services about this matter as well. In fact, just yesterday I spoke with the president and chairman of the Alberta Foster Parent Association, and I assured them that we would not displace their program during this coming year. In fact, we're going to extend that lease for a six-month period beyond June 1 and allow them to provide these important services with special conditions that they will be soon made aware of, because we are concerned about the safety of the children in their care. It's a wonderful program, and I will also commit to the member and to the AFPA to help them find a more permanent solution for the long term.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Water Quality Monitoring

(continued)

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Environment has spent some time over the past few weeks assuring us that we have safe drinking water in this province, yet we have just heard that Bellshill Lake, which drains into the Battle River, is three and a half times over the limit for human consumption. To the Minister of Environment: how can your department not be aware of this contamination site?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just received this. Somebody from the opposition sent this to me in the House today. I commit that we will look at it and get them the information that they need. The fact that I don't personally know about this example does not mean my department is not aware of it. In fact, I will guarantee you that my department will be aware of this issue. So to suggest that we're not aware of the issue is totally inappropriate.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what assurances does the minister have for those people who live downstream on the Battle River that their water is safe to drink?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, all communities have to have a treatment facility. If it's coming through a treatment facility, they have legislation that they have to meet. They have monitoring they have to meet. We do random inspections. As well, they must have a certified operator running their treatment facility. If they are getting it from wells or dugouts – in my area we get water from dugouts – then we make the availability to individuals like that to

have their water tested to see if it's good or to see what kind of condition their water is in.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: does this level of contamination mean that your department's monitoring and reporting policies are not working?

DR. TAYLOR: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. It means obviously either he's misinformed or intentionally misleading, one or the other. For accepted Canadian drinking water standards we are one of two provinces that have more stringent water treatment standards than the Canadian drinking water standards. We have in Alberta the safest water in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Waterton Lakes National Park Development

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans value great economic development, and also we value the enjoyment of our natural heritage. A constituent of the Calgary-Fort riding, also the vice-chair of the Alberta Conservation Association, has voiced to me his concern about the development of the eastern border of Waterton Lakes national park. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Could the minister explain to us the process of approval for that particular development as it relates to the provincial and municipal authorities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House that in fact Cardston county followed the process as per the land use bylaw in accordance with the Municipal Government Act, and in fact they've had public hearings pertaining to this issue. This is truly and solely a municipal responsibility which they are following in accordance with the Municipal Government Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My supplemental question, the only one, is to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for parks and recreation. Could the minister update us briefly on the policy to ensure the protection of our natural parklands?

THE SPEAKER: Very briefly, hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, very briefly, Mr. Speaker, this program really had its genesis back in the late '80s and early '90s, when our current Premier was Minister of Environment. A study was undertaken then to begin the process to designate certain parts of the province as special protected areas. I believe 1.3 million hectares or thereabouts have already been designated, including 76 over the last few years, and we've got about five areas left to go that we're still looking at. The program is well under way, and I think the residents of this province will be well pleased when those results flow in sometime I hope later this year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Western Canada Protocol on Education

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The western Canada

protocol is raising serious concerns. Upper grade content is being moved to lower grades, rendering resource collections gathered by schools over many years and at great cost obsolete. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Will there be additional funds for schools to provide resources for topics that are being moved from one grade to another?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

2:10

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In talking to the school boards, they have raised this issue, and consistently what the school boards have asked me to do is not to envelope funds for specific areas. So, yes, there is extra money. As the hon. member knows, we increased the budget for school boards this year by \$250 million, and there is money available.

The hon. member has actually touched upon a very good question, and that good question is the whole idea of curriculum and how we change curriculum. I will let the hon. member know that we're exploring what is called the evergreening of curriculum, where we will almost consistently be changing it on the computer, on the Internet, and I believe that this will indeed solve a lot of the issues that have been brought forward about teacher supplies, about curriculum-based supplies. That's the direction we're going, and I believe it will solve all the issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what steps are being taken to ensure that protocol changes will not repeat the problems that we've had with the high school mathematics program?

DR. OBERG: Again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has asked a very good question. Since I've become the minister, over the last two years I've probably heard the issue about mathematics somewhere in excess of a thousand times, indeed many of them actually from my side as well. We are working hard on the mathematics, and we have achieved what we have set out to achieve. It has taught us a lot of very important issues. A lot of very important answers have come from that because we did make mistakes in the institution of the mathematics curriculum.

One of the things, as I've already alluded to, that we're moving toward is the evergreening of the curriculum, where we will be changing small amounts of it continually so that we will keep it up as well as not having the massive change that occurred when we changed the mathematics program. This is something that my department works hard on and, indeed, is planning for the next seven, eight, and nine years on how to change the upcoming curriculum.

Just as a complete aside, Mr. Speaker, the English curriculum in high school has not been changed for – get this – 20 years.

DR. MASSEY: It says something about good literature.

To the same minister: given that the protocol is becoming a patchwork with the withdrawal of British Columbia and Alberta from the high school work, is the project still viable?

DR. OBERG: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I still feel that the project is viable, and indeed I feel the project is laudable. We can't be having people that are moving from Saskatchewan to Alberta, from Manitoba to Alberta – and, yes, there may even be the odd person in Alberta who moves to Saskatchewan – completely unknowing about the curricu-

lum. So I believe that it is certainly a laudable cause, and we will continue to work with our western partners on the western Canada protocol. I will assure you and I will assure the hon. member that the needs and issues of Albertans come first when it comes to curriculum, and we will do what we have to do and what we need to do to change the curriculum in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Conflict of Interest Court Case

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The very long list of unanswered questions on the Jaber affair got a little longer this week. On Monday the Premier said that a deal between the Crown and Mr. Naqvi had been made which resulted in the Crown obtaining his testimony.

MR. NORRIS: What's your question?

MR. MASON: On Tuesday the Premier changed his story and said that it was an arrangement.

MR. NORRIS: Question.

MR. MASON: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, will you please deal with that unruly member over there?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: There's a synergy that exists between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands and the hon. Minister of Economic Development, who's couched behind the hon. Minister of Government Services. I do not know the history of this great affection between the two hon. members, but it seems to envelop itself in this Assembly on occasion. So let's make a deal. Let's all work together; okay? When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands speaks, hon. Minister of Economic Development, you go shush. When the hon. Minister of Economic Development speaks, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you button it, and then life will be good.

Please proceed.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I accept the deal.

Conflict of Interest Court Case (continued)

MR. MASON: Will the Premier tell the House exactly what he meant when he described this as an arrangement as opposed to a deal which had been made between the Crown and Mr. Naqvi?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I answer the question – and I'm really not going to; I'm going to have the Justice minister and Attorney General answer the question. You know, what's so disappointing about this member and the questioning is that it has nothing to do with public policy. You know, we're dealing with a serious issue such as drought. We're dealing with the ongoing issues of education and health. We're dealing right now as best we can with the anguish and pain of a Lethbridge family. We're dealing also with the good news relative to the Conference Board of Canada, the Minister of Finance. These are all big-picture issues that are of absolute importance to Albertans, and all this member can talk about is the Jaber case, which has been investigated, which has been prosecuted and a conviction obtained.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: I'm sorry. I thought the Attorney General was going to answer the question, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we've now been four minutes. Please proceed.

MR. MASON: Will the Premier tell the House, Mr. Speaker, the details of this so-called deal or arrangement?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question I will refer to the Justice minister and Attorney General.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason why we referred to the situation as an arrangement rather than a deal is for exactly the reason this member is bringing it up, for clarity in the public mind. When people in the public hear the term "deal," they assume that there has been some concession granted or some immunity granted. That has not been the case in this situation.

What's happened in this situation as in many, many investigations and certainly investigations of this kind is that they need co-operation from one of the people who knows what went on in order to prosecute the other. In this case a strategic decision was made by the investigators in conjunction, presumably, with the prosecutors that the charges should be pursued against the government official, that that was the serious situation. They obtained as part of the investigation what is called an unwarned statement from the other person involved in this situation.

An unwarned statement is just that. Because the person is not given the usual warnings about how a statement can be used against them in a court of law and the rights that surround it, that statement cannot be used against that person. No concession has been made to anyone with respect to whether charges will be laid or could be laid. If investigations show that there were additional facts or if other facts come forward upon which a charge could be based, facts which if proven would lead to a conviction, then charges could be laid.

No immunity, no deal, but appropriate investigation techniques to get the information where it can be obtained from and used appropriately in a court of law.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then I would ask the Minister of Justice and Attorney General whether or not the statements made by Mr. Naqvi in response to the Crown prosecutor are in accordance with what we just heard from the minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, there is no deal in terms of the process. Normally one understands a deal to be somebody getting something; a usual case of this, immunity from prosecution. No immunity from prosecution has been offered. No deal has been made with the gentleman named. What has happened is that the investigators have taken an unwarned statement from the individual. That unwarned statement and that individual's testimony and co-operation in providing evidence in someone else's trial at law cannot be used against that person as evidence. If charges are to be laid against anyone else, then other evidence will have to be collected.

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

2:20

Workplace Safety

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about a good-news story in Alberta. The good news is that school is out for many of our university and college students, and it will soon be out for many of our high school students, and that means there'll be 150,000 students across Alberta looking for summer jobs. Now, as the chairman of the Council on Workplace Safety I know that workers younger than 25 years old are 17 percent more likely to be injured and workers with less than six months on the job are three times as likely to be injured. Now, that's not a good-news thing. Would the Minister of Human Resources and Employment tell us what his department is doing to ensure the safety of our young workers looking for summer work?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, as you can appreciate, with that number of young people coming into the workforce, it does require a response certainly on behalf of employers, on behalf of fellow employees, and then of course from us in Human Resources and Employment that have a mandate to provide for workplace health and safety.

As it relates to young workers, there are three areas that we're currently quite involved in. The first one that I would mention is that along with Alberta Learning we have what we call a job safety skills curriculum – of course, this is going into the high schools – and we're dealing there with grades 7 to 12, working on personal safety, on workplace safety, and of course safety systems management. By way of statistics and to give us some benchmarking on this, Mr. Speaker, in 1995 we were working with four schools and 19 students. Today in this particular program we're working with 450 schools, and I'm briefed that there are now 10,600 students that are involved. So we understand that this isn't a quick fix necessarily, but it's certainly getting them off to a good start.

The second program is one that we are collaborating on with the Workers' Compensation Board, and it's called Heads Up. Really it's directed at young and inexperienced workers, and the idea there is to get them concerned about their safety and then asking questions.

Of course the third one, our Youth Connections program, which I've mentioned many times here, does have information on workplace rights, responsibilities, safe work practices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have many oil field companies in my riding, and they look forward to hiring these summer students. I'm just wondering: will these employers now need permits for young workers?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, again, in terms of permits it depends on age. If we have situations where the young person is actually an adolescent – and this means that they would be aged 12, 13, or 14 – then they do require a permit, and they have to make application to employment standards to satisfy us that the environment in the workplace that the young worker would be going into would not be injurious to the life, health, education, or as a matter of fact the welfare of the adolescent. In many cases, in fact I would say most, we'd also require the written permission of the parent.

Now, just so we don't start getting lots of calls on this, I might add that we can employ adolescents without permits if they're involved in what we call small ware delivery: if it is newspaper or flyer delivery, office clerks, or retail clerks. But if they're involved in any sort of construction area, it's unlikely that we would support a permit to a person less than age 15.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you. My second supplemental to the same minister. So, then, how can workers or employers find out a little more detail about the programs for young workers?

MR. DUNFORD: We're very proud, Mr. Speaker, of a couple of services that we have put in place. We're using taxpayer funds to do this, but we think it's a responsible way that we try to balance taxpayer funding against the needs and the wishes of the workplace. We have a safety call centre number – and if I could read that into the record, it's 1-866-415-8690 – or they could visit the workplace health and safety web site, which is www.whs.gov.ab.ca.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Hub Oil Company Ltd.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In early August of 1999 Hub Oil exploded in Calgary, tragically killing two workers. My first question this afternoon is for the Minister of Environment. What studies are currently being conducted by the department to ensure that there is public safety and that soil requirements are being measured? What tests are currently being done by the Department of Environment on the Hub Oil site?

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, as the member knows, the Hub Oil case is right now in front of the court system, and I cannot comment as Minister of Environment on that court case or what's happening surrounding that court case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: is the minister's department currently conducting long-term studies on the plant site and in the residential neighbourhoods regarding emissions that are toxic to the citizens of southeast Calgary?

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the regional health authority in the city of Calgary was involved in some follow-up work that was done. Also, during my time as Minister of Environment my recollection was that soil studies were conducted at the time of the emissions at Hub Oil and at the time of the fire. To the best of my recollection, those tests which were conducted demonstrated that the soil was safe at the time and that the proper remediation was done on the soil and all the residences in the area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question this afternoon is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is the Department of Municipal Affairs through the Safety Codes Council conducting any studies or any tests regarding the explosion that occurred at Hub Oil?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this House that clearly the council is working very closely with stakeholders and many groups pertaining to this important issue. I can assure the member that much of the review that is going on is intended to be, again, in the best interests of all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Minimum Wage Workers

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that some of my constituents are having difficulty making ends meet, what with higher rental and living costs. Can the Minister of Human Resources and Employment tell us how many low-income families are living on the province's minimum wage?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we won't have exact numbers, but I think we can probably provide the hon. member with at least a feel for the kind of numbers that we'd be talking about. Currently there are 1.6 million people working here in the province of Alberta. Of course, due to the fiscal management of this government this is the highest number there ever has been in terms of gainful employment, and of that we're very, very proud. Of those Albertans that are working, it's our estimation, as near as we can be, that 98 percent of those are working at more than minimum wage, leaving 2 percent of that number at that level.

Minimum wage workers tend to be between the ages of 15 and 24, and most of them are working part-time. Mr. Speaker, I can say that here in Alberta and with the economic fiscal policy of this government we're setting the stage for minimum wage workers of course to move up within those organizations where they're currently employed. A strong economy, a low unemployment rate, and the kinds of training programs and family supports that we have help all working Albertans. It is important in Alberta to be working.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that most minimum wage earners are young people, as you mentioned, what are you doing to ensure that they have a promise of a better career in the future?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the best ways that we're working in this area is our Youth Connections program. I would invite any member here in the Legislature to visit one of our sites around the province, and you'll see there that when young people come in, we can really help get them career oriented. Certainly we have web sites providing information. We are normally recognized in Human Resources and Employment for the tremendous printed material that we can offer people for their education and information.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What supports does your department offer for low-income families who may be working for minimum wage?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, this government has provided the Alberta family employment tax credit, which puts cash into people's pockets. Through the national child benefit program we've provided for children's health services such as prescription drugs, optical, and diabetic supplies. We have housing programs. Here in Alberta it is important to get into the workplace, even if it's at the minimum wage. We do have support programs for them to get them in that transition of course from the minimum wage, but as they gain experience, they move up not only the experience ladder, but they move up the wage ladder as well.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

National Physiotherapy Month

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize National Physiotherapy Month, which runs from April 22 to May 21. National Physiotherapy Month provides an ideal opportunity for physiotherapists in Alberta to showcase their expertise and accomplishments and welcome community members to their facilities. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association has chosen to develop a campaign for National Physiotherapy Month called Spring into Action as a way to celebrate. The goal is to promote healthy gardening and help gardeners stay pain free this spring.

Physiotherapists have a detailed understanding of how the body works. They are university educated and trained to assess and improve movement and function and relieve pain. They promote good health by encouraging their patients to improve and increase their independence. Physiotherapy in Alberta plays an integral role in continued efforts to provide care and assistance, co-ordinate activities, and disseminate information to promote fitness, good health, and injury prevention.

I think it would be appropriate for all members to recognize the work that physiotherapists do in Alberta. You never know; you might need one one day.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Edmonton Heritage Fair

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday I had the pleasure of bringing greetings to the sixth Edmonton regional heritage fair, held in the Legislature pedway system. I also had a lot of fun participating as one of the judges. The heritage fair is based on a science fair model but asks students to create a project about Canadian heritage, history, culture, or geography. Students in grades 4 to 9 are involved, and it was really satisfying to see students making good use of our libraries, our museums, and our archives. I think that's thanks to great advice and assistance from their teachers. I was pleased to see these students using these resources for their projects rather than just the Internet, which is so tempting today.

The pedway system was filled. There were 229 projects displayed and prepared by 350 students and judged by 100 members of the community. The same fair was held in four other Alberta communities: Peace River, Lethbridge, Calgary, and Red Deer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Leaders of Tomorrow Volunteer Citizens of the Year

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year the St. Albert Community Information & Volunteer Centre organizes a tribute to be paid to the leaders of tomorrow and to the volunteer citizens of the year. On May 5 my colleague the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and I had the opportunity to congratulate these winners, and I would like to acknowledge them in the Assembly today.

Of the leaders of tomorrow, the elementary division award went

to Jeremy Goodall, the junior high division to Venessa Carlson, the senior high division to Jeff Beaton, and the postsecondary division to Matthew Heyworth.

The volunteer citizens of the year were chosen because it is the International Year of Volunteers. All three nominees were acknowledged: Dieter Knobloch, Bernie and Alfreda Melik, and Dr. Craig Roxburgh.

These are indeed extraordinary citizens of St. Albert. I would ask the members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating these fine young leaders and citizens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Edmonton Public School Board

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The editor of *The School Administrator*, an international magazine for school leaders, notes: we rarely turn over the majority of any one issue to spotlight a single school district, but we are making an exception this month. That exception is for the Edmonton public school board, whose Centre for Education is situated in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Edmonton public schools have embraced site-based decision-making and made it work. During the past five years Edmonton has essentially re-created itself as a system of choice for its 81,000 students. The district offers a highly imaginative array of about 30 programs from traditional back-to-basics to schools with strict dress codes to programs for hockey or artistic students or tailored to home schoolers or those with elements of the Christian faith and schools for those looking for international baccalaureate programs.

I join Editor Goldman and add my appreciation to Superintendent Dosdall, the Edmonton public school board, and the thousands of teachers and support staff for their service to children and for their expansive vision of public education.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Alberta Teachers

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize collectively the teachers of this province, the educators of our children. They are the women and men who have a profound impact on our children's lives and their future by providing them with a solid foundation, that being quality education. These hardworking and dedicated professionals give generously of their knowledge, their compassion, and their caring day after day. They help to inspire in children a love of learning and inculcate values of fair play, equality, and hard work, all of which will serve these children as they grow throughout their lives.

I know that all members of this House will join me in applauding and thanking all of our teachers for dedicating their lives to making a difference in the lives of the children of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

National Youth Bowling Championships

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the 2001 national youth bowling championships, organized by the Youth Bowling Council of Canada. The event took place last week in Calgary with the participation of teams from all our provinces and territories. They proudly represented the best of their zone, totaling over 300 selected youth bowlers. With them were hundreds of coaches and parents.

Thirty-six years ago the program named Youth Bowling Council was organized for youth bowlers. The national YBC each year enlists the aid of over 6,000 parents and adults to voluntarily coach, supervise, and instruct them. The fact that bowling teaches coordination and good fellowship and may be played alone, with a friend, by a family, or in competition with others makes it the number one participation sport in Canada. The fact that bowling is a sport that everyone can take part in makes bowling the number one social recreation in Canada.

I would like to congratulate the organizers, sponsors, youth bowlers, and parents for making it a successful national event in Calgary.

Portuguese Musical Society

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and recognize the 25th anniversary of the Portuguese Musical Society of Edmonton. A large celebration was held on Saturday, May 5, 2001, at Our Lady of Fatima church with the Edmonton and Calgary bands in attendance. The day began with a sod-turning ceremony on the site of the new home for the music society. The land has been purchased, and construction is slated to begin soon.

The Edmonton chapter president, Manuel Mota, and the secretary and conductor, Sandy Duarte, are overjoyed that the music society will soon have a permanent home. The marching band is composed of members of all ages, with youth always eager to learn to play a musical instrument and join the band.

Congratulations and best wishes, Portuguese Musical Society, in all your future endeavours. God bless.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I will now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 3.

[Motion carried]

2:40

Lloydminster Biprovincial Upgrader

Q3. Mr. Bonner moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

What are the yearly projections for upside interest accruing to the province from the operations of the Lloydminster biprovincial upgrader for the period 1999-2014 as specified under the upside interest agreement of February 7, 1995, between the government and CIC (Crown Investments Corporation) Industrial Interests Inc.?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. On behalf of the Minister of Energy, who is not here today, Mr. Speaker, and in the spirit of open government I'm pleased to respond to this question. I would like just to make a couple of points first before they respond.

Alberta oil sands are presently attracting significant investment. Currently there's about \$53 billion spoken for, \$53 billion that could be invested by 2010, which is a significant investment. As the owner of the resource, Mr. Speaker, Alberta not only benefits from the royalties, but Alberta also sees and takes part of the risk.

Currently, bitumen prices are depressed, and when those prices are depressed, of course the royalties aren't at such a significant level. Now, the goal would be to have this resource upgraded in Alberta, of course, and that's certainly what we are working towards.

So given the variability and uncertainty attached to forecasts, especially longer term, the government does not forecast to 2014. We recommend, therefore, that this written question be rejected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry to close the debate.

MR. BONNER: No further comments at this time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

[Written Question 3 lost]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I hereby move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 206
Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act**

[Debate adjourned May 15: Ms Blakeman speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to enter into this debate and speak against Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. The bill, that has been proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East, seeks to set down rules and regulations regarding conflict of interest for regional health authorities. This is an admirable idea, but I must speak against Bill 206 as I feel it would overly complicate our existing system.

Mr. Speaker, in 1994 17 regional health authorities were created to take over from 150 individual hospital and health unit boards. The regional health authorities were to ensure that the health issues of each region were dealt with in a timely and cost-effective manner. Since 1994 regional health authority members have been appointed by the Minister of Health and Wellness. Very soon there will be a system in place where two-thirds of members will be elected and the remaining one-third will be appointed by the minister.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The regional health authorities were given the responsibility of governing ethically from their inception. A regional health authority sets the direction for the health delivery system in the region, develops a business plan for the region, sets policies to guide programs and services, makes budget decisions, and consults with a wide range of community members.

Mr. Speaker, each regional health authority must develop conflict of interest bylaws and policies and have them approved by the Department of Health and Wellness. The Minister of Health and

Wellness is ultimately responsible for the actions of health authorities. The minister is governed by the Conflicts of Interest Act and expects a similar level of ethical conduct from the RHA boards.

The regional health authorities report to the minister, and he will work to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest through the selection criteria of regional health authority members as well as requiring adherence to codes of conduct and bylaws. The selection criteria for RHA appointments and the elections is outlined in the Local Authorities Election Act and the Regional Health Authorities Act.

Mr. Speaker, when members of the regional health authority are chosen to be part of the board, a number of items are considered to ensure that there will not be a conflict of interest. As a result, people with direct or indirect connections to the health system are judged to be ineligible. If you are a nurse employed by the region or a doctor or a physiotherapist working in the region, you are not eligible to be a member of the regional health authority. People who are directly or indirectly involved in certain contacts with the regional health authority are also not eligible to serve as members. It is also the minister's prerogative to dismiss any and all members of the authority if the authority is not properly exercising its powers or carrying out its duties under the Regional Health Authorities Act or if for some other reason the minister considers it in the public interest to dismiss the members.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Wellness is responsible to the voters, and soon so will be the majority of regional health authority board members, making all board members more accountable. Additional to the open forums, elected board members of each regional health authority under the guidance of our elected minister of health develop a code of ethics. The code of ethics is an extensive list of standards that must be followed. It also covers areas of conflicts of interest that may not be covered by the bylaws of the Regional Health Authorities Act. Each regional health authority develops its own bylaws and policies and codes of ethics because the regions have different needs and concerns. The bylaws are similar but unique and enable the boards to deal with regional issues in a timely and effective manner.

Mr. Speaker, I will give an example of a region that has an extensive code of ethics and has complete conflicts of interest guidelines. The Chinook regional health authority has a very extensive bylaw dealing with conflicts of interest which includes defining conflicts of interest, measures for disclosure, and mechanisms for resolution of all such conflicts in a public forum. Under the current RHA members' report they report to the minister in matters of conflicts of interest. Under Bill 206 they would report to the Ethics Commissioner.

The office of the Ethics Commissioner, Mr. Speaker, is exclusive to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and to senior government officials. To include regional health authority board members as an additional responsibility would reduce the availability of the office to the Members of the Legislative Assembly and senior government officials. The Ethics Commissioner would surely become less effective overall if he had to deal with all the regional health authority board members in addition to his current responsibilities. The resource that the office of the Ethics Commissioner provides to government is of extreme importance, and we must protect his ability to function effectively to protect the interests of Albertans as they pertain to Members of the Legislative Assembly and senior government officials.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 removes autonomy from the regional health authorities, which currently resolve their own conflicts of interest situations. These issues are resolved in a public forum, open and accessible to every region and every community. The background

of each member of the RHA board is scrutinized before their appointment, and when there is even a slight potential for a conflict, bylaws and codes of ethics prevail in eliminating bias in the decision-making process of the RHA.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, all decisions made by the RHA come to the minister in the form of a business plan or a health proposal, which is also heavily scrutinized. Contracts, labour agreements, and issues of supply and waste disposal are all decided in a cost-benefit analysis, and any individual that may benefit from these agreements is excluded from the decision-making process.

Mr. Speaker, as I have outlined, the system of preventing conflicts of interest has multiple monitoring systems, and every decision is closely scrutinized to prevent any individual from exploiting the health care system to their own advantage or benefit. Our RHA boards have spent years developing codes of conduct, ethics, and bylaws which acknowledge the importance of having a system that is immune to corruption. It is unnecessary to extend the office of the Ethics Commissioner to watch over RHAs as they are comprised of members who are very capable of monitoring their own membership. Also, if this system does fail, the supervision of the minister of health will prevail in ensuring that RHAs operate in the public interest.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to a bill that was put forward by the hon. Member from Lethbridge-East, and it is Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. Certainly it is one of those acts that we do need, and we need it very desperately in this province, particularly when we look at all the reasons for having such legislation. Without a doubt, when we look at Bill 206 and the type of legislation it will provide to Albertans, it is dealing with one of the more sensitive departments that we have in government. It is dealing with, beyond a doubt, one of the most expensive departments we have in government, and it is dealing with some of the most sensitive material, that Albertans cherish and wish to be private. So when the hon. member proposed this bill, he certainly did it by providing the absolute best legislation that we can provide to Albertans. [interjections]

Now, we hear some oohs and aahs from members on the opposite side. Mr. Speaker, they tried to tell us that this is too much legislation, yet we have on the floor of this Assembly a bill called Bill 1. It is the flagship bill of the Premier for this First Session of the 25th Legislature. Now, this bill is also a bill that duplicates other bills that are currently in place. This is a bill that was not in place when billions of dollars of rebates were given out earlier this year, yet there seems to be a need for this type of legislation. Here we have Bill 206, which is there to protect Albertans, there to protect Albertans with their most sensitive information, and we have people from the opposite side saying that this is not required. Why the double standard? So, yes, I will speak to this, and I will say that there's every bit a need for this bill as they perceive that there is for Bill 1.

Now, currently in Alberta there are 17 regional health authorities, and they write and implement their own conflicts of interest bylaws applicable to all staff of that regional health authority. When we are designing any public policy, there are some critical questions that must be asked, and certainly what we have to do when we examine public policy is assume first of all that there are various positions in the policy that are correct. So we assume when we see conflict of

interest laws being written by each particular regional health authority that each of the regional health authorities will have legislation that will be the very best, that will be consistent so that people, no matter where they are in this province, as residents of Alberta can be certain that the utmost and best legislation is there and that there is consistency.

We certainly have that when we look at the Canada Health Act and we look at the five principles that apply to all Canadians. So in the delivery of those services by the regional health authorities, why should we not expect conflict of interest legislation to be consistent, to be the same for each of the 17 regional health authorities?

Now, then, another reason why we do need this legislation is that – all of us in this Assembly agree – the traditional form of delivering health care in this province has changed drastically and has changed drastically over the last decade. So we do have in the province now an increasing dependence on private, for-profit health care. We do have people that are sitting on regional health authority boards that are also owners of private, for-profit facilities. So do we not need stringent legislation in order to protect Albertans? We would assume that that legislation would be in place. We would assume that people cannot, in the same position, wear a hat when they're dealing with public health care and put on a different hat for private, for-profit health care. We have seen any number of these conflicts arise in this province, particularly when we look at the Calgary regional health authority.

So what will this piece of legislation, Bill 206, do to firm up the conflicts of interest? How, by not having it, does a public health care system get undermined? Now, then, Bill 206 will certainly restore public confidence in the public health care system and also with our regional health authority boards. There always is in any elected or appointed position a perception, whether it's real or imagined, that people in that position do have an opportunity to gain. It is often said to every member of this Assembly when they are out on the street about our pensions that we supposedly are perceived to have and the great influence that we can certainly deliver as members of this Assembly. So here, then, we certainly have to have some type of legislation which is consistent and which is beyond reproach when dealing with perceived or real conflicts of interest.

As well, when we look at Bill 206, does what happens correspond with accepted practices in the private sector or in parts of the public sector? Again, as I mentioned earlier when I was discussing the Calgary regional health authority, we do have numerous instances where we have people sitting on both sides of the fence, and it does undermine public confidence in our health care system. I would think, as well, when we look at health care, whether it be private or public, that it is the most important service that government provides in this province and in this country. It is certainly one of those services provided that is the envy of every other country in the world, and it is worth our taking every possible step to protect it and to certainly make certain that we do not have conflicts of interest.

Albertans want to know beyond a doubt that conflicting interests play no part in their health care delivery today, and they also want this assurance that it will not in the future. As well, when we look at Bill 206, one of the great advantages is that it will put in uniform legislation applicable to all regional health authorities, and it will increase our ability to monitor and to deal with conflicts, potential or otherwise.

3:00

Now, then, Bill 206 is the first bill being brought forward by the Official Opposition. This legislation would apply comprehensive and uniform conflict of interest rules to all regional health authority board members and employees as well as to all contractors and

independent health service providers that have a contractual relationship with the regional health authority.

This legislation is modeled after the Alberta public service code of conduct and ethics. Bill 206 applies disclosure and conflict of interest principles similar to those applied in industry and government, and if those standards are good enough for industry and government, then certainly they should be good enough for the regional health authorities.

Now, certainly a positive step this year – it's going to occur in this fall's municipal elections – is that we are also going to be voting on two-thirds of the regional health authorities' boards of directors. It is certainly a step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker, but again this new change doesn't go far enough. We have 83 members in this Assembly that are voted on by the public at large to handle a budget that I believe is in the neighbourhood of \$21 billion. We have been given that responsibility. Now we are asking people in this province to have one-third of a regional health authority appointed.

The people of Alberta trust us with the responsibility of over \$20 billion, yet we take one of the larger departments of that and we do not have that entire board elected. Certainly I think this would be a step in the right direction. If people knew that their position on that board was due to them being elected by the public, then certainly this would be another incentive for people, and we would not require as stringent rules for conflicts of interest. But we do require these rules. As long as there are appointments, there are no guarantees that people would be dismissed from these boards for conflicts of interest.

Now, then, this piece of legislation, Bill 206, has legislative importance in three dimensions. First, Bill 206 addresses current and future conflicts of interest outlined by providing a conflict of interest definition and a mechanism by which conflicts of interest can be investigated. The bill also requires that recurring or ongoing conflicts must result in either the termination of the relationship with the regional health authority or the divestiture of the asset causing the conflict. Again, this would certainly address some of the concerns that we have heard regarding the Calgary regional health authority, where we do have people sitting on the board that have interests both on the public side and on the private, for-profit side of health care delivery in the Calgary region.

Secondly, Bill 206 applies a uniform standard of legislative conflict of interest rules to all regional health authorities. Current conflict of interest rules governing regional health authorities are neither uniform nor legislated; that is, no one said that conflict of interest rules apply to all regional health authorities. Each regional health authority will be developing its own conflict rules, and the conflict rules are mere bylaws, not statutory legislation.

Finally, Bill 206 is designed to restore public confidence in Alberta's health care system. Conflicts between private and public interests, whether perceived or real, are damaging to the public's estimation of and confidence in public officials. This is particularly true when the conflict deals with a service as personal as health.

Now, then, Mr. Speaker, this is good legislation. It is legislation that is required. It is legislation that Albertans want. Regional health authorities have a public duty to uphold the highest ethical standards so that public confidence in the health care system is preserved. It is the responsibility of regional health authorities to safeguard public finances and to ensure that personnel they engage do not have private interests that can benefit either directly or indirectly from the regional health authority's activities.

It is also the responsibility of the regional health authorities to adopt, apply, and enforce conflict of interest rules that are at least as rigorous as those applying to us as MLAs and to government employees and contractors engaged in public service under the

Public Service Act. Albertans have a right, Mr. Speaker, to regional health authority services provided with impartiality and integrity.

Now, then, this bill, Mr. Speaker, covers situations that should be covered by public record. What the information makes apparent is that there is good reason for Albertans to be concerned that regional health authorities have permitted personnel it engages in its own business to be involved in actions which give rise to real, potential, or apparent conflicts of interest. There is widespread public concern that commonly accepted standards for the conduct of public business in relation to conflicts of interest have not been adopted – and the example I've been using is the Calgary regional health authority – in a timely fashion or that these sets of rules and guidelines have not been enforced. These certainly do warrant an investigation by the Ethics Commissioner.

As well, Mr. Speaker, in my closing remarks here I would certainly want to say that Bill 206 is a very, very important piece of legislation. It is one that I would urge all members of this Assembly to support. It will put in place rules and regulations that are equally as stringent as what we as members of this Assembly uphold and follow.

With those comments, I would like to take my seat and cede the floor to other members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to enter the debate on Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. I really share and value the principle of protecting the Alberta public against conflicts of interest. However, it is without any reservation that I rise to speak against Bill 206, as proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East.

3:10

It is my position that Bill 206 is redundant because all of the concerns it raises have already been addressed by the new regional health authority election and appointment regulations. Bill 206 in effect is questioning a new system of regional health authority elections and appointments as outlined under the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001. Essentially it alleges that our system is open to all sorts of conflict of interest situations, and frankly, Mr. Speaker, this is just not the case.

Let me start out by saying that the debate that occurs in this Assembly is essentially so members across the way can help us to see where we must improve to better serve Alberta if the points raised are worth while. However, I intend to show today, Mr. Speaker, that the basic assumptions underscoring Bill 206 are flawed, and therefore the bill itself should not pass.

[Mr. Amery in the chair]

Without doubt, the sponsor has the best interests of Albertans at heart. Health care is vital to Albertans, and as such it is the responsibility of everyone in this Assembly to find innovative ways, effective ways to deliver the best health care possible to Albertans. This is a task that all of us should take very seriously, and this is exactly why the regional health authorities were created and why we are moving to a system of elections that decide two-thirds of each board. This new system will provide Albertans with the most efficient and best possible health care governance. Further, Mr. Speaker, the makeup of the boards will ensure that all Albertans will be represented fairly.

However, according to Bill 206 our regional health authority system is susceptible to a number of conflict of interest situations. Bill 206 states that all potential candidates must disclose any conflict

of interest they may have with regard to their private interests and the ways they may further those private interests as members of the RHA board. Well, truth be told, I'm speaking here today to assure the sponsor that this government already has a system in place to ensure that all of those who are appointed or elected to a regional health authority do have the public interest at heart and not their own pocketbooks.

Mr. Speaker, if we take a look at the rules established for the regional health authority elections and appointments, we see firm regulations that ensure that no conflicts of interest or improprieties take place. Just as a reminder here is a list of some of the ineligible persons for election or appointment to a regional health authority board: first, regional health authority employees, Health and Wellness employees, independent health service providers that get funding from either a regional health authority or the government, the directors, officers, and employees of health service organizations receiving 50 percent or more of their funding from Health and Wellness, a regional health authority, or both. As well, spouses of any of the above-mentioned groups are ineligible for election. Any elected government official in Canada or any person nominated to hold office is ineligible, and judges are also ineligible.

Further, Mr. Speaker, the government has mandated that if any of these ineligible candidates do run or stand for an appointment to a regional health authority, they remove themselves from any conflict of interest within 30 days of their election or appointment. As well, the employees of a regional health authority or the Health and Wellness department are required to take a leave of absence to run for a regional health authority position.

It seems to me that what Bill 206 is asking is that all persons who run or stand for a position on a regional health authority must disclose any conflict of interest, and if a conflict of interest is declared, they must take appropriate measures to remove themselves from it. Mr. Speaker, I would ask: isn't this already stipulated by the regulations concerning the election and appointment to regional health authorities? After all, we don't have conflict of interest regulations and an ineligibility list just for show. We have them to make sure that the people on the regional health authorities are people who speak for the best interests of Albertans.

Our regional health authority boards will be made up of reliable, impartial community stakeholders, people representing all of the citizens of Alberta's communities, people making sure that the health care in this province will be as good as it can be both now and in the future, not people out to make a buck or two from the health care system. The list of eligible and ineligible persons makes sure that the process is open, accountable, and, above all, clean.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

This government has made it clear that any conflict of interest is unacceptable, and those rules will be enforced. I therefore wonder why we would need Bill 206. It doesn't propose to do anything that this government hasn't already endeavoured to do. We could wrap the regional health authorities up in red tape many times over if we liked, but why bother, Mr. Speaker, when the system works as it stands? Alberta is poised to lead this country into the future as a first-rate example of the best way to operate and to govern the great health care system for Albertans.

With the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act we are giving Albertans the regional health authority boards they have asked for, and we have made sure these boards will be composed of impartial and accountable Albertans who are governed by strict conflict of interest regulations. We've covered these bases.

In closing, I repeat that I cannot support Bill 206. I leave this

forum for my colleagues to join me in the debate, and I thank you, thank you, and thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciated the comments from all the members, and that's the spirit of the Legislature.

I'll start with some general comments on Bill 206. The integrity of Alberta's public service is of profound importance to the people of this province. Alberta and indeed Canada have over a very long period developed a tradition in their public service that is in many ways the envy of the world for its impartiality. I use the term "public servants" in the broadest sense of the term to include elected, appointed, employed, and contracted officials of the public service. Citizens in Canada are confident that they can approach public servants knowing that their interest as a citizen should and normally will come first. This is a matter of ethical duty, and it cuts to the heart of democracy.

Many of my thoughts today have been stimulated by a book entitled *Honest Politics*, which I think should be standard reading for every MLA. What are the fundamental principles of public service ethics? Well, there are several, including impartiality, fiduciary trust, accountability, and responsibility.

Impartiality can be understood as a lack of bias in public decision-making. Public officials have a duty to be impartial as they exercise their duties, and if they are in positions that seriously reduce that impartiality, they may no longer be able to appropriately fulfill their duties.

Fiduciary trust rests on the shoulders of public officials because they are acting on behalf of the public. They are trustees of the public interest. This means that public officials have a responsibility to protect and promote the public's best interest. The public interest without exception must always prevail over private interest.

Accountability means that public officials must be able to demonstrate in a credible manner that the expectations of public officials are being met.

Mr. Speaker, because human beings are what they are, we cannot always rely on good intentions and unwritten conventions to ensure that our public servants behave ethically, so society has encoded these expectations in regulations and in laws, as we are discussing today. In Alberta there's the Conflicts of Interest Act, which applies to us as MLAs here today. There is the Public Service Act, which applies to public servants, and under this act there is a code, a well-delineated, well-written, and well-thought-out code of conduct and ethics. At the moment neither of these acts apply to regional health authorities, although RHAs receive billions of taxpayer dollars and are creatures of the provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, it's the intention of Bill 206 to ensure that Alberta's regional health authorities are held to the highest standards of ethics, standards which we believe all Albertans would support. There exist in Alberta a number of situations which raise the gravest concerns about conflicts of interest in Alberta's regional health authorities. For example, there are a number of senior officials in the Calgary regional health authority who are or who have been in untenable positions for being on the public payroll. These situations have been brought to the attention of the CRHA board but have been allowed to continue. My comments today are not directed at individuals. They are directed at a system, a system in which the RHAs should require that apparent, potential, and real conflicts of interests are discontinued. Instead, the system today allows apparent, potential, and real conflicts of interest to continue without resolution.

I will provide one example that has been the subject of some question periods. The chief medical officer of the Calgary regional authority, who is paid in the range of a quarter million dollars a year to oversee the delivery of medical services in the region, has immediate family members who are major shareholders in a surgical company that contracts to the Calgary regional health authority. In other words, this individual is ultimately responsible for a contract that channels large sums of public money to his immediate family members.

There are a number of other such cases in the Calgary regional health authority involving eye surgery and other areas of medicine. Material I have tabled in this Assembly provides details, including the names and positions of individuals and the names of various companies, including numbered companies, whose cases raise serious questions about conflicts of interest.

Bill 206 would bring the regional health authorities into line with conflict of interest legislation and codes that are common in other aspects of public life. At present each RHA is allowed to develop its own conflict of interest guidelines. This is simply not working. The codes that have been developed, such as the ones at the Calgary regional health authority, do little that is effective. They merely ask the person who is in conflict to declare their conflict and remove themselves from immediate decisions. This over the long term becomes meaningless action, a kind of charade of propriety. In fact, it appears that people who may be in conflicts of interest might have even participated in developing the CRHA's conflict of interest policy. Little wonder that nothing much has been done.

Conflicts of interest that have gone on for years are allowed to continue, to expand, and indeed to work their way into the culture of the organization. An organizational culture of conflict becomes ingrained so that standards of public-sector conduct that are normal in other institutions, including, as far as I know, every other aspect of the Alberta government, may no longer apply in these situations. In fact, Mr. Speaker, not only are these expectations required in almost every area of the Alberta government; a great number of private corporations have the same standards. A great number of private corporations would not tolerate and do not tolerate the kinds of apparent and real conflicts of interest that we are seeing in some RHAs. I've made various inquiries of major businesses and have found that generally they are quite ruthless in ending conflicts of interest among staff.

The other day I was able to obtain TransAlta's policy on conflict of interest, and it was unequivocal. TransAlta simply states point-blank that perceived, potential, or real conflicts of interest are to be avoided. There is no room for people being in prolonged situations where there are questions of whose interests they may be serving.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 would ensure that all Albertans will benefit from the same high standards of ethical behaviour from their RHAs, when it comes to conflicts of interest, that are expected in the corporate sector and the rest of the public sector. Among Bill 206's most important provisions is section 8(2). Under section 8(2) there are requirements that ongoing conflicts of interest must be ended. It simply isn't enough for a person to excuse himself from a decision. If the conflict is ongoing, it must be terminated. The way the bill proposes ending the conflict is by requiring the person in question to either dispose of their private interest that places him or her in conflict or to end his position on the public payroll.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, many of the concerns that Bill 206 is intended to address arise around chiefs of medical departments. Chiefs of medical departments sit undoubtedly in a difficult position, a position in which conflict of interest easily raises itself and must be dealt with.

Chiefs of medical departments in regional health authorities are under contract to the regional health authority and as such are servants of the public interest. They are frequently paid, by most people's standards, very well. The chief of a medical department in a sizable RHA may well be paid \$100,000 a year for the part-time position. A chief medical officer for an entire RHA may be paid a quarter of a million dollars a year of taxpayers' money to look after the public interest. These are not just token public appointments. These are serious, contractual, well-paid public appointments under which people occupying them must first serve, without exception, the public interest.

It's also worth pointing out, Mr. Speaker, a particular point that was made in this Assembly the other day which I believe to be erroneous, to be a misinterpretation of the facts. The fact of the matter is that the controls on MLAs and the legislation that covers MLAs' conflicts of interest do not apply to regional health authorities. The same standard, the same legislation that applies to us does not extend to regional health authorities. I wish that it would, and if it were the case that it did, Bill 206 would in fact be unnecessary.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at considerable length here. [some applause] And I guess the other members would like me to. But I think that for now I will rest. I look forward to the opportunity to debate this bill at greater length in committee.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to stand and debate Bill 206, presented by the Member for Lethbridge-East, Bill 206 being the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act.

As I've been listening to the debate itself, we do have 17 regional health authorities that already have in place their own conflict of interest bylaws or regulations that fit well in their own jurisdictions. I heard the member opposite saying that he has reviewed TransAlta's standards that they have for conflicts of interest. I would like to know whether possibly EPCOR or anybody else has the same ones which are being proposed under Bill 206. I think, again, each corporation in this case has their own set that fits them well.

When we look at conflict of interest, again we have to look at every regional health authority having written up their own set of regulations. Also, the Minister of Health and Wellness continues to take the ultimate responsibility for whatever actions are taken by the authorities. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that we need Bill 206, because it would duplicate what's already in place.

Also, Mr. Speaker, when we look at this fall, we're going to have election of two-thirds of board members. That is why the government has tabled Bill 7 in this session. With Bill 7 this government has considered the new challenges that will be posed by the elected health authorities and has extended and tightened up conflict of interest regulations in this area for potential flaws at the time.

Mr. Speaker, going back to Bill 206, although the intentions are noble – I believe there's some good stuff in here, but it's already in place right now. So, again, I'd say that it's redundant; it's being duplicated. I think we have some very good people that hopefully will be running in the election, and there are going to be people that are going to be cognizant of their responsibilities as members on a regional health authority, and there are conflicts of interest rules that they have to abide by.

I think that when we look at this, Mr. Speaker, mention was made that we have to have the RHAs held to the highest of standards. I believe the 17 RHAs that are out there are already held to a high standard. I believe they're working toward the good, the betterment

of our health system for the residents of Alberta. As I indicated earlier, we do already have conflict of interest guidelines that have been put in place by regional health authorities.

I'm not going to dwell much further on this, Mr. Speaker, but I believe Bill 206, as indicated, is a noble gesture by the member opposite for Lethbridge-East, but again I would urge my colleagues and everybody in this House to not vote for Bill 206. I believe we have good mechanisms in place. I can reiterate, go over what I've said again, but I don't think we can do that. Again, the disclosure of conflicts of interest is already there. I think that whoever is going to be on the regional health authorities, whether elected or appointed, has to recognize that any potential conflict of interest by their family members has to be recognized, and I think they already know that.

Again, as we know here in the House, we ourselves are bound by conflict of interest bylaws, or at least I do personally on my own. I certainly would not want to be in a conflict that would affect this government or Albertans here in this province. I think everybody has a conscience of their own. I think the good people that are running in the election and the one-third that will be appointed will all be aware that they have a conflict of interest regulation to look at.

We have an Ethics Commissioner that we have to also speak to, and of course he's going to say that you have to disclose what your interests may or may not be. If you have interests that would be affecting you because of a regional health authority appointment or election, you should disclose them or discharge them, if that's the case, so that you can run.

I think we do have some pretty good laws in place right now. So to have Bill 206 accepted would not be the right thing to do. Although, as I indicated, there are some pretty good things in here, they are already being done, Mr. Speaker.

With that I sit down and allow some other member of the House to address Bill 206, and urge all my colleagues and members of this House to reject Bill 206. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

3:40

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak in support of Bill 206 and to respond, if I might, to some of the comments that have been made by members opposite during the debate that we have been undergoing.

I think it's important to start with what is actually in the bill, and, Mr. Speaker, the definition of conflict of interest appears on page 1. . . . means a conflict between the public and private interests of a board member, independent health service provider, employee or contractor that occurs when they use their position to gain personal benefits or benefits for their relatives that are not available to the general public.

So we aren't talking exclusively about health board members. The act is intended to apply to a wide range of individuals that are employed by or associated with regional health authorities.

The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs made some rather interesting arguments. I found the one argument, if I am interpreting him correctly, that somehow the minister of health was going to look after things to be spurious, I guess is what I would call the argument. It seems to me that it's asking a great deal that the minister of health be held responsible for the ethical behaviour of the hundreds of people that are involved in the regional health authorities and that would come under the aegis of this act. I found it an interesting but, I think, irrelevant argument that somehow or other that minister could hold that responsibility.

The notion that each region has a code of ethics has been men-

tioned by a number of members opposite, and it's interesting. I think the point was made before that those codes have actually been made up by some of those regional health authorities that they apply to. It's a little like the fox guarding the henhouse to expect that the standard that Albertans would expect is going to be reflected in each and every one of those codes of ethics. It seems the rationale for not having one code of ethics that applies to all of the authorities, just as the code of ethics here applies to all of us – it's hard to understand why someone would argue against that position.

There was another comment I think made that the Ethics Commissioner couldn't handle the job, and I found that an interesting sort of argument given that it was this government that added to the Ethics Commissioner the work of the privacy officer and freedom of information. So it's, again, an argument that was made but I don't think carries much validity when you look at what's happened and when you look at the ethics officer for the federal government and the number of employees that officer is responsible for. The argument that the job is just too big for one Ethics Commissioner I don't think holds much water.

The notion that this bill would take away the autonomy of health boards is really an interesting one. Just how autonomous are they when a third of the members are appointed by the provincial government? It's hardly an autonomous board if those appointments are made from outside. So the argument of autonomy, again, is one that I think is rather weak.

The notion that RHAs have spent years developing codes of ethics: unfortunately, when it comes to codes of ethics, time in doesn't mean quality out. They may have spent a great deal of time developing codes, but I don't think that that assures us they are of the rigour and comprehensiveness that the application of Bill 206 would be.

The comments from a couple of the members that the system works well seem to be – and I find it quite incredible coming from a member from Calgary: the notion that the system works well. When you look at the Calgary regional health authority and the conflict of interest, Mr. Speaker, three of the private, for-profit surgical facilities that have current contracts with the Calgary regional health authority are owned or partly owned by senior medical officers of the Calgary regional health authority.

You know, the largest contract for the provision of surgical services was awarded to a private, for-profit clinic owned by a Calgary regional health authority medical officer and his business partners. Two of the five private, for-profit surgical clinics that provide virtually all the eye surgery in Calgary are owned or partly owned by CRHA medical officers. The list goes on. The private, for-profit eye surgery clinics in Calgary appear to co-operate with one another in regards to the facility fees they charged to the CRHA rather than compete with one another. Two of the private, for-profit surgical facilities that have contracts with the CRHA are located in former public hospitals once owned or operated by CRHA.

So to claim that the system works well is to stretch matters, Mr. Speaker, and I think that the members opposite have not really taken seriously the provisions of Bill 206, because I think it is a well-crafted bill that would serve the province well, and I would urge its passage.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The leader of the ND Party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 206, the Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act. It's generally accepted in modern democratic societies that people elected or appointed to serve the public in government or govern-

ment agencies must put their duty to the public above their private interests. They cannot and are not expected to use the knowledge, experience, and contacts gained while working in the public sector to financially benefit themselves or close family and associates in a way that would not be available to ordinary citizens. We expect public officials, whether they are permanent or contracted public servants, elected representatives – Members of Parliament, Senators, MLAs – to serve the public interest. Where there is a conflict between the public interest and the private or the perceived problem of this kind of conflict between private, family, or party interests, the public interest should always prevail.

3:50

So, I guess, when we debate this bill, these are in a sense some of the principles that we should pay attention to. Since it's dealing with a situation that's been created by the actions and the statutes of this government over the last several years – the latest of those actions being Bill 11 – I think the bill is a timely step to address the potential for conflicts of interest to arise in our health care system, given the organization and the functioning of our regional health authorities.

I have been listening to at least a part of the debate, and it's been argued that given the unique conditions under which each RHA has to function and deliver the services required by residents of the region covered, we have to make to special order the conflict of interest rules as well. I have difficulty figuring that out. The minister has the responsibility to make sure that there are certain uniform standards that prevail across the province, so much so that he has retained within the law the power to dismiss any regional health authority that in his or her judgment doesn't measure up to a sort of uniform observance of and compliance with these expectations which he or she holds the government has.

So there is, on the one hand, an expectation and a clearer statement of it in the statutes of the province that the minister is responsible for seeking and establishing and making sure that such province-wide standards are observed. Yet, on the other hand, this same minister turns around and sees no reason to expect some uniformity, some standardization of the conflict of interest requirements across the province, across the boundaries of the 17 regional health authorities. Just because there are 17 regional health authorities in itself is no argument to have 17 different sets of conflicts of interest regulations. It makes absolutely no sense.

Logically, it has certainly no purchase anywhere. You know, if you think through it, it makes no sense, whether it's the regional health authority in Calgary or the Capital regional health authority or whether it's some other regional health authority that's contracting out services, which in fact is at the root of the problem. The potential that has been created for conflicts of interests is, of course, the very decision that this government made and put in law: that regional health authorities will be encouraged to and legally certainly authorized to contract out services. That creates the potential for conflict of interest insofar as the very people who work for the regional health authority make decisions and have inside knowledge of what decisions are to be made, how they're made, what is the overall set of considerations that lead to the making of a decision. This is the kind of inside information that's not available to those providers on the outside who don't have either the shareholders or members working inside the authority. So that creates the potential for conflict and the real instances of conflict.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods cited already the results of a carefully done study in the Calgary regional health authority by a former journalist who worked for the *Calgary Herald*, Gillian Steward. Gillian Steward, in her study which is called Public

Bodies, Private Parts: Surgical Contracts and Conflicts of Interest at the Calgary Regional Health Authority, demonstrates clearly and concludes the instances of conflicts of interest that arise and remain in place in the Calgary regional health authority.

Now, what this bill tries to do is put in law some arrangements which will ensure that across the province every regional health authority will comply with certain rules when it comes to ensuring that the potential that's been created by the very acts and policies of this government for conflict of interest to arise doesn't become a reality. And if it does become a reality, then there are ways in which to deal with it.

So, as you may have already inferred from what I'm saying, I'm speaking in favour of the bill. I am certainly hoping that the members on the government side will allow this bill to proceed to the next stage. If they have specific objections to certain clauses or sections of the act, then surely they will have their chance to bring forward amendments to improve the act, as I think this Assembly is entitled to do with any act that comes before it. We can certainly try to make changes in it, and in the end if the amendments that may be proposed don't get voted in, then surely we have a chance to vote a bill down. But to vote a bill down at the second reading would seem to be not a good thing for a Legislature to do.

I think it's a bill that addresses serious problems, serious concerns that Albertans have, serious issues that pertain to whether the present arrangements that are in place to deal with conflict of interest work properly or not. I think it's a bill that needs serious consideration, needs fuller debate in the House.

In the end, certainly, the will of the majority will prevail. So I will ask the House as a whole, on all sides of the Legislature, to vote for this bill at second reading so that it will see a clause-by-clause study and debate in the House. At the end of that process, using our wisdom, individual and collective, we'll say yes or no to it.

It looks like my time has run out.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. leader of the ND Party, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close debate on second reading of Bill 206.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to stand and close debate on Bill 206. This is a bill that looks at one of the issues that comes up in the discussion about how we portray to Albertans our commitment to open and accountable processes as we deliver services that the public has asked us as their government to implement. We look at it from the perspective of how do we make sure that individuals out there across Alberta reflect on our deeds and our actions and say: they're thinking about our best interests, the best interests of Albertans. We want to make sure that we end up conveying to them the kind of message that effectively we are trying to instill in them a confidence that our delivery systems are serving their needs.

Bill 206 looks at the issue of the conflicts of interest legislation under which the public service operates and basically takes that same set of standards and that same measuring stick and applies it to the health authorities that we've created around the province to effectively replace what would have been the public service under a previous structure of government. Essentially, then, what we should be doing is extending to that new level of government because it's part of our delivering of that service – we're basically going to extend to that entity or that agency the same expectation that we would have had they still been under the umbrella of the public service in delivering services for Albertans.

4:00

We have to look at it from the perspective of the fact that within the Regional Health Authorities Act, yes, there are clauses and requirements that each health authority have its own defined conflict of interest guidelines, but what we've got here is effectively the creation of a patchwork. I know they consult with each other, they look at each other, but in the end each regional health authority has a different set of conflict of interest guidelines that they operate under. What we have, then, is a situation where Albertans in one part of the province judge what's going on in their area, but when they hear about something that goes on in a different area, they don't see a consistency. Mr. Speaker, we have to start looking at that and making sure that that kind of perception of all Albertans is based on a common set of guidelines. We should look at that in the context of: how do we deal with it?

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake mentioned that we also have overarching here, conflict of interest guidelines that are set up by the relevant participating professional organizations, but that basically deals with the individual and the patient or the recipient of the health service, not the relationship between the decision-making and the openness of that decision-making. So to say that we've got that in place and we don't need Bill 206 doesn't work very well.

As we come to the conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I guess I want to use the same analogy that we heard from the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar when he talked about the sheep that were wandering and we had to have a shepherd for each flock. Well, I would suggest that under modern agriculture, where consistency of product and the need to have a homogeneous type of product and a consistent definition of product – what we would be doing if we were agricultural operators now is bringing each of those flocks in under a common set of nutrition requirements, a common set of management requirements. So we would in effect be bringing the flocks together under a common shepherd, and that's what we're doing with Bill 206. We're bringing all of the regional health authorities under the Ethics Commissioner, where we can have the consistency the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar asked for when he was talking about having these little flocks looked after in a common way, reflecting the kind of new approach that we would be dealing with in tending those sheep that the member was talking about.

We also need to look at the efficiencies that can be created by dealing with it that way.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the motion for second reading of Bill 206, Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Massey	Pannu
Mason	Nicol	Taft

Against the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Ouellette
Ady	Jacobs	Rathgeber
Amery	Jonson	Renner
Broda	Lord	Snelgrove

Cao	Lougheed	Stelmach
Cardinal	Lukaszuk	Stevens
Cenaiko	Lund	Strang
Danyluk	Marz	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Masyk	Taylor
Friedel	McClellan	VanderBurg
Goudreau	McClelland	Vandermeer
Haley	McFarland	Woloshyn
Herard	Oberg	Zwozdesky
Horner	O'Neill	
Totals:	For – 6	Against – 41

[Motion lost]

Bill 207

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 207 with the large number of members assembled here this afternoon. It was very nice of them to attend and hear the speeches this afternoon.

This Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, is an act that seeks to help offset the high prices of tools for tradespeople and journeymen. This bill came about after my discussions with many people. I can't remember the first time I ever would have heard about a mechanic, for example, not being able to deduct the cost of his tools as an employee. The first conversation where I would have heard of this would have been a long, long time ago, I'm sure, but as recently as during the election campaign when going around and speaking with people, many times apprentices or journeymen would make the comment that they thought it was unfair that they were unable to deduct from income tax the cost of their tools.

A couple of days ago I was speaking with a recent university graduate, just a recent graduate, and he had worked for several years in his own little construction company. He was asking me what kinds of things I was involved in currently. I said: well, one of the things that's keeping me busy right now is just kind of getting ready for this private member's bill. He said: well, what's the bill? I explained that we sought to bring forward a bill that would enable journeymen and apprentices to deduct the cost of their tools from income tax. He looked at me – and this is an educated person, just received his bachelor's degree – and said: "Well, I've been doing that all along. Was that illegal?"

The difference, Mr. Speaker, is pretty simple. He was self-employed. He wasn't a journeyman. He, in fact, had started his business out of high school and had learned the business with his father and was a good businessperson, but he decided to go to university and get a degree to become a teacher. But he had been deducting the cost of his tools all along, and he looked at me really quite surprised that tradespersons working for some employer were unable to do just that. So he's one of many people out there that just would assume that this is a normal course of affairs, except for those tradespeople that are caught in that position of being purchasers of very expensive tools and yet unable to deduct the cost of those tools from their income tax. It wasn't my initiative particularly. It was a great many people out there making me aware of those concerns and that they would like to see that corrected and addressed somehow.

4:20

I noted with interest, when I started doing some research on this bill and when some people started helping me with it, that federally the same initiative has been introduced. In fact, just before the recent federal election there was a federal bill called C-205 which sought to do almost exactly the same as this particular bill that we are discussing today, Bill 207. It sought to do exactly the same kind of thing at the federal level. The people who were involved in it indicated in some articles that were written that there was a great deal of hope that this would come through federally as well, but there's no guarantee of that. In spite of the fact that the bill was put forward and likely would die on the Order Paper with the federal election, the comment made by the people involved was: we should keep pushing for it as tradespeople. We should keep pushing for it as legislators that can address this issue on behalf of those people paying these high costs of tools. If we are able to implement that, as we are capable of doing here in Alberta, perhaps then that would provide some initiative as well for the federal scene to be addressing those concerns.

What are the specifics, then, of Bill 207? Bill 207 would amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to allow any of those journeymen or apprentices in those 50 registered trades that we have here in Alberta, those 50 trades that have apprentices and have journeymen that are registered in the province – those people would be able to receive a nonrefundable tax credit for any amount of money over \$500 spent on the purchase or the rental or the replacement or the maintenance or the insurance of those tools that they purchased for work during that tax year. The tradespeople would have to provide receipts for any of those tools purchased within that tax year in order to receive the credit. We know that doesn't differ from all sorts of businesspeople that must keep their receipts as well. In order to get that tax credit, they'd have to have these receipts. They'd also have to have a certificate from their employers stating that those tools purchased were in fact necessary and to be utilized on the jobsite.

Mr. Speaker, when the Alberta Tax Review Committee handed in its 1998 report on the state of income tax in Alberta, it recommended that there would be no new tax credits introduced, and that wisdom prevailed through the introduction and the amendment of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. That certainly parallels the federal experience that I just spoke about with Bill C-205. There was opportunity to initiate the changes, but they were not taken up, and it had been left to a private member's bill or, subsequent to that, some initiative by the government themselves to do so. The intentions of the committee can be understood, but in the case of the journeymen, Alberta's registered journeymen, and the apprentices there's more that we can do. The high cost of the tools which they must have in order to work puts them at an unfair disadvantage when compared with other Albertans.

Let's consider an example of the high costs of these tools and look at the Canadian Auto Repair & Service council's 1999 report. It was entitled *Bridging the Gaps*. In that report the council noted that a little bit under 40 percent of all automotive technicians and apprentices in Canada pay somewhere between \$1,000 and \$2,500 for tools every year, and in fact about a quarter of the technicians pay over \$2,500 every year. If we put those figures together with another statistic, that over 50 percent of all automotive technicians would pay more than \$20,000 for tools they have to have in order to do their jobs, that's a staggering number, but even more obvious that this is an important bill to consider is that about 10 percent of those technicians would pay in a lifetime over \$50,000 for tools.

Most registered journeymen in any trade – and it doesn't matter which one of those 50 trades we speak of – would have about \$10,000 worth of tools at a minimum in order to do the job that they

are asked to do by their employer. If we consider, though, that the average income for these workers is around the \$35,000 per year mark, we see that this is a considerable expense for these employees when compared to the salaries earned. Much of their income has to be put directly back into creating that income.

If we consider also the Automotive Industries Association of Canada report to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance in Ottawa, we see in that report that the AIA has noted that entry level apprentices typically need a starter set of tools before they'll even be offered a position. The AIA reports that this set of tools will generally cost around \$4,000. So when those apprentices go out on their first job, their first bill is for a huge set of tools requiring at least \$4,000 on average. I think everyone understands, Mr. Speaker, that \$4,000 is quite a lot to any young person about to start out in a trade let alone a set of starter tools that he or she might need just to get going in that job.

The high cost of tools deters young people from entering the trades. If we do not provide support through a tools tax credit or some other mechanism, we would risk losing potential workers, workers that are necessary for our continued prosperity. When we read articles almost daily but certainly weekly in our local papers, we know about the need here in Alberta to acquire more tradespersons. We need people to work in our resource sector, to help build our infrastructure, to help build our homes, our communities. Without them and their contribution to our province our economic momentum will stall, because their skills are sorely needed as we move towards the expansion of our industries.

With the cost of their tools running so high, it's clear that tradespeople need our help. It's a problem that we can remedy, and we should do so. Mr. Speaker, the creation of a tax credit for the benefit of trades journeymen would recognize the continued growth in trade heavy employment sectors; for example, goods production, the forestry industry, logging, the oil and gas industry, in construction and also in manufacturing.

Some members might argue against the bill, Mr. Speaker. They might say that it'll be difficult to administer a tax credit because administration costs might be high or perhaps because workers would have to go through all the hassle of keeping those receipts. Getting certificates from their employers might be a little bit of a problem as well. But really would it be all that difficult, and how many people keep those receipts for income tax purposes already because they have a business and are able to make those deductions? Would it be any more difficult than administering the education tax credit for example? I wouldn't think so. It might be a little trouble getting used to doing it, but that would be about all.

If it's really that difficult to administer, then the argument would hold for almost any other kind of tax credit. Those tax credits are justified and therefore they exist, and taxpayers appreciate that they have the opportunity to be recognized for those costs. While the tax credits depend upon eligible tradespeople keeping their receipts, I think any reasonable person would understand that if they're able to have the tax credit, they will keep those receipts and they will make use of them when they do their income taxes. If this bill were to pass and they had the opportunity to deduct those costs of tools, we would see a much more formal bookkeeping system being initiated immediately, and probably all those folks already keep track of their costs just for their own personal purposes.

Now, if we consider that the beneficiaries will most likely be those young men and women who are attempting to build that career, to enter through the apprenticeship process and start off on a career in the trades – or perhaps it may even be an older person who is supporting their family, their spouses and their children – we realized that a tax credit will be a real benefit to them. It would be

a relief to them for those high costs of tools, and Bill 207 is a mechanism whereby we can do that.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, I think then when we consider those facts, we understand that Bill 207 is a viable bill, a mechanism that we would encourage to be promoted and to be sponsored by this Assembly. These benefits ensure that more Alberta families will be able to enjoy our Alberta advantage. They will not have to stretch their budgets, because those work-related costs do so to those journeymen and apprentices. It would also make sure that our young people would recognize that their trades are appreciated and recognized through the income tax system so that even their costs would be deductible from their income tax.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members to vote in favour of this bill. I know that many members assembled wish to speak to the bill and contribute their personal experiences and their thoughts, some that are journeymen themselves, some that have family members involved in trades, and others that have heard from their constituents that this would be an appropriate way to go. I know that many of these people wish to speak to the bill, and at this time I'd take my seat and allow them to do so.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to compliment the hon. member for bringing forward Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. In speaking to this bill, we are looking at a bill that we would normally see under federal legislation, not provincial legislation. It certainly is a bill that does have some merit, not only in the area of tradespeople but I think in many other different areas. People would like deductions for workplace expenses and do require them. We had an hon. member earlier this week bring up the fact that teachers on the average spend in the neighbourhood of \$600, I believe the figure was, out of their own pockets in providing materials for the classroom. Certainly that would be an honourable tax deduction as well, for the moneys they paid to assist in their classroom.

Now, the member also made some very good observations here that this would certainly enable various young people to enter the trades, a system with very heavy expenses at the front end of their training and, as well, on the front end when they do become journeymen. It certainly is an issue that bears merit from the fact that particularly in these boom times here in Alberta we are experiencing a severe shortage of skilled workers, of tradespeople, and this in itself leads to many situations that this bill would help address. Of course, with the shortage of skilled labour and tradespeople all construction costs in this province are driven up. As well, with the training that we've had over the past number of years for tradespeople and the demand being quite small, young people have chosen not to go into this particular field, and I'm sure the costs have a bearing on that.

As a result, the average age of tradespeople in this province is somewhere close to 50 I would believe. We as legislators have to look forward and see that very soon in this province we're going to have a tremendous shortage of tradespeople, and certainly anything that would help attract these people into studying to become a tradesperson or entering an apprenticeship program is laudable and is something that we should look into.

What I wish I could have seen in the bill or heard from the member is specifically what stakeholder groups he spoke to before

drafting this bill and presenting it here on the floor of the Legislature. I don't see any indication of that, and certainly I know that this is an issue. There must be many, many groups out there that would be more than willing to assist in drafting this legislation and perhaps would bring in some intricacies that we haven't thought of. So I would definitely want to see more input by stakeholder groups. I notice also that none of the people from the building trades seem to have put forth any submissions to the hon. member. So I do have some reservations when I see this.

As well, what I don't see here is any type of an impact study on what would happen if indeed we introduced this legislation and how it would affect the administration, as he pointed out. As well, I would have liked to have seen, because it is a provincial bill, how this would affect provincial taxes for this particular group and to see what the overall costs would be. So those are two reservations I certainly have about Bill 207.

Then, as well, I look here and I see that section 2 of this amendment act would be the only real amendment to the Personal Income Tax Act, and it would simply add section 10.1 after the existing section 10 of the act. It defines tools as "portable equipment used in the performance of a tradesperson's occupation."

So I think this bill certainly does warrant a second look. I certainly think it would help address the situation that we are currently facing in this province, where there is a severe shortage of tradespeople. Also, it would provide us with a steady supply of tradespeople in the future, because we know we're going to have a huge turnover in the number of tradespeople because their average age is so high.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I think what this bill would provide is what all of us in here want for our youth, and that is opportunity. If this is a bill that will assist in more young people in Alberta getting trained here, living here, staying here, and providing their services to the community, then I certainly would support it.

Those are my comments and observations at this point on Bill 207. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

4:40

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take the opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. Some very valid comments, and I'm sure that they can be dealt with. I want to also mention the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

It's a long overdue bill, Mr. Speaker, and I was very happy to hear that this bill was being brought forward as a private member's bill. Not only in the campaign but in my previous business experiences I've had occasion to deal with many, many journeymen from the different vocations. It is a very large problem, very much more so for some of the mechanical areas than maybe for the large chunk of the 50.

But that said, I think I'd like to approach this more with kind of the W5 approach: who we are affecting, why, what, and wherefore. And I agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry that this should be a federal bill. Obviously, all apprenticeships and tradespeople across the country are faced with this issue, but I really don't think we'd do any good by dragging our feet and hoping someone else brings forward a bill. As was stated before, it got to the Order Paper, so there's definitely merit in it. I think if we can proceed with this bill and maybe work out the kinks and make it presentable, our provincial colleagues and our federal cousins may come forward and say that it's a bill whose time has arrived, so let's look at it that way.

I think Alberta should maintain its leadership role in programs like this, so let's go with that.

Now, what are we going to accomplish with this bill? What we're going to do is put people to work. We try so hard in this country to create jobs and to provide incentives. Here we've got people that are ready to go to work, and maybe the only thing holding them back is the amount of money it takes to outfit their particular occupation. You know, we seem to consider education an investment in the future, which it is, Mr. Speaker. Well, these people are investing in their education right now, and we don't have to wait two or three or four or five years for them to get a job. Their education is part of their job, and they need the tools to complete that.

So we're accommodating people that are already in the workforce, and who are these people? We probably all know some. We could probably list many, many apprenticeships. I've got two or three nephews that are in the 19- to 23-year-old age group that are in apprenticeship programs, and I know many other young people from our community as well as many middle-aged or older people that have just decided it's time for a change. The graduation ceremonies at Lakeland College that we attended here this spring showed how diverse the age group and the population were in the apprenticeship programs. It's not specific to one age group, but by and large it's young people picking an occupation.

Now, the one thing I've seemed to notice in our community – and I'm sure it's much the same around the province – is that these aren't the wealthy people. These are kids that have an idea that they want to be something, and they want to go to school and get out and make a living. Often it's a time of their life when they're wanting to start a family, maybe, or set up a home with someone, and already they're behind the eight ball. "Can we maybe put a down payment on a house, or do I have to buy tools?" It's a very small amount of money, maybe, to someone who's established in business to spend \$3,000 or \$4,000 on wrenches, but to someone just starting with an idea, it's a lot of money. So I really think if we can accommodate that and give them a chance, then we're doing a good thing.

Now, the "when" of this. When should have been 20 years ago when we set it up. We didn't do that. When should be now. So let's go forward with this, and let's be very constructive in notifying our neighbour provinces and the other provinces of Canada and the federal government, through our government departments, that we feel this should be a national program. I think it should fall under a straight tax deduction. I know that a tax credit may be all we can do, but to make it simpler, that's really what it should be.

We want to talk a little bit about how else it will affect people. The hon. member mentioned before about some of the prices. Well, I've checked with not only the college in Vermilion but many of the businesses in my constituency to see just how much it really is and how much it is a part of their educational communication with their instructors while they're attending college. Mr. Speaker, in our community the average start-up set for the automotive mechanics was between \$4,000 and \$7,000. Now, they had to have that before any of the businesses in town would take them in and enroll them in the apprenticeship program. Still, with \$4,000 or \$5,000 they had to spend early in their careers as high as \$4,000 a month, and even the most seasoned tradespeople were spending an average of \$2,100 a year on their tools. So it never seems to quit. I think that many of these tools grow legs and leave the jobsite by themselves. That's what they tell me. I know it happens. I've tried to keep tools in my garage. The average value of all of the mechanics' tools in the automotive industry there was \$16,500, but if you just considered the top journeymen, it was around \$30,000.

Now, the start-up set for the heavy-duty mechanics is a little more. It's around \$7,000 to \$10,000. That's a good chunk of change when

you've just been in school or when you've just started a job. It's a good chunk of change any time. They also had to spend considerably more per year on either the purchase of new tools as equipment designs changed, or maybe their expertise became more involved from engines to transmissions or such, and they spent on average between \$2,500 and \$4,000. Their tool sets ended up at around the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range.

Those are the most visible, the mechanics. But there are other types of mechanics that require very specialized tools, too – and we're very lucky in Alberta to have such programs in our colleges and universities and technical schools – particularly motorcycle maintenance, not a very common thing, but the tools are very expensive. Outboard marine courses.

MR. CENAIKO: Motorcycles break down.

MR. SNELGROVE: They sure do.

There are many other mechanically inclined vocations that do have a huge requirement for tools, so it's important we cover the whole spectrum and keep the emphasis on the connection to the apprenticeship program and tradesman certification. Just for an example, let's talk about electricians. Many people would say: well, all they have is a tool belt. For many electricians that might be all they have. It may only take them \$500 to purchase their tool belt and get a set of tools and go on their job. But out where we are, Mr. Speaker, sometimes the electrician has to be a little more independent, and depending on his tools, whether it be meters or drills or a saws-all, stuff that they would use in their daily work and that small electrical contractors may have one of but not two, it brings them a lot more job security or a lot more hirability if they have extra tools that they bring with them to the job. When you start to add some of these tools to their inventory, you can get into \$2,000 or \$3,000 or \$4,000 just like that.

The other thing that an inventory gives a young person with a genuine interest in it is portability. If you're working at a site where they own the tools, where they have everything there, where you may take them and do the job but they all go back, you're kind of indentured to them I guess would be the term. So by allowing them to start to build their own tool base, we may be actually encouraging many more independent small contractors to come out of the apprenticeship system and contribute to our economy. You know, it's a long-term thing to build a good, balanced small business base in any province.

The other thing we have to keep track of – it's not just tools. The safety aspect of our industries has changed dramatically in the last few years. I know that in our business, Mr. Speaker, to do any work on oil sites or refineries or such, you have to have these special coveralls. You've got to have the glasses and the boots. These coveralls can only be used so long. Once they've been washed or once the inspector feels they're a little tarnished, it's out the window, and they're several hundred dollars a set.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: How much?

MR. SNELGROVE: Several hundred dollars a set.

So we have to keep in mind that some of these tradespeople that work in those environments have costs that are exclusive, that are not inclusive to anyone else in Alberta.

The other thing that can happen in some of the businesses are the special tools dealing with high voltage. You don't buy the \$2.99 pliers from the discount store; you buy the \$35 or \$40 pliers that'll keep you alive. So there are a lot of things that make the expense and change it.

4:50

The other thing that I certainly don't really know is: what happens in the technical system? As we look around the room, we've got most of the people on laptops. I'm not sure what kind of meters and what kind of testers it's going to take in the future to see if the computers are all working properly or what it takes to fix them, what it takes to check the instrumentation at a water treatment plant, things like that. I don't know, Mr. Speaker, but I wouldn't want that price to be a hindrance to a journeyman or to a tradesperson going down that road towards that. I'd like to think that we have an open mind here in Alberta about pushing people towards independence and allowing them to do their jobs properly.

When I discuss with the teachers at Lakeland College about: "What are students saying to you? Are the tools the drawback?" many of them are saying, "Yes, I can complete the schooling, but there is no way I can get \$3,000 worth of tools." So maybe if ma or pa can get a receipt, it'll help him out.

There are other tradespeople, like welders – in many, many cases welders have formed their own businesses or companies. They've got their truck and their welder and they're on the road. But I think we should make it fair for those that don't want to go through the expense of incorporation and allow them to deduct. A welding truck could easily set you back \$50,000 or \$60,000, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAYLOR: That's just for the truck.

MR. SNELGROVE: More if you want a welder, I guess.

It's that these vocations do become very expensive, Mr. Speaker. I would hate to think that just because of bureaucracy we have to force them into a corporation or a company to get the deductions to do exactly the same job as they're going to do. It's just a cost we put back on ourselves.

Some of the other industries in the apprenticeship board have said that it could get very expensive to do specific jobs. The flooring industry: people that do tile. As you've seen out in our lobby, some of the carpet-laying equipment can be very expensive to purchase. It's fine if you work with a big company that provides that, but if you're one that wants to work out of your truck or even work as a contractor, not a company, for a supplier, you need all those tools yourself.

I would only say this, Mr. Speaker. The presenter of the bill made a case that could stand on its own. I don't think that we need to rehash much of what he said. It's a very timely bill. It was very much supported by the industry and by the teachers in the industry. I think my point today is: let's move this forward. Let's make it a very presentable bill to the rest of Canada, but more importantly, let's make sure that Albertans trying to work have every benefit that we can give them as a provincial body.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close, thanking you for the time and encouraging the rest of the people to join me in supporting this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise to speak to Bill 207. I believe that this is an important bill which will spur greater economic growth in this province by introducing another mechanism of tax relief to the hardworking Albertans who must regularly purchase, repair, and replace expensive tools. The creation of a tax credit for the benefit of trade journeymen would recognize the continued growth of our trade-heavy employment sector. It is for this reason that I will support Bill 207.

No matter how capable or educated, tradespeople in this province

often cannot find employment unless they have their own set of tools. I know that while I was campaigning, I did stop at quite a number of places such as service stations and other industries in my constituency. That was something that some of the apprentices, especially the mechanics, came out and said: you know, it would be nice to have some relief on the cost of the tools. Because technology changes daily, they're finding that they're having to buy, especially right now – when you look at some point in time, I was able to repair my own car. Now, unless you have electronic computer gadgets, because that's what your car is built with right now, it's physically impossible for everybody to have that piece of equipment. Certainly, right now the mechanics that are the journeymen that have gone through NAIT are finding that they have to have these tools if they're going to be working. Certainly a lot of the service stations, the dealerships do provide that type of equipment, the larger type of equipment, but the smaller, handheld equipment that are electronic can run in the thousands of dollars, and they are essential for what the mechanics are doing.

Each year it is estimated that the average tradesperson spends over \$500 for new tools. Bill 207 will help relieve some of this burden on trade journeymen and apprentices, who are so very important to the continued success of Alberta's economy. As I have said, tools are expensive, and it is difficult for those who are new workers and are finishing an apprenticeship to obtain a job without having a personal set of tools. I have a concern that this initial cost for tools is such a barrier that it could deter new generations of workers from the trades. I believe Bill 207 would provide just the incentive we need for a new generation to choose a trade as a career.

I was listening to CBC radio last week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: What?

MR. BRODA: Yes. You should listen to it sometime.

They were discussing the need for trade workers in Alberta. Their main topic was on our current growth and development compared to other provinces. A major concern that was raised and a concern that I share is that there are not enough people learning trades right now to fill the positions being created. There has been an overall increase in enrollment in schools like NAIT and SAIT over the past decade; there is still a shortage of skilled tradespeople. The experts who were commenting on this problem were particularly worried that they would not be able to attract new people fast enough, and even then they would have to wait for them to finish their apprenticeship. Apprenticeship levels have been increasing over the last decade but are still not where we need them to be.

The chances for placement are substantially increased for those who have acquired tools of their own. This is often an unattainable expectation for a new apprentice and worker but is becoming more the norm in the trade industry. As trades specialize more and more and technology increases, there is a greater need for each employee to have their own tools and the equipment necessary to do their job.

Employers are increasingly placing the responsibility on the employees to purchase a personal set of tools because it alleviates their burden of purchasing, replacing, and repairing expensive tools. Not only that, but I think the individual, the apprentice or the journeyman, once they have their own tools, they look after them a lot better. The employer is saying: if I provide the tools, a lot of times they're being lost. The apprentice or the journeyman would say: those are my tools; I will look after them.

Mr. Speaker, I fear that because employers necessitate that those who work with them purchase their own tools, the growth potential for new generations of trade workers in our province could be weakened. Bill 207 would help our province's chance to stop the

widening shortage of workers in this sector. The value of stimulating new generations of tradespeople in our province cannot be overlooked. I believe that Bill 207 is an investment in the growth in the future of apprenticeship trade workers in this province, and I would encourage everyone in this Assembly to support Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:00

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of Bill 207, presented by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. The bill is called the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, and I believe that this bill is a positive step towards greater development of the trade industries in our province. Much of our revenue, everyone knows, is derived from trade-heavy employment sectors. Our province could only benefit if we support this bill because we would be supporting the trade sector in so many ways.

Our province has benefited by efforts to keep personal taxes as low as possible for Albertans. We have made every effort to do that, and it's certainly – as in the news and from reports that came across in the papers today – indeed an attractive place to be and certainly an attractive place to live and work. So by this bill we want to extend that tax advantage, if you will, to those who are working in the trades or to those who are training to work in the trades. The money that these tradesmen, journeymen, and indeed students of the trades would be able to keep in their pockets or spend with their families or in the improvement of their quality of life or indeed of their workplace would improve the quality of life that they enjoy, that we all enjoy. It would certainly generate more spending within our economy, and that's always good news indeed.

I also support Bill 207 because I believe that it is important for our province to support the development and the continued growth of the trades-heavy economy of our province. It is usually the responsibility, as was pointed out earlier, of the employee to purchase the tools that are necessary for their work. Often the apprentice or journeyman tradesmen cannot find employment unless they have their own personal set of tools. By having their own tools, they are investing not only in themselves to become better and more capable trade workers, but they are giving employers alternatives in an essential sector of our economy.

I would like to digress for a moment, Mr. Speaker, to mention that this is something that I highlighted when I brought forth my sponsored bill, Bill 202. The origin of that bill, the genesis of it, came from a young high school graduate who wanted to go into the trades, who had registered in an apprenticeship program, had to pay for his instruction fees – his tuition, if you will – and he also had to buy a car that would take him to his place of employment. He also had to pay in large sum for his own tools, and that was a great outlay of money. I might add that he also was expected to pay a very high insurance rate premium for the car that was to take him to his place of work. However, that's another topic that we have discussed, not thoroughly though, in this Assembly.

Why I reference it, Mr. Speaker, is simply because I believe that if we as a province are looking to make it a worker-friendly, a tradesperson-friendly circumstance and environment to encourage young people to work in the trades that we so desperately need their expertise in, then we should be looking to the likes of Bill 207. We should be voting in favour of it in order for us to give them one more opportunity, one more occasion, to say to them that we respect the costs and the outlay that they must put towards their work and that we appreciate the work that they do on behalf of all of the industries that involve the trades.

I would like also, especially at this moment, to mention the oil and

gas sector, which is dependent upon skilled tradespeople to provide the expertise necessary to extract and utilize our natural resources. I feel that it is important to provide easier access for young apprentices in these trade sectors to ensure that these industries are getting the skilled support they need.

The trades, as I said, are so important to our Alberta economy. Not only are they important to our economy, but they're very important to our own domestic circumstances, because for all of us who are domestic engineers, we do know that we need the skills of tradespeople who come to our homes to assist us in those areas that we need. So even if we take it out of the heavy equipment industry sector and put it into our own respective homesites, we realize the importance of tradespeople.

We want to increase the future enrollment in trades schools and those seeking apprenticeship positions. As a province which is so dependent on the work of skilled tradespeople, we must continually look for new ways to attract the number of workers we need and to keep their skills in our province. I believe, should we pass Bill 207, which I'm hoping everyone will agree to do, we should in effect create again an environment and an attractive aspect of our work environment in this province that would see young people – and older people, too, who wish to seek anew the learning and the development of their skills in these trades – seeking to come to our province, and certainly then it would respond to the needs that we have in our various sectors.

The tools and equipment that tradespeople require to work are expensive. I shan't repeat the numbers that have been identified by my colleagues, who have spoken with those who are instructors and those who are practitioners in the trades. They have identified quite ably the cost and the expensiveness of tools to be used in the trades. But we also know something further, Mr. Speaker, and that is that the equipment or the tools that we use and the equipment that they are working on often need to be replaced or repaired in order to create a level not only of efficiency but appropriateness and currency and certainly to be able to respond to the mechanisms that we have in our communities and in our workplaces. So with this constant renewal or, as they say when we speak of the technology industry, the evergreening of the trades sector and the equipment that they use, that does require some additional and some new tools, and they are a constant expense to those who are working in the trade.

In order for our province to continue to attract a new generation of people into the trades, we need to remove the barriers that the young Albertans face. I feel that this would be an attractive element, should we pass this Bill 207, because it would be another occasion on which people would be able to not just speak of but experience the Alberta advantage. In other words, it would say to our young people and to our tradespeople what we know and we believe, and that is that we value their skills. We appreciate their attention to and their contribution to our economy, and we are willing to do something about it so that through a rather fair and more equitable and appropriate way the expenses that they do incur in order to provide their services at the workplace can be recognized.

I believe that Bill 207 is an important step in helping generate new interest within the trades sector. As technology improves the goods-producing industries – forestry, oil and gas – in our province, we need to ensure that there will be enough new people coming into the trades to support these industries and certainly to support our fast-growing leadership economy in this province and, I might say, in this country and indeed across the continent.

5:10

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again encourage everyone in this Assembly to support Bill 207. It speaks to our

young people. It would make it more attractive, I think, and more viable and possible financially for them to enter into a trade. It would endorse in a very concrete way our appreciation and our recognition of the important role that tradespersons play in our economy, and it would acknowledge in a more equitable fashion the way in which we choose to encourage and to endorse those working in the trades within our province. Again, I can't say often enough: I hope everyone here will support the bill brought forth by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. He is aware of it. I hope you are aware of it, too, and that we can all support this endeavour as we look to the tradespeople of Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak in support of Bill 207. It's been my career prior to this career to be involved extensively in an industry and a business where tradespeople were our lifeblood. I started in 1965 in the trades, and of course, as you would realize, at that point in time there wasn't much support for these types of initiatives.

MR. LUKASZUK: I wasn't around then.

MR. KNIGHT: No. You probably weren't here.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding that, we started a business in 1971 and employed over the years as many as 50 tradespeople at a time. Probably in that 30-year stretch we have seen in the neighbourhood of a hundred young people come through our doors, start out as apprentices, and continue through the trade training process, all to become very productive members of the province of Alberta's success story.

I would say that it could have been a lot easier for them to continue and to get their training if they'd had an opportunity to be able to have legislation such as this in place supporting them with respect to their taxes paid on their tools, taxes to be returned to them or credited to them. The purpose of the bill, of course, is to give these tradespeople relief from the expense they incur when they buy tools to start and continue their career in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would amend division 3, section 10, of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, and the credit would be available on money spent over a \$500 threshold and would be classified as a nonrefundable tax credit. Bill 207 allows the province, which has already extensively reduced taxes as a means of spurring economic growth, to introduce another mechanism of tax relief to Alberta workers who must regularly purchase and repair or replace expensive tools. There have been many positive changes to the tax system in Alberta, and this proposed amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act would ensure that Albertans continue to benefit from these changes.

Mr. Speaker, tradespeople are often required to purchase, upgrade, and update tools and diagnostic equipment every year to continue their chosen trades. As already stated by my colleagues, practising technicians and apprentices can pay thousands of dollars in tool costs each year. Bill 207 would give relief to the people in the industry who must buy tools to start, support, and continue their careers.

Since many apprentices and tradespeople must have their own tools and equipment to begin working, an initial barrier exists for Albertans who do not have the money to invest in tools. Contractors and businesses require that employees supply this expensive equipment for a variety of reasons related to costs and commitment. This tax credit could assist employees, investing in their future and the productivity of Alberta.

The added benefit this credit has is that it is especially important to the low- to middle-income earners. These are the people in Alberta who most need the relief. They are the ones who experience the most severe negative impact related to the cost of tools.

Mr. Speaker, industry groups are in favour of the introduction of a tool tax credit. Industry leaders see the absence of a tool tax deduction as a factor that places several trades at a disadvantage when competing for the next generation of trainees and employees.

Here in Alberta tradespeople have played an essential role in economic growth. It would be a distinct disadvantage to experience a labour shortage in these industries. By introducing a tax credit for tradespeople, the government has the opportunity to attract new workers from inside the province along with skilled workers from outside the province and across North America.

In the Economic Development business plan for 2000-2003 the mission of the department was "to promote Alberta's continuing prosperity." An excellent way for the government of Alberta to follow up on and continue with the promotion of Alberta's prosperity is to give a tax credit to hardworking tradespeople in this province.

Mr. Speaker, as technology advances and there are more and more technological aspects to our daily lives, the diagnostic equipment that's required for tradespeople and technicians to work with gets much, much more expensive. As our demographics change, the situation with tradespeople is very similar to that of teachers, nurses, and other professionals where there are more people retiring and moving out of the field than we have moving in to replace them.

It has been stated in this House today, Mr. Speaker, that \$53 billion of capital investment can be expected in the province of Alberta over the next 10 years. We are already short of tradespeople and people to get involved with that capital expenditure, and this is one way that we could help relieve that shortage.

Mr. Speaker, as has already been pointed out – but I think it's important to re-emphasize – there was a movement at the federal level to give just such a tax credit to tradespeople, specifically to mechanics. The deduction was to encompass maintenance, rental, and insurance costs, the full cost of tools under \$250 or such inflation adjusted limit as is set by regulation, or the capital cost allowance of tools over \$250 as set by regulation.

5:20

Unfortunately, the bill died on the Order Paper, but it has been recommended for years to the federal Minister of Finance that changes be made to the federal Income Tax Act to provide for tax credits for mechanics' tools. Alberta can take a step where the federal government appears reluctant. We can help the workers of the trade industries by having a tax credit on the tools that they need to keep their businesses and careers going.

Mr. Speaker, I have not much more to add. I would just like to say that I think this bill deserves our attention and our support. I would say that it's a very well-drafted piece of legislation, the evidence of which is it only took a page and a half of paper with respect to getting it out to us. So I think that was a plus in itself.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to adjourn debate. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an extremely productive afternoon with much co-operation and some

very excellent debate. In view of all of that, I would move that we now call it 5:30 and that we adjourn and that when we do reconvene this evening, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion proposed by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 16, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/16

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order. A reminder to all hon. members that, as is the usual custom, only one member stands and speaks at a time. For the benefit of those in the gallery, this is the less formal part of the Assembly, as you may be able to determine. If you're looking over your maps of where people are, they may or may not be there because in the committee stage members are allowed to move about quietly and to sit and talk to other people as they want. If you want to speak, you must speak in your place.

Tonight we have a couple of estimates, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and then the Community Development department, but before we commence the evening's deliberations, I wonder if we might have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my privilege and distinct pleasure to introduce to you and to all of my colleagues in the Assembly a very special group of Edmontonians today. They're all seated up there in the public gallery. They're all distinguished in their own fields, have a quite enviable record of achievements and a record of contributions to Alberta and Edmonton. They are part of a group called the Free Spirits. They've been in existence for at least a half dozen years, and my wife is part of this group. Let me introduce all of them first and then ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. Maybe they can start rising as I name them. They are Barbara Belch, Carol Berman, Paula Brindley, Marguerite Gendall, Pat George, Jackie Hildreth, Shashi Kalia, Cath Lopaschuk, Cathie Lylock, Lynne Morgenson, Swinder Pannu, my companion of the last 44 years, Razia Sachedina, and Saroj Singhmar. Please give them all a warm welcome.

head: Main Estimates 2001-02

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

THE CHAIRMAN: We'll call upon the hon. minister and Deputy Premier to begin this evening with her comments.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will start by introducing a couple of guests in the gallery: our deputy minister of agriculture, Brian Manning – and Mike and Faye are with him – and Maureen from my office, who I think everyone knows.

I'm going to give a very, very brief overview of our budget and business plan so that we have lots of time for questions. I'll start with some general comments, and I don't think these are comments that anyone would be surprised to hear.

Our agricultural community is faced with some very serious difficulties related to input costs and world prices for products and the potential for weather problems, and that's a subject that we could probably spend the whole next hour just discussing. Hence, highlighted in this budget is assistance for the agricultural industry.

This budget contains programs to assist the industry with rising input costs and other items. Funding in this budget we hope will help us deal with the immediate concerns so that we can go on and concentrate on solutions for sustainability in the industry.

The budget for program expense for 2001-2002 is \$883.3 million. That's an increase of \$255.5 million when compared to the last year's budget. Of course, the largest budget increase appears in the farm income support allocation and is for the assistance for the \$10.29 cultivated acreage payment that was announced on April 27. I can say from the comments I've had from my colleagues in the Legislature and from farmers that have called me that this was very welcome.

When we announced this program, we said that this is to support producers in a time of difficulties, difficulties that are caused through no fault of theirs, and that this would help with a transition period. We certainly have to find long-term solutions for the issues that are facing farmers, and that is what we hope this assistance will do. We are going to be dealing with some of those issues through the ag summit process. We expect the Agrivantage teams to have some recommendations to us over the period of the next month and that we will address most of these issues by the end of December.

Additional funding of \$17 million has also been included in that program, and of course you would know that that is to extend the winter natural gas rebate program over the summer months for the province's irrigation farmers, greenhouses, and alfalfa processors. I think all members understand that it was entirely up to the producers, the greenhouse owners, or the alfalfa dehydrators to choose the four months that they would apply this, because they don't get it twice. I think they know that.

Crop insurance, shown on page 43 of the estimates, shows an increase of \$12.2 million, up to \$201.7 million. Of course, this is based on a rolling average loss to premium ratio for the past 20 years.

The next significant budget change is for sustainable agriculture, which shows \$2.3 million. We recognize the importance of food safety on the viability of the industry and the need for vigilance for the health of Albertans. Therefore we've included in the budget a \$2 million increase for food safety programs.

A final comment just on numbers. The budget shows \$61.7 million for quota exchange and restricted expense. That is an increase of \$2.4 million over last year. However, that expense, before the Finance minister gets excited, is offset by a corresponding amount of revenue that's included in other revenue. In other words, these items that are termed restrictive have no effect on the ministry or the government's net operating results, the bottom line.

The restricted revenues and expenses, for those who are not familiar with that term, relate to the price equalization pool operated by the Dairy Control Board, which is part of our ministry.

Those are the most significant funding changes in the ministerial financial plan for this year. However, I should point out that this plan is based on the assumption that, one, commodity prices will not decline further, that interest rates will be reasonably stable, and that we will not experience a disastrous year of claims on the farm income disaster and crop insurance programs. These assumptions mean that achievement of the plan is subject to some major risks, including widespread crop losses due to bad weather, conditions such as drought, which we seem to be experiencing right now, further declines in global commodity prices, especially for crops, and changes in economic conditions such as higher interest rates or the strengthening of the Canadian dollar. These three items have the potential to affect farm income dramatically and, in turn, indemnities paid out under crop insurance and the farm income disaster program. The financial plan is obviously not designed to deal with a disastrous year of claims under these two programs.

The business plan I'll only touch on very briefly. This plan is a bridge to the longer term solutions that we're working on with industry to develop through the Ag Summit 2000 process. I know that if we work in these areas, we can assist the industry to remain one of the cornerstones of our economy. Many of the initiatives that were recommended by summit participants are addressed in the plan that you have in front of you. I know that many of you in this Assembly attended a number of the summit meetings, so I will just highlight a few strategies and major initiatives.

Under goal 1, "improved industry competitiveness," we will "advocate policy, legislation, regulation and institutional reforms that assist industry to respond to growth opportunities," including negotiating with the federal government for marketing choice in Alberta for wheat and barley.

Under goal 2, "increased amount of value added to industry commodities, products and services," we will "encourage new and expanded investment in value-added processing." We are seeing that occur almost daily in this province. I would recommend to all members that they take advantage of the offer, especially for the capital region, of some information that shows how many businesses in this actual capital region process agricultural food and ship the value-added product to over 100 countries in the world.

8:10

Under goal 3, "increased diversity of commodities, products and services," we will support the agriculture industry in its efforts to "take advantage of emerging life sciences opportunities." In that, we speak of things like nutraceuticals, a great opportunity in that area, especially with the marvelous research capability we have in this province. I believe there are some 37 researchers at the University of Alberta that do research in agriculture, plus many other areas of research opportunities through the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute and others.

Environmental stewardship: very important to us. We will "provide guidelines, standards, regulations and legislation for environmental performance requirements to sustain the quality of Alberta's soil, water, air and agriculture land resources."

Finally, under goal 6, "continued excellence in food safety," we will "develop and maintain targeted food safety surveillance systems that validate the safety of Alberta's agriculture and food products." We have performance measures in the document. I think they are quite self-explanatory, but I would welcome any comments from hon. members where they feel that those performance measures can be strengthened.

We remain very confident that the food and beverage industry will continue to grow during the period of 2001 to 2004. I want to remind hon. members that \$16.5 billion is the extent to which this industry impacts us on a cash basis. We are targeting that shipments of value-added product will increase by 9.5 percent by 2004, and that target is \$9.2 billion. This is an ambitious target, but I do believe that with the quality product that we have, with the entrepreneurial people that we have in this province, with the stable fiscal regime we have in this province, we can meet that goal.

That is a summary. It's a very quick one, but I will look forward to your comments and respond appropriately. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. It's a real privilege tonight to stand and comment on the budget and the departmental allocations of the minister responsible for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Mr. Chairman, as you know, this is an area of special interest to me.

This is where I've spent my life working: in agriculture, agriculture policy, and the kind of issues that are important to appropriate rural development and directed rural development. I've really enjoyed the last nine years, and I hope that as I move on in this position here, I still don't lose my touch with the agriculture ministry, because it's a really important area for me.

To the budget tonight, Mr. Chairman. I guess I'll start with and go through some of the issues that came up with specific numbers that I've noted, and then I want to spend a little bit of time on some of the issues that come up in the context of the business plan and some of the comments and suggestions from the community that we heard through the ag summit process and on questioning where those have gone and how they're being implemented.

The minister began tonight by talking about how we have to accept the fact that there's a lot of risk associated with this budget, and I think this year everybody in the agriculture community recognizes that. We have to basically be willing to look at this in the context of a document in progress as we see whether or not it rains in the next month and whether or not we see any kind of significant improvement in world prices.

Some of the things that basically come up in the context of the overall budget – I'll just kind of start with a very brief overall comment on how it's structured here. For the last six or eight months we've had a lot of discussion about the reorganization that's going on within Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in terms of their different focuses and how they're putting together kind of a structural team approach that crosses a lot of the other program outlines that we used to have within Alberta Agriculture. Yet as we look at this budget, there's no attempt to try and build that new structure into the reporting system that we have here so that we don't see any kind of a change to this focus, you know, the complete flow-through in terms of what constitutes the rural community, the product, the export market development, the value added, all in the context of these value chain concepts that get talked about very directly and very often in the agriculture community.

In many ways the restructuring was supposed to reflect some of those issues, yet in this budget we see the same old traditional types of breakdowns in terms of the judgments. From that perspective, the question that I would put to the minister directly is: basically, the accountability that we need to deal with in the context of the budget, how soon can we see those kinds of budget numbers so that we can trace it back to the actual activities and performance of Alberta Agriculture as it undertakes this structural transition?

I'll just go through the programs here to start with. The thing that comes up in terms of the second program, where we'd looked at the planning and competitiveness part of it is that there's a real kind of out-of-line number that shows up on the table on page 31. We started off with a budget last year of \$67 million. That was in comparison to \$219 million the year before and a projected actual expenditure of \$310 million this year, and then they're putting in for the current budget \$351 million.

The question that comes up there is: is it a typo? Is it a reporting error that we've got a number that's so far out of line in the context of what was in the 2000-2001 budget, what was actually spent in 2000-2001, and what has been budgeted in both the year previous to that and this year's budget? Why was it that one year, particularly last year, the budget was so low, yet the expenditures were basically in line with the two budgets that bracket that component part? It's kind of hard to look on page 33 and pick it out because we don't have the historic trend that shows up on page 31 of the budget.

The other thing that I've targeted here is the recognition that we now end up with the farm income support programs showing up in two different places in the budget: under program 2 in terms of the

farm income support component – this is on page 33 – and then when we go to the Ag Financial Services component, there's another sector in there for the farm income disaster and the crop insurance. If we're going to look at how we provide support and direction to the individuals who are involved in the support programs of agriculture, it would have been probably a lot easier to look at it and deal with it in the context of having these all in one place. I recognize fully that the administration of the farm income assistance program was not done through Ag Financial Services, that it was done in a different way, but if we could see these things combined together so that we could look at them.

Another thing that's quite interesting here is that when we look at the revenue table, which is further along in the book, it shows about \$244 million being received as a federal government transfer in support of agriculture. Most of that was directed to the respective farm income support programs, yet when we look at the crop insurance, the farm income disaster program, and the farm income assistance program, we don't see a revenue component there that shows that these were revenues received from an outside agent and dedicated to that specific line item.

8:20

I guess it would be easier for us to be able to look at the relationship between provincial and federal funding on these programs if we could see that dedicated revenue, because you know, those dollars do come from the federal government specifically for the farm income assistance or the crop insurance programs. Maybe I'm putting too broad a definition associated with dedicated revenue, where this would be a revenue that is specifically associated with an activity of that line item departmental structure. I think that for understanding ease, so that we can see where these dollars are going, it would be really quite helpful to be able to show that there are some federal dollars in there.

You know, I guess this kind of goes to the discussion that we had a year ago, when the first acreage payments were being discussed, talked about. We questioned the former ag minister, and he talked about how the money that was kind of moved around in the departmental budget was done in a way that the dollars that were all being moved into that initial acreage payment program were already matched dollars, so they in essence had a federal component in it. So for both us looking at it as opposition and also Albertans looking at it in terms of how programs are funded and how we track the dollars, having maybe even an asterisked dedicated revenue there would help us quite significantly.

The other component that I wanted to look at and ask the minister about. I assume from some of the previous conversations we've had that the farm safety education programs and that are in program 2.3, somewhere in there. The one thing that I want to do is just make sure that the minister recognizes how much the agriculture community appreciates the work that her department is doing in these areas right now, because farm safety is really important to people in the rural community.

We had an incident in southern Alberta just recently where city friends of ours took their children out to a farm to experience rural life and experience some of the things that we who live in rural Alberta take for granted. Unfortunately, a farm accident occurred, and they lost a son. You know, as we look at our programs and look at the way that we deal with making our mark and committing to people, that farm safety program, Madam Minister, is something that really plays an important role and is really appreciated by the people in rural Alberta. I've noticed even in the last year or so that there is the odd ad that shows up on the regular TV channels. Maybe this someday might have helped this young boy who didn't understand

the risks he was undertaking when he went out to a rural community. So I would just encourage you, let you know that that's a program that as I travel the whole province, I hear a lot of good things about.

As we go through, you know, especially in program 3, industry development, I know that this is where a lot of that restructuring is taking place in the context of the value chain components in the constituency, or that makeup, and it would be really, I think, interesting if by next year we could see some restructuring of the budget that would give us a sense of how those kinds of activities are being put together.

A comment there in that section, program 3.5 on page 35, where you've got all the regional breakouts. One of the things I got in terms of feedback from a lot of people in Alberta Agriculture when they were talking about the excitement they're feeling with this team concept, the whole concept from one end to the other, right to the export market, is that this regional breakout doesn't really necessarily matter so much, because people all over the province are part of these teams. They've got the communications systems in place through their computer links so that where they're actually located isn't really that much of a deal to them. They can be part of these teams and be very active. So I guess I would say that some day we need to look at having that kind of reporting.

I think an issue that's come up in a lot of the other programs and subprograms that we see here – you know, there are some little changes in dollars here and little changes in dollars there that are not really that important. There was just one other one that I was going to comment on, but I'll probably get to that as I come back again at a later date.

As we go through this, the relationship that we look at, then, I guess is how these particular items move and go into the goals of the department and also the performance indicators.

I found the one I was looking for, so I'll deal with it now while I can. In program 6 the question comes up in the context of the budget allocated for farm income disaster. In 2000-2001 it was \$163 million, yet when we ended up the actual preliminary data for 2000-2001, it was only \$21 million actually distributed through the program. We're talking about a possibility of \$59 million this year, yet we're talking also about how the sector is facing a real risk this year in the context of continued downward pressure from international prices, drought: some of the factors that are there.

When we're looking at the claims that were made in the 2000-2001 budget year, how is it that they were so far off from the \$163 million that was projected there? What happened to the difference? Were those excess dollars, then, transferred over into the farm income assistance program? Wouldn't it be appropriate for us to see that kind of line transfer between the budget that was approved in the Legislature last year and the estimate of the actual expenditures that are being reported this year so that we can track how the dollars were moved within the minister's appropriate jurisdiction given the new Financial Administration and Government Accountability acts in the context of the ministers?

You know, we set aside \$163 million last year. We're setting aside approximately \$60 million this. Obviously what's happened is that the other payments that are going out affect that, especially when we look at the 2001-2002 estimate of \$60 million. When farmers file this year for last year's farm income disaster claims, the acreage payments that were paid out last year will kind of boost their income a little bit, and I guess it seems that if we look at that in the context of last year's \$21 million actual expected payout, what we're going to say is: you know, with these other payments that were made last year, the \$4 and the \$6 at the two different periods, why are we expecting to have to pay out so much under FIDP, the farm income

disaster program, given that so much went out under the farm income assistance?

8:30

You know, this also leads us to the question of how effective and what kind of a review is in place for the farm income disaster program, because obviously with this kind of budget and then actual delivery of dollars, it's not working in the way farmers are expecting it to. It's not protecting them. We recognize that that program probably would work very well for one-year or possibly two-year sudden downturns in revenue, but when you get a long-term cyclical program in place, the program basically cancels itself out and doesn't provide for very much of an opportunity to really be a functional program. What we need to do is look at how this can be combined or revamped to really give us a program where farmers can participate and ensure in some way their production costs so that they can actually have a degree of stability to how they basically manage their risk.

That's what these programs are all about, Mr. Chairman, basically trying to give the farmers an opportunity with public help to be in there and manage the risk that's so associated with farming in a province where our climate is becoming much more variable and also where we're in a position where we as a producing area, even as a producing country, have less ability to deal with or control the international aspects that get kind of imposed on us as participants in the agriculture sector. So we have to look at: is it appropriate for us to be dealing with the current structure and the current combination of programs so that we can actually have a safety net for income that serves the purpose and that in effect becomes part of the decision-making process for farmers in the sense that they see it as a risk management tool, not as an income supplement or as a political type of issue?

Mr. Chairman, I see on my watch that I'm down to less than 30 seconds, so what I'll do is take my seat, let somebody else have a shot, and then I can guarantee I'll be back to ask some more questions as time permits.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

I've got two members standing. Is there agreement? Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to speak on agriculture. I have lived my whole life in the city, but I do have many family members who farm, and I enjoy helping out during the harvest and at various times of the year, branding, et cetera.

I'm going to address a range of topics here today. One of them concerns the action to "advocate for the elimination of subsidies that distort trade and production," which I'm sure we would all agree is in theory something to strive towards but in practice is probably going to be exceedingly difficult to achieve. It undoubtedly overlaps with the Minister of International Trade.

Some of the questions I'm wondering about here. How will the ministry advocate for the elimination of subsidies that distort trade and production? How are they going to proceed given the international scale of that, the number of countries involved, the entrenched international interests in the various subsidies? So the fundamental question there is: how is the minister going to advocate for the elimination of subsidies in other countries?

If and as they succeed at that, I'm wondering which segments of Alberta's agriculture industry will be most affected, or if they don't succeed, what compensatory mechanisms will we be looking at ourselves? Are we going to end up having to develop a subsidy system parallel to what the Americans or the Europeans have to

ensure that our farm sector survives? I would be quite interested in more information on the questions of agricultural subsidies and trade and so on.

I'm also very interested and very aware about the need to support rural communities, the social infrastructure requirement of rural areas, farm communities, small towns and villages throughout the province. I know in the rural development area of this department it's undoubtedly of very, very great interest. Certainly my view has always been that a rural community is far more than just the economy of the farm sector. It has to do with the availability of services, the quality and availability of schools, the quality and availability of health services and of cultural amenities and of parks and lakes for fishing and so on, all things that I know many, many people in rural Alberta cherish and value and things that help them to continue to live and thrive in the rural areas.

So if we're looking at the ministry's agenda to encourage economic and social infrastructure and transportation and other services, again, what mechanisms will the ministry use to encourage these kinds of things, to encourage the necessary economic infrastructure and to encourage the development of social infrastructure? Does this department have or intend to have considerable co-ordination with, say, the Department of Health and Wellness or the Department of Learning to ensure that those threads of the social fabric of rural Alberta are strong and even being strengthened rather than the trend of the last few years, which is weakened?

I'm also aware of a real concern over transportation issues for farmers in rural areas with the whole shift of the transportation infrastructure away from the railway and the elevators to the highway and to the huge grain terminals and the concern that over the longer term this is going to add very significantly to the costs to farmers. Rather than being able to truck their grain six or eight or 10 miles to a nearby elevator where it then gets loaded and handled by the railways, they're looking at having to haul grain 40 or 50 miles to these superterminals. That I believe in the long run – and I know many farmers believe this as well – is much more to serve the needs of the big grain and transportation and rail companies rather than to serve the needs of the farmers. As the cost of fuel climbs and as the cost of the added equipment such as huge trucks climbs, we're facing real issues around the viability of farms and their ability to get their crops to market. So I'm wondering exactly where the ministry is headed in terms of encouraging rural transportation and systems for getting grain to market.

Another particular area that caught my eye with this department was the specific focus on elk ranching. I think this is an area in which we have considerable controversy and some questions that still remain. If the department is planning to partner with the Alberta Elk Association and the U of A to develop an Elk Centre of Excellence, lots of questions have come up. When is this going to be operational? Who are the industry partners? What do they bring to the table, both in terms of perhaps good things and in terms of vested interests that may cause questions to be raised about the whole operation of an Elk Centre of Excellence? Finally, of course I'd like to know: what is the department's financial contribution to this program? I'm not sure that many Albertans are aware that elk farming is as extensive as it now is in Alberta, having doubled, I think, in the last five years. I've certainly heard reports that there are more elk now in Alberta on farms than there are in the wild. That raises, of course, all kinds of questions around disease and hunting and so on.

8:40

One other area – and I will make this my last area of comment here – concerns the Farmers' Advocate. I notice that the Farmers'

Advocate expenditures are expected to drop. The Farmers' Advocate I know from direct personal experience provides a very useful role for farmers in a range of activities including in particular I think the concerns that farmers have and the challenges they face in negotiating with oil and gas drilling companies, companies that want access to their property and potentially want to take control and assemble the mineral rights under a farmer's land. Given the increased drilling activity in Alberta, the phenomenal rise in oil and gas drilling, I'm curious at least, if not a little bit concerned, that spending on the Farmers' Advocate is down a bit. Certainly I don't want to see farmers and the interests of farmers weakened by a shrinking of the ability of the Farmers' Advocate to fulfill its role of advocating for farmers.

I would also note one other line here under support for 4-H clubs, an incredibly important organization for rural Albertans. It brings people together; it teaches rural children wonderful lessons and skills and life attitudes. I notice that at a time when there is tremendous prosperity in Alberta, our support for the 4-H organization is dropping a bit. I would certainly be concerned if that's any kind of long-term trend. It does relate back to questions of strengthening the rural social infrastructure. It's exactly organizations like 4-H that help keep our rural communities strong and vibrant and help to keep the next generation of farmers interested in their lifelong commitment to the land.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman and Madam Minister, I will take my seat. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to speak to the estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Like my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, I'm not exactly a country born and bred kind of guy, but I've taken quite an interest in farm issues since being elected to the Legislature and have actually had an opportunity to tour a number of areas of the province and familiarize myself with at least some of the really basic elements of agriculture. I'd like to address a number of issues tonight, but I want to focus on the changes that are taking place in the agricultural sector and the effect that the government's and the department's policies in this budget have on that direction.

Agriculture has been perhaps the last holdout of local ownership in our economy, but having said that, Mr. Chairman, it's clearly besieged, and the result is that there's an ongoing threat to the family farm and in fact to local towns and villages throughout this province. We've seen particularly the movement of large and vertically integrated corporations into the area of hog production in particular, where they take on not just the production of hogs and the processing of hogs but the production of feed. Virtually every element of the industry is coming under the control of single corporations operating in areas.

Of course, before they can get a foothold, they require the construction of very large-scale operations for the raising and production of hogs. I don't believe that the trends we're seeing are inevitable. They are not strictly the result of economic forces over which we have no control. They require the collaboration of governments and elected officials in order to make these changes come about. So I view with some concern some of the statements in the ministry business plan which although they are not explicit about supporting the development of massive operations in this industry clearly imply that it is the government's policy to facilitate this change in the agricultural sector.

There's good evidence, Mr. Chairman, that these kinds of large-scale agricultural operations have a tendency to push down prices for

the products that farmers receive, to move purchasing of input supplies and so on away from local communities and into large cities or even, in fact, sometimes outside the province altogether, and they produce significantly less jobs than the family farm. There are studies we've looked at done by universities in the United States that show that the family farm operations produce up to three times the number of jobs as the large-scale corporate farms that are now moving into Alberta on a massive scale.

There are a number of things that can be done about this, because we feel that it is a very serious challenge facing agriculture in Alberta. A return to single-desk selling would rebalance the opportunity for small- and medium-sized producers to be able to sell their products on a competitive basis with the large-scale operations.

The other point I'd like to make with respect to this, Mr. Chairman, is the need for environmental stewardship, and I'm very pleased to see in the business plan of the department that they in fact put an emphasis in goal 5 on "improved environmental stewardship." But the question is how that's going to be done and, in fact, if it can be done if we have massive scale hog plants in this province.

For example, a hog operation with 150,000 hogs produces as much waste product as a small city, and not only that, it can't be readily distributed. It has to be liquefied and then the containment and the restraint of that manure becomes a very serious problem. It poses a real threat to groundwater, since it's usually not properly contained. It spreads flies, produces nuisance odours in the vicinity far and wide, and generally is a major threat to probably our most precious resource and our most endangered resource in this province, and that is our groundwater. So movement of the province to deal with the groundwater issue is compromised by the government's agricultural policy of promoting and facilitating these kinds of hog operations.

MR. STELMACH: Where?

MR. MASON: There are lots of examples which I can refer the minister to. These operations, Mr. Chairman, have been much more widespread, of course, in the United States. They've only taken root in Alberta since the mid-1990s. So most of the examples of this are in the United States.

In April 1999 Murphy Family Farms, which is now the Smithfield facility, in North Carolina spilled more than 1.5 million gallons of manure into a swamp adjoining a tributary of the northeast Cape Fear River. Investigators believed tree roots punctured a lagoon wall. In October of 1999 employees at a Seaboard Farms facility in Oklahoma overapplied manure to farmland until it ran off, and they had to recover 102,000 gallons of manure. In December Carroll's Foods, a hog lagoon in North Carolina, spilled 200,000 . . . [interjections]

Well, Mr. Chairman, they did ask the question. Maybe they didn't expect that I would actually have some answers, but there's a whole list of things here. For example, in 1999 large-scale livestock producers spilled or dumped manure over 100 times in the 10 states surveyed, for a total of 4 and half million gallons. The report concluded that lagoons and other so-called technologies used at factory farms are not working and threaten public health, wildlife, and the quality of our rivers, lakes, and coastal waters. So there's very, very strong evidence in the United States, where this development is far more advanced, that it actually poses a serious threat. [interjection]

You know, this is the only time, Mr. Chairman, in all of the debates of the estimates that I've actually been heckled by the minister to whom I'm supposed to be speaking. I hope the minister

will forgive my newness to this field, but I do feel I have some comments I'd like her to hear.

8:50

So environmental stewardship is important, and I recognize that is identified in the government's business plan for this department. Nevertheless, Mr. Chairman, it is incompatible with the direction the government is going on these large-scale operations.

The last point I would like to make is about the control of land use in the province. I and I know some other members, even opposite, were serving on regional planning commissions at the time that the minister at the time, Dr. West, abolished them. We warned at that time that there was going to be a lot of difficulty around this kind of development, because the division of urban and rural use was going to become blurred and we were going to have urban developments spilling into rural areas and incompatibilities of land use taking place. The kinds of plans, the joint planning between adjacent municipalities, that were touted as the answer have in fact not worked as was predicted by many, many people from many, many political perspectives at that time. So now we see more and more acreages and those types of developments intruding into rural areas, and you see rural areas competing for large-scale retail and commercial operations as opposed to their traditional location in cities.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North told me that there are in fact bylaws in some municipalities that won't allow combining after 10 o'clock at night. Well, Mr. Chairman, even a city boy can see that that's ridiculous. But it's coming as a direct result of the overlap of urban and rural land uses into the same area. So you have conflicts between rural residents and acreage owners and the farmers that are supposed to be producing the food and have to go all night.

The government also needs to address this and not just in this department. It needs to reimpose the kinds of limitations and restrictions on urban use in rural areas in order that agriculture can continue to operate according to the way it needs to in order to be effective, and the government has contributed to this problem by eliminating the regional planning commissions, whose job it was to protect agricultural land and to define the boundary between rural and urban land use. So, Mr. Chairman, those are my comments with respect to that.

I have a question or two for the minister if she's listening. On page 36 of the estimates the infrastructure for irrigation is being increased from \$17 million to \$24 million, and we would like to know if that is a capital investment or an operating expense. It appears to be an operating expense, but it seems to be listed as a capital investment.

I would like the minister to please, if she could, on page 36 under votes 4.4.4 and 4.4.5, elaborate relative to livestock operations and what these expenditures are for. I'd like as much detail as the minister is able to provide.

I'd just like to mention in closing, Mr. Chairman, another issue for which the government is not necessarily responsible, rail line abandonment. It's more related to federal policy. I want to put on record the concern about the closure of country elevators in many parts of Alberta and whether or not the government is going to try and do anything about that.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I hope that some of the members will be able to hear what I've said when they read *Hansard* tomorrow. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real privilege to get up again and bring up some more issues that I wanted to talk about.

We pretty well covered the actual number parts of the budget as it's presented in my first chance to address the Assembly.

The one question I would ask that I don't find in this budget document in terms of the assets that are managed by Ag Financial Services in the context of the capital value of them – it would be interesting to have a report on the total value there: what potentially might be their land holdings through, say, foreclosures, recaptured land values, but also some of the loans that are outstanding so we can track a little bit of the direction they're going in terms of the support for new farmers and get an idea of what level of asset they're actually managing from year to year. We'll be able to track it, then, in terms of the upturns and the downturns in the ag sector as it looks for, you know, the viability of farms.

Mr. Chairman, more specifically right now I'd like to turn to some of the departmental mission statements, the goals, and the performance indicators. I want to raise the issue here that I've raised in some of the other departments that I've had a chance to speak to in the last couple of years. I think what we need to have is not just this particular minister but a lot of the ministers deal with some kind of a descriptive relationship between what their goals are in the performance indicators. You know, Agriculture here basically reports performance indicators for their activities being Alberta farm cash receipts, net cash income, the value of shipments of food and beverages. We get into value of agriculture and food international exports, the contribution to Alberta's gross domestic product, the employment and output equivalency in terms of the land productivity. These basically are macrolevel indicators until we get into the last couple in terms of employment and the land productivity index.

If we're going to be able to evaluate the real effectiveness of some of these specific programs, we've got to have performance indicators that relate directly to that kind of program. As an example, the farm income support programs in their collection, you know, the three or four different ones that we provide dollars for, a report that reflected, say, farm sales or new farms, kind of the sustainability, because basically we're providing support programs to farmers to give them help through a transition in a down cycle or through a natural disaster. If we don't see any change in the trends of farm sales, number of farmers, then it's hard to relate what we're doing to any kind of positive benefit.

I know the argument is always there: well, it would have been worse if we hadn't had them. You know, we have to have some of those kinds of measures. For an example, we keep talking now about the new structure that's coming in Alberta agriculture. Well, this is going to be focused on development and promotion of these valued chain systems. So let's look at measures that talk about how new products are brought into the community, how they're moved from the innovator stage right through to the viable industry stage and see how that kind of tracking can go on. I know that these are going to be crude to start with in the context of not being really accurate, but if we don't start trying to develop these kinds of performance indicators that specifically relate back to the activities that we're undertaking, then we're not going to be able to judge over time whether or not the changes that we've put a lot of manpower effort into, a lot of thought effort into, and a lot of community involvement into, actually give us a payback. Those are some of the things that we need to look at.

9:00

One of the things I was also looking at as we talk about the diversity of commodities and the value-added industries. I noticed on the web site of Alberta Agriculture they had a page there that lists a whole series of investments in agriculture value added in the last 10 or 12 years. I think that's how far they went back. I looked at the

list, and in many cases there were some very exciting new ones, like the potato plants in southern Alberta, some of the new additions, the Cargill plant. I guess I don't see it as a real great investment in Alberta agriculture when, say, Iowa Beef comes in and buys out Lakeside Feeders. All this is is a transfer of ownership; it's not really a significant investment that increases the capacity of our sector. The things that are really important are the investments that come in here that bring in new money and create new capacity rather than just buying out capacity.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I would probably be the first to admit that a buyout like that a lot of times leads to greater access to capital or greater access to management, but in the context of the volume and the capacity of our sector to make quantum jumps in its growth, what we're looking for are the new plants like the Lamb-Western and McCain's potato plants that came in: some of these. Then we can see where those investments in the sector are truly going to contribute to further processing and also the encouragement for the farmers to switch to a higher valued crop or product. So I guess that's one of the things that I would like to see show up a little bit in terms of what we're doing.

As we look through the goals of the ministry, some questions have come up with goal 2, "increased amount of value added to industry." Mr. Chairman, I've already talked a lot about the value chain linkages that are going on, and this concept was talked about a lot during the ag summit process. I guess one of the performance indicators that we could start to show now, because I know some of these value chains are starting to show up, is a performance indicator that talks about the number of these that have actually developed or how groups have gotten together to develop even a short value chain. A lot of the things that we do start with one little step at a time, and a value chain has to start with two different groups working together to increase their product value. That's one of the responses that we can provide to the minister in terms of her question at the start asking for suggestions on how to deal better with the performance indicators.

When we go to goal 3 here, the ag summit action teams are mentioned. One of the things that I hear about quite frequently as I travel around rural Alberta and talk to farmers is: what's the status of these teams? Where are they going? I would just encourage the minister to do, possibly on an occasional basis, a news release or something, talking about where they are in the progress. I think everybody in the sector appreciated the one that came out talking about who were the Albertans that were assigned to this, because a lot of people were wondering if they'd been fully staffed. So I've used that news release quite frequently, talking about, you know, if you want to know about this area, these are the people that are dealing with it. But still people are asking: how far along are they? So some kind of a progress indicator there would be appreciated by the sector.

I guess one important thing that comes up is at the top of page 40. We're talking here about managing risk. What we're dealing with is the administration of crop insurance, hail insurance. I guess what we need to do is, again, as I brought up a little earlier, clarify the role of Ag Financial Services in the context of some of the farm income disaster programs. The crop insurance is basically administered through that, yet the administration of the farm income assistance program was done through the ministry, you know, when you look at the budget structure here. So to kind of give a common point of entry for these kind of things, we need to deal with that.

Next, goal 5. We talk about "environmental stewardship." I would encourage the minister to as quickly as possible get the intensive livestock waste management issue settled. You know, the guidelines are out there. They now are part of a lot of the municipal-

ity land use plans and zoning approval processes, but Albertans still want to see a strong commitment to some level of provincewide involvement in those kinds of environmental issues. Even the farmers I talk to say: let's just find out where we're going to go so that we can work with it. As far as being on one side or the other, right now they just want to know what they're going to have to deal with.

I think that as we go into this issue of the environmental stewardship, some of the performance indicators that we might want to look at because of the public's concern as much as our legislative initiatives are issues of water quality, not necessarily water quality at the drinking water tap but water quality in the public water bodies that we have in the province – you know, the lakes, the rivers, the streams: that kind of thing – so that people can understand and appreciate their ability to go out there and use these as recreational facilities.

One of the other things that we want to look at may be land subject to erosion. I think a good performance indicator here would be – we don't see reports anymore about the acres summer fallowed in the province. There was probably an unusually high amount of actual wind-caused soil erosion this year. I think we saw it this winter quite a bit. So these kind of things would give us a chance to look at how we're doing there.

Maybe something that would look at pesticide or even antibiotic claims in the livestock industry. You know, how many times are cases reported? Just so we have an idea of the safety and pureness of our food system. We've had a couple of unfortunate cases in the last while of recalled agriculture products; they've been sent out, and they've had to be recalled from the retailer or in some cases even from homeowners. I think that one of the things that we should be really proud of is that even though these things occur, in the context of our overall production capacity they're a very small volume. So in that context we do have an unbelievably high, and very proudly high, quality of food that's produced in our province.

When we talk about food safety and that, I would like to ask the minister to explain where we are now in this common food inspection that we were trying to work out with the federal government. My understanding is that we're getting more and more now to one level of food inspection in Canada. I think that in the long run it's a good goal, as long as we don't compromise the quality and the reputation that we have in Alberta. If we have one standard, it will work, especially if we can get into looking at some of the issues of how to deal with some of the ISO 9000 type of certification programs.

9:10

As kind of a wrap-up comment, Mr. Chairman, I just want to make some comments that the ministry has always been very supportive of requests I've made, and I find them very easy to work with in the context of getting the support information that I need. So as I conclude, I just want to really express my thanks to the various ministers that I've worked with but also to the staff of Alberta Agriculture. They've been very, very co-operative, and I hope in the process I haven't broken any of their trusts.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I hope we can continue this at a later time.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to respond.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all members who participated in the discussion of this I think very important part of our provincial economy certainly but,

more importantly, a provider of safe, quality food products to everyone in this province plus a very significant provider of quality, safe products that are known throughout the world. As I've said, we export to over a hundred countries, and we do have an excellent reputation.

For that reason, I'm a bit concerned about one hon. member's comments with the new buzzword, factory farms. That is not the case in Alberta. I don't think there's a hog barn that has over 20,000 hogs in it. I could stand to be corrected for 500 or 1,000 hogs. To use examples that are U.S. and not Alberta I think is unfair to our industry. No similar activities have occurred in this province, and certainly we've gone through a very extensive process on intensive livestock, looking at good guidelines and rules that they will operate under. As I indicated in my opening comments, we've put an awful lot of extra effort and money into environmental stewardship and sustainability. One thing that all hon. members should keep in mind is that it is of no benefit to any agricultural producer to degrade the land or mistreat animals, because that is their livelihood.

We're as concerned about water quality. We drink it. We don't have expensive purification systems. I asked the hon. member where the city of Edmonton puts their sewage now. Why I'm raising that is that we all have a responsibility, because the North Saskatchewan River doesn't end here, and there are a lot of people downstream that reap the benefits or the effects of that. So it's up to all of us. It's not a rural or an urban issue to maintain the quality of our land and of our water. We're committed in our department to doing that.

The industry has been on a roller-coaster ride – there's no question – and it requires all of our support and understanding. So I only encourage all hon. members. Most of the comments we had tonight were very productive, only aimed at making our industry stronger and better. It is a sustainable industry, and the opportunities for this industry and its ability to affect in a very positive way the quality of life in this province are absolutely unlimited. It is a sustainable resource. It can be for long into the future.

I remind everyone that agriculture is the industry that built this province, and it will be the industry that sustains this province long into the future, when many of these other activities are gone and forgotten. There will never be a time when we do not need a high-quality, safe food supply, and I can tell you that the producers in this province will deliver that, the value-added processors will deliver that, and they will continue to make Alberta a proud name in all countries in the world where we export our great products.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$610,031,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Community Development

THE CHAIRMAN: For the opening comments we call upon the hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed my great pleasure to rise before you and all colleagues tonight to present for the Assembly's approval the new three-year business plan and the budget estimates for the 2001-2002 years for Alberta Community Development.

Among our many priorities, Mr. Chairman, are persons with developmental disabilities, persons with other disabilities, sport and recreation, arts and culture and multiculturalism, libraries, volunteer development, historic sites, museums and cultural facilities, parks and protected areas, film classification, planning for our centennial, human rights, citizenship and the status of women, and many other important areas.

Helping me out in all of this, Mr. Chairman, are numerous individuals, some of whom are here with us tonight that I'd like to just quickly introduce to you. In our gallery are Dr. Bill Byrne, our deputy minister, and his assistant, Mr. Chris Robinson, Mr. Rai Batra, Ms Darlene Andruchuk, Mr. Hugh Tadmán, Mr. David Steeves, Mr. John Kristensen, Mr. Mark Rasmussen, Ms Kathy Telfer, and from the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board Garry Donald and Jim Menzies, as well as my own executive assistant, Pam Boutilier. They should all rise and take a quick bow because they've worked very hard over the last while.

Thank you.

[Mr. Fischer in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, I want to basically accomplish two things this evening: first, to review the three-year business plan and, secondly, to discuss the 2001-2002 budget estimates. But before I do that, I also want to thank some colleagues who are integral to this entire process and who chair various committees within our department: the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, the Member for Calgary-Currie, the Member for Calgary-Montrose, the Member for Little Bow, and others who are very involved with us.

Our business plan outlines the actions that will support our vision statement, which is this: "A vibrant province where Albertans experience fair opportunity and the quality of life to which they aspire." Our mission statement articulates the process, and it reads:

To advance the quality of life for Albertans by providing leadership, support and opportunity so they may participate in the social, cultural and economic life of the province.

Our core businesses have been amended to reflect the ministry's new responsibility, and they are as follows:

1. promoting community development;
2. protecting human rights and promoting fairness and access;
3. ensuring inclusion and participation for Albertans with disabilities;
4. preserving, protecting and presenting Alberta's history and culture; and
5. preserving, protecting and presenting Alberta's provincial parks and protected areas.

Community Development helps to support and enhance our province's quality of life in so many ways, and I'd like to just highlight a few of them for you now. We contribute to the health and viability of our communities and our community-based volunteer organizations. We help to ensure that all Albertans have equitable access and opportunity to participate in society. We preserve and interpret our natural and historical resources for the benefit of current and future generations. We provide very necessary supports to nurture our young artists and our young athletes as leaders for tomorrow. We encourage Albertans to appreciate and experience a very wide range of opportunities in the arts, culture, and multicultural areas. We assist persons with disabilities by providing many supports and also by encouraging society to see

ability where they may have seen limitation before. We support lifelong learning by increasing access to information. Mr. Chairman, this is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does provide you with at least a glimpse of what it is that we're all about.

Now, with respect to the 2001 through 2004 business plan we are taking a different approach than in previous years, and it is built around success factors, that help us determine success in achieving our vision. To put these factors into action, we've developed what we call stretch targets, targets that we plan to achieve by 2004, and five critical success factors, that are listed on page 89 in the plan. I know all members will rush there immediately. You will see that we are linking the program areas in a very logical manner. As well, instead of identifying a list of actions that relate to each goal, we have taken a much broader approach and identified corporate initiatives that cut across our core businesses and will help us arrive at where we want to be by 2004. You will see these corporate initiatives listed on pages 91 to 94. I also would like to take you through a few examples to illustrate this new approach.

9:20

For example, under the success factor titled Focus on Those We Serve, the stretch target is to make all ministry activities "needs-driven and evidence-based" by 2004. One of the corporate initiatives linked to this success factor is to "implement directions from the Building Better Bridges - Final Report in co-operation with Persons with Developmental Disabilities Boards and other ministries." This report resulted from extensive consultations which I had the privilege to personally undertake with the assistance of others. In order to focus on those we serve, I should also add that we have increased the budget for PDD to reflect our increased caseloads and to address increased operating costs. We've also allocated new funding for the brain injury initiative to begin building much-needed programs and services in that area.

For another success factor, Create Beneficial Opportunities, the stretch target is to make ministry programs and services "readily accessible, effective and beneficial." This will be accomplished by corporate initiatives such as maintaining "care for heritage collections by acquiring, preserving and making accessible the material culture, natural history and documentary heritage of the province" and by maintaining "care of our natural heritage by managing provincial parks and protected areas to sustain their ecological integrity." Our parks and our protected areas and our cultural facilities and historic resources have much in common, Mr. Chairman, preserving, protecting, and presenting our heritage whether it is cultural, historical, or natural.

Now, under the success factor Nurture Effective Alliances the stretch target is to establish "appropriate working relationships with all entities having similar corporate objectives." An example to illustrate this is the aboriginal policy initiative, and Community Development will support the Alberta aboriginal policy initiative in several ways including but not limited to

funding support for the 2002 North American Indigenous Games, implementation of a provincial policy concerning traditional ceremonial materials, and planning for the establishment of the First Nations Development Fund.

Mr. Chairman, a change in business plan also means a change in how we measure our success. I would like to turn briefly to the performance measures section of our business plan. While we have retained the link between measures and performance assessment in each core business, we have now grouped the ministry's measures under four essential, overall categories: participation, satisfaction, quality of life, and economic impact. We wanted our performance measures to be more meaningful to our stakeholders and to our partners as well and to specifically address what we have heard from Albertans.

Turning now to my ministry's budget estimates, I want to focus briefly on how the ministry proposes to meet existing and new commitments. I want to begin with libraries. In Budget 2001 we have allocated an additional \$715,000 to Alberta's public libraries to recognize Alberta's growing population. This brings the funding to \$14.9 million. As well, we are allocating an additional \$1.75 million beginning in 2001-2002 to assist with the costs of sustaining the Alberta public library electronic network, which of course is a project between the government of Alberta and the Alberta Library.

The 2001-2002 budget provides \$126 million for the Alberta 2005 centennial program. This program celebrates the province of Alberta's 100th anniversary by supporting legacy projects for the benefit of future generations. In this year's budget we've allocated approximately \$40 million to very worthy provincial legacy projects such as main street revitalization efforts, an official history of Alberta, aboriginal and youth initiatives, and to the centennial legacies grant program, which is for community projects.

I should also point out that my ministry has transferred \$85.4 million of the aforementioned \$126 million to Alberta Infrastructure to manage on behalf of Community Development the construction or renovation of several government-owned facilities. We're talking about major projects here.

The persons with developmental disabilities budget for 2001-02 is \$378.6 million, which includes a \$53.4 million increase from last year's budget.

In support of the cross-ministry economic development strategy, we are providing a \$1.78 million increase for parks and protected areas, including funding for costs associated with public safety, evaluating interpretation, environmental education programs, and work associated with the special places program.

In an effort to make our activities more needs driven and evidence based, another of our stretch targets, the 2001-02 budget for the human rights and citizenship branch has been increased by \$200,000 to enable the review and consultation on the Blind Persons' Rights Act and to improve the existing legislation for people with disabilities who rely upon the assistance of an animal.

Alberta's vibrant arts and culture sector plays an important role in sustaining the high quality of life that we enjoy. The Alberta film development program in its first year of operation demonstrated great success in rejuvenating Alberta's film industry. In fact, in 1999-2000 an investment of \$2.9 million attracted productions valued at \$33.2 million, \$19.2 million of which was spent right here in Alberta. I want to sincerely thank the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View and the Member for Drumheller-Chinook, who is now our Deputy Premier, for the important work they did in that regard. We've extended that Alberta film development program, Mr. Chairman, by \$5 million per year in 2002-03 and 2003-04.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I'm sorry, Mr. Minister. Your time is up.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'll come back and finish this when time permits. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I would like to call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I'm pleased to be able to rise and participate in the debate on the budget for Community Development, and I appreciate the minister's speed-reading there in trying to get all of his information in. Of course, I appreciate the very hard work of the staff members of Community Development. I know that they're working very hard to try and provide all of the services,

doing, as always, as much as they can with very limited resources.

This portfolio is a bit of a moving target. This is my fifth budget debate on this portfolio, and it has been different every single year. There have been different entities covered under the umbrella of Community Development. As the minister pointed out, we lose housing and seniors this year and gain persons with disabilities, parks and protected areas, and also First Nations development into the portfolio. As a result, I find it very difficult to track the portfolio, and certainly that's been some of the feedback that I've had from member agencies that receive their funding through the department as well. The bottom line always manages to look a little better every year, but that's mostly a result of having large programs transferred in. It's not affecting the core services that remain consistent in the department.

Those core areas include things that I think are really vital to making Alberta a special place. That's about the people components of the department: human rights, women's issues, multiculturalism, youth, volunteers. It's about our activities like arts and culture, historical sites, heritage, sports and recreation, fairs and festivals, and of course the places, which include the 18 really wonderful historical sites that we have which are much involved in tourism in this province.

I note the large sum of money that came into the department this year came in under promoting community development, which is essentially now housing the persons with abilities section. I'm wondering what happened to the old community development, which used to be about helping organizations in the community develop their potential. Alberta at one point had a reputation that was unmatched for services that were offered by the expertise developed in the department around board development and seminars and that sort of activity. I don't know where it falls anymore.

So looking at this department from year to year becomes increasingly difficult. When you first look at the budget, it appears to have six or seven areas, and each year less and less is explained about what indeed falls underneath the department, because there's no subvote breakdown on it. I would certainly appreciate seeing those subvote breakdowns again. The last time they were around was about 1995. So for people trying to look at these budgets and figure out exactly where they fall and what's happening to them, it's a loss. You know, are they under Community Development? Well, no, not anymore. That's not what it means. Everything else is rolled up so high into a one- or two-line explanation that people don't really know what's going on anymore.

I find this department particularly not open and transparent compared to some of the other departments that I have debated. I would encourage the minister to look at expanding, in fact, what's covered under here. It is a huge department. There's a lot of different sectors to it, but let's not hide them. Let's not hide their light under a bushel. Let's get it out there and celebrate what's in this department.

9:30

Now, performance measurements are a particular interest of mine. When I look at the performance measurements, some of them are the same as what we had in the previous year and some of them have sort of changed and their numbers have changed, which is always interesting to me.

I'm just going to stop here and respond to the minister's description of where the department is trying to go with these new corporate values, which I'll reserve judgment on at this point. But I do find it a little odd that we're talking about corporate values when most of the agencies that are housed under this department or in fact receive funding from this department are not corporate; they're nonprofit

agencies. So this whole movement that we have seen in this department towards a corporate mentality is dismaying to me. And the stretch targets I'll come back to, because I have some questions on that.

When we look at the key performance measurements under the "Participation" section, we're still having the level of community volunteerism, but the numbers are slightly different from what were appearing in the comparison budgets from the previous year. Perhaps the minister can comment on that.

When I look at the percentage of adult Albertans participating in sports and recreation, that looks fine. We've got adults using public library services. That's great. But "percentage of adult Albertans participating in arts and cultural activities": this measure keeps floating, keeps changing. In five years I think I've seen just about five different measurements on this one. I'm exaggerating slightly but not too much. This year we're seeing that there are no comparative results because they've changed it yet again, so there's nothing to compare to from '98-99. The figures being given for results in '99-2000 are 89.6 percent, and the target between 2001-2004 is 90 percent. I'm wondering why it's only 90 percent. You're only looking to increase your target by .4 percent in four years. You must have higher expectations than that.

Again, we have a problem with new measurements and changing measurements under adult Albertans visiting museums, historic sites, or interpretive centres.

In particular, I noticed that the "visitation at provincial parks and provincial recreation areas," which is a new measurement in this department because it came in with the new section when the ministries changed, is in fact dropping. We're going in '98-99 from 8.6 million to '99-2000, where we've got 8.5 million, and our target in 2001-2004 is less again, at 8 million. I'm curious as to why the department would be targeting for less, but I'm sure that will be explained.

When we look at the measure under "Satisfaction," the "customer satisfaction with community development assistance provided", what we're getting here for the results is "methodology revised", "methodology revised", and for the target, "to be established." But in the previous year's budget it in fact does give us some targets, so what's happened here? Are we having trouble translating from the previous book to this book?

I also always question satisfaction. Surveying people as to how they're satisfied with a given activity I question in every department in this government. I don't think it's a useful management tool. Yes, you want to know that people like what you're presenting, but frankly that isn't always the best measurement of whether you're being successful. It's an easy performance measurement to use. It's too easy. It's too easy an out, and I strongly recommend we revisit that.

Now, when I look at the measure for "Quality of Life," there's nothing to compare to for '98-99. Results in '99-2000 are exceptionally high, ranging from 87 percent up to 98.9 percent, and then targets again slightly above that, fractions above that, for 2001-2004. So what are you trying to tell us here?

Percentage of adult Albertans who consider the following as important in contributing to their quality of life:

- Arts and culture
- Sport and recreational activities
- Public libraries
- Volunteer activities
- Environment free of discrimination

These very high performance measurement results, and then a tiny, tiny increase for the entire target years of the three-year business plan.

I note and I applaud the government for continuing to support the

Alberta film development program. Very important for this province. We have a long way to go to recapture where we were at before this government so mistakenly and shortsightedly cut the support to film and left it floundering for a period of time there. We're back up to \$40 million, or that's the target, but we came down from well over \$100 million on this, so we've got a long way to go to recapture that. I encourage the minister to continue to work with the community, which is very astute in what it needs to do well at this. I hope we'll be able to recapture where we were at.

Now, I'm going to jump around here because, as you know, there's so much in this department that it's impossible to cover it in one hour. I'm aware that I will disappoint some groups in that I won't be able to raise their issue.

I'm questioning what the \$54,000 in capital investment is under program 3, human rights and citizenship. There is a capital investment of \$54,000. I'm wondering what that is.

I'm also wondering what the \$2,829,000 is for program 6, parks and protected areas, again under capital investment.

When I look at the minister's office and deputy minister's office, there's a \$300,000 increase in here. I'm wondering why. If he can please give me a very specific breakdown of exactly what is being done with this money.

Community services. As I said, most of these are going down slightly, and in a few cases a minuscule increase for those core services.

When I look at things like the Provincial Museum, Royal Tyrrell Museum, historic sites and cultural facilities, Provincial Archives, all of these have gone down slightly from the previous year. I'm wondering why they've been reduced. I think all of these organizations have been very clear that they need continued support. What did they do to deserve being cut?

One of my concerns – and I met with the previous minister and did a fair bit of lobbying on this – was that the money that was assigned to the 2001 World Championships in Athletics did not ensure an arts component. Seeing as this money came from Community Development, which also includes an arts component, I question why there were no strings attached as far as this went, because frankly, as a result, I don't think we have a very strong arts component in this. I think that's a failing of the provincial government's commitment to upholding that. Certainly we've had the organizers trying to come up with additional money to support the arts component, and they have not been successful. Considering the amazing community that we have here in Edmonton and in Alberta, what a mistake. What a loss to not be promoting that.

9:40

We have a number of new highlights that are being noted. In "funding for the establishment of the First Nations Development Fund," a number of new initiatives in there.

The minister had mentioned that there was additional money in the budget to support a review of the Blind Persons' Rights Act for persons who are using an animal. Again I have met with the previous minister on this one, and I strongly encourage whatever consultations take place to please be open to having this included and expanded to work with service dogs. Once we've got that act open, let's get into the 21st century here, because certainly there are service dogs that are assisting people with seizures, service dogs for people with things like CP, multiple sclerosis. There are all kinds of possibilities. We have some very fine examples across the world of how to certify these animals, how to check them, and how to identify them that we can be following up on.

I'm hoping that the province is giving serious consideration to working with the city of Edmonton on two different projects for the

Legacy program. We are in desperate need of a new art gallery. I understand that there are already talks going on about a combined museum with the Provincial Museum and staff at the University of Alberta, which sounds like an excellent program. Really exciting possibilities there. The province provided Edmonton and Calgary with the Jubilee auditoria for the 50th anniversary, and I'm hoping we can be looking at something similar.

I have been tabling in this Assembly a number of examples of possibilities for what to do with the Rosedale power plant. There was an excellent opportunity to be putting a museum or an art gallery right in the centre of downtown, a real showpiece that everyone entering the city would see. The department staff and recommendations through to the EUB about the use of the Rosedale site: I'm hoping that the minister will still do the right thing and not allow the destroying of part or all of the Maxwell Dewar Building. In fact, I'm sure the staff are aware that in allowing destruction of part of it, we've basically signed the death warrant for all of it, because there are certainly plans for stage 2 and stage 3. So two more huge turbines that EPCOR has finally admitted they wish to put in that place.

That's the end of that building. Let's not kid ourselves that we can take down one wall and let one turbine in there. Once we get into this project, we're destroying the whole darn thing. So I'm still looking to the minister to be brave and do the right thing there. He can, in fact, save that power plant for use by all Albertans and make it a magnificent entrance to the city with tourism possibilities. And there you have a beautiful site to be considered for your museum or for an art gallery.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Some other issues I'd like to try and get through. I will impose upon my colleagues and try to get additional time later in this very short one hour that we have to debate this very multifaceted budget.

Women have absolutely disappeared. The word is never mentioned, and I have read all the way through the business plans and the actual budget. I think that's shortsighted. I'd like to know, as I ask every year: exactly what is this program doing and where does it exist? Exactly what is the funding that is allocated to status of women in this budget? I'm bringing up the concerns about the cuts to women's shelters across the province. Although they are housed and funded under Children's Services, I still expect status of women to be cognizant of what's happening in this area. I notice that there was funding to do an aboriginal lens in looking at government programs. I've been asking for years for a gender lens. If the ministry can understand doing that for aboriginal issues, I'm sure they could find their way to doing that for women's issues, and we do still need that.

One of the issues that keeps coming up again and again in what's left of the women's community is assistance for networking. I'm looking for the minister to be seriously considering that. It's very difficult for people that are working all day long and volunteering all night to still try and get together in whatever volunteer time they've got left. There could be support there for networking coming from the government. Also, support for immigrant women's programs. There's an excellent agency, Changing Together, which does not get any specific programming money through this government, and there's a good way for it to be done. Additionally, for status of women to be looking at women's health issues. So women are turning up in all the different departments, but nowhere is there any ownership or any concern being expressed and an overview being done.

I'm aware I'm coming up to the end of my first 20 minutes. Cross-

department initiatives, again on women's issues. This can be done, and this is the only portfolio under which it can be done. I'm looking again for leadership to be taken here. Five years. I keep trying. It's possible to do, folks.

All right. Thank you very much, and I shall return later for the rest of my notes.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to spend the next 20 or so minutes making some observations on this department's budget, Community Development. I want to start by noting that this is the first time the minister has a department under his direct control. He's solely responsible for it, so I wish him good luck in his first full-fledged portfolio responsibility.

I was listening to the minister, and the minister certainly touched on various priorities of his department as he was trying to set in motion programs and policies and activities that will help him reach the goals in the next three years, but as he was talking about this, he did talk about the status of women.

I started looking at this part of the budget yesterday afternoon sometime. I was looking for something on the status of women – and my colleague from Edmonton-Centre has already mentioned this – and I couldn't find any specific mention anywhere in the budget document on that specific item or issue. Mr. Minister, in making your introductory remarks, you did single that out as one of the initiatives you're paying attention to, yet here in the budget any mention of this is totally, totally absent. So I would like you in your response at the end of the debate to pay some attention to it. Show me where the resources are. Where are you hiding all these programs related to issues related to the women of Alberta, immigrant women and other women and women in general?

I will be making a few observations on some of the programs this ministry is responsible for in a moment, but in terms of general observations the department keeps changing, as has been noted before. New programs are brought in, and new services have been brought in, so one wonders when you look at the overall budget: how do you make a judgment about whether or not the overall budget of the department has indeed increased, given the fact that its responsibilities have also expanded? It was difficult in the absence of any detailed information provided here to make that kind of assessment. I think it's important for the department to keep these things in mind so as to assist everyone who is looking at the budget, including MLAs in this House, to be able to make accurate judgments about what the state of the budget is and whether or not there are real increases in there. The overall figure certainly is up by 16 or 17 percent, but so are the responsibilities of the department.

9:50

I would briefly like to talk about support for the arts, cultural and recreational programs, human rights and citizenship, services for persons with disabilities, museums and historical sites, and last is parks and recreational areas.

Let me start with the item on libraries. Libraries are clearly a vital resource for enriching our lives and our communities across this province. As a result of declining provincial support over the years, one wonders if public libraries are really public in nature. They have begun charging user fees and/or annual membership fees that pose a financial hardship to many Albertans, many users, particularly those citizens who most need their services. Over the past decade operating grants to support Alberta's 245 library boards have not kept pace with either population growth or inflation. This year the government is planning to spend I think only about 3 percent more

than last year. Alberta library boards have been asking for additional resources so they can eliminate fees as well as add, if you wish, new books, replace aging stocks, and add other resources. Exactly what action is the minister planning to take to allow Alberta libraries to better serve Albertans?

I have one question on page 95. I was trying to again see what that statement exactly means. It's under highlights for the year 2001-2002. There is some reference made here to increase the operational funding to the province's libraries to \$14.9 million. From what figure? You know, that's missing there. You say that it's going up to \$14.9 million, but from what? That should be there. It's difficult to look around when you're going through. Everything's laid out, yet when you read these lines information is missing. I think it's easy to provide this information for the ease of discussion and examination. I couldn't figure that out easily.

On the issue of arts funding, virtually all provincial funding of the arts is channeled through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. When one factors out the film development program introduced by this government three years ago, having recognized they'd made a very serious blunder in eliminating that program to start with, arts funding has remained virtually frozen over the past 10 years. So there again under the highlights on page 95 I think you do draw attention to some increases here, but the film industry is a vital arts activity in the province. It certainly has huge potential financial dividends for the provincial economy. I think it needs to be paid more attention. By even the most generous calculation the government spends about \$22.4 million supporting the arts sector, a sector that contributes hundreds of millions of dollars to the economy each year.

My Tory opponent in the recent election at one of the forums on arts and culture proposed spending 1 percent of the provincial budget on the arts. That would have been more than \$200 million a year. In fact, he did mention that figure. He said: elect me and you'll get \$200 million invested in arts on an annual basis. I want to tell you, Mr. Minister, that I'll settle for a fifth of that, about \$40 million a year, if you'll give me that. I'd certainly go back to my constituency where lots of artists live and give them the good news. So I was just waiting for your word. I'm not asking for \$200 million.

My next question deals with program 3, human rights and citizenship. I appreciate the fact that some additional resources are being applied in this area. However, I'm not sure the increase is as good as it appears. Is the \$1.062 million in vote 3.0.2 new money, or is it simply an accounting item? I went to page 107 to get some answers to this, but the information there seems to lead me, at least, to the conclusion that it's not new money. Could you clarify that?

Finally, could the minister clarify exactly how much money is being provided to the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission and how much of a budget increase they will be receiving? My quick look at that item indicated that the increase is very, very, very minimal. In fact, to me it seems that the operational budget for human rights is nearly frozen over the last few years at a level which has been low as is.

My next question is on centennial projects. I refer to page 95 of the estimates books again which indicates that \$126 million will be provided to this program this year. I agree that Alberta's centennial is a significant event in the history of the province. However, I wonder about spending this amount of money on a centennial that is still four years away. Also, what kind of governance structure is in place for these funds? How will we be able to make sure these funds are spent wisely and on the right priorities? Will this become just another program where government MLAs hand out cheques even in the ridings of opposition members?

I'll give you an example. Last September when the first grants

were announced, one of the grants was for renovation of the Arts Barns in my constituency, known as Edmonton-Strathcona. I was perhaps the only person who was not informed or invited to the event, the big celebration to hand out the cheque. I wonder if the minister will continue with the policy to not invite the MLAs for the areas for which these funds may be announced at a certain time. I was not made aware of the grant. I wasn't invited to the function. I hope, Mr. Minister, as a former opposition member that you will make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen under your charge.

My next question relates to persons with developmental disabilities. I note that this responsibility followed the current minister from his previous portfolio as Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. Given the close fit between health care services and services to persons with developmental disabilities, I want to ask what the rationale was for this transfer. Secondly, how will the minister make sure that service gaps don't develop because the PDD boards and the health authority boards report to different ministers? What are the co-ordinating mechanisms there to make sure such gaps do not develop? I'm certainly not questioning your commitment to these services, and I recognize that significant additional resources are being applied.

One question there on page 109. I may as well ask it right now. It stood out. It caught my eye very quickly. It's under Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board, Statement of Operations, under Expense, board operations. The budget for the board operations jumps by more than 100 percent from last year to this one, if you notice, from \$7.6 million to some 18 million dollars. I wonder if this can be justified or if you will in fact make some comments on it for us to understand why this increase, such a large increase, for the board.

10:00

Also, some concerns about the decision to transfer responsibility for provincial parks and protected areas to the Ministry of Community Development from the Ministry of Environment. Why was this change made? What actions will the minister take to make sure that completing Alberta's network of protected areas becomes a top priority? Will the minister take action to prevent his colleague the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development from compromising the possibility of establishing new protected areas in the Kananaskis area as a result of establishing huge new forest management agreements which seem to be under way?

In my constituency office I get from my constituency assistant every week a log of the various calls and e-mails that we get. I've got dozens and dozens of calls over the last two weeks from people expressing a great deal of concern about the forest management area in that region that's in negotiation right now with the Spray Lakes company or whoever they are. So there are some serious questions, some serious concerns that Albertans are communicating to us. Again, under your charge, in your good hands, I wonder: what will be the fate of these areas, and how will you address these impending threats to the continuation of the protected areas programs?

Another question for you. I notice on page 96 under your highlights for this current fiscal year, at the top of the page, the first line there: "Work with Alberta Infrastructure to renovate a facility to accommodate a new home for the Provincial Archives of Alberta." You're familiar with it. I'm familiar with it. There had been an attempt made to move the archives from where they had been in the Provincial Museum to a site somewhere near Stony Plain a couple of years ago. That certainly is not there. Has a new site in the city now been identified? If so, I hope you will answer the questions: where is that site, and which building will be renovated in order to accommodate this very, very precious historical information resource for the use of Albertans and Canadians from across the country?

So these are some of my questions and observations. I will now

let some other colleagues take over. If I have another chance, I may have a few other questions later on.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I welcome this opportunity to participate in Community Development estimates this evening, and I thank the minister and any members of his department that are here tonight. We are a little short of time, so I won't spend too much time. I will be putting forth a number of questions, and perhaps he can supply answers in writing if he doesn't have the opportunity this evening.

Now, then, I notice that here in 2001-2002 \$10 million has been set aside for the World Championships in Athletics, and by the end of this fiscal year that will total \$40 million which has been provided for this event. So my questions are: what specifically has the money been marked for, or is it left to the discretion of the 2001 World Championships in Athletics committee to use this money as they see fit?

Along the same lines, can the minister provide a detailed list including costs and types of projects his ministry is involved in as part of preparations for housing the 2001 world track and field championships in Edmonton? I guess what we're looking more for here is if you can provide us with: how much of this \$40 million has gone into facilities, how much of it will go into transportation, into salaries, into entertainment or hosting costs, and how much have we committed to hosting international committee members when they arrive in our province? So if the minister could do that, please.

The Premier has also expressed concerns about how money is being spent on the championships. What I would like to know is: has the department taken any steps to ensure that money transferred or given to the committee is being well spent? In other words, what are the checks and balances here? What are their obligations as this committee to report back to the minister on where the dollars have been spent? What measures is the department using to determine the value of the money we have given to the championships committee?

Again, I notice here that particularly with major championships throughout the world there has always been an arts segment of the games. I see that there doesn't appear to be any money that is designated for the arts, and I'm wondering if I have missed this or if there are dollars here. As well, I notice, particularly with the Calgary Olympics, which are so close to us, that there were a number of residual benefits. Of course, one of those was in the tourism industry, where even a year or two after the Olympic Games were held in Calgary, we continued to have a great interest in that city and surrounding areas from visitors around the world. I would like to know if the department has worked in partnership with other departments to ensure that we get maximum benefit out of the great advertising we're going to be seeing with having these games here in Edmonton? How will that be perpetuated over the next few years?

As well, if the minister could please provide a copy of the criteria used by his department to assess which projects would receive funding during the 2001 world track and field championships.

I would like to move along now to the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, certainly a area of this ministry that is near and dear to myself, having been involved extensively in recreation and sport in this province for the majority of my adult life. I notice here as well that this is one of those areas where we have continually increased demands, not only because we have more people participating in recreational activities and sport, but also we've had a tremendous strain put on a number of our facilities in this province just by the sheer number of people moving to Alberta. Yet with all this demand and the increased emphasis that we want to

place on sports and recreation, really since this foundation was cut back in '93 or '94, their funding has never really been increased. It really has been flat for quite some time. So I would like to know when these dollars can be restored to this particular foundation?

Now, then, I see that there is a marginal increase here of 1.3 percent, of \$231,000. If the minister could please outline where this money is earmarked? Will the department provide a specific breakdown of the source of the total estimated revenues for 2001-2002 of \$18.2 million, including how this was generated? Again, I don't expect great detail, but if we can get a sketch as to where these revenues came from.

10:10

Also, I see that when we look at campgrounds and parks in this province, we have some 530 sites in the province. Now, what I would like to know from the minister is: are all of these sites run by the province, or are a number of them leased? If they are leased, one of the big concerns in regards to parks and campgrounds that was brought out at the AAMDC was that there appear to be two different sets of rules. If you have a private campground and right beside it a former provincial campground that is now leased, there are two different methods by which those people pay taxes, and there was great concern over this.

As well, certainly at one time, when parks were a much bigger and more detailed section of the ministry, we decided that we were going to change the focus and allow a lot of people to lease these parks. Certainly the province has spent literally hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure to develop these parks and these campgrounds. What I would like to know is: what checks are there in place to assure Albertans that the tax dollars they put into these facilities are being protected by the leaseholders? This is certainly a very good question because we do have a tremendous amount of money out there.

As well, how many of these sites have been allowed to more or less return to their natural state due to the fact that nobody has chosen to lease these sites because they're just not economically viable? Rather than the province maintaining them, nobody is taking care of them, so they've been allowed to return to their natural state. We see grass in these campgrounds up to and above the picnic table benches and whatever. So if we could have a count as to how many of these sites have been abandoned.

Now, then, as well there was a \$768,000 drop, or 6.6 percent, in the program expense for provincial programs, and this is in the estimates on page 105. If the minister could please provide to us who exactly will be affected by this cut.

Meanwhile, in the same part of the budget, Alberta and interprovincial games will receive a 23 percent increase, from \$1.830 million to \$2.251 million. What will this additional funding be expected to achieve? Is this because we have more games and more events out of the province, or do we have more competitions within the province or more events? Or is it just the fact that we are looking at more competitors? So if we could have a breakdown as to how this increase is going to be taken care of.

Now, another line that I would like to question here before I do turn this over to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is the 13.5 percent cut in the funding to the Percy Page Centre. This is such a unique centre that I think we are the envy of many provinces in Canada for having a centre of this nature. It's a centre that co-ordinates so many provincial programs, and certainly a decrease of 13.5 percent will have a huge impact on the Percy Page Centre. So if the minister could please let us know why there are these cuts to the Percy Page Centre.

Now, if time does permit, I would like to return and ask a few more questions, but at this time I'll turn it over to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Yes, it is indeed very tight timing to try and get through all the things that are in this department. What I wanted to do in the 10 minutes that we've got left – a number of agencies had contacted me in response to my notification that tonight was the debate on Community Development, many of them arts organizations, and I know that the minister, having come from this sector and having been involved with semiprofessional arts organizations for many years, would be interested in hearing some of these stories.

I think the major point that's trying to be put across here is that the funding for arts and culture has been stagnant. It's worse than stagnant, because it was essentially \$1.6 million in 1988, and it's \$1.6 million today. These groups can't go out and buy supplies in 1988 dollars. They have to pay 2001 prices. So they have suffered an extraordinary decrease in what their money can buy for them.

The results are fewer shows, fewer artists hired, fewer opportunities, fewer programs, and particularly less risk taking. There comes after a certain point a self-censoring of projects that they choose to do because they're under such pressure to generate this revenue, which is the new formula by which they will qualify for their own grants, that they feel forced to take the safe road and not do some of the riskier projects. Those are the ones really that in the end put us on the map. That development of our stories, that arts development is what is most critical and has few champions, but we're losing that. We're losing new play development, we're losing multimedia, we're losing literary opportunities, and that's really the crime here. When we look back on what we're so proud of from the development of the ministry of culture under the hon. minister at the time, that's what was really extraordinary, and both the minister and I were working in the sector at that time, and we know what it was like.

So I'm going to go through some of the points that have been raised to me in the letters and e-mails that I received. Here's one: "It will mean hiring less artists, and doing less in the way of presenting, programs." This group received 20 percent less in their AFA festival grant, and

the cost of providing the same service to the community (renting tents, paying service bills, etc.) is costing between 12% and 15% more for the same stuff. It's so demoralizing, trying to put on a great event that the community wants/needs and having inadequate money to do it. Sponsorship dollars are also becoming more scarce as every not-for-profit is going to the same well!

She sent me an article from *Canadian Culture* magazine about how other provinces are investing in festivals and reaping enormous impact from it. Quebec did a study in which they showed that they were realizing

\$35-\$40 [million] in provincial tax revenues, 83 per cent increased revenues between 1993-1998 and increased tourist attendance . . . [and particularly] noted that proper funding of program activities is key to the development and renewal of major events.

Amazing things happening in Ontario as well, again with the study identifying all kinds of things. Ontario spends \$1.6 million, the same amount that's going to arts in Alberta, to assist "in marketing selected tourism festivals and events to strengthen the brand image." I mean, wow. That doesn't make us look very good, stacking up against that. That's what they spent to promote this stuff. We're spending that amount of money for every arts and cultural group in the province. Also some interesting stuff out of Nova Scotia, and I'll send this across to the minister so he can have a look at it.

10:20

There's been a real issue around PASOs, provincial arts service organizations. I'm sure the minister has heard me speak in this Assembly many times about that. This was the downloading of

programs from the government onto the sector. They accepted those programs because they didn't want to see them lost. Then we ended up with the designation of these PASOs. But I noted before and I'll note again that what they got was the exact line item to run the program. They didn't get administrative dollars. Increasingly these organizations are coming back and saying: we can't afford to do this PASO stuff; it's sucking away our main reason for being here. There's pressure on them from the AFA and from the department to do more with less, and it's costing them to do this. I think there's a real problem there.

Based on what I've seen, I think the minister may well be looking to the point where some organizations just go: "Forget it. We don't want to do this anymore. Back to you." Then we're either going to lose the programs, or they're going to end up back in the minister's lap, so it's worth his while to be giving some more support here.

The Arts Touring Alliance of Alberta got their grant cut by 6.3 percent and with no warning. At this time PASOs are being told to get out there and provide service and connect with the rural community. Well, for that one, you know, they're having to cut the very stuff that accomplishes that connection. The other issue is that PASOs are denied charitable status and casinos, so while they're supposed to be funding all of this stuff from somewhere, they're not being able to get access to casinos for some definition. Perhaps the minister can have a discussion with his colleague from Gaming and with his federal colleague at Revenue Canada about that one.

Here's another one. The Alberta Craft Council has sent me a very long e-mail detailing all kinds of cuts that they've had and things that they can't do because of the one-grant rule. I admit that to some the previous way of doing things where an organization would get an operating grant and they'd apply for special project grants or perhaps for a touring series or a community series might have seemed like double-dipping, but the truth is that those extra grants came into being to supplement that operating grant. That's why they were all there. To turn around now and say, "Okay; only one grant," is resulting in significant cuts to these organizations. They're cut back on their operating, and they've now lost access to all of these other grants that were supplementing them by \$6,000 or \$10,000 or \$12,000 and sometimes more than that.

So the Alberta Craft Council notes that they lost a \$10,000 grant for traveling exhibitions. The entire \$25,000 for Series, the adult summer school in Red Deer, is going to be cut over the next two years. The council itself has lost \$5,000. They note that their PASO activity accounts for about half of their work, yet really they're only being funded at about 26 percent. So they're in essence subsidizing this stuff by another 24 percent. Really the Alberta Craft Council is the fourth or fifth largest in Canada and in some cases exceeds others for the number of exhibitions that they've got – there are over 20 – and do much of the public work.

They note that they're one of the few craft councils in Canada that are paying commercial lease rates when others are in heritage buildings or get much more of a subsidy. The one in B.C. at Granville Island is paying \$350 a month. They're paying \$3,000. Saskatchewan Craft Council receives nearly five times what the Alberta one does. In Alberta there's no money in Tourism, Economic Development, Learning, et cetera, available for arts projects; we're having to fund it all.

Now, he also comes through and says: "Look; the AFA is what we wanted. It's doing a good job. The staff are certainly motivated. The big problem here is money." This sector has been choked off for a long, long time, and I expected this minister to do better. We'll see what happens in next year's budget, but I am sorely disappointed by his lack of support for this area in this budget. Certainly, you know, we've got everything there: the infrastructure, the AFA, the policies. They're just being choked off by money.

When I look at things like the media arts council, they're cut significantly. I think they were cut the most, 18 percent for the media arts council. This is the area that's expanding the most, and they were hoping to be able to hire a staff person and open an office. They can't do that. They're servicing over 900 Alberta media artists. Nothing is going to happen for them there.

The Banff Centre. I mean, what a gem, and that's been consistently reduced in funding and support from this government, the emphasis all going to the business faculty and the business side of it. This is where it all started, and we had an international reputation both for our artists going out and other artists coming in here. Certainly it has all of my support. It's a great resource not only to Alberta but to all of Canada. It's just quietly withering away there with, I think, a deliberate plan from this government to make it wither away. I would look to restoring this to the dynamism that it used to have.

I heard from things like the Heritage Festival and Afrikadey, both of them pointing out what popular festivals they are, how many people like to come, what it does for promotion of multiculturalism and understanding and tolerance. They're being cut. You know, Afrikadey is saying: we may not be able to keep going. [interjections] Oh, I'd be very disappointed to hear these members heckling on that one. Please, do you really want it out there in the community that you're not supporting festivals like this, especially ones promoting racial tolerance?

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the people were not heckling you. I think they were just groaning that unfortunately the time is up.

We'd call on the hon. Minister of Community Development to make his concluding remarks.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I took copious notes, and I'm sure my staff did. I stopped counting after about the 100th question, so I will provide written responses. I know how large the department is, believe me, and I applaud the opposition members for trying to get through it, as I did earlier. We will work through those questions, and I will undertake to provide the responses.

I do just want to conclude with a couple of comments, though, in a broad general sense that I didn't get in under the first few minutes, and that is to just re-emphasize that we do recognize the economic impact and the importance of nurturing our Alberta talent in the area of Alberta film development, which is why we extended that program for another two years beyond this current year to the tune of \$5 million per year.

Sport is also an important aspect. Therefore, an amount of \$400,000 has been allocated in 2001-02 to honour Alberta's commitment to the 2004 Arctic Winter Games. We also committed \$40 million from lottery funding to host the 2001 World Championships in Athletics in Edmonton. This funding and support for other games will help us achieve our corporate initiative that is listed on page 92, which includes references that some of the members made to the Alberta Games, the Alberta Seniors Games, Western Canada Summer Games, Canada Games, Arctic Winter Games, the 2005 Goodwill Games, and of course the 2001 World Championships in Athletics. Support for these events is very critical in our overall support development plan.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that my ministry has many entities that report to it, and of course the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation is one of them. It receives about \$15 million in lottery funding, and it goes a long way to help out in that area. The Alberta Historical Resources Foundation receives about \$6.6 million, and that goes a long way to helping out in that area. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which received \$16.1 million

in lottery funding, also is responsible for the Alberta film development program.

M. le Président, il me donne beaucoup de plaisir aussi d'annoncer que j'ai la responsabilité pour le Secrétariat Francophone. Je suis très fier de ça parce que ce secrétariat veut consulter les Franco-Albertains et les Franco-Albertaines pour développer, à partir des besoins exprimés, un plan d'action qui servira de base pour la négociation d'une entente fédérale et provinciale pour appuyer le développement de la communauté Francophone. C'est très important pour beaucoup de nos Albertains.

10:30

In any case, we also have to remember that it's the International Year of Volunteers, an occasion to celebrate our province's real heroes, and the Wild Rose Foundation will be allocating all of its \$6.6 million in lottery funding to help community service organizations, beginning with the first round of grants that has now gone out. I would just give an additional reminder to people who do read *Hansard* that the Wild Rose Foundation is undertaking the very important Vitalize conference coming up on June 7, 8 and 9 in Edmonton. It's a wonderful opportunity for our community volunteers to come out and receive some additional training, learn something about what other communities are doing, and share in a marvelous experience.

Mr. Chairman, I'll just close by saying that this ministry can and does make a very significant contribution to the quality of life in this province. [some applause] I appreciate the applause. I'll have to say that all again now. Unanimous consent to extend my time, please?

HON. MEMBERS: No. No.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I want to say that Community Development impacts the quality of life of every single Albertan in this Chamber and outside this Chamber. It's our job to ensure that with this ministry, which has a fine tradition under previous ministers to demonstrate flexibility in meeting and serving the needs of Albertans, that fine tradition is continued. I'm confident that these high levels of service and performance will continue.

I will undertake to provide the written comments to the members who've asked for them. I'm grateful for their input. I know they care deeply about this department, as do I.

I want to again thank my staff who are here tonight and those who are out in the field for their tremendous support.

We look forward to great things in this wonderful year when we're balancing economic and fiscal and quality-of-life issues in the Future Summit, and I'm happy to play a leadership role in that regard.

Thank you all.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of Community Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$591,160,000

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's been a very productive evening, and as I mentioned, I've got at least 100 questions to respond to. I want to get at them right away, so I would move that we adjourn for the evening and reconvene tomorrow. Oh, I'm sorry. We're rising and reporting first. I'm so anxious to get to the questions to answer them.

I would move that we rise and report progress and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following to be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development: operating expense and capital investment, \$610,031,000.

Community Development: operating expense and capital investment, \$591,160,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur with this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1 **Natural Gas Price Protection Act**

THE CHAIRMAN: We have for our deliberations right now amendment A2 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on behalf of her colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Do you have any further comments or questions with respect to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. In light of the hour I'll be very brief. Whenever you see something you don't agree with, the best thing to do is to work hard and try to improve it. This is certainly the purpose of amendment A2, to deal with auditing.

Now, when we look at the Natural Gas Price Protection Act as it exists, there is the capacity here, Mr. Chairman, for billions and billions of dollars to be disbursed. I'm not against consumer protection from rising natural gas prices, but I'm certainly against this bill. The amendment would provide an auditing feature, and I would urge all hon. members of this Assembly to accept this amendment because there has to be an auditing feature to ensure that if it's billions of dollars that are going to be spent, that money is going where it is directed and where it is proposed.

That is why I took the time and decided that an auditing feature incorporated into this legislation would be a sound idea. I'm

confident at this time that hon. members of the Assembly will accept this amendment. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Myself and the research staff have had another look at this bill and have detected another flaw. It's simply a slogan bill, and I can hear the hon. member's sloganeering. That is a simple description of this bill. It's quickly taken from the *Calgary Herald* editorial pages from 1974. If we're going to be recognizing the strong majority the government has, we're going to have to again try to improve this.

I see in here in section 3 that there is talk of rebates to vendors. Section 3 currently reads, "A rebate under this Act may be made directly to eligible consumers or to a vendor."

10:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister is having difficulty with his desk? Hopefully it is now rectified and won't need fixing again. Sorry for the interruption.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: That's fine, Mr. Chairman.

There's no definition of a vendor in this bill. When you consider that "a rebate under this Act may be made directly to eligible consumers or to a vendor for the benefit of eligible consumers" and in particular that this could turn into a bill that subsidizes generation of electric power from natural gas as a fuel or a feedstock, I think it is very important that there be a specific definition of vendor in this bill.

I'm proposing an amendment, and at this time I would like to present the amendments to the chair. Perhaps they could be distributed, please.

THE CHAIRMAN: I wonder if the page could pick up the amendments. Thank you.

MR. MacDONALD: May I continue, Mr. Chairman, or shall I wait? [interjections]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, we are just pausing for the moment. It's not an invitation for disorder.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to explain amendment A3.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, I think it is very important that there be a specific definition of a vendor. This bill in its present form again could get totally out of hand. In previous legislation which deals with this issue and unfortunately is going to be repealed, the Natural Gas Rebates Act – the existing rebates act has a specific definition of a vendor. Why when we see the fact, for instance, that location-based credits are being initiated to have natural gas fired generating stations located in different areas of the province where there are transmission constraints in our electric system – again, this rebates act could get totally out of hand without a definition of vendor. We're talking here about rebates to vendors, and what harm – what harm – would there be to having a specific definition of exactly what a vendor is going to be? This indicates to me that this bill was drafted in haste. It is simply again a slogan bill, Mr. Chairman.

Now, I'm not going to go at this time into the details of this, but in order that there will be no huge subsidies and this will not be used as a vehicle to subsidize electrical power generation by natural gas

generators, we need to be careful about this. That is why we need this definition, and I think this definition is suitable, and it will meet that purpose, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

MR. MacDONALD: I am very disappointed, but at this time, Mr. Chairman, I can only say, in summing up my remarks in committee, that this legislation is simply a bill that could possibly cause financial turmoil down the road for Albertans. There is existing legislation in place. We all heard the arguments that we had to get out from underneath the dome and not burden Albertans with excessive legislation, and this is excessive legislation. This is a repeat, because the bill is already in place that will provide rebates. The rebates in the existing legislation also can be provided by . . . [interjection]

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister of Environment, thank you. If you wish to be on the speaking list, stand up and speak when it's your turn. Right now it's Edmonton-Gold Bar's.

MR. MacDONALD: I would remind all hon. members of the Assembly that this bill is before the Legislative Assembly. It's not before the courts. I would encourage all hon. members, if they have something to say about it, to please stand up, because I would be eager to listen to their comments.

This bill in this form is simply a slogan bill. It is not necessary. That is all at the moment that I have to say. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:49 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 17, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Guide our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature two delegations in your gallery today. First a delegation of three members from West Africa, who are here to learn about Alberta, including our justice system. They are members of a Rotary professional exchange. The delegation is led by Ali Badara Tall, a justice of the first level court in the capital of Burkina Faso. He's joined by Adama Soro, lead partner in an Ivory Coast law firm, and Fatouma Kone, a legal adviser to the government in Mali. They are accompanied by Chris Gowers, president of the Riverview Rotary Club in Edmonton and a member of our civil claims mediation team – I should say essentially a volunteer member, because members of that mediation team get paid an honorarium for the mediation they do – and of note, of course, also a member of the new Super 8 on Calgary Trail. These guests are seated in your gallery. They're here and they've visited our courthouse and they've looked at some of our judicial dispute resolution sessions. I've met with them and talked generally about the benefits of arbitration and mediation. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

It's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some special visitors from France. Paul Guiguen is the mayor of a town of 1,900 people, the mayor of Plessala in the province of Brittany. Like our Premier he's serving his third term. Paul Guiguen is here, of course, because his daughter Aurelie Guiguen is a grade 12 student visiting Edmonton and will have three more months with us as another Rotary International exchange student. She has been here providing volunteer services, working in our community, and will be here to work on the world games. She participated in the Success by Six golf tournament, which I hosted last fall. She's done other volunteer activities with the Rotary club that is sponsoring her, and she has devoted lots of energy to working as a volunteer with Grey Nuns and in many other ways. Her family from France is fortunate to be able to come and visit her while she's here: her father, Paul Guiguen, her mother, Gisele, and her sister, Catherine. All of them of course are accompanied by Dave Dorcas, a member of the Gateway Rotary Club in south Edmonton, which is sponsoring her visit. I'd like them all to rise while we wish them bienvenue and bonjour.

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some very special guests seated in your gallery today.

From Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency we have Louise Knox, founder of the Lakeland chapter of Mothers Against Drinking Drivers, who, I would say, was recently elected national president of MADD Canada. She is accompanied by her husband, Ed Knox, who will take over her responsibility as president of Lakeland chapter of MADD. Mr. and Mrs. Knox's introduction to Mothers Against Drinking Drivers came about after the tragic loss of their 16-year-old son, Mike Knox, to a drunk driver on October 2, 1999. It is our sincere hope that no other families experience the loss of a loved one to a drunk driver. Accompanying them today from MADD Canada are Andrew Murie, national director from Mississauga, and Chris George, national director of communications and public policy from Ottawa. The ribbon that the Assembly has before them is in recognition of today's ceremony that took place in the rotunda, which was the joining of the Edmonton PAID chapter and MADD. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition, which was originally presented to the Minister of Seniors and MLA for Stony Plain, on behalf of the Youth Coalition against Poverty, which was signed by approximately 2,650 residents of Edmonton and the surrounding area.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table copies of my responses to questions raised during the Committee of Supply estimates for Sustainable Resource Development.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a response to a question posed by the hon. interim Leader of the Official Opposition on May 9, 2001. The second is a response to questions raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on May 9, 2001.

MR. DANYLUK: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table five copies of a letter from the Aspen View board of trustees regarding Bill 16.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have two tablings today. They're both from school boards in my riding. There are five copies each of some letters regarding the School Amendment Act, Bill 16. These letters outline the things that they support in the act and some of the things they'd like to see changed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have one tabling today. It's five copies of a letter from the board of trustees of the Peace River school division. The school board has concerns regarding some of the sections of the School Amendment Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the required five copies of a letter from Chinook's Edge school division that I'd like to table at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to make two tablings today. The first is an Alberta Environment memorandum from the deputy minister to the minister dated January 12, 1987, and the subject is used lubricating oil. It says: "find an analysis of the used lubricating oil problem in Alberta."

The second is the required number of copies from Hub Oil Company. This is a response to an emission control order "as requested by the Emission Control Order issued on May 25, 1988."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to table for the Assembly an incident summary put together by Alberta environmental protection, environmental management system. It is dated July 22, 1998.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table three different letters in the House. The first two deal with the Spray Lakes sawmill forest management agreement issue. The first one is from Hal Retzer of Calgary, opposing that agreement. The second one is from Mr. Bob Hinman of Turner Valley, also calling on the Premier to turn down the Spray Lakes sawmill proposed agreement.

The third letter, Mr. Speaker, is a letter written exactly four months ago today by the Premier to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General asking him to undertake a legal review of the eligibility criteria for MLAs seeking support from the Alberta risk management fund.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. I'm tabling a letter which is addressed to me with attachments of letters sent to the Premier and to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment from Mr. Lance Lamond, a board member of Poverty in Action. The letter highlights the plight of the poor in Edmonton and urges the Alberta government to increase the SFI benefit rates by 11 percent.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe my guests are in until 2:45 today, so if I could defer that to later.

MR. OUELLETTE: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise in the House today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a wonderful lady from the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake constitu-

ency. She has worked for this Assembly for the past four years as an assistant to your former colleague Mr. Gary Severtson and now continues her hard work as my constituency assistant, and she does a super job. She is accompanied today by her husband, who is a horticultural colleague and friend of the hon. Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. He also has a radio show on 95.5 FM called *Gardening with Pete*. I would ask Jan and Pete Wasylyshyn to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's not often that I have guests from my constituency, so it's a real privilege for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you two members from my constituency. They're from Crossfield: Mr. Iver Storseth and Ms Joanne Penner. They just happen to be the family of a young man working in your office, Brian Storseth, who is your summer temporary employment program student. I know that he's in good hands in your office and he comes from a good area. It's a real honour to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Agricultural Waste

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In southern Alberta a livestock truck wash has been overfilling its lagoon this winter. Under a special permit it has been surface spreading the water on agricultural land. This week the sledge from the bottom of the lagoon was spread on a reclaimed gravel pit on the floodplain of the Oldman River. This operation is zoned commercial but handles agriculture waste. I raise this in the open, recognizing that this operation is only a few miles from my farm, but I raise it on behalf of the public and on behalf of the immediate neighbours who have been calling me. My first question is to the minister of agriculture. Is it true that because this is zoned commercial and handles an agriculture waste your department is not responsible for the actions?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'll try and clarify as best I can the areas of responsibility. First, the truck wash was permitted by the county of Lethbridge. I should make that point. Secondly, I will say that the county used recommendations from Alberta Agriculture regarding manure nutrient utilization in its permit. So I should say that. Thirdly, the other departments that would be involved in this, of course, are Alberta Environment and Alberta Health through public health. So they also have a role in determining the safety of handling wastes. Primarily, Alberta Agriculture is used on the technical advice portion of these types of permits, or in fact if there is a call of a possible infraction or a concern, they would be called, again by either the county or Alberta Environment or public health, to offer that type of technical advice as to how to handle the complaint. That is what has occurred in this case.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Environment. Is it true that because this is a livestock waste handling operation, even though it's zoned commercial, your department is not responsible?

DR. TAYLOR: At the present time, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment does not have legislation regarding agricultural truck washes, as this one particularly is, but we are working with the county and I believe it's the Chinook health region down there. In the particular case in question, the gentleman or the business has been given until June 30 of this year to develop adequate ponds or adequate lagoons – that would be the right word – to handle his wastewater. These lagoons have to be in place by June 30, and that will be enforced by both the county and the regional health authority.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. My next question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, who should the neighbours and the southern Alberta environment group that has taken this up appeal to for help in determining the appropriate actions on this case?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would suspect there are a number of areas and jurisdictions where the residents can appeal. Obviously, there are a number of departments involved. As the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development pointed out, this is a matter that involves the county, involves Environment, involves Health, involves Agriculture. So I'm not saying that I'm the appeal body, but if the residents want to send a letter or if the hon. member wants to communicate on behalf of the residents with my office, I'd be more than happy to undertake a process to co-ordinate the efforts to address this particular issue.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Continuing on this issue, Mr. Premier, who should have controlled this week's spreading of the sludge from the bottom of those lagoons on the Oldman River floodplain?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development pointed out, there are three government jurisdictions involved in this particular matter, and of course there is the county. I sense from the hon. minister's answer to the first question that Agriculture seems to be the lead agency on this, so I'll have her respond.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the county would probably be the first response. Alberta Environment would be involved in this, as would the health unit or the public health portion of the Chinook health region. Again, I do know that in this instance Alberta Agriculture was requested to be a part of this to give technical advice on the use of manure nutrient. I believe that this is being done as part of a reclamation project, so the Minister of Environment may want to expand on that area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're getting conflicting information from this. Is the code of practice law in these cases? Alberta Environment says no, yet fish and wildlife, in the same department, say yes, and Alberta Agriculture says: if it's in the bylaws for the county. How do we get a consistent set of guidelines to control livestock waste?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it's an interesting question, and if there appears to be or if there is in fact a lack of co-ordination, I would like the

hon. leader of the Liberal opposition to bring this to my attention in perhaps a more formal way, in a written form, so that we can get to the bottom of the problem and correct whatever deficiencies may be identified.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture: is the Klapstein report covering this issue where there seems to be a hole between Agriculture and Environment, commercial zoning, agriculture zoning, livestock wastes, other pollutant wastes? There's a real hole here, and this operation seems to be fitting right into it nicely.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the responsibility of the Klapstein report, as it's known, or the report on intensive livestock operations, will contain some rather broad-based recommendations in this whole area. However, there are issues around zoning, and that's why this consultation in this report was necessary. Whether it's a commercial zoning for an agricultural industry or whether it's on a farm, I think all members in this Assembly recognize that the environmental side of this or the health side of it is incredibly important. I think the hon. member has identified an area, and I sense from the Premier that there are three ministries that had better be sitting down and ensuring that there is an avenue and a venue for these matters to be dealt with expeditiously.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A long-standing member of the CRHA board served on the CRHA's finance committee at the same time that a company in which he was a director and shareholder reneged on a \$650,000 loan from Alberta Treasury Branches. This individual still sits on the CRHA board. To the minister of health: can the minister of health explain how someone who was a director of a company that reneged on a \$650,000 government-backed loan is an appropriate candidate for an RHA board?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should say at the outset that the immunity from civil litigation arising from slander or libel which is conferred upon members of this Assembly and comments that they make here ought not to provide a basis for attacking individuals who are not here themselves to respond to such allegations.

Mr. Speaker, there are good people who serve on our regional health authorities. They do have conflict of interest bylaws, which are extremely strong. They are the same bylaws that form the basis of that which applies to Members of the Legislative Assembly who sit in this House. Our Health Care Protection Act ensures that there's full ownership disclosure that members may have with respect to private facilities. Contracts are reviewed through a very lengthy and complete process. We do scrutinize the individuals that are appointed to regional health authorities.

I need not remind the hon. member that we are going to two-thirds elected members on our authorities this fall. I expect that not only will good people continue to be appointed, but good people will also come forward to be elected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions were on the policy with which government appoints RHA members.

Can the minister explain how the government's policy on appointments to RHAs would allow a person to lead an RHA's finance committee at the same time his company is defaulting on a \$650,000 government-backed loan?

MR. MAR: Well, I can say this categorically, Mr. Speaker: our policy is certainly not to besmirch the good reputation of individuals.

DR. TAFT: Is the fact that this same individual has family connections to three for-profit nursing homes that contract with the CRHA of any concern to the minister?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, as I raised this the other day in this Assembly, this is a well-worn path that leads exactly to nowhere. All of these contracts are scrupulously examined, and I stand by the good work that is done by the regional health authority and its members.

Mr. Speaker, it is not for me here today to make any kind of response to the kinds of allegations that are being made here. If the individual has such an allegation to make outside of this Assembly about an individual, as the Premier said, he should do so and stand by the consequences.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Risk Management Fund Review

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exactly four months ago today the Premier asked the Minister of Justice to undertake a legal review of the eligibility criteria for MLAs seeking support from the risk management fund. The Premier took this action, clearly before the election, in the context of the \$800,000 legal bill racked up by Stockwell Day, which the Premier himself described as obscene. My question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, did the review ever take place, and if so, what are the results?

MR. KLEIN: I will have the hon. Justice minister and Attorney General supplement my answer. Indeed I asked the hon. minister to undertake a review of the risk management fund and how that fund is administered. Mr. Speaker, I think I also sent a memo to yourself relative to the duties and the functions of Members' Services to adjudicate these particular matters. I must remind the Legislature that Members' Services is a committee of all members of the House, including members of the opposition.

I would like to see this matter resolved, Mr. Speaker, indeed. I talked about the \$800,000 cost associated with this particular action, including the judgment and the fees that were charged by the lawyers in particular as being obscene. In my mind they are too, and I think the hon. leader of the third party agrees with me on that particular point.

Relative to the question, I will have the hon. minister respond.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we have of course started and conducted some internal reviews with respect to the conduct of the risk management fund and how it's handled, but in the intervening period an application was brought before the court by the former Speaker of the House. We're awaiting a decision on that application, and we took a considered viewpoint that we should wait for that decision before we conclude the review on the chance that something coming out with respect to that decision might be appropriate to be considered as part of the review and also on the

basis that as we go outside the department for advice on issues relative to insurance and insurance coverage, those sorts of issues, it would be prudent to do so after the decision comes down from the court, which we expect anytime.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is looking for agreement where it doesn't exist. I don't agree with his assessment of the obscenity of the charges.

But let me ask the question now. Would the Premier or the Minister of Justice give some reasons for the prudence that they're using to delay conducting this review?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if I heard the hon. member correctly, he said that he doesn't agree with the obscenity of the target. Well, the obscenity of the target was a judgment of I believe \$60,000 compared to a combined bill for both the plaintiff and the defence of \$800,000 less \$60,000, \$740,000. If he doesn't see anything obscene in that, then his sense of money value is a lot different than mine.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my final question. If the Premier really wants me to make a judgment on whether or not that bill is obscene, I think he owes it to this Assembly to release that bill so that we could all look at it and then make a decision whether we agree with it or not. Just \$800,000 in itself is neither obscene nor not obscene.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what there is to release that hasn't already been made public. As a matter of fact, I think the lawyers for both sides released the costs associated with this particular action, both the plaintiff costs and the costs associated with the action on the part of the defence to defend the particular lawsuit.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:00

Home Schooling

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Home schooling has become a popular choice of learning in the last decade. During the election campaign I had several of my constituents ask questions on funding. My question is to the Minister of Learning. What is the increase in funding in home schooling in Budget 2001?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, the amount of money that was before Budget 2001 was \$1,051. This has increased to \$1,088, which is an increase of 3 and a half percent, the same as the school boards received.

The other component of this which is extremely important, as well, is that a parent is eligible to apply for up to 50 percent for curriculum courses and curriculum books if they show receipts to the school board. So the parent can be reimbursed directly for their expenses on the home schooling side.

MR. BRODA: My first supplemental to the same minister: do home schools receive funding for computers or other educational technology?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, no, they do not. However, I would add a proviso here, and that is that if 50 percent of their course is taken through a distance learning centre, through a school board, they

could possibly be eligible for things such as computers, Internet access, all of this, through the school board.

To the hon. member, I would encourage your home schoolers to take a very close look at some of the virtual schools that we have, because I really feel that that would accomplish a lot of what the home schoolers are attempting to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister again. He briefly touched on the Internet. I was just wondering: with the Supernet, the high-speed Internet, that's going to be coming throughout the province, will the individuals that do home schooling have access to line charges to be paid by Alberta Learning?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the very quick answer to that is no. Obviously, what is involved with Supernet is that we will be connecting Supernet to schools, hospitals, and libraries as well as, potentially, municipal buildings. If the home schooler wants to access Supernet, I'm sure what they can do is go to the school libraries and utilize it there or the libraries within their communities. That's probably the best way, but we are not going to get into the business of paying line charges for every house to be hooked up to the Supernet.

Oil and Gas Reserves

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, yesterday Alberta's Energy minister made a trip to Washington, D.C., to talk about Alberta's energy sector. At the same time, the U.S. is planning to unveil its continental energy plan today in Washington. My questions are to the Premier. Has the government examined the effect that increased demand would have on oil and gas reserves in Alberta over the next 20 years?

MR. KLEIN: Have we done an examination? I don't know, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that the Department of Energy keeps current on these particular matters along with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers. I don't know if the hon. member is talking about the pressure on oil and gas or the pressure down the road on a by-product of gas in particular, and that's electricity. Perhaps she can clarify that particular remark.

We're there, Mr. Speaker, because we understand that the continental energy policy involves pricing for a commodity or commodities, ostensibly oil and gas. The reasons our minister is there – and they're valid reasons – are to participate with CAPP in a series of seminars to outline Alberta's position relative to investment in the oil and gas industry and also to familiarize, I guess, those in the United States who might be interested about the rules and regulations and especially the constitutional authority of the province as it relates to the ownership of those resources.

Mr. Speaker, we've often said that as the Prime Minister and the President talk about a continental energy policy, they're talking about commodities or they're talking about setting a price for a commodity that in the case of Canada the country doesn't own. The province of Alberta owns the majority of those commodities, and we want to make sure they're protected.

MS CARLSON: Then perhaps the Premier can answer this question. Will the Premier commit to examine the longevity and sustainability of Alberta's oil and natural gas reserves before entering into any continental energy plan with the United States and making that available to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, it's not up to the province to enter into a continental energy plan. It's a responsibility of the province to protect as vigorously as we possibly can our constitutional authority over the ownership of natural resources, including oil and gas. We're talking about a significant resource – a significant resource – some 300 billion barrels of oil sands product alone today, and that's outside of conventional oil and gas, 200 trillion cubic feet of proven reserves and 260 trillion cubic feet of proven reserves for gas, Mr. Speaker. That is very substantial indeed, and we want to make sure that we protect it, because it is our resource.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier answer this? How can he be certain that an increase in resource sales to the States won't mean increased costs for Albertans in the long run? Large volumes, you're talking about, but not a large number of years of sustainability for this province.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is the ability to export natural gas right now. As I understand it, we're providing the United States with something in the neighbourhood of I've heard as high as 19 percent and as low as 12 percent of their total energy needs relative to natural gas and natural gas in turn generating electricity. That is huge. But while those exports take place, there are rules and regulations in place to ensure that the needs of Albertans and the needs of Canadians are met. You simply can't take and suck all the gas and the oil out of this province and send it south or anywhere else. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I heard this absurd comment from across the way that that is what is happening. I'm wondering today how this hon. member is heating her home or running her automobile. She's doing it through the resources, and the resources of this province are providing that. So obviously it's absurd to say that it's all going to the United States and it's all being exported. It's not. We will make sure that Albertans are protected and that Canadians are protected, but we'll make sure that we have the opportunity to earn a reasonable amount off our resource and at the same time ensure that there's an adequate supply of energy for the nation and for the province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

School Board Trustees

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The job of school trustee requires a great deal of skill, hard work, long hours, and dedication, and they also often have to endure a great deal of public criticism. There are concerns being expressed that we will have difficulty in continuing to attract highly qualified candidates to take on this important role in future particularly because of very low salaries. A few weeks ago a Calgary school board trustee resigned her position with only a few months to go until the next election, and I understand an Edmonton trustee also recently resigned. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Learning. What kinds of remuneration are made available for the position of school board trustee?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I will say at the outset is that the majority of the school trustees are very dedicated people and are people that definitely are not there purely because of the salary, purely because of the remuneration. They're there for what they can do for kids and are very active in the school system. In general, across the province what we have is a wide

range. Probably on the low side it's around \$3,000, and on the high side it's around \$25,000. For the hon. member's information the average salary that was paid in Calgary, which is where the hon. member is from, was around \$11,700.

2:10

MR. LORD: To the same minister: are there any specific actions being taken by your department to attract and retain school board trustees who have the necessary experience and qualifications required to excel at the job?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you. First of all, the elections are coming up in the third week of October, and I would encourage everyone in this Assembly and everyone who is listening to think very seriously about running for a school trustee position. It's a very rewarding task, and indeed it was something that I performed before coming into the Legislative Assembly.

In direct answer to the hon. member's question, the Alberta School Boards Association is undertaking a very intensive communication campaign right now to educate the public about what a school trustee does and the rewards of the job in the hope of getting a whole group of candidates to run for the upcoming election, because reasonably, hon. member, it is democracy that will determine who our next school boards will be, and the more that we get to run the better.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you. My final question: since voter turnout historically has been very low for school board elections, are there any actions under way to increase voter interest and awareness and encourage more people to get involved and come out and vote in the elections?

DR. OBERG: Again, Mr. Speaker, as I've stated in the previous two answers, a school trustee position is an extremely important position. It affects the lives of each and every one of our children, and it's something that we cannot take for granted.

Prior to the election in the third week of October, we will be putting out a very generic advertising campaign to say: please run; make sure you get out and vote. Historically, as you stated, the turnout for these elections is extremely low, and we would like to see that changed. I think it is very important for people to get out and vote, very important for them to exercise their democratic right and vote for the school trustee that they believe will do the best job for their particular circumstance.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Gasoline Prices

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year at this time the price of oil was \$29.33 per barrel and the price for gasoline was around 65 cents per litre. This year the price of oil has dropped to \$28.86 per barrel, yet gas prices have risen, in some cases above 75 cents. My first question this afternoon is to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to striking an all-party committee to immediately study gasoline retail pump prices in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't mean to sound facetious, but by

the time we strike the committee, get it up and running, it's very likely the price of gas will be down to about 65 cents. You know, these things are cyclical, comparatively speaking, and related to the earning power.

I can recall back in the '70s when the price of gasoline at the pumps went through the roof. As a matter of fact, there was an extreme shortage, and there were pictures on television of miles and miles of cars lined up to get gasoline because basically someone started the rumour that we were going to run out of gasoline and there was going to be a tremendous shortage. The price went up. There was indeed a shortage at that particular time. It had nothing to do with the oil in the ground. It had something to do with world politics and the supply of oil particularly from the Middle East.

Nonetheless, there are a number of factors that reflect the price of gasoline at the pumps, and relative to the specifics – oh, I don't have the hon. minister here.

I was going to have the hon. former minister reply, but she can't. So I will take the matter under advisement. I will.

MRS. McCLELLAN: The Finance minister could.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I could have the hon. Minister of Finance reply because it does relate to money.

THE SPEAKER: Well, we're going to move on to the next supplementary here. The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I said: immediately strike a committee.

How can the Premier stand in this Assembly and tell us that gas prices are based on oil prices when clearly today we have higher prices for gasoline and lower prices for oil?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I understand that the hon. Minister of Energy answered this question – I believe it was on Monday – in response to a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I believe. He explained that there are a number of factors that lead to the pricing of gasoline. One of those factors, I think I heard him say, was how much they bought the product for some months previously; in other words, how much hedging was going on, and how much did they pay for future oil that was, in turn, turned into gasoline? That may be one of the factors.

MR. MacDONALD: Again to the Premier. Yesterday at the Petro-Canada at 90th Avenue and Ottewell the price of gasoline per litre was 70 cents. Today at the Esso at 99th Street and 82nd Avenue the price is 75 cents a litre. In Calgary at Centex Gas on Elbow Drive and 95th Avenue the price of gas is 72.9 cents a litre. It goes even higher in other neighbourhoods in Calgary. This is an issue that is very, very important.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. We've all agreed that there would be no preambles. What is the question?

MR. MacDONALD: Will the Premier, please, for the sake of consumers in this province strike a committee of members from different parties in this Assembly to study the retail price of gasoline in this province? Immediately strike a committee.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we can strike all the committees we want. But what can be done other than to get into the marketplace? And I don't think we want to do that. I know we don't want to do that, and I'm sure the Liberals don't want to do that.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Oh, yes, they do.

MR. KLEIN: Well, perhaps they do.

Mr. Speaker, there is an agency that looks into prices for all commodities called the Competition Bureau of Canada. It's a federal agency. Whether it's gasoline or bread or anything else that is a consumer product, if it's deemed there is unfair competition, the bureau of course has the authority to look into these matters.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, as I said at the beginning, by the time we strike a committee, by the time we get into a process – and I don't know what the end of the process is going to be, because I don't know what authority this Legislative Assembly or an all-party committee would have; probably none whatsoever – by that time the price of gas could very well be down in the mid-60s, where it was a couple of weeks ago.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Opticians' Scope of Practice

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Concerns have been raised in my constituency that optician associations in several provinces have initiated discussions regarding legislative amendments which would allow opticians to prescribe eyewear. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Have similar discussions occurred in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that this is an issue in the eye care community. In this province the professional association, the Alberta Opticians Association, has proposed that opticians be authorized to perform simple sight testing. This is something that would be properly discussed with respect to the regulations that are being developed under the Health Professions Act.

MR. JOHNSON: My second question is to the same minister. Is it likely that when regulations are developed under the Health Professions Act, the scope of practice for opticians will be expanded in any way?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can't speculate on exactly which regulations will be developed under the Health Professions Act. I can say, however, that this is an appropriate avenue to review the proposal by the Opticians Association. All affected stakeholders, including the opticians, would have several opportunities to give input into the development of the regulations under the HPA.

There is a Health Professions Advisory Board under that particular act, that is composed of members of the public as well as health professionals. This board will provide advice to me with respect to matters under the act, and it would be my intention to ask this board for its recommendations regarding the scope of practice for opticians.

MR. JOHNSON: I have no further questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

2:20

Hub Oil Company Ltd.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under the terms of approval from Alberta environmental protection due to expire on February 1, 2006, there is a requirement for the plant operation of Hub Oil Company to carry out groundwater monitoring on a semi-

annual frequency and submit an annual report. To the Minister of Environment: given that crucial information such as the amount if any of PCBs, arsenic, cadmium, and lead would appear in this report, will the minister provide to the Assembly the reports from 1999 and 2000?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have an appropriate process to go through. It's the FOIP process, the freedom of information and protection of privacy, and certainly the member has access to that process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Transportation, then, please. Given that Hub Oil Company has sold blended fuel oil to asphalt companies in this province for years, has the Department of Transportation analyzed the level of PCBs, arsenic, cadmium, and lead shipped from Hub Oil to the province's asphalt plants to ensure that the levels of these toxic substances are below maximum allowable levels?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I don't know specifically of any products shipped from Hub Oil to any paving project in this province. However, I can assure the hon. member that we don't allow any kind of material to be incorporated in asphalt unless it meets the very strict guidelines and regulations that are monitored by the Minister of Environment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: what are the bases on which groundwater monitoring reports are reviewed by the chemicals assessment and management division's groundwater protection branch of Alberta environmental protection?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously when we're doing tests and monitoring, they are reviewed by our professional scientific staff. We have a number of scientists there. When we do monitoring, whether it's air quality monitoring or soil testing or groundwater or drinking water monitoring, our professional scientific staff in the particular area – if they're water staff, then they monitor scientifically the tests. The air staff monitors the air quality tests. If it's soil testing, then our soil experts monitor that. The water sample monitoring will be handled in the same way as any monitoring is handled.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Petro-Canada Labour Dispute

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are on the strike-bound Petro-Canada refinery, which last Saturday sent a thick plume of black smoke across Edmonton's east side. A spokesperson for Petro-Canada described the incident as very serious, yet the company has announced its intention to resume refinery production today despite the current strike. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. In light of the tentative agreement reached yesterday, which will be voted on tomorrow, will the minister order Petro-Canada to hold off resuming

production at least until the vote results are known so that the health and safety of metro-Edmonton residents are not further compromised?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's not quite a mixed metaphor in terms of the question, but the hon. member, I think, is trying to bring two different aspects of our department into play. If there is any sort of health and safety hazard that currently exists, then our workplace health and safety people will be on the job and will be looking at that. That will have no impact and no effect over the collective bargaining process. Employees in this province have the legitimate right to go on strike. Employers have a legitimate right to try to carry on their operation as best they can during that strike. So one does not necessarily lead to the other.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the minister justify allowing unskilled replacement workers with less than two weeks' training to handle extremely dangerous substances in large quantities, such as hydrogen sulfide and hydrochloric acid?

MR. DUNFORD: Under our workplace health and safety guidelines, Mr. Speaker, there are ample legislation and regulations in place to cover that. Certainly in the sense of compliance, then, with those regulations, it's a matter of workplace health and safety. Unlike the hon. member, I have full confidence in our staff.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, then, share with us what information he is relying upon that makes him so certain that the use of untrained or partially trained replacement workers in a highly complex oil refinery is not compromising either workplace safety or public safety?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the standards are in place. We have workplace health and safety officials that monitor such standards. The allegation about a worker's ability to deal with it is simply a matter of the company's obligation to meet the standards that are in place. If those standards are not met, then of course we have all manner of ways in which we can take action.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Alberta Trailnet

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning Alberta Trailnet announced two programs: the Trans Canada Trail discovery program, which involves the development and installation of interpretive panels along the Trans Canada Trail, and the Bridges for Canada initiative, which involves building bridges along the Trans Canada Trail, involving the military forces. To date eight bridges have already been completed. My first question today is to the hon. Minister of Community Development. Can the minister tell me if Trans Canada Trail or Alberta Trailnet has obtained or plans to obtain all the necessary municipal development permits prior to the construction of these bridges?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are no bridges on the trail in Alberta at this point, but I should point out that one has been proposed for the Athabasca area. It is neither the responsibility of

the Trans Canada Trail Foundation nor of Alberta Trailnet to obtain any local approvals. Any of those approvals for any type of construction or for the trail itself, for that matter, are totally the responsibility of the local trail operator. The local trail operators, I'm sure, will be working with the municipalities for any of those proposed projects. That's my understanding of what's going on there in the Athabasca area, and that has to be done prior to the commencement of any of that trail development or bridge development.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the minister was so thorough in answering my first question and also answering my second, it leaves me with my last supplementary. Could the Minister of Community Development tell this member if this government has any financial involvement whatsoever in the construction of this bridge program?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, we don't have any direct involvement, but I think the House would be reminded that we did give a start-up onetime grant of about \$1.1 million awhile back. Those moneys undoubtedly have been used for a variety of purposes.

I would say specific to the issue of bridge construction along this trail, that will unite all of Canada eventually, that that particular project is being funded largely by the Canadian military, the Military Engineers. I understand that they're covering the costs of development as well as production and implementation and materials. The one spec'd for Athabasca, assuming approvals are had and all of that, would be entirely covered by the Canadian forces. We should thank them and the Bronfman Foundation, by the way, for their work on this trail to date.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Use of Outside Counsel

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his last annual report the Auditor General recommended that "the Department of Justice enhance its systems for managing and reporting on the cost-effectiveness of legal services, including contracted services." The Auditor General stated that "Justice's accountability systems for contracting outside counsel do not include measurable performance expectations, or monitoring and evaluation of performance" and that "public disclosure would improve Justice's accountability." My questions are for the Minister of Justice. Since the Department of Justice did not provide a response to this recommendation, what is the minister doing to improve the accountability of outside counsel?

2:30

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're following the recommendation of the Auditor General in developing a process to better monitor outside counsel, the effectiveness of services provided by outside counsel, and the efficacy of using outside counsel.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Has the minister completed his review of the bill for outside counsel in the recent defamation action relating to the former Minister of Finance? Did the department get value for money?

MR. HANCOCK: A very interesting question, Mr. Speaker, and I think a very good question. The department has reviewed the account in question. The account was rather large, and I would be offering an opinion, I guess, if I were to say whether we viewed it that we got value for money. Suffice it to say that the case in question was quite complex, notwithstanding that the result and the amount of damages claimed was not significant. The problem with that particular case was that it involved an individual member of the Assembly, it involved defences to a defamation action, and it involved a law firm providing advice with respect to that particular lawsuit, which involved numerous avenues of research.

What I can assure the member is that department counsel followed the various bills that came in on that particular incident – it wasn't just one bill; it was a monthly bill that came in – followed up on the bill as it came in and ensured that every avenue that was being researched with respect to that case was considered to be if not an appropriate avenue at least one that we couldn't, in our judgment, complain about at that particular time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. The minister spoke of following every avenue of review, but did the minister – and if he didn't, is he willing to? – send this particular bill to the taxing officer of the court so that it can be impartially reviewed by an independent officer of the court?

MR. HANCOCK: As I responded with respect to an earlier question in the House today with respect to the matter about the review of the risk management process and how we handle it, we have deferred making a decision with respect to taxation as well until after we receive the decision from the court, because I think both of those avenues of review should be done in the full context of the court decision.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

School Board Boundary Changes

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent letter from the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta outlines its concerns related to the proposed changes to the 4 by 4 separate school formation process. Two of the school boards in my riding have also written me to say that they do not support the changes outlined in Bill 16 regarding this specific issue. My questions today are to the Minister of Learning. How do you respond to the association when it says that this process will be more cumbersome and less democratic than the current process?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the best way to respond to this question is to explain what we have now and what Bill 16 will provide. What we have right now is called the 4 by 4 process. Essentially what happens is that the minority religion within a four-mile by four-mile square has the ability to petition for a school board. First of all, they have to ensure that they are the minority religion. There has to be a poll taken to show that they are the minority religion. Second of all, a vote has to be held. The vote has to be tabulated by the separate school board, and then the vote is sent on to me, at which point I either approve or disapprove the formation of that school jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, what is being proposed in this legislation is two

ways that this can occur. First of all, if the separate school board sits down and combines with the public school board, where both school boards come forward to me and say, "We want the separate school board expanded to be coterminous," it will occur. The second way is that if a separate school board wants to expand within the area of a map that is predetermined, it will be petitioned by its petitioners, of which there must be three electors. It must be then a public process to listen and to talk to both the public side and the separate side, mediated by an independent facilitator. It will then occur. You be the decider or whoever be the decider whether that's more cumbersome. Personally I don't think it is, and even more importantly I think it's a lot fairer.

REV. ABBOTT: Again to the same minister: will the proposed changes, as the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta says, promote the separation of students and contribute to the decline in enrollments in rural communities?

THE SPEAKER: The purpose of question period is not to have a debate on a bill before the Assembly.

The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the 4 by 4 process is available right now, today, to every Catholic elector, to every minority religion elector within the province of Alberta. So if the concern is whether or not Small Town, Alberta, will receive a Catholic school jurisdiction, that chance is out there right now. What we are trying to do under Bill 16 is we are attempting to put some rationality to this process. We are attempting to have everyone in the community, not just the minority religion, sit down and have a good discussion about whether or not there should be a separate school district in that particular small town.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is the fairest way possible. The 4 by 4 system did not allow for any public consultation. I will give an example of my own community, in which case there are 13,000 people: 175 people voted to have a separate school district in Brooks, and with those 175 people there was a separate school jurisdiction brought to Brooks. There was no way for the other 12,000 and some people to even get into the discussion.

REV. ABBOTT: So my final question then: will these changes result in one minority faith being favoured over the other?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the quick and short answer to that is absolutely not. The minority rights are still there. The minority rights, whether they be Catholic or whether they be Protestant, are still existing. The constitutional rights are still there under this law. What this bill does is provide a better, more rational alternative to formation of separate school districts.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get the privilege of introducing guests from my constituency. Today I

have quite a number of them, 130 very studious and well-disciplined students, and I know because I was visiting with them on the lawn. They're here today to see how well disciplined their members of the Assembly are, and I'm sure we won't disappoint them.

Accompanying the students is a group of very hardworking and dedicated teachers: Mr. Bob Worsfold, who is also the ATA local president; Ms. Cindy Patterson; Mrs. Jane Flexhaug, a teacher's assistant; Kelvin Beaudry; Ms. Kara McDonald; Mrs. Sharon Collin; Mrs. Jolene Burgeson. As well, a group of parents: Mrs. Cindy Lodder, Mr. Lyle Blatz, Mrs. Debbie Rockwell, Mrs. Laura Olson, Mrs. Carolyn Leeuwenburgh, Mrs. Tami Gardner, Mrs. Tammy Cotton, Mrs. Cheryl Corsiatto. They were delivered very safely to us today by bus drivers Don Irwin, Mike Irwin, and Bill Moore, who preferred the sunshine on the lawn. I'm sure the group will take our best greetings back with them. I'd ask them all to rise today, in both galleries I believe, and accept the warm welcome of our Assembly.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Theresa Nelsen

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my privilege to acknowledge and extend congratulations to Miss Theresa Nelsen. Miss Nelsen, a grade 12 student from Whitecourt, was named a member of the 4-H Alberta-Northwest Territories agriculture development tour during the annual Alberta 4-H selections program in Olds. Miss Nelsen is 18 and a member of the Roydale 4-H Multiclub, where she's specializing in beef production. As a member of the Alberta-Northwest Territories agriculture development tour Miss Nelsen and 25 other 4-H members will participate in activities designed to increase the awareness of the diversity of our agriculture industry.

Miss Nelsen will have the opportunity to travel to Yellowknife this summer and explore the diversity of culture and lifestyle in Canada's north. Mr. Speaker, this is a great honour and an important education experience for Miss Nelsen and the 25 other participants. It's a chance for them to see part of our great country that they may not have otherwise had a chance to see and to experience the rich culture of the north and to find out more about the depth and significance of our own agricultural industry. This is important not only in developing the skills and knowledge of the participants who may follow a career in agriculture but also in developing the citizens and leaders of Alberta. This is something the 4-H program is designed to do.

To close, Mr. Speaker, I would like to again offer my congratulations to Miss Nelsen on receiving this honour and to wish her a wonderful experience on this trip and a very bright future. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

2:40 **National Missing Children's Day**

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day, a day to reflect upon the appalling tragedy of missing children, a day to join together to offer hope to those families who are still searching, and a day to remember with sadness those children who will never return.

In the past week we've all lived the anguish of parents faced with a missing child, and when we learned that that missing child would never return, we were devastated. The Jessica Koopmans of the world shatter us. How could she have been protected? How do we

prevent children from meeting such an end? We can be overwhelmed by our grief and our helplessness, cowed by the feeling that we have no control, but we dare not and we must not. We can take control, all of us: our families, our society, our schools, our child care agencies, our government, and our courts. We must all redouble our efforts to create a safe environment for children, an environment where our children are allowed to be children, to grow, to learn, to dream, to play, and to love, free from drugs, violence, poverty, and fear.

While we are doing that, we can support groups like Child Find Alberta, Missing Children Society of Canada, Missing Children's Network Canada, and Our Missing Children. We can acquaint ourselves with strategies that will prevent our children from going missing. We can work with children themselves, arming them with the knowledge that may prevent them from becoming victims.

A week Friday, on National Missing Children's Day, we will be asked to leave our porch lights on to help light the way home for missing children. Let those same porch lights remind each of us of our responsibilities to children. Let those porch lights remind us that we can take control, and this year let those porch lights shine across the province in memory of Jessica Koopmans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Crime Prevention Week

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While door-knocking in my constituency during the recent election, I was very surprised at the great increase in the number of large, barking dogs I was encountering, even just over the last couple of years. It was pretty clear to me that concern about crime has become one of the very biggest issues on my constituents' minds, and my conversations at the doorstep confirmed this. That is why I am so pleased today to rise before this Assembly to speak to an important awareness initiative in this regard, important not just to my constituents but to all Albertans.

May 11 to May 18 is Alberta's 10th annual Crime Prevention Week. Led by Alberta's Solicitor General, this week is intended to raise awareness about crime prevention initiatives across the province and to encourage Albertans to help make our communities safer. The theme this year is the Many Faces of Crime Prevention, and it is intended to remind us that we can all play a role and should play a role in helping prevent crime in our communities. I would encourage all members of this Assembly, if you aren't doing so already, to work with your constituency organizations to help identify and bring some well-deserved recognition to any individuals who have gone above and beyond to help prevent crime in your communities.

The province is helping to do this. Two weeks ago Alberta's Solicitor General announced more than \$580,000 in community crime prevention grants to assist various community organizations across the province. On May 12 in Calgary a ceremony was held to honour some of the businesses, organizations, and individuals who have put their heart and soul into making a difference through crime prevention in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to encourage all members of this Assembly to play an even bigger part in building safer and stronger communities by getting more involved. Let's all just get out in our communities, not only this week but year-round, and support crime prevention initiatives in our neighbourhoods.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Inland Cement Limited

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is recklessly fast-tracking the approval process for Inland Cement's conversion to coal operations. Doing so is needlessly endangering the environment as well as the health and well-being of tens of thousands of Edmontonians. By Inland Cement's own account arsenic, mercury, sulphur dioxide, and chromium emissions will all increase. In addition, converting to coal will increase greenhouse gas emissions by more than 400 tonnes per day.

This proposal has raised widespread concerns among the residents of this city. At a recent public meeting over 200 local residents came out on a beautiful spring evening to express their concerns and their frustrations at a government that appears to be doing only the company's bidding. In addition, a petition calling for a full environmental impact assessment has gathered 1,300 signatures and is still being circulated. Finally, there are major concerns about the risk of setting a precedent for future coal operations. The government has been talking about streamlining approval of coal-burning power plants for some time now, and I fear that if the Inland Cement conversion is fast-tracked, other coal projects will be as well.

In this case, the Minister of Environment has the authority to order a full environmental impact assessment. This would include public hearings where intervenors could obtain legal funding, witnesses could be cross-examined, and alternative evidence presented. I strongly urge the government to order such an assessment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Projected Government Business

MS CARLSON: I would ask the government to please share the orders of business for next week with us.

THE SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Victoria Day being Monday, government business on Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, second reading of bills 17, 15, 11, 16, and Committee of the Whole if time permits as per the Order Paper.

Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, day 13, estimates for the departments of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Innovation and Science, and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, May 23, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, the estimates for the departments of Revenue and the Solicitor General and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, May 24, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply, the main estimates of the Department of Environment. Time permitting we would request reversion to Introduction of Bills for the introduction of the main estimates appropriation bill, which I believe will be Bill 20, and then second reading of bills 17 and 18 and as per the Order Paper.

THE SPEAKER: The Official Opposition House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

Imputing Falsehoods against a Member

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise under 23(h) and (i): making allegations and imputing false motives, in reference to a response from the Minister of Health and Wellness earlier this afternoon in the exchange during question period.

This is a continuation, Mr. Speaker, of an exchange between this

minister and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview since Monday of this week on issues that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has been asking with regards to conflict of interest policy. The minister has been making some allegations and urging – as well as some private members in the Assembly in heckles – to name names and that the questions being asked are not based on policy.

I would suggest that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is well within his rights within the terms of the questions he has and the rights he has under the terms of qualified privilege of a member where he has an obligation to ask questions, and the minister has an obligation to hear those questions and respond accordingly.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has not made any case under 23(h) or (i) with respect to the exchange in question period today. Clearly, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview was, in phrasing the question, referring to a specific individual. It was clear to myself and to all other members of the House in the detail that was provided that there was a specific individual being referenced.

A question could have been brought on a policy question as to what qualifications a member might have before being appointed or what type of a review is in the appointment process, but by raising the question in the manner that it was, there was a clear allegation being made in the question, and the hon. minister, in responding, indicated exactly that: there was an allegation being made which could be a clearly identifiable person. If someone were to raise questions of that nature in the House, where the individual in question could not defend themselves and where the details of the incidents being brought forward could not be properly explored, that was improper. I agree with the hon. minister, quite frankly, that it is improper to bring questions forward of that nature.

2:50

Issues with respect to ethical questions of that nature have to be phrased very, very carefully, Mr. Speaker. If you want to raise a question of policy, which is most appropriate in this House – to raise issues of policy – then phrasing the question in a policy framework is appropriate. But phrasing a question in a manner which anybody can tell is an allegation about an individual who's not here to defend themselves, in a situation where the specifics could not be brought forward and dealt with is inappropriate. Therefore, the minister's response was entirely appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on this point of order.

DR. TAFT: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've taken great care and I take great care with every question I ask not to impute or raise allegations. It was a question of policy and how a policy was implemented, and I raised an example to illustrate it. If you read the question, you will realize that there was no allegation there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on this point of order?

MR. MASON: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Please proceed.

MR. MASON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Government House Leader indicated that questions on policy alone should be brought before the Assembly during question period. In fact, it is fundamental that accountability of the government is also a fundamental principle for question period. The appointment of individual

members by the government, if there is a serious problem that could affect the performance of their duties, is perfectly within the scope of question period.

[Mr. Hancock rose]

THE SPEAKER: No, you've already participated once; that's it.

Hon. members, the citation provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie had to do with Standing Orders 23(h) and (i) of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Let me at the outset make it very, very clear that sections 23(h) and (i) have nothing to do with the arguments put forward here or the questions this afternoon. Sections 23(h) and (i) have to deal with allegations made against another member, or "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." That's what the protection of that particular standing order is all about.

Now with respect to what we have here this afternoon, here's the text of what happened. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview:

Can the minister explain how the government's policy on appointments to RHAs would allow a person would allow a person to lead an RHA's finance committee at the same time his company is defaulting on a \$650,000 government-backed loan?

The word "his" is included in the question.

The hon. minister, "Well, I can say this categorically, Mr. Speaker: our policy is certainly not to besmirch the good reputation of individuals."

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview: "Is the fact that this same individual has family connections to three for-profit nursing homes that contract with the CRHA of any concern to the minister?"

The minister:

Mr. Speaker, as I raised this the other day in this Assembly, this is a well-worn path that leads exactly to nowhere. All of these contracts are scrupulously examined, and I stand by the good work that is done by the regional health authority and its members.

It is not for me here today to make any kind of response to the kinds of allegations that are being made here.

Now, with respect to allegations, 23(h) and (i) have to do with allegations with respect to another member. There was no allegation made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview with respect to another member in the Assembly. Neither was there any allegation made by the Minister of Health and Wellness with respect to another member in the Assembly from my reading of the text and my observing of this particular matter this afternoon.

Now, there is a concern, though – policy issues: yes, absolutely; no doubt at all about it. That's what this Assembly's all about, and that's what question period's all about. Question period is not about debate. It's about seeking information and holding the government accountable. There are situations that do happen periodically when hon. members sometimes name individuals who are not in this Assembly who cannot be protected or sometimes have allegations that may be made about members whose names are not there or suggestions.

The difficulty the chair has is that the chair never knows if an hon. member raising the question is, quote, seeking something with a shotgun approach; i.e. you fire a shotgun bullet and the 57 pellets are going out, hoping that one of the 57 will hit a mark. That's a pretty dangerous form of questioning. That's a very, very dangerous form of questioning, because it also leads to another member rising on a point of privilege with respect to that kind of an approach. So one has to be very, very careful.

These questions today do not suggest the existence of a known individual to the chair, never raised in this Assembly before, but it can lead to some implications that all hon. members can deal with if they want to rise on a point of privilege at any time or a point of order that can be dealt with in the question period.

In terms of a point of order today dealing with allegations, the rules speak very clearly about allegations about other members in this particular Assembly. There's nothing in the text that the chair reads with respect to this that would cause concern about that.

There are, however, a whole series of violations today with respect to the Standing Orders. Let's just remind ourselves of what some of these are. We have a clear understanding that when we stand in this Assembly, we deal with another hon. member with the greatest degree of concern and courtesy that we should have. That means addressing the hon. member by the constituency and the correct name of their constituency, and if they happen to be the Opposition House Leader, that's the courteous title that's given to the Opposition House Leader. If it's the Leader of the Official Opposition, that's the courteous title that's given to the Leader of the Official Opposition.

It's also courteous to deal with ministers in much the same way, and the correct title for ministers are what they are listed as. It is not the minister of agriculture; it's actually the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. It's not the minister of health; it's the Minister of Health and Wellness. We had two violations with respect to that today. The Leader of the Official Opposition incorrectly referred to one minister with the incorrect title, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview incorrectly referred to a minister with the incorrect title.

Now, preambles are also an agreed-upon procedure, agreed to in this Assembly, and the chair has a signed document with leaders from three parties agreeing what the rule on preambles is. They've been signed. Their name is etched on the piece of paper. It's there. I endorsed it.

So let's see now. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, in your second question you had a preamble. The leader of the third party, in your second question you had a preamble. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, in your second question you had a preamble. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, in your third question you had a preamble, and there was an interjection from the chair with respect to that matter. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, on your third question that you had today, you violated *Beauchesne* 408(e) and (f), and you violated 409(1). The minister of education and the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, you received an admonition from the chair with respect to enticing debate in the Assembly.

So we have a four-day weekend coming up . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: That's Minister of Learning.

THE SPEAKER: Minister of Learning, yeah.

We have a four-day weekend coming up, and the first thing that will happen with the chair is that he will spend much of Friday reading the rules, getting the titles correct. I would encourage all members to take the Standing Orders, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice*, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* and do a quick overview just so that we're really going to be in shape on Tuesday next.

3:00

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order. For the those sitting in the gallery, just so you're aware, this is a portion of the procedure of the Legislature where there is some

informality. Members are allowed to remove their jackets and move around from their seats, and they are also able to have a coffee or a juice in the Assembly.

head: **Main Estimates 2001-02**

Seniors

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: This is a designated department. I'll invite the hon. Minister of Seniors to open debate.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am very pleased to be here today to discuss the first three-year business plan for the new Ministry of Seniors. Alberta is the only province in Canada that has a ministry devoted to seniors. This demonstrates the government's strong commitment to enhancing the quality of life for Alberta's seniors. It also enables the government to provide a greater focus on the current and future needs of seniors in our province, particularly those most in need. As the Minister of Seniors I'm looking forward to working with Alberta seniors and being an advocate on their behalf.

Responsibility for housing is also part of the new Ministry of Seniors. This includes housing for seniors, for lower income families, for individuals with special needs, and for the homeless. It is incumbent on us to help those members of our society who are unable to find adequate accommodation and to support them in becoming healthier and more self-reliant, contributing members of our communities.

The Ministry of Seniors' business plan is closely aligned with the priorities of the government of Alberta's 2001 to 2004 business plan. Of particular importance to this ministry is the government's priority of caring for children and supporting seniors and families. As the ministry responsible for seniors and housing our three-year business plan is developed around two core businesses:

1. supporting the independence and well-being of seniors; and
2. supporting family and special purpose housing needs.

Our 2001-04 business plan takes a different approach from previous years. Instead of identifying a list of actions that relate to each goal, we have taken a broader approach and identified corporate initiatives. You will see these listed under each of five success factors.

Regarding our performance measures, a number of improvements have been made, retaining a link between measures and performance assessments in each core business. We wanted our performance measures to be more meaningful to our stakeholders and partners as well. The measures will address what we have heard people want us to deal with.

Our first goal is to ensure that seniors have "access to the supports they need to live as independently as possible in a secure and dignified way." One of the most effective ways to do this is to actively communicate with seniors on a daily basis. We accomplish this through our toll-free Alberta seniors' information line: 1-800-642-3853 or, if you're in Edmonton, 427-7876. Since its introduction in 1994 the line has received over 989,000 calls, and we expect to take our one millionth call early next month.

My ministry is always looking for ways to enhance the communication and/or delivery of our services and programs to seniors throughout the province. One way that's being considered is through existing seniors' centres. Late last year I gave the go-ahead to the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta, the Alberta Council on Aging, and my ministry to conduct a study on the role, services, and funding of seniors' centres. I look forward to the results of the study as it may offer some good opportunities to further our support to seniors. I should explain that a key component of successful aging

is for seniors to have opportunities to be active and involved in events, programs, and the life of their communities. Seniors' centres offer such opportunities.

I'm proud to say that Alberta offers one of the most comprehensive packages of benefits for lower income seniors in Canada. The Alberta seniors' benefit program provides a cash benefit and is used to calculate a partial or full subsidy of Alberta health insurance premiums for seniors that are most in need. As of March 2001 over 181,000 Alberta seniors, or roughly 59 percent, were receiving benefits from the program. More than 166,000 seniors pay no health insurance premiums whatsoever.

Budget 2001 provides an additional \$2.1 million over the 2000 budget for the Alberta seniors' benefit program to assist lower income seniors with increased living expenses. The special-needs assistance for seniors' program is an income-tested program that provides lump sum cash payments to help seniors who can demonstrate that they are unable to meet their basic needs. It is the only such program in Canada. Last year the program helped more than 7,000 low-income seniors who were experiencing extreme financial difficulty.

Budget 2001 provides an increase of \$2.2 million over last year's budget for the special-needs assistance for seniors' program. These increases bring the budget for these two programs to \$166.3 million. Seniors eligible for benefits will see the increases starting this July, as this is the start of the new benefit year. Most seniors will receive approximately a 4 percent increase, but as in the past we are looking at fine-tuning the program, so it is possible that some seniors will receive a higher amount.

Seniors' housing is another important program in our ministry. Between the shelter component of the Alberta seniors' benefit program and our seniors' housing program, over 1 in 3 seniors in Alberta receives some form of assistance with their housing costs. The government is committed to working with our community partners to determine how best to meet seniors' future housing needs. We support the development of community resources for seniors to allow them to age in place. By this I mean ensuring that personal and health services that seniors want are available to them within their own community whether they choose to live in their own home or live in a supportive housing facility.

In 1999 the government introduced the healthy aging partnership initiative, a \$10 million fund to encourage the development of appropriate supportive housing accommodation so that seniors can live in a place in their own communities. Last fall the government committed an additional \$10 million and targeted onetime funding for the seniors' supportive housing incentive program. This program aims to provide additional supportive housing projects that are comfortable, residential, and safe for low- and moderate-income senior citizens.

This year the budget saw an increase of \$33.8 million to support seniors' housing. This includes \$31.7 million to develop more community-based supportive housing for seniors to age in place, an additional \$1.6 million to address the maintenance and operation of publicly owned seniors' housing units, and an increase of \$500,000 to support 300 new lodge units for Alberta seniors.

The government of Alberta has made seniors one of its top four cross-ministry policy priorities for 2001-02. Led by the Ministry of Seniors and co-championed by Alberta Health and Wellness, Alberta will lead the country with seniors' policy initiatives that will see 19 ministries and government entities develop a strategic framework with a 10-year outlook. The initiative will build upon a solid base of current programs and services and set the course for the well-being of seniors in future years.

The second goal in our business plan is to support "family and

special purpose housing needs.” Alberta Seniors is committed to facilitating the provision of social housing while adhering to the fiscal responsibilities of the government. This government has in place a family and special purpose housing policy framework that establishes the strategic cornerstones needed to ensure that affordable housing alternatives are available to those in need. The framework sets a new direction for the continuum of housing needs of the homeless, transitional housing, supportive housing, social housing, and affordable housing based on flexibility and local decision-making.

As part of our business plan my ministry is committed to working with communities to address housing needs, recognizing that every community has different housing needs and circumstances that are best resolved by local planning and decision-making. My ministry will continue to develop its partnerships to meet the housing needs of low-income families and special-needs clients.

The ministry offers family and special purpose programs to help low-income families and persons with physical disabilities and hard-to-house and Metis families. Our plan is to recognize the needs of remote, rural, and off-reserve aboriginal housing, and we look at the feasibility of this program being self-supporting. We will also pursue co-operative commitments for funding from the federal government in this regard.

3:10

Mr. Chairman, I see that I’m running out of time, so I will just close by saying that there are quite a few more housing initiatives that I was going to bring forward at this moment. We’ll wait for the questions to come and then deal with the homeless and programs that we have in place and so on.

What I’d like to say in conclusion is that my staff, who are up in the gallery working so hard this afternoon, will attempt to answer the relevant questions after they hear the comments here and they have the opportunity to review *Hansard*.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I’m glad to have the opportunity to have the Ministry of Seniors as a designated ministry under our budget process, which allows us to spend two and a half hours looking at the budget and the policy, performance measurements, and plans of the government regarding seniors. As the minister mentioned, this is a new stand-alone ministry. It was previously under the Department of Community Development, and as the critic for Community Development I had seniors under my critic portfolio in the past.

I’d like to start today, at least in my first opportunity to debate, by just going through some of the concerns that have been raised with me by seniors. They fall broadly into three categories: health, housing, and other issues around money that are placing seniors into strained financial circumstances.

Just before I start, I do have a couple of inquiries from seniors who at times feel frustrated that what they’re trying to say through to the ministry is not being heard. I’m wondering if the minister can please detail for me and for all seniors in Alberta: what is the process when a senior phones into the seniors’ line expressing a concern? What is the process that that message follows to get through to the minister, if indeed it does get through to the minister? What kind of follow-up monitoring and evaluation is involved in that?

Now, issues under health care. The one that comes up I would have to say the most often is the question: why did the government

choose not to eliminate health care premiums for seniors? This was talked about a lot during the election. I think it was mused aloud by the Premier at one point, but in fact this budget has come down . . . [interjection] Yes. I think there were Conservative candidates that talked about it in their election.

MR. MacDONALD: Promised it.

MS BLAKEMAN: I’m sorry. Promised it. [interjections] Not the one I was working with.

So we would like an explanation from the minister as to why the choice was made not to eliminate health care premiums for seniors. Certainly when we look at the fact that seniors have a fixed income and are not in a position where they can readily earn more money or get more money through investments, if they’re fortunate to have them, the strain of paying health care premiums can really put a dent in their pocketbooks, and when we talk about trying to assist seniors, it has always struck me that this was a very immediate and straight-through line to putting dollars back into the pockets of seniors. As the previous Minister of Finance used to say: putting those sweat-soaked loonies back into people’s pockets.

MR. MacDONALD: What’s he saying now?

MS BLAKEMAN: Not much.

Along with that question of course goes a question about reducing the amount of money that seniors are having to pay for their Blue Cross, another issue that has been raised with me.

The next issue is around dental support or payments for dentistry. I had raised this with the minister in the previous year, written to both him and the Minister of Health and Wellness, I believe, asking why there couldn’t be more assistance for dental care for seniors. I’d been hearing both from seniors and from dentists, in fact, pointing out that the range of programs that are available is very confusing to seniors as to whether they will qualify for subsidy or they won’t qualify for subsidy. What we’re finding is that they’re just not going, and as one senior pointed out to me, seniors need good dental care if they’re going to be able to eat a nutritious and healthy diet.

The present dental assistance program which comes under the seniors’ benefit program is totally inadequate. Somewhere else someone points out that the government manages to support children’s teeth, and why aren’t they paying a bit more attention to the teeth of seniors which, when they fall out, don’t grow back? I thought that was a solid point.

I think it is a concern for us, and this is ongoing now. I’m looking to the ministry as to why they chose not to give additional support here. What I was asking for was a fund of money that would essentially ensure that seniors who wanted it would be able to at least get a dental checkup. Certainly on the campaign trail I heard from specific individuals who required extensive dental work and simply couldn’t afford it even through the programs that were available through the ministry. This was really affecting their health and their quality of life, for obvious reasons.

Next on the list of concerns under health is home care, and this is an ongoing, chronic area of concern for those working with seniors, those who are seniors, and the people who are family members of seniors. There is not enough funding in this area. What has the minister done to work cross-departmentally with the Minister of Health and Wellness around ensuring that there is adequate funding for home care? Is there some formula that the government is working on that they just don’t want to spend more than X amount of money? Is that connected to the demand for the program? Because we have a situation where the government is saying, “We

want seniors to stay at home; we want seniors to age in place," but seniors, in order to be able to do that, need home care services, and they can't get them. I mean, there are waiting lists for them. One woman from an agency here in Edmonton wrote to me that there's a three-month wait for in-home occupational therapy assistance, difficulty with the waiting list for home care.

Also, we have split home care into a number of different areas, because we've got home care, we've got housekeeping, and in some cases we seem to have this personal care, which is yet another area. When we look at the housekeeping, the point being made is that it's not very well done, that they're not there very long, and it makes it really difficult for seniors to keep going on their own when they can't get that kind of assistance. It has to be pretty specific to cover what they're looking for.

So what is the budget? Can you break it out for us, please, for housekeeping services and exactly how that works and how much the ministry is putting toward it? And if it is a cross-jurisdictional funding, then what is the other funding coming towards it? Are there any plans to increase the amounts of funds in here? What is the formula by which the minister is determining how much money is in that fund? Is it based on need, or is it based on some arbitrary amount that the minister decides is enough?

3:20

I have notes here that with extended care there needs to be more respite beds and access to respite beds, more in-home follow-up and community resources for people. There's a special note from Fran Matthews about mental health, that we're lacking in community resources including – and I've certainly experienced this one – a need for home visits and assessments. It's very difficult to line that up. We know something's wrong, and we can't find anybody to go into the home, have a look around, make sure that the person is all right, that there's some food in the fridge and that everything seems to be moving along on an even keel. It's quite frightening to know that there's a senior in trouble there and you can't get a mental health professional to go in and make sure that everything's okay. I am very cognizant here of not contravening someone's privacy, but I think we're much in need of mental health professionals that are specializing in seniors. Also under the mental health banner we're looking for better day programs, social programs, and low-cost counseling.

A number of people have raised the issue of transportation as far as health care. They get taken to the hospital in an ambulance, but they may not need an ambulance to go home. A taxi fare is quite a strain on their pocketbook, or they have to phone and wake up a friend or a relative in the middle of the night to come and get them. If they are visiting doctors' offices, they can go to a doctor's office in one place, get sent for lab tests in another place, and get sent somewhere else to pick up some sort of prescription. This really adds up if we're looking at taxi fares. I know of one organization for seniors where they will drive people around, but that agency is constantly struggling for funds, and I only know of the one available in Edmonton. So transportation for seniors for that is an issue that's being raised to me.

I've had this same issue raised somewhere else. Yes, here it is. They can't get around without expensive taxi fares, especially if they're frail and unable to drive. Health services are scattered: an appointment with a physician in one place, another place for lab tests, and another place for prescriptions. This is especially difficult if they're having to get in and out of these cabs and release the cab and make it across an icy sidewalk. So what is the minister doing about this? Are there any plans? Is there any funding that's available to assist community groups to deliver this kind of service?

What's out there to help people on this one? Yeah, this is the same person that raised the issue of being stranded at the hospital as well.

Back to home care. This is from Wanda Cree: there needs to be considerably more money invested in home care services, especially services which are of a personal care nature. I agree with her that more seniors are needing personal care than nursing care. They may need help getting dressed in the morning, are having trouble buttoning things or combing their hair or fixing their hair in some way. They are capable of living in their own home, but they need some assistance. The frustration that's out there is that when they go looking for that little bit of assistance or even a little bit more of assistance, it's very hard to access it, and the cutoffs for where the assistance is provided for a nominal charge or no charge seem very, very low to people. Wanda points out that staying at home is a laudable goal, but it is not feasible unless personal care can be provided where needed.

What's the government doing to work with seniors, with municipalities around the issue of building codes so that it's possible there could be more of what are sometimes called garden suites or granny flats or smaller facilities where a senior could be living on the same lot or very near to or in the basement of a family member but still have a separate life? That's mostly around bylaw and zoning changes with the municipalities. Is any work being done on that?

A couple of issues are being raised under health care around continuity of care and training of doctors. Wanda is making the point that for older people with chronic conditions, they need to be able to consult a physician who knows and understands their case and is making sure that the medication and the advice is consistent. We do certainly see that, where seniors are having three and four and five different doctors and nobody seems to be in control here or in charge of a sort of totality of care to make sure that they're not being overprescribed. One doctor doesn't seem to talk to another doctor. Again, probably a cross-departmental initiative here, but it still – and I've raised this issue before – needs to be worked out.

I'm having a couple of concerns raised around the amount of support that's given to seniors for hearing aids and for glasses. It's minimal; that's certainly true. There is something there, and that's better than nothing. But I'm sort of curious. As we're trying to encourage independence, for things that for a fairly small amount of money make life much better for seniors, like hearing and sight, which enables them to travel and move about and be much more a part of our society, which is so hearing and sight based, I'm just wondering why the amounts allowed here are so low and so infrequent.

The other issue around doctors is the need to encourage more graduates with a specialty in geriatric medicine or gerontology and also look at the way they're paid. Right now there's no incentive for a doctor to spend additional time with a senior because they're paid per visit regardless of what the visit is for or who the visit is with. There's no incentive to spend a longer period of time with a senior going over all the different kinds of medication that they've been prescribed or explaining what a condition means or explaining what other kinds of lifestyle changes a senior could take that didn't involve pharmaceuticals. There's no incentive for them to spend that time because they're making their money by having people pass through at a certain rate per hour. Sorry; that's not fair. That sounds very mechanical. Nonetheless, for an amount of time that would prove productive for us here, there's very little incentive for doctors to do that. The first area there was incentive programs to have more people going into gerontology.

Another issue raised around health care was that there are qualifying times for provincial health care programs, and we're seeing a situation now where seniors may be moving to a different

province to be closer to their children. I think the statistics tell us that most parents try to live within 100 kilometres of one of their adult children. When that's happening, they're moving across provincial lines, and then they're into a situation where they can be into a qualifying period of time in order to get assisted accommodation. So it's less about health care and more about housing and access to programs there. I'm wondering if the minister has been working with any of his colleagues that are responsible for seniors' issues in other provinces around making this more transportable so that seniors are not as restricted by mobility and could more easily join their children in another province.

3:30

Once again I raise the issue of women and osteoporosis funding for pharmaceuticals but also for research and for health and wellness alternatives. I continue to have a concern around this area. Osteoporosis is 100 percent preventable. What are we doing to make it nonexistent here? I'm not seeing much of an improvement in the rates. So I hold the minister accountable and ask him to please respond about what initiatives they're looking at. Is there anything happening right now? What kind of encouragement are they giving the Minister of Innovation and Science to look into that?

Thank you. I'll resume my questions again shortly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise to speak about seniors' issues. I have a great deal of personal experience working with seniors, working on policy areas and working on service delivery, and I have a large number of seniors in my constituency. It's delightful that there is once again a Department of Seniors. It's not the first time there's been a Department of Seniors in Alberta. There was 10 years ago or so a Department of Seniors, and when the current regime came to power, it quickly ended that department. So it's good to see it coming back to life. It is an area to which we all should be paying careful attention.

I do receive many comments from my constituents on seniors' issues. In fact, I certainly have one of the largest concentrations in terms of percentage of seniors in my constituency of all the constituencies in the province. I sense two sorts of populations of seniors. One group, who are perhaps better educated and have a higher income, are enjoying their retirement or enjoying their older age, have sufficient money to stay in their own homes, to enjoy their lives, to do some traveling. I also know that there's a large number of seniors whose incomes are actually very low, sometimes appallingly low, and I think we too often don't pay enough attention to these seniors. Their numbers are growing, and they are dominated to a large degree by women who through their earlier lives have not had the opportunity to build up pension reserves or other sources of income and find themselves often as widows in very vulnerable positions.

With that sort of framework I would mention a couple of specifics that I hear routinely from constituents. One is a call for the restoration of seniors' benefits to a level that was available up until 1992 or so. Seniors' benefits peaked in Alberta in about 1986. They were tightened and tightened through the later '80s and early '90s. Seniors would like to at least return to the levels of the early '90s. They look at other areas of the province where resources were reduced: wages for public servants, wages for MLAs, support for health care and education and transportation, and so on. They now see the funding to those areas returning to levels of 10 years ago and in some cases even exceeding the levels of 10 years ago, yet seniors

consistently feel that they are not enjoying those benefits. They have not had resources restored to them that so many of the rest of us have had restored, and that feels to them and frankly to me like unfairness and injustice.

The seniors' property tax benefit comes up frequently in my constituency. Seniors feel like they did enjoy a property tax benefit some years ago that offset the cost of the education tax to a substantial degree and allowed them, especially if they're in a lower income area, to stay home longer. That benefit has been eliminated, and I'm not at all aware that there are any plans to restore it. I certainly would encourage some kind of renewal of that program or a program similar to it.

Also, in general I hear a lot of concern that those support services to keep seniors in their homes – whether it's homemaking, home nursing, home care services – are not what they need to be. As a result, seniors' health and independence deteriorate sometimes more rapidly than they ought to, and seniors actually end up requiring more help by being forced into institutions. As a point of human dignity and as a point of good management of resources, I would encourage the Seniors minister to advocate as much as he can for stronger services to keep seniors in their homes and in their communities. With those general comments, I'll move to some specifics.

Line item 1.0.1, to be very specific, for operating expense and capital investment for the minister's office, is \$308,000. Being a brand-new department, of course there's no previous figure, but considering that the figure from last year for Community Development for the minister's office was \$307,000, given that this is a smaller department by a considerable amount, I'm wondering how the minister justifies this new amount for a department that has less combined responsibility than when it was but one component of a bigger department.

I also notice the budget for the deputy minister's office, item 1.0.2, will be \$260,000. It was only \$216,000 for the Community Development department last year. Again, considering that Seniors is a smaller department than the old Community Development department, why do we see this increase? What is the justification for this rise? What in fact accounts for the over \$200,000 increase for finance and administration in this department?

Getting to the issue of communications, which is always so important to this government, how does the minister compare the budget for communications at \$363,000 with that for the old Department of Community Development's budget of \$367,000? In other words, we are spending virtually the same amount on communications for a much smaller department. I'd appreciate a rationale for that.

Moving to some other specifics: income support for seniors. As my opening remarks suggested, this is an area of real concern for a large number of Alberta seniors. The government is in fact boasting of spending an additional \$4.9 million for the Alberta seniors' benefit program this year. Of course, any increase in money is something that we applaud, but this increase is really misleading. It's not going to have a significant impact. As a percent, it amounts to I think just over 3 percent of the total budget in this area, barely adequate to cover a rise in the cost of living. I doubt if it's adequate, in fact, to cover the per capita rise in the cost of living. If I'm wrong on that, I'd appreciate the minister correcting me.

I would like to see in the longer term greater support for the incomes of seniors. I'm wondering how much of the increase that's there this year will go to things such as administration costs. How much of the increase will actually go to individual seniors and senior couples? Is the department changing its criteria for availability for funding under the income support programs?

3:40

Now I'd like to move to one of the particular things that undoubtedly the minister will be leading, taking a great interest in personally, and that's the announced seniors policy initiative. I believe, going from a news release, it says: Alberta will lead the country with a seniors policy initiative that will develop a strategic framework and a 10-year action plan to address the needs of Alberta's aging population. Well, I think that's a terrific idea. If we're looking for a strategic framework and a 10-year action plan, I've got various thoughts and suggestions for that kind of an initiative.

I would, for example, suggest that there's a strong rationale for that initiative. It's a well-known fact that Alberta faces a rapid increase in the number and proportion of older persons in its population. As a result, Alberta's system of services for seniors probably needs to be re-examined to ensure that it can effectively meet the changing needs of seniors in the future without sacrificing resources available to future generations.

I think you may want to look at some key objectives for this seniors policy initiative. It could include, for example, developing a seniors action plan to guide government action and decision-making for, say, the next 10 years. It could also include as a key objective developing and continuing an effective consultation process that involves seniors and other members of the community in decisions about public policy and about the seniors' plans. I would encourage you to ensure a good geographical and sociological mix of people in these debates about seniors' issues and the development of a seniors' plan.

In developing and proceeding with the seniors policy initiative, there is a series of strategies that the minister may want to look at. You may want to consider a public opinion survey, for example, of seniors or people, say, age 45 and older about what their experiences and expectations and attitudes are with respect to aging and programs and services for seniors. You may want to invite briefs about seniors' issues and potential resolutions to them from organizations across Alberta. You could potentially conduct a survey of people who provide services to seniors, including perhaps services focused on aboriginal Albertans, who are too often overlooked. You could have a series of public meetings in, say, 12 different communities across Alberta to address issues of concern to seniors. You might want to have some special study sessions on issues, and of course you'll have a series of meetings with seniors and with people interested in seniors' service delivery.

You might well find that seniors want more money, but I suspect that they would recognize that there are limits to what society can provide to them. They would want, as much as anything, fair treatment, not special treatment.

If you proceed with this seniors policy initiative, I'm sure you'll find some important results. You might find that the people expect commitments to seniors to be respected and that if significant changes are made to seniors' programs, enough time is allowed for them to successfully adjust. After all, many people plan years and decades in advance for their senior years, depending and counting on government programs to be there. If those government programs are cut or eliminated or changed, people do not necessarily have the time to adapt and change decades of planning.

You might also find from your policy initiative that greater emphasis should be placed on services provided in the home and in the community as opposed to services provided in institutions such as nursing homes and lodges and so on. You'd probably find that people are encouraging the provincial government to provide a greater range of housing options for older people so that people have the most flexibility we can allow them to adjust their housing to their own physical, financial, and social needs.

You might find that the provincial government ought to co-ordinate more closely with the federal government to improve the financial security of older Albertans through, for example, expanding pension coverage to cover the people I mentioned earlier on, widows and people who find themselves in their older age without adequate pension coverage because they never had the opportunity to contribute to pensions.

There are great concerns around the co-ordination of services to seniors. That has been an issue for many, many years, and I guess it will always be an issue, something that we have to always work at. Of course, the need to evaluate seniors' services will come up.

Now, a great deal of information and study was done and a great deal of money was spent on this exact kind of initiative 10 years ago. Something close to \$1 million was spent on that. An extensive report was developed, planning for seniors' services, looking 10 to 15 years ahead from that time. It looked at spending patterns. It looked at technological developments, new technologies enabling people to stay at home. It looked at issues such as elder abuse.

I'd encourage the minister to go back and review all those files and draw on that knowledge that was prepared at such length and with such expense and commitment 10 years ago under the former Department of Seniors. He may even wish to consult with the minister of the time, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury, Mr. Roy Brassard. Of course, a lot of that material was going to be made public and in the end was ordered to be destroyed by the government, but perhaps we'll see it come back to the public eye.

I'll wrap up my comments by encouraging the department and the minister to enthusiastically pursue his mandate, to listen carefully to the needs of Albertans, not only seniors but all Albertans, people who will become seniors as the years go by, and to consider their plights, their needs, and the frailties and problems that all of us will face as we grow older.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll wrap up. Thank you very much.

3:50

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to participate in the estimates debates on seniors this particular year. It's nice to see that finally this government has elevated the importance or status of seniors by separating it out of its previous home in Community Development and giving it some measure of importance. Certainly to seniors this is a very important department, and certainly to all of us who will some day be seniors it is also very important.

[Mr. Maskell in the chair]

It's of particular concern to us, I think, when we take a look at what's happened to seniors and seniors' programming and seniors' funding over the past years that I've been in this Assembly. They've taken some pretty hard hits on programs. They've taken some pretty hard hits in housing, and they've taken some pretty hard hits in direct dollars and benefits. Many of us, including the Official Opposition, would argue that those programs haven't been reinstated and that seniors are still hugely disadvantaged in this province that's supposed to have an Alberta advantage for all. In fact, they are still behind in terms of the original '93 round of cuts that came forward. Continually it is of serious concern to people in my constituency how seniors are supposed to experience their share of the Alberta advantage after putting decades of their lives into supporting this province.

My constituency, Edmonton-Ellerslie, people often think would

have a very low seniors population. Mill Woods is a relatively new community in Edmonton, but the fact is, Mr. Chairman, that I have a high seniors population. More than 8 percent of the people in the constituency are up to 65 years of age, in the 55 to 65 years of age range, and 7 percent of the constituency are 65 years or older. That percentage is creeping up year after year by small percentage points, by tenths of percentage points in terms of the age of the population base there. So we are seeing a significant aging in that particular population. They are vocal about their concerns and about what has been happening to them in programming, and it's wonderful to have an opportunity to bring some of those concerns forward.

The Member for Edmonton-Riverview talked about some of the issues that are also outstanding in my constituency. Property taxes were a big benefit and were something that people planned into their retirement income or expenses and which isn't available. There used to be home upgrading grants. I know there's now that seniors' benefit that's available to seniors for unusual expenses, but there is a great deal more than just unusual expenses that come up to throw seniors into a loop.

In terms of them being able to share in the vision that the Seniors department outlines in its ministry business plan, I think that significant changes have to be made, Mr. Chairman. If we take a look at that division, it talks about "a vibrant province where all Albertans experience the quality of life to which they aspire." Oh, that's a motherhood and apple pie statement if I ever heard one. But is it actually a vision that this government is on the road to being able to implement and seniors are able to access? I think not, Mr. Chairman. I don't see it in the acts of the government. We see some commitment in the words of the government, but we see little commitment in the acts of the government to ensure that all Albertans experience the quality of life to which they aspire.

In fact, even when you take a look at the mission and the core businesses and goals supporting those, we don't see quality of life specifically defined there. For the most part, what they talk about are issues that they don't support with dollars or programming.

In the core businesses when they talk about "supporting the independence and well-being of seniors," there are specific problems. If we take this over and relate this to the measure of quality of life that is in the more detailed Seniors' business plan 2001-2004, what do we talk about? If you're talking about supporting the independence and well-being of seniors, what's that backed up by? It should be backed up by some of the measures.

The measure they have here is Quality of Life, and that's the only one I see here that relates to this particular core business. What do they say? They say, "Percentage of eligible seniors receiving the Alberta Seniors Benefit." So what they're talking about is dollars, Mr. Chairman. They don't talk about the other aspects of well-being or independence for seniors that would support that. Money helps, Mr. Chairman, but it isn't the answer to all of the issues that are outstanding for seniors.

So who this helps, then, in terms of money are those who are significantly disadvantaged, but what else do seniors need to be both independent and have well-being? They need health. How do they get health in this province? They have to have access to the health care system. Do they have timely access? Are there support systems in there once they are within the system to help them be both independent and support their well-being? I would suggest the answer to that, Mr. Chairman, is no.

If we take a look at access to health care, there is no special treatment given to seniors for them to be able to jump queues or have access to support systems. I don't see any special access for seniors in terms of even letting them know what's available and how they make their way through the variety of systems.

Talk about often complicated problems when it comes to seniors. It isn't just primary care hospitals that they need to access. Often there are rehabilitative issues around injuries, or there are mental health issues often with seniors or support issues in terms of those who are accessing the health system.

Do we have a good home care system in this province so that seniors, if they have some sort of a health issue, can either be independent or ensure that their well-being is enhanced? The answer is no, Mr. Chairman. If seniors do not have children or other people supporting them who come into that sandwich generation, those who provide support for elders in the community, if they don't have access to those kinds of people, they are often left in great trouble. They don't have the support system from the government to provide enough or ready access to home care if they need transitional health care.

They don't have that kind of access to mental health or even to transportation to get to primary care sources. There's the bus system. The public transport system in this province is nonexistent in many locales and poor in the larger regions. So if they don't have independent means of getting there – and often if they're not well, they're not able to transport themselves – how do they get to these primary care facilities, and how does this core business of supporting independence and well-being support that? It doesn't, Mr. Chairman.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There's the DATS program that supports people who need to access the system, but what's wrong with the DATS system? Quite a few things. They won't guarantee pickups, Mr. Chairman, so people can't make appointments on time. You have to book several days in advance, and people often don't know. If they have a health issue and they need to see their doctor that day, it doesn't work like that. You just can't pick up the phone and call them like a taxi. You have to book well in advance. You can't make appointments on time. The arrival time is not guaranteed, so often we see frail seniors, people who need assistance out in the cold, out on the street waiting for their rides, to be picked up.

Those are serious issues that I don't see being addressed in either the business plan or the summary if we're talking about achieving independence and well-being of seniors. Where does this happen in this program? This has got to come under this particular minister's mandate, and I don't see any measures there in terms of enhancing quality of life on those kinds of issues. So if the minister could tell me specifically what it is they are doing in their department to enhance access issues, to enhance transportation issues just on the health care side.

What else is there that can support the well-being of seniors? Well, there are all the extracurricular activities, the cultural side of society. What do we have that the government does to support that? Nothing in this particular department. So if the minister can address that in terms of the issue, I would appreciate it, because I don't see anything listed here. It seems to be completely not here.

4:00

Then they talk about "supporting family and special purpose housing needs." Well, it's a joke, Mr. Chairman. If we take a look at the waiting lists and the requirements for people in terms of housing needs, they're astronomical in this province. There are huge waiting lists for people who need access to housing.

I liked the system that there was before in this province, where the government owned and participated in low-income housing. Now with the kind of system that we have, it's a long waiting time for people to get on the list to have housing.

Often with seniors, because of health reasons, housing needs can change overnight. I think there are some pretty decent programs in place in terms of adapting households for wheelchair access or decreased mobility. [interjection] Yeah, the home adaptation program. I think that's a pretty good program. We've had a few concerns over the years in my constituency with that program, but for the most part it works pretty well. But if we take a look at people who, because their health changes, need to come out of the homes they're in and into other kinds of housing, particularly if it's low-cost housing, it's a nightmare. It's a nightmare of paperwork for those people to go through, it's a nightmare of departments for them to have to access, and the waiting list is long.

What often happens and what I see in my constituency quite often is lower income people where the husband has a stroke or a heart attack or some other issues and now he's in a wheelchair. Generally in my constituency that spouse has been the primary breadwinner, so often the wife isn't working. Suddenly now they're coping with reduced income, perhaps only pension income left, reduced mobility of the person, dealing with the wheelchair, dealing with additional support systems that they have to provide for the individual, and what help is there for that person? There's not much, Mr. Chairman. If they need to move into a different kind of housing, the waiting list is long and the paperwork is formidable, to say the very least. They have to deal with transportation issues. Is there support within this department for those kinds of issues? I would suggest that it is minimal and tough to get. Hard for these people to make their way through the paperwork.

I know that in my constituency office my executive assistant spends a great deal of time supporting these people through the hallways of government to try and access the kinds of resources they need, and that's a real shame, Mr. Chairman, because these are people who would like to live in dignity, who would like to be a part of this vision that the government has for seniors, and clearly they are not. So if the minister could address why that is.

When I take a look at their business plan and I take a look at the second measure that they have in the quality of life category, it says "percentage of . . . applicants receiving the Alberta Seniors Benefit." Mr. Chairman, I don't know why that's a quality of life measure. I'm not exactly sure where you would put that kind of a measure, but people who need the Alberta seniors' benefit, who are eligible for that, are looking at quite a different quality of life than this member is going to look at when she's a senior. I'm not sure that measuring who gets it, who's eligible for it, is a reasonable way to measure quality of life. It's 99.3 percent in '98-99, 99.4 percent of those people in '99-2000, and the target is 100 percent for future years. Excellent. That's an excellent target. It isn't a measure of quality of life though. It's a measure of the efficiency of the bureaucracy of the government. I do not think it's truly a measure of the quality of life, and I take great offence that that should be listed as a measure here.

Let's talk about the other one. The percentage of eligible seniors receiving the Alberta seniors' benefit is a new measure, and the targets haven't been established yet. Once again I believe that that is a measure of the efficiency of the government department. It isn't a quality of life measurement.

For quality of life, measuring the success of that would be to go out and survey the seniors and ask them what they think about their quality of life based on input factors like the cost of living, like access to health care, like access to proper housing, like access to transportation systems, like access to cultural activities. Those are quality of life measurements, Mr. Chairman. Let's see what people have to say about that. List those categories; ask them on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied they are with the kind of support they get from the government on that. I think we're going to see some very

interesting information, and it may point out to this minister where there are some serious deficiencies in the kind of support that this government is providing in terms of meeting what they say is their vision and their mission and their core businesses. So let's get some performance measurements in here that actually measure what it is they're talking about, not government efficiency, although that's important to have too, but let's put those under government efficiency measures. I don't think they're quality of life measurements at all.

Satisfaction measurements. Once again, what do they talk about? They talk about performance factors for government departments. They don't talk about anything to do with quality of life issues. So I think that's very important to be addressed.

Before I run out of time, I just wanted to spend a little bit of time on the Auditor General's comments. Seniors was taken out of Community Development, which is where it was and where the seniors' issues are addressed in this particular report. Most of them are with regard to housing assistance, Mr. Chairman. I would like the minister to update us in terms of what's happening with the issues outlined by the Auditor General.

He talked about how this ministry "provides subsidized housing to Albertans in need" and how "housing programs are administered by management bodies on behalf of the Ministry." How effective are those management bodies? Do we see the costs of those being lower than what they used to be when government did that service itself?

You know, a lot of people think that the government isn't an efficient provider of some services, but in fact that's not true. If you take a look at things like road building, the government is much more efficient. Particularly when you take a look at the long term and the cost of repairs and standards, the government can be very efficient. So does the minister have some information available on whether or not these management bodies are providing better service and more efficiency and lower costs than the government did when they did it themselves? Any documentation he has on that, I'd be happy to take a look at.

Then it talks about the ministry maintaining "an infrastructure of government owned housing projects, and supplies additional housing units," and so on. The issue is that there are increasing numbers of families and seniors needing assistance, such an issue that the Auditor General remarked on it. We need to know what it is that this minister is doing about this, how they're shortening up the waiting lists, how they're providing more housing: important issues, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm glad to have the opportunity in this special longer debate today to be able to do a part 2 and continue on. I had started out by saying that I was looking at three areas: seniors' health, seniors' housing, and other issues that have arisen around seniors' financial situations. In the first part I had spoken about health care premiums and why weren't they eliminated, access to dental, concerns around home care and availability of home care and housekeeping, comments on hearing aids and glasses, the need for doctors trained in gerontology, medical research on women and osteoporosis.

4:10

Just two more issues I'd like to do under that general category of health. The first is exercise. This is interesting, because the generation of seniors that we have now is not a generation that grew up with Club Fit and Spa Lady. I mean, essentially these folks

worked, and that was their fitness. So they are not as aware as generations that will be following them of proper exercise, access to facilities, perhaps even being trained in the use of equipment or in rules of the game.

One of the points that's been raised to me, again by Wanda Cree from the Seniors Community Health Council, is that it's difficult for seniors to get good information about exercise without paying a significant amount of money, and I'm aware that seniors may not be terribly comfortable going to some of the fitness centres that are around now. The point she's making is that seniors' centres should be offering more of these types of programs, but it's difficult for them because they're not receiving funding. So I was very happy to hear that my years of pounding away saying that there should be some kind of operational funding for seniors' centres is being taken seriously by the minister and that the minister has charged the Seniors Advisory Council and the Alberta Council on Aging to work together on a study about operational funding for seniors' centres. I'm very glad to hear that. It was worth it. Sometimes you wonder if you're being successful. It's nice to see when you are.

But I think that's an interesting point that she's raised about essentially training for exercise. It's just not part of the current generation's life experience that you need training for exercise or even different things that people could be doing. It just isn't part of their life. They just worked and got their exercise through their work, and now they're not working anymore. We do know now that exercise is a part of health and wellness, so what can we be doing to promote this? Certainly putting it through the seniors' centres seems like a good suggestion to me.

Earlier I was looking for the reference for one point – and I've found it – coming from Ed Gordon. This was around prescription drugs. He and others are suggesting – and this isn't the first time I've heard this – “reduce the charge for prescription drugs from 30% back to the 20% that it was prior to 1993.” I know somewhere else – I'm sure I'll find it in my notes as I go – there was a suggestion that there be no more than a \$25 charge for prescriptions. We are more and more managing seniors' health through pharmaceuticals, and it's not unusual to have a senior on eight to 12 prescriptions. Those all start to add up on the pocketbook pretty seriously. So that's the suggestion.

My question, then, to the minister is: what's being done about that? What kinds of studies are up? What amount of money is budgeted for it? How much will be allowed for that? What kind of assistance is available around that?

One of my colleagues had talked about the home improvement grant, and there was a RRAP program in conjunction with the federal government. Now, I'm noticing that there is a home adaptation grant line. It's appearing under the housing budget. Yeah, 3.2.1, home adaptation program grants. Based on what I'm seeing from the seniors, they don't know that this is still available, so I'm wondering exactly what this program is. Perhaps it's just on your web site and is easily downloaded and sent over to me, and I apologize for asking if in fact it is on the web site. But obviously the seniors are not aware of it because I've got several people that are commenting on the loss of it.

Particularly when we look at increased prices in utilities and we add to that the government's desire to have seniors staying in their own homes, I think we may all be well served if they were able to make adaptations to their homes to make them more energy efficient both for electricity and for heating. So that was from Ed Gordon.

Now, two more things under health care. One is – and there's no specific program for this; it's just a situation that I keep seeing come up – what's the department got to offer in these circumstances? I understand that there is an expectation that people should be able to

look after themselves, but that isn't always true. Certainly there's an expectation out in this society that when you get sick, somehow you'll be cared for, and people just don't understand that that is not a seamless function. I note that in a copy of the *Alberta Council on Aging News*, the May/June 2001 issue under Val's Views, she tells a story about a couple where one of them fell and was injured and was hospitalized for a period of time.

The spouse at home in fact was not very independent, had been relying on the wife to do the grocery shopping, take the dry cleaning in, do the laundry, clean up the house, get the prescriptions, and all of those little trips back and forth. He in fact was blind and all of a sudden was faced with strangers coming into his home going: “Okay. Your wife won't be back. She's in hospital for a month. She won't be back until the end of the month, so now we've got to look after you.” They discovered very quickly this is not a seamless system. There's a lot of places where you can fall through the cracks: in trying to get respite care, in trying to get home care workers. She details the concerns about personal care attendants supplied by a private company and the concern that they'd “been given minimal domestic and dietary training.” I've certainly heard that concern before, and what we're coming to here is standards of care.

I'm curious as to why there was a lack of support – or was it a government policy? – for the Member for Calgary-West's private member's Bill 203 to establish a committee that would look at developing standards of care. I've raised this issue of standards of care a number of times in the Assembly. There seems to be reluctance on behalf of the government to go down that path. I'm interested in hearing from the Ministry of Seniors the reasons why there is so much resistance to developing standards of care, which would cover wide-ranging levels of care.

I have often heard the complaint about limited domestic and dietary training that they'll come in, but they won't actually make you a hot meal. They'll make sandwiches, and maybe they'll open something that's in the pantry, a can of soup or something. Then the person is asked to sign a form that says that the care worker has been there for 45 minutes. In fact, they may well not have been, and there's a question about whether travel time is included in the time the individual is signing off for or not. So I think there's an issue there.

So I highly recommend this. I'm sure there are staff members in the department that regularly read the Alberta Council on Aging newsletter, but this is the May/June issue with Val's Views, and I'm particularly talking about that story. It is a good illustration of a story that I've heard many times.

The last issue under the health area that I want to talk about is elder abuse. I did receive a very thoughtful letter from Catholic Social Services talking about their elderly adult resource service, which is nicknamed EARS, and the elder abuse intervention team. They point out that while many seniors do have the resources to be able to extricate themselves and they're not as vulnerable as children, there are seniors who are not. They are too frail. They have a life history of being victims of abuse. They have increased social isolation, family dysfunction: a number of things that add up to this small group of people being very vulnerable and requiring outside intervention.

4:20

They raise a very good point, and that is that we are now dealing with a number of seniors that arrived in Canada as immigrants and haven't fully integrated, and that can be for a number of reasons. More frequently I'm seeing family reunification where there are grandparents who are being brought over to join the rest of the

family. That's hopefully a good thing. They may not have ever really learned the culture and how to get around on the bus and how to use the bank machines and all of those other things that the rest of us take for granted and know very well how to do. They are particularly vulnerable if they are outside of that particular ethnic community.

The plea that I'm making on behalf of these organizations is to consider creating a mandated service for them. They're envisioning caseworkers who are trained in intervention strategies in abuse and have legal and financial resources to implement change. So when I look back on the Protection against Family Violence Act that was originally proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands in 1996 and eventually became a government bill and was passed – I mean, there are all kinds of financial resources and legal resources that were in that bill, and I think it might be time for us to look at a similar sort of bill that puts those in place for vulnerable seniors who are victims of elder abuse.

Part of the concern here is that these two programs through Catholic Social Services are really only available in the city of Edmonton. They're not available for outlying regions or for rural areas, and I did not have time to check to see if there was a similar program in Calgary. So there's a very good one here and very good examples to be followed, but we certainly need the support for it, and they need to be able to do the intervention.

Now, I'm moving into the area of seniors' housing. I have had a motion up two years running now – I never had a good enough draw to actually get it up and get it debated – about having the cost of telephones included in the 30 percent subsidized rate that seniors are paying in subsidized housing, the argument being that telephones are no longer a frill, an extra. For anyone that has the medic alert, they work through the telephones. If you don't have a telephone, you can't even have that service. The phone is certainly the first resource that someone who's hurt or in trouble would need to dial 911, but it goes well beyond that in that it's also a contact with the wider world of families and friends, and that's contributing to better mental health and better socialization.

So I urge the government to consider including that. I mean, it's \$22 or \$23 for a base telephone rate at this point, which may not seem a lot of money to members of the Assembly but can be significant when the disposable income for a senior is less than \$100 a month. That's a big chunk of it. I'm looking at someone that's contacted me from one of the seniors' residences, and they're again asking about that telephone subsidy and again asking why they're still paying health care premiums.

The other thing that has happened with housing – and I know the government's aware of this, but the situation is improving at a glacial pace.

DR. TAFT: Painfully slow?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, painfully slow.

That's around long-term care beds and new housing alternatives or living alternatives for seniors. We do have a situation where the system is backing up. There aren't enough long-term care beds, so then they've got people staying in lodges and other types of accommodation for much longer than they would have. So now you have a program that was not set up to be dealing with seniors that are that ill, but they are having to. Then people that should be moving into the lodges can't get in because there's not enough room, and now we've got them in my constituency, where I have independent living, where I have apartment buildings with individual suites in them. The building itself is a subsidized seniors' residence, but every senior has their own apartment in there. Those started out as

55 and over, and they were meant to be either for individuals who had to retire early because of some health problem or who were in fact seniors that needed subsidized housing.

They were meant to be independent living units, but what we are seeing now is that they are having to accept people who are more frail and in much more need of assistance, without any sort of consultation with the seniors that were already in there. The buildings are having to become less independent and more care oriented, which is of some distress to the seniors that are already living there. There's no question that it's the lack of long-term care beds that has made that come into being.

Another issue that's raised often by seniors who are living in the subsidized senior residences is that the 30 percent they pay for their rent is based on their gross income, not on their net income. They feel very strongly that it should be based on their net income, in other words on what we would call their take-home pay, rather than on their gross revenue for the month. We've had problems with that in the past, where somebody would cash in a bond or an RRSP and because it appears as a lump sum in their bank account, then all of a sudden they are assessed 30 percent of that huge chunk of money. I mean, eventually we find ways to work that out, but it's quite a frightening experience for a senior to think they're going to lose 30 percent of that kind of income. They feel very strongly, and I'm wondering whether the minister has looked at this at all, considered it.

What is the justification for the policy that they have in place at this time? Considering increased numbers of seniors, is the department looking at sort of grandfathering one type of program and phasing in another type of program? What's being looked at? I mean, I've read all of the studies that have been done by this government, but there are not very many specifics there. A lot of nice words, but it's not clear what direction it's going in, and I'm looking for more detail.

I've also spoken before about portable subsidies. And I'm aware I'm going to run out of time, so I will come back to do part 3 as soon as I can get back on the speaking list. But I'd like to cover having these subsidies being portable, protection of persons in care, standards of care, and then some of the other miscellaneous issues that have been raised with me around programs that were cut by the government that seniors would like to see reinstated. I will return to go over those issues at another time.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak on the budget estimates for the Department of Seniors. It's a new ministry. In talking about budget estimates this year, I've been somewhat critical of the creation of several new ministries. The Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General: that ministry has been split. Finance and Revenue have been split. These splits were difficult to justify in any real way, based on substantive reasons for it. It appeared to us, at least, that these splits and the creation of new ministries was more an attempt to create work, you know, for more Tory MLAs than based on the need for good governance.

4:30

However, in the case of a separate ministry for seniors, I think it's a welcome development, a welcome change, and I congratulate the government for making that decision. I wish the minister, who's an experienced member of the cabinet, good luck with his new responsibilities. I think he's well qualified to represent the interests of seniors and to make sure that services are delivered to them.

[interjection] I'm talking about myself too. He'll represent me well.

So the minister, I think, needs to be commended for undertaking this effort and presenting his budget estimates in the way he has.

Seniors, as we all would agree, have paid their dues to our society. They worked hard. They paid their taxes. Now is the time that they need our care and support, and we ought to meet their needs. Their numbers are growing. There's an identifiable need for these services, and the need for these services is growing.

I think when I look at the ministry's core business statement here, "supporting the independence and well-being of seniors," certainly the question of independence and well-being is a very critical one from the point of view of aging seniors. Many seniors, of course, who own homes want to stay in them, and certainly all of them want to live healthy lives in their aging years as much as possible.

Of course, in order to remain healthy, they need to be able to access health care services with reference to their particular needs. It is, I think, well known that seniors in general use more drugs than the rest of us, so their resources get increasingly channeled into paying for the portion of the expenditures that they incur with respect to the use of drugs to remain healthy and to seek a cure of ailments that are related to aging in particular. So I was looking here to see where the new ministry may have undertaken some new initiatives to address, for example, the special needs and the special circumstances which seniors are faced with.

In general, I perhaps should say that in looking through the mission statement, the core business, the goals, the highlights for 2001-2002, I was looking for sort of a statement which would suggest that the minister is willing, as I know he would want to be – in addition to being shepherd of the services and the provision of those services that seniors need – to play an advocacy role as well. So he would become an advocate on seniors' issues, although that statement is not to be found in the text on pages 389 and 390. I would certainly encourage him to view his role, in addition to what's stated here, as seniors' advocate. I know that seniors' interests, seniors' concerns are close to his heart, so I will encourage him to think about inserting in the next year's business plans a commitment to advocating on their behalf.

I know that in 1994, in the midst of the Tory government's budget cuts, the government started requiring Alberta seniors, for example, to begin paying health care premiums. I suspect that this minister may be one of those in the government and also in the Tory party who might in fact favour the scrapping of health care premiums for all Albertans. Certainly there is, I think, a compelling argument that can be made that health care premiums should be scrapped for seniors. Most seniors, unlike many working Albertans, do not have the employers sharing their premium costs. Many Albertans who work may in fact benefit from the employers picking up at least part of these costs.

In the case of seniors where incomes are particularly limited, middle-income seniors in particular, I think they find paying \$800, if a senior couple, rather onerous when their expenditures related to use of needed drugs continue to go up as their ailments increase with age. So I would ask the minister to seriously consider standing up for seniors and to call for abolition of health care premiums. The seniors are a good group to start with in order for us to move towards scrapping health care premiums for all in Alberta and to become the ninth province in the country to do so.

Secondly, in the health care issues I think there's a need for a seniors' universal drug plan which covers medically needed drugs for all seniors without seniors having to pay exorbitant prices for the use of these drugs in order just to remain healthy. So that would be my second proposal to the minister. It's certainly not in the works. It's not in the budget, but I'm trying to sort of focus my comments

on what I see is missing in the budget rather than what is. I'll come to what is, also, if time permits.

I am aware that the minister recently met with several seniors' groups. These seniors' groups have been urging this government, and I'm sure they've urged this minister, to work towards the elimination of health care premiums at the earliest opportunity. The question is: will the minister take these concerns seriously and work towards putting an end to this unfair, regressive tax that especially hurts seniors? I would like him to comment on it to see what kind of actions he might be contemplating taking on behalf of seniors on this issue.

One of the other casualties of the government's budget cuts over the years is the partial rebate of property taxes to seniors, that dealing with education taxes. This was a very useful program in that it encouraged seniors to remain in their own homes longer rather than having to sell those houses and move into institutional care.

4:40

In my own constituency there's a very large number of seniors. Many of them live in their own homes, and with the costs of heating and electricity going up, they are very concerned and express these concerns to me at the door and through phone calls to my office. They're very concerned about their ability in the future to be able to own their own homes and stay in them as long as they choose. They may have to make the decision to sell them for economic reasons, not for reasons that they cannot any longer live alone or independently in those homes.

On the surface many seniors look rich because they are owners of homes. Their homes are all paid for. They may be home rich, but most seniors are income poor, and I think that needs to be kept in mind. So the question there is: is the government considering bringing back the seniors' property tax rebate, at least for lower income seniors who own their own homes? I guess if the answer is no, is the minister thinking of taking an initiative in the future? Is he opposed to it? Seniors in my constituency certainly will be interested in hearing from the minister on his reasons either for or against reinstating that rebate program.

The next set of questions that I have deal with waits for home care and waits for admission into long-term care facilities. I do frequently receive complaints that waiting times are too long. I appreciate that the primary responsibility to address this rests with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, but I also notice that one of the key strategies that the ministry has stated here is to play a leadership role, to "provide leadership, organizational assistance, consultation and facilitation services" to support seniors' organizations and also to co-ordinate, I guess, across ministries the programs that seniors need and access. So I wonder what the Minister of Seniors is doing to address this problem.

Mr. Chairman, a few other comments here. I was looking at page 391, the ministry statement of operations by program. I apologize to the minister for being absent during most of the time he was making his introductory comments. Some of these questions may have been addressed already. If that is the case, I do apologize for it. I had to go out to attend to some other urgent business.

There is a question here that I have on the debt servicing costs on page 391. The debt servicing costs budgeted for this year, for example, the current budget year, are smaller than for the previous two years, information on which is included here. Is it because of the drop in the mortgage rates or interest rates, or is the need declining? How do we explain this? So some comment on it, if possible, would be helpful.

A couple of other matters here that caught my attention have to do with program 3, special purpose housing. There's an item, 3.2.3,

support to special purpose housing providers, with \$18.6 million allocated there. That's a figure that's about 50 percent more than the previous year's actual estimated expenditure. First of all, what form does this support take, and secondly, would the minister kindly comment on this 50 percent increase, which is a fairly substantial increase? I just was curious as to how come we have this increase here?

Community-based homelessness housing. There is again \$3 million mentioned here, and there are several initiatives that seem to be indicated here. I just wondered what those initiatives are. Does the minister consider \$3 million adequate, or is the figure there because that's all that the government can afford? Is this sufficient to meet the needs associated with these initiatives related to community-based homelessness?

Assistance to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation at 3.2.6. I notice a substantial increase there of about \$10 million. I think that is to be welcomed, because the needs for housing are growing for seniors, and this increase in assistance to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation I think will be very, very useful.

There are a couple of highlights for the year 2001-2002, two items at the bottom of page 389 that I was looking at. "Provide \$31.7 million to support the Healthy Aging Partnership Initiative." I wonder who the partnership is with and how this money can be accessed. Is it a new initiative, or is it something that has been there and more money has been added to it? It looks like it might be a new initiative, and that's why I'm asking the minister to provide some basic information on it: what exactly it means, how it can be accessed, if it's new, what specific population it targets to service.

The second item there: "Provide a \$7.9 million increase in funding for seniors and family and special purpose housing providers to assist with maintenance and rising operating costs." Again there's a mouthful of things here: seniors and family and special purpose housing providers. Seniors and families: are these the ones that are living independently in their own homes? Is "special purpose housing providers" a reference to special subcategories that refer to the activities of providers or what? So I'm a little bit unclear about what this particular allocation of money is about and what its purpose is.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude, and I'll let other members of the Assembly speak to the estimates. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

4:50

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get an opportunity to discuss the new Department of Seniors this afternoon. Certainly it was part of the provincial election campaign of the Liberals in Edmonton-Gold Bar to advocate that there be a stand-alone ministry. I think it's a very, very good idea that this ministry is now independent. I thought that to keep the size of the cabinet down, we could have eliminated the junior Ministry of Health and Wellness and had a stand-alone ministry without increasing the size of the cabinet. Regardless, I congratulate the government for initiating this stand-alone ministry, and I wish the minister the very best as this ministry develops its programs and policies. Certainly seniors and seniors' issues in this province cannot be taken for granted.

I hope we're not going to continue to consider that the rising costs of health care are the fault of seniors. We have heard countless times, Mr. Chairman, that the cost of health care is increasing because the seniors percentage of the population of Alberta is increasing. Well, we all know that is simply not the truth. There is

10 percent of the population of this province that is over 65. To cite the rising population of seniors as a reason for health care costs going up is again simply not true. I don't think it is appropriate to use seniors as a scapegoat for rising costs in health care. This negative stereotyping of seniors in this provinces is simply not supported by any data.

Donna Wilson, a professor of nursing at the university, did a very extensive study, and her conclusion was that a small minority are heavy users of the health care system. Most of Alberta seniors are healthy, happy, and able and willing to live independently. I would encourage the minister to ensure that Albertans who are over the age of 65 have that choice to live independently. Even if they have some health problems, I think that there should be a program in place to ensure that they can live independently in their own homes as long as possible.

Now, there's the CHOICE program, which has been initiated by the Capital health region. I believe it came as an offshoot of a pilot project in San Francisco, and it worked well with seniors. To the credit of the regional health authority they have experimented with it here. It is working well. I understand it is an expensive program, but it works well. I would encourage the minister to take programs of this nature and expand them, because it would be, I think, appropriate to do.

We see that in the budget there is an increase in ministry support services. I'm curious about that. I understand the department has now grown and was previously only one part of a bigger department. Before I get into my questions regarding the reasons why this spending increase has gone on, I would encourage the minister and his officials – and some hon. members of this Assembly may be astonished at this – to study what the Japanese nation is doing in its care of the elderly. The percentage of Japanese citizens who are over 65 is significantly higher. If they can't do some studies on the Internet or through the fine library that's downstairs, I would encourage the minister not to travel alone but to take several members of the department and go to Japan at taxpayers' expense and study exactly what the Japanese are doing and come back and apply that to long-term planning in Alberta. So when the day comes that we have an aging population, then everything can be in place so that we can deal with it effectively.

The first example that comes to mind of the lack of long-term planning is the manpower study that was done on the shortage of health care professionals in this province by Alberta Health in conjunction with the regional health authorities. It was squirreled away in the library. It was hidden from public view, and now look at the mess. I even see in the paper today where there's cancellation of surgeries at the Royal Alex because of a shortage of nurses. They have pared back six weeks early for the summer season because they simply do not have the nurses. If that study had been acted on three years ago, then we wouldn't be in this trouble today. I would bring that to the minister's attention so that if there are some long-term studies, the minister and his officials can start planning now for the future. There won't be nearly the need for crisis management through appropriation bills, which is currently the trend.

Now, program 2, services to seniors, on page 387. Under 2.1 a number of items are seeing slight increases from the 2000-2001 budget, but since a number of those are expected to be over budget for 2000-2001 – this is according to the preliminary, Mr. Chairman. The preliminary actual amount reported in this year's budget for some of these is actually dropping from the comparable 2000-2001. Why was it deemed necessary to increase spending throughout last year but it is not necessary to continue? Could the minister also please tell us what the money was spent on, tell us all the things that are going to be available this year?

In the time that I have, will this minister tell us if seniors can expect an increase in benefits yearly to match inflation and the rising cost of living? I understand that the federal government was even contemplating in 2001 having an exclusive seniors' benefit. [interjection] Yes, we as Liberals considered that we have an increasing cash benefit to match inflation. Such a program would lead to yearly increases in the budget but would bring stability to recipients and the ability to anticipate what their future benefits will be. It also would provide the security of knowing that benefits will increase to match rising costs of living. Static expenditures do not allow for that.

Now, I don't have the page here, but I see a significant increase in grants for the Alberta special-needs assistance program. That's needed certainly. I would be curious if the minister could provide an update to me on the turnaround time on the application for these grants. I know the staff in the Alberta special-needs assistance program go out of their way with constituency-based applications, particularly with the rising costs of energy. The special-needs assistance program was even quoted when the crisis was at its zenith before Christmas as a solution for seniors who may be cold or in the dark this winter. The turnaround time for the special-needs assistance program will certainly have to be turned around.

When we think of fees and fee changes in this province and how it might affect seniors or how it might affect how the government thinks of seniors, I have to look at the Community Development fee changes for the Provincial Museum of Alberta, for the museum in Drumheller, the field station outside Drumheller, Rutherford House, and the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre. Seniors' entrance fees are going up a dollar at the Provincial Museum of Alberta. At the museum in Drumheller they're going up a dollar. At the field station they're also going up a dollar. At Rutherford House they're going up 50 cents, and at the Frank Slide they're going up \$2.50.

5:00

Now, I would have thought, you know, that at nonpeak times in the spring and fall perhaps we could keep those fees for seniors where they were if not eliminate them entirely. It's sort of a reflection on the whole argument of Alberta health care premiums for seniors. If you put the price up, that amount of money, if you're on a fixed income and three or four seniors want to go on a day trip, is a lot. Other people may think it's small and it's insignificant, but I think it's a reflection on just what this government thinks of seniors. I certainly hope not, but I was looking at that and thinking to myself: those price increases can mean a big difference on whether seniors will visit the facility or not.

Now, in getting back to increasing cash benefits to match inflation, I would strongly encourage the minister to adopt our policy and match the Alberta seniors' benefit to inflation. We need to look at the boosting in funding here. I think it's \$4.1 million for the special-needs assistance program. Now, I've gone through that, and I have one more item that I would like to briefly discuss before I take my seat and cede the floor to my colleague from Edmonton-Centre.

It's regarding seniors' housing grants. I had the privilege of attending along with the mayor the 100th birthday celebration of a senior in Montgomery Legion Place. You enter the Montgomery Legion Place – it has over 300 units. We need more of this type of housing, not less. I think it's the responsibility of the government, regardless of whether it's here or whether it's in Saskatchewan or British Columbia, to provide affordable, safe housing for seniors. The word here is affordable. The private sector seems to be taking care of the high-end units. Many of the seniors, particularly women, can't afford those, and I would encourage the minister to ensure that there are lots and lots of units built across this province at this time,

because they're needed. They're what people can afford.

I would like to ask: what is the department's policy on providing support to housing providers and to seniors directly? What is the balance between the two, providers and seniors, and will that be changing?

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, I believe I will take my seat. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. There were just a few other points and comments that I had received from people that I wanted to bring up. In this, my part 3, I've already addressed a number of issues under health and quite a few issues under housing. There are just a few more I want to go over.

I should make a point here of saying that in all the correspondence and comments and opinions I received from people that I've been using in my comments today, the agencies that have responded were very complimentary to the department and made a particular point of noting that they felt that the staff had always worked to try and resolve issues or try and make something happen. I think that that's a very good sign of the dedication of the staff, that are understanding that the endpoint is what's important here and not allowing bureaucracy to stand in the way.

Now, Operation Friendship is pointing out something that in fact has wider implications. They're talking about the shortage of nursing home or long-term care beds, and I had spoken of this before. It's interesting because they're dealing with people that are more difficult to deal with. They have addictions or chronic mental health, a bad lifestyle, or a combination of all of those. She does point out that the government has been aware since 1981 of the need to be dealing with the hard to house, but she's raising the point that they can't find any place to move people when they need more care than their facilities are designed and funded to offer. So they end up trying to cope with people who in fact need a higher level of care.

That's a point that I raised in the second section, that was around the subsidized seniors and the independent living and the whole dearth of long-term care backing everything up all the way down the line. That's exactly what she's bringing out here, so it is an issue. I know it's been brought up in the long-term care report and in the impact on aging report, but we're still struggling with this, and the facilities are not becoming available fast enough.

The other issue she raises – and again this is not specific to the particular community she's dealing with. Early discharges from hospitals, both for physical and mental problems, is a really large problem for seniors without families to help. They have trouble getting out, maybe dealing with stairs. They can't shop or find something proper to eat, get their prescriptions filled. She in particular is dealing with people who are illiterate, but again this crosses communities, because if you have a language barrier, it's almost the same thing. They're not understanding directions for care as well. So that's the gap I spoke about earlier, where it's not seamless.

I also heard from some folks in Ansgar Villa. They're raising a lot of the same points. The subsidized housing should be 30 percent of net. They talked about dental care. They note: "Mr. Klein announced free dental care for children, why not include seniors? When our teeth fall out, they don't grow back." They're talking about the increase in seniors' benefits in general as they start to look at the cost of food, gasoline, heating, and bus fares. Everything is going up, and their incomes don't go up. So it's very important, and we need to look at indexing whatever assistance we are providing.

Always there are questions about what happened to the property tax rebate program and the renters' assistance program. Now, there was a series of I think it's close to 20 programs that were cut or reduced by the government in '93-94, and every day there are seniors saying: "When are we going to get some of that stuff back? We helped. We gave up our 5 percent. Why is the government restoring everyone else to a level they were at before these cuts or restoring them in some way, everybody except the seniors?" I have to agree. Certainly, again, if we're going back to that overriding principle of keeping people active and healthy and independent in their own homes, the issues around property taxes are ones that we're going to have to deal with here.

The other issue that's new to that mix is the cost of energy and of electricity, particularly for people that are living in high-rise apartments or condominiums. Once again, I'd point out that they are paying both a higher rate for the utility and their rebate is lower because the government has allowed them to be classified as a commercial user and are not recognizing that this is residential. For seniors in condominiums this is an enormous struggle, and it's not going to help any of us here if they end up having to sell or move out of their condo because they can't afford the condo fees anymore and then are looking for some kind of subsidized housing from the government. That is all just going to back upstream and end up in the minister's lap, and we have to be proactive about that and, at the same time, be fair. I think that's going to be the struggle.

Another woman, Mrs. Moore from Calgary, was asking about the provincial property tax and said that "fixed-income senior homeowners need larger rebates on electricity and [natural] gas." So same point being raised again.

5:10

I wasn't able to get into a number of the other specific questions that I had for the minister. When I sort out the notes, what I will do is pass them on to him in writing and ask them to be included and to be answered as well. Even with an extended debate period today, I'm finding I didn't have enough time to get out all the questions and issues that I wanted to raise with the minister.

My thanks to the House leaders for allowing this ministry to be designated as a special debate time. I appreciate that very much. Thank you for the opportunity.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. Minister of Seniors, is there anybody else who wishes to speak?

The hon. Minister of Seniors to close debate.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the participants for their questions. I will be trying to get back and respond to the relevant questions upon a review of them. There are, as was pointed out, a lot of issues that we have to deal with. A lot of the questions raised were on cross-ministry stuff, so you can see that our cross-ministry initiative is very appropriate.

I would like to close by saying thank you for your input. We'll try and get back to you with as good answers to the relevant questions as possible. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan

and proposed estimates for the Department of Seniors, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$342,582,000
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THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following department.

Seniors: operating expense and capital investment, \$342,582,000.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that pursuant to Standing Order 3(4), regarding Victoria Day, the Assembly stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 22.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The House stands adjourned until Tuesday afternoon at 1:30. Have a wonderful weekend.

[At 5:16 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Hon. members, at the conclusion of the prayer, would you please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. From our farmsteads, towns, and cities comes the call of our people that as legislators of this province we act with responsibility and sensitivity. Lord grant us the wisdom to meet such challenges. Amen.

Please join in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly the former Member for Calgary-Montrose, Mr. Rick Orman.

Mr. Rick Orman was elected to the Alberta Legislature in May of 1986 for the Calgary-Montrose riding. Following the election and during his distinguished career, he was the minister of career development and employment, minister responsible for lotteries, major exhibitions, and fairs. He also held the portfolios of minister of labour and minister of energy.

Mr. Orman is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask him to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 4 and 6.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 11, 12, and 13.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After question period today and pursuant to Standing Order 40, I plan to rise in the House and ask for unanimous consent to debate the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to stop making decisions that could provoke provincewide job action by teachers, interfere in free collective bargaining, and have already raised serious concerns on the part of school boards.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and table five copies of the Power Pool of Alberta 2000 annual report.

I'm also pleased to table five copies of the Balancing Pool annual report for the year 2000. This is their first year of operation, and I note as I table this that the average price of electricity in Alberta today for the month is 9.2 cents per kilowatt-hour. This is about a 30 percent decrease from January 1, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table today five copies of a letter dated May 17, 2001, addressed to me and signed by Dr. Morag Pansegrau, the chairperson of the board of trustees of St. Albert Protestant schools.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. I'm tabling five copies of a resolution passed on May 20 by the Alberta Teachers' Association annual representative assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter addressed to the Premier by Mr. Will Lusena of Calgary regarding his opposition to the proposed Kananaskis FMA.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the benefit of the Assembly I have a chart today to table. It's entitled Natural Gas Prices for Electricity Generation. It's from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter by the CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board to an injured worker in Calgary. This was dated March 27 and indicated that he would be getting a wheelchair replacement. As of this date he is still waiting for a wheelchair to replace the one that was damaged, and he is a prisoner in his own home.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured and pleased to rise in the House today to introduce to you and

through you to the members of this Assembly a group of energetic and enthusiastic grade 6 students from St. Teresa of Avila school in Red Deer-North. They are accompanied by their teachers Ms Shari Schoenberger and Mr. Ken Griffith and their parent helpers Mrs. Carol Havell, Mrs. Kate Kuhn, Mrs. Erma Brady, Mrs. Angela Alvarez, and Mrs. Laurie Gilbertson. I would ask that they all rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you a number of students from the Argyll Centre in my constituency, where virtual learning is occurring. There are seven students and eight adults. The group leader and teacher is Mr. Mark Karstad and the parent helpers are Mrs. Donna Howard, Mrs. Laura Warman, Mrs. Judy Wollman, Mr. Trevor Smolski, Mrs. Cheryl Schulz, Mrs. Sati Singh, Mr. Edmund Howard, and the students. I would ask that they all rise now and receive the very warm welcome of our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my assistant from my constituency office, Whitney Issik. She's come to meet with some different departments and help me out in my office here in Edmonton for the day. Could you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly, Whitney.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Missing Children's Week

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the government of Alberta I proclaim May 20 to May 26, 2001, as Missing Children's Week in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, our society is evaluated as a just, caring, fair, and honourable society in direct proportion to the compassion, dignity, and even love that we give to our frail elderly, to other vulnerable souls, and souls like our children. In Alberta parents support all of our children, their growth and development. Surely together our goal must be that every child grow up secure, safe, and capable of achieving their full potential, successful at life, and most of all loved by that family.

1:40

A missing child is every parent's worst nightmare. The morbid fear, the overwhelming guilt, and the anxiety consume every waking moment. Thankfully most parents and children never endure such a grievous separation. For those that do, we stand by them or perhaps we search in teams to recover the child. We all too frequently, as in the case of sweet Jessica Koopmans, attend a final service of memorial.

This week many communities are joined in raising awareness of child safety through the Child Find Alberta organization, who reminds parents and children of the importance of staying safe as families, a reminder to our communities, too, to protect their most vulnerable by staying alert to danger and by being ever watchful for a child.

Mr. Speaker, 63,712 children went missing in Canada in the past year, and 8,832 children went missing in Alberta in 1999. More data will come out on the 25th of May. While most children that were

reported missing are found or returned home, some are never found.

To this House I commit both to prompting parents and teaching children to be safe and to assisting children to understand their responsibilities and rights as well and commit to all that we will serve our children better if we join forces in this proclamation.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May 25 is National Missing Children's Day, a day to celebrate those children who have been safely returned to their families, a day to offer hope to those families who are still searching, and a day to mourn those children who will never return.

Three symbols are associated with this week: a child's teddy bear, a crossed blue ribbon, and our porch lights. The teddy bear signifies the love and the security we want for all children. The blue ribbons can be found posted next to child-friendly sites on the web. The porch lights are those that we will all leave on on Friday of this week, National Missing Children's Day, to light the way home for missing children.

Tragically for us Jessica Koopmans has become a fourth symbol, a symbol that we haven't done all we can to protect our children, a symbol that reminds us we have failed to prevent evil from invading a child's world and a community, a symbol that reminds us we must redouble our efforts to ensure every child is victim proofed, and a symbol that reminds us that only through community action can we create safe, caring environments for children and prevent future tragedies. Child Find Alberta, Missing Children's Network Canada, and Our Missing Children are but a few of the organizations we can support.

We must do more. We must ensure that our schools have the resources to help children grow into healthy adults. We must ensure that child and family services are in a position to help those in need of assistance. Most importantly, we must create a community and a culture where the lives of children and families are rendered the sanctity that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Water Quality Standards

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Environment confirmed that Alberta has among the highest standards of drinking water in Canada. Setting high standards is a good start but not the full solution to the problem. Walkerton demonstrates that standards alone are not sufficient protection. My questions are to the Premier. What provisions are there for safeguarding, testing, and monitoring water quality in Alberta so that we can make sure that our water is safe?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it's been some time since I was involved in that portfolio, so I will have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, all the water treatment facilities are operated by trained and certified staff members. So that's the first thing: we have quality staff operating those.

The second thing is that as they do their water treatment, they are constantly monitoring their own water. We had a recent incident in

Grande Prairie where a piece of equipment shut down. They immediately knew that they had a problem, and they immediately put out a boil water order. So that's the second thing that happens: the operators constantly monitor what's happening in their own water treatment plants.

The third thing that happens is that we do spot and random checks constantly throughout this province, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that everything is operating as it should be so that Albertans can be assured of the safety of their drinking water.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: which ministry has the ultimate authority and responsibility to act when standards are violated?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, there are both federal and provincial agencies that have the authority to respond, but as it relates to Alberta, to this province, it's my understanding that it is the Minister of Environment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: what are the remedies or penalties for the violation of these standards?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, relative to the intricacies and the details of fines and other punitive measures that might be taken, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, once again, we do enforce our standards through a number of procedures. First of all, if there's a problem in a water treatment plant, we will go and enforce our standards on that plant, and we will say to the municipality or whoever that you must meet these standards and enforce those standards to maintain our high-quality standards and ensure them. So through our constant monitoring, our constant spot-checks, the randomness of our checks, we very carefully monitor this.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Continuing to the Premier: how does the government's plan to increase privatization of water testing improve the safety of Alberta's water supply?

MR. KLEIN: I don't know the extent to which there are plans to privatize water testing, but I would assume – no, Mr. Speaker; that's incorrect. I wouldn't assume. I would take it as a matter of fact that whoever is contracted to test water would have to abide by the standards that would be set by the Department of Environment and to some degree, as it relates to public health, by the department of health.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When they move to the privatization model, are they considering the issue of increased penalties, the addition of sanction or some means to make sure that the private sector does follow the rules that the public servants are now dealing with?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the process to ensure that the rules are being followed, again I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly as we move to privatization, it's just like anything else: it will be constantly monitored. Just as we monitor and check on our water treatment plants, so we monitor and check on the people that are actually doing the testing. Once again, the fact that we move to privatization does not lower the standards. It only allows the private sector to do that. We can all have confidence in Alberta's water.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're not questioning the standards at all. The question again is: as we move to more privatization, will there be the same kind of confidence available for Albertans to make sure that their water is safe, that they'll have confidence both in the process and in the carrying out of those tests?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. I would remind the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that ultimately the buck stops here. Whether it's a member of the Alberta public service or whether it's a contracted service, if it is a government responsibility, the buck stops here. In other words, eventually the minister and perhaps the Premier or the government as a whole are held accountable no matter who provides the service, whether it's the private sector or public-service employees.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

1:50

Meridian Dam

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. The Meridian dam, if it's ever built, would be an Infrastructure project. Why is this department not leading the feasibility study?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm somewhat surprised by the question from the hon. member, because she's been around here for some time and should know that Infrastructure does not build dams anymore.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Environment. Why is the Minister of Environment leading the study into the feasibility project of the Meridian dam when his department is supposed to be protecting our water resources, not developing dam projects?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, in the first place, we're not developing dam projects, Mr. Speaker, and we are not leading a feasibility study. This is a project that has been talked about for at least 20 years. In the past there were commitments made that when Saskatchewan was prepared to contribute a certain amount of money to a feasibility study, we would go forward with a feasibility study. It should be noted also that the federal Liberal government has done a considerable amount of engineering work already in the past on this project.

Now, what we're looking at, Mr. Speaker, really is a cost-benefit analysis. What it is: how does it affect the environment? I mean, our job is to protect the environment, and before any project like that is built, we must be able to see how this protects the environment. The other part of our job at Environment is water management. So part of our job is to manage the water, which is a very scarce resource in this province, and we will do that as well.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister then: can he tell

us why his department is leading the charge on the study of the Meridian dam when he potentially stands to benefit from this project?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a bit of an innuendo there, quite frankly, and I think it's totally inappropriate. I do not in any way benefit. I'm not sure what she's suggesting by that innuendo. The dam certainly isn't in my constituency. I have no personal benefit out of this. So how would I benefit? I'm not sure, and I resent that innuendo.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Teachers' Salaries

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the Alberta Teachers' Association held its annual representative assembly in Edmonton, including a special session Sunday afternoon right on the steps of this Legislature. I've never seen teachers as angry as those attending the ATA assembly with what they consider to be this government's unjustified interference in their negotiations with school boards. My questions are to the Premier. Why has this government decided not to leave it up to school boards and to the ATA to decide what constitutes a fair and reasonable salary adjustment for this province's teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as has been said so strongly in this Legislative Assembly before, we are not getting involved in the collective bargaining process. What we have done is we have put in a line item guaranteeing the teachers of this province at least 6 percent and have left the flexibility for the various school boards to negotiate higher if they deem that's where the money should go. It also gives them the flexibility to put those extra dollars into other classroom activities, and it's based on the priorities identified by the local school districts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Premier as well. Why is the government putting the province's school boards in a no-win situation by not providing them with sufficient resources to both improve classroom conditions and pursue fair salary settlements in their negotiations with teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know what the hon. leader of the third party deems to be fair, but I'm telling you that if I had in a business plan a 19 percent increase over three years, I would think that that was fair, plus an absolute figure of 6 percent to accommodate a minimum raise for the teachers. I would deem that to be more than fair, and I'm sure if the hon. member were still a university professor and if he knew for absolutely sure that he was going to get 6 percent – well, maybe not. I don't know. But I'm sure that most professors, if they knew that they were going to get 6 percent – 6 percent at least – would be more than happy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It looks like the government is ready to bring in wage controls like Mr. Trudeau did in the '70s. Why is this government determined to pick a fight with teachers by singling them out for its new policy of wage controls?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, since when has offering money been

related to picking a fight? Never. When we say, "Here's 6 percent, and here's the ability to negotiate more," that is hardly picking a fight. We have no intention of picking a fight with the ATA or the teachers. We value very much teachers in this province and the tremendous contribution they make. There are teachers in this caucus. There are teachers in the Liberal caucus. There's a teacher sitting right over there. It's a wonderful profession, it's a respected profession, and it's for precisely that reason that we put as a line item in the budget a minimum 6 percent increase for teachers. That could hardly be construed as picking a fight.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Provincial Investment Returns

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our province's spending budget has reached a high-water mark of \$21 billion. I feel very confident that now we have an excellent minister responsible for money generation.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I really enjoy listening to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Would you please join with me in listening to him too.

MR. CAO: Thank you.

My question is to the Minister of Revenue. Given the drastically low value of the stock market relative to its peak time, can the minister explain how Alberta's investments are affected?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to respond to the Member for Calgary-Fort. As he rightly said, our investments are substantially affected by how the market bears. Our equity markets have been down over the past year, but I would like to assure this member and all Albertans that our investments are both soundly and prudently invested. It's important to note that we have quite a diversified portfolio, not just in the equities but in fixed income, in real estate, as well as foreign and national equities. Our income is down about \$300 million over the past year, and that's in part because the previous year was such a strong year in the equities market. Even this year we will earn a \$787 million return on the heritage savings trust fund.

MR. CAO: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear that our investment is not tied into the stock market alone.

To the same minister: what is the future forecast for investment income given that the stock market is low?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a challenge to predict any markets, where they're going to go, but in our three-year business planning we do make our estimates of what we would best guess would be our return on our investments. We estimate in this coming year that we'll have about \$550 million dollars. That is once again down due to the decline in the markets, but that still is a return on our investment, because about 73 percent of our investment is in fixed income at this stage.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Based on the information that the minister stated here, what is the wisdom of taking risks with Alberta's money by investing in the stock market?

MR. MELCHIN: Once again, Mr. Speaker, it is a prudent investment strategy to invest in the equity markets. The equity markets have outperformed over the long term, and the purpose of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund is to maximize those returns for all Albertans. We should have a portion of our portfolio in the stock markets to ensure that over the long term, not just over any one year – for example, over the last three years we've had an average of about \$1 billion in returns because we are in both the equity and fixed income markets.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Premier's Flight to Prince Rupert

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to get clarification on issues relating to the upcoming review of the Conflicts of Interest Act. Last Tuesday the Premier indicated that he had flown on the Syncrude jet to his fishing lodge twice. This was confirmed by his chief of staff. This past Friday the PC Party vice-president confirmed that the party had paid for one such flight. To the Premier: how was the second flight covered?

MR. KLEIN: I understand the same way, Mr. Speaker.

DR. TAFT: Given that the Premier has at various times said that this fund is taxable income and at other times that it is for expenses, can he tell us if it is taxable income or if it is for expenses?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. member is taking us relative to this. This is party business. It is none of his business. It is personal business. I don't get into whether he received any money for the books he published using a tremendous amount of government research and government information. I don't know if he gets any money for his activities with the Parkland Institute. I don't care, because that's his personal business, and the business he's talking about relative to the fishing lodge is personal business. The simple fact is: those flights were paid for, and they were not paid for by taxpayers' dollars.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm that this fund uses money from tax receipted donations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would assume, and I don't know how and I don't care how the Liberal Party conducts its fund for its leader. I have an idea. I don't get involved in the intricacies or the details as to how the fund is managed for me. I know it is there. There are no objections, only from the Liberal Party. They don't talk about their own fund. One day they say that it's \$500, and the next day they say that it's \$1,400. Now it's probably nothing, because they have no money.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules*

& *Forms*, sixth edition, section 410, states the following: "Ministers may not be questioned with respect to party responsibilities."

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

Shooting by Edmonton Police

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Solicitor General. The minister will recall that last week Mr. John Pavic, a resident of Edmonton-Rutherford, was fatally shot by an officer of the Edmonton police tactical squad. Edmonton police have stated that the action was justified because the police officer considered his life to be in danger. My question: given the police must have a strategy to avoid confrontation where possible, why was the police officer in a situation that endangered his life and resulted in the death of Mr. Pavic?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be pleased to provide a response to that question, but the matter is currently under investigation and is the subject of an internal Edmonton Police Service review. Also, in matters of this sort a fatality inquiry is mandatory.

I can say generally that the Edmonton Police Service and all police services across Alberta do have policies and strategies in place designed to avoid confrontation wherever possible. The chief of the Edmonton Police Service has indicated that several attempts were made to talk with the man and get him to put down the knife that he carried. It was apparently requested that the police obtain a warrant before entering the man's apartment, which they did. The police chief has also revealed that a nonlethal taser gun was used to try and subdue the man, but for some reason the taser did not work successfully. My understanding is that the result was that a police officer found himself in a hand-to-hand combat situation with a man armed with a knife and that lethal force was then used.

Mr. Speaker, as always happens in cases of this sort, the investigations and reviews will determine whether policies and practices need to be changed. I'd also like to tell the member that police are taught to protect lives and not to take them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has touted the AISH program as being a nationally recognized program providing adequate compensation for people with disabilities, yet my colleagues and I receive calls on a regular basis indicating that with escalating costs \$855 monthly is not enough to live on. My first question is to the minister of human resources. How can the minister expect people in this province to live on \$855 a month?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the hon. member and for all Albertans I think we have to expand a little bit on the AISH program. When it is put in such a way in which the question indicated, one would then think that that was the only asset that an AISH person might be eligible for. If that is the case, then I would hope that hon. members would bring situations like that forward, because what we find in an overwhelming majority of cases is the fact that along with that income we have provided some assets that

can be exempted from consideration of this person's overall total portfolio. One very, very key ingredient to that is that an AISH person in Alberta could have up to \$100,000 of assets and not be deducted in any way. So I think in the matter of fairness – and certainly I know that the hon. member has always shown himself to be one that wants to be fair in these matters – it's important to have a look at the overall situation of an individual or that individual within their family.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Community Development. Does the minister disagree with the strategy to revise AISH as set out in the Full Citizenship March 2001 document prepared by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities?

Thank you.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities does an incredibly good job in reviewing all the issues that pertain to the disability community, and in fact the member across the way would be very interested to know that we have again taken the lead in this important area by creating now the Alberta disability strategy. It's not yet ready for public release, but I'm sure he'll find some comfort and some greater expansion on the issues in that report once it's finished. It's been arrived at, I should conclude, after provincewide consultations with all the stakeholders that we could possibly get to, literally hundreds of people, dozens and dozens of groups and organizations who advocate for the disability community, none the least of which is this minister.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Premier. Will the Premier clarify for this Assembly what the government's position is on AISH considering that strategy 2 of the Full Citizenship document calls for matching the Ontario maximum of \$930 per month, which is an immediate increase in pay to those on AISH of \$75 a month?

Thank you.

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, things are vastly different in Alberta than they are in Ontario. As far as I know, we're the only province that has a program that is specific to AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped. I don't know what program or programs exist in Ontario, but I do know that our AISH program is somewhat unique. Perhaps the hon. minister can shed some more light on it.

MR. DUNFORD: It is a matter of some uniqueness, Mr. Speaker. In fact, at a recent national forum the AISH program in Alberta was credited with its ability to respond to the needs of low-income Albertans. But just because we might be doing good doesn't mean we can't do better. As a matter of fact, we're about to embark on a review of all programs and services to low-income Albertans, and certainly we're going to make sure that AISH is a part of all of that in terms of investigation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care System

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the recent provincial election and since, many of the residents of Edmonton-Meadowlark indicated to me that they were concerned about the future of the Misericordia community hospital, which is located in my constituency. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the status of the Misericordia community hospital and its role in the future?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Misericordia facility is an important acute care facility with the Capital health authority. The facility has recently been expanded and is back to full service status, and in this regard a number of things have happened. There's been a recent opening of a new intensive care unit at the facility. Also, three more operating rooms have been opened, and finally a number of surgery beds have been recently opened with three more to open this summer.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the same minister. As health care is one of the major concerns to my constituents, can the minister advise what progress has been made in recruiting doctors to Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. Attracting and keeping physicians and other professionals here in the province of Alberta is a top priority. The Canadian Institute for Health Information indicated that from the years 1996 through 2000, if memory serves me correctly, the number of general practitioners increased by 11 percent and the number of specialists increased by 16 percent. From 2000 to 2001, the current year, I'm advised from the College of Physicians and Surgeons through one of their quarterly updates that there were 5,205 physicians on the in-province registers, and this is an increase from the previous year of 161, or 3.2 percent.

We think that we're doing a good job in terms of recruiting physicians. We think that our overall tax structure and fee structures make Alberta a very attractive place for doctors to live and work. We've done a number of things, Mr. Speaker, in not only recruiting but also in the training and retention of physicians. The setting up, for example, of residencies for international medical graduates and also having residencies for rural physicians and increasing the number of physicians that we train in our medical schools have all helped to increase the number of doctors that we have practising in Alberta.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, last week there were media reports about the earlier than usual closing of wards at the Royal Alexandra hospital. This action was in response to the amount of overtime being worked by our nurses. As the health system cannot operate without our nurses, can the minister of health advise what strategies are in place to hire nurses to work in our health facilities?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the new collective agreement with nurses in Alberta we think will go a long ways towards helping recruit and retain registered nurses in the province of Alberta. That agreement includes a number of new and innovative recruitment strategies and retention strategies. I'm advised by regional health authorities that since the ratification of that particular agreement, a number of nurses have been calling wanting to return to work or take refresher courses to allow them to upgrade their skills so that they would be able to return to nursing. We are working with regional health authorities, Mr. Speaker, on a number of fronts.

Perhaps most importantly, though, we've done a recent quality of life survey for nurses. The responses from nurses have been quite instructive and quite interesting. One of the things that nurses indicate would help with their work environment is further education. Nurses have indicated that this is very important. In that regard, we have responded fairly recently with a \$10 million program to allow nurses to further their education. That, we think, is going a long ways towards improving the quality of their work environment.

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

Lobbyists Registry

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over two weeks ago after questions from the opposition the Premier committed to having the Minister of Government Services examine the issue of a lobbyists registry in Alberta. Indications were given at the time that this report would be completed within two weeks. My questions are to the Minister of Government Services. Well, given that it has been two weeks, could the minister report on the status? Where is the report?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly right. As a matter of fact, I believe that as of last Thursday it was 14 days. The initial intention was to make sure that we looked at the provincial governments across Canada, looking at their lobbyist registrations as well as finding out what the federal government did for lobbyist registrations. Since that first mandate was put out, we've added a few things. I recently wanted to make sure that the review includes some other key criteria, so that's why the report has not been tabled at this point.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I appreciate the additional work that the minister is putting into this. But given that we already had a report, the Tupper report, and we had a report from the Ethics Commissioner, how much longer are we going to have to wait for this information?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, there are those other reports out there, that we are also looking at. Some of the scope of the work that I've expanded on is to look at the cost of such a registry as well as the bureaucracy that such a registry will put in place. Now, the other thing that came up a few days after we talked about costs and the bureaucracy was to look at a definition of what a lobbyist would be, could be, what it would look like. We're expanding our scope into that area as well, and that is a very difficult area to describe and to define. So I'm afraid it's going to take quite a bit longer before this comes forward.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, since I can't get a commitment for this session, could I get a commitment from the minister to table his report when we return for a fall session?

MR. COUTTS: I think the hon. member can be reassured that something will be made available for everyone to take a look at prior to the next session.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Wainwright.

Natural Gas Reserves

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Energy has just returned from his mission to Washington in which he was trying to sell more of Alberta's energy, including natural gas. The government's own data from the EUB show that proven natural gas reserves are dropping every year. At current production levels the proven reserves of natural gas would only last 8.2 years if no new gas reserves were found. The discovery of new natural gas reserves has fallen short of consumption and exports in every year since 1983. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Is the minister at all concerned that proven natural gas reserves have dropped dramatically in the last 10 years and are continuing to decline rapidly?

2:20

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to correct the member's information in that gas reserves have not dropped substantially. What we've seen with the gas reserves is that it takes more and more to replace them. So in fact two things happen. One, Alberta will always have first call on its own natural resources. Part of the prosperity is the fact that Alberta has more gas, more oil sands, more oil than what it uses itself. I know this is a foreign concept to the New Democrat member, but what happens is that the private sector invests money. That in turn creates jobs, and then the products that are refined from that are sold to other markets, with the exchange coming back to Albertans. In fact, the royalty income that Albertans enjoyed from oil and gas last year was some \$10.1 billion Canadian.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister seems unfamiliar with the statistics provided by his own department, does the government's energy policy support an increase in exports of natural gas from Alberta?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, there is always opportunity for this province to export gas, to see the building of a multibillion dollar pipeline in Alliance, that has created tremendous jobs and opportunities for Albertans. In fact, Albertans are world leaders in the technology of Arctic fabrication and the technology of pipeline fabrication and the technology of getting oil from the ground and into markets, the same as natural gas. One of the reasons that Alberta has been able to move ahead in its development of rural Alberta, the many farms that are out there, in the areas of this great province, is because of the oil and gas reserves that sit in the ground, that are worth nothing when they're in the ground and only take value once they become a marketable commodity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the minister's interesting grasp of economics, what is he doing to address the fact that proven natural gas reserves have dropped every year since 1983? I'm asking for concrete steps.

MR. SMITH: Twelve thousand gas wells will be drilled this year, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Sex Offender Registry

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Solicitor General. More needs to be done to protect society from sex offenders. Our laws today are simply not getting the job done. In recent media interviews the federal Minister of Justice, Anne McLellan, is quoted as saying that a federally administered Canadian police information centre, commonly known as CPIC, could easily provide a national and less expensive alternative to the provincial sex offender registries. Why is Alberta proceeding with the provincial sex offender registry if an existing national information base is already there?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you. I'd like to tell the Assembly that Alberta has been asking the federal government since 1997 to set up a national sex offender registry. Mr. Speaker, talk is cheap. We would like the federal government to take some action and put a national registry in place.

CPIC is not an easy solution. First, the database that they use is outdated. The police have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the system for its current use, let alone adapting it to a new national registry. Use of the system for a national sex offender registry would require a costly upgrade. In addition, there is no present federal legislation compelling an offender to provide personal information once the sentence is complete.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the federal minister put her money where her mouth is and put the necessary legislative changes and resources in place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What benefit will there be to Albertans if a provincial sex offender registry is put in place?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government's priority is to protect Albertans and ensure our communities are safe places to live and work. With respect to a sex offender registry, our position has always been that a national registry is our first choice. The thing about sex offenders is that they do not stay in one place. A system that allows them to be tracked between provincial boundaries would be the most effective, but in the absence of a national tracking system, a provincial sex offender registry would at least enable police to track the movement of sex offenders within Alberta.

We also hope to co-ordinate with other provinces that are setting up a registry. Ontario has recently introduced legislation, and I've spoken to the justice minister there. B.C. and Saskatchewan are also looking at introducing similar legislation, and I will speak to them this week. Our hope is that by moving ahead at the provincial level, the feds will start moving ahead at the national.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you. Given that my constituents have asked why chemical castration is not used as an alternative, has the minister considered this alternative?

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, but there are many details that we're looking at right now. The bottom line, of course, is to protect all Albertans. I'll be recommending to cabinet in the

next couple of weeks. Decisions about what it will look like and who will have direct access to it will be made at that time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mobile Community Response Teams

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lack of family resource centres, family violence shelters, or ministry-operated child welfare facilities in some children's service authorities are presenting some significant challenges. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. How soon will the minister be initiating the mobile community response team pilot projects to assist youth and children and families in crisis?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As reported earlier in this Assembly, our mobile response team is going to the northeast quadrant of the city of Calgary. Currently we are almost on the threshold of getting those teams active, but the necessity of bringing all members of the team together, listening very carefully to the needs of the nonprofit groups in the provision of children's services, particularly in the McCall centre and other parts of that general geography, have taken a little longer than we'd hoped, but by later in June and clearly by July these mobile teams will be active in the city of Calgary in the summer months, when I think they'll be most effective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Yes. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: what are the time lines for the evaluation of the pilot projects?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, over the next two years, but clearly over the first year we'll be looking very closely at the effectiveness of that program. Added to that, we're looking at the addition of funds, about \$1.2 million this year, for the youth in transition program throughout Alberta, and I would hope that through the addition of those funds, particularly in that centre, we will also be able to look at ways and means of assisting some of the youth and see if together those programs are going to net a positive effect.

If they are not successful or don't show success in the first year, Mr. Speaker, we could certainly look carefully at whether to continue the program. But the indication from Street Teams and other CART teams, child rescue workers both with the police and so on, gives us a lot of confidence that it will be successful. So at least over two years for the pilot projects.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that some authorities must transfer children to another authority with complete services, when will all authorities become full-service authorities?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. It is a function, however, of economics. For example, in the treatment of children who have been apprehended and protected under the PCHIP legislation, we will have very specialized staff trained and very specialized facilities, and it's simply not economical to put those through all authorities. We will be looking at what is cost-effective,

what is practical, and looking at where the needs are greatest. I could look at the treatment for fetal alcohol syndrome in much the same way.

Where we have concerted growth of populations that have really special needs, then we will look at that particular centre as most desirable. Throughout Alberta the demographics are so different, the resources are very unique between the two cities and parts of rural Alberta, so to promise or commit to something in every region would be impractical. We will look at what is practically possible in all cases.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

2:30

U.S. Energy Policy

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday in Washington, D.C., the President of the United States released the country's national energy policy. This policy document was over 170 pages long but mentioned Canada and Alberta only briefly. My questions today are to the Minister of Energy, who I understand was in Washington at the time this policy was made public. Can the minister please indicate to the members of this Assembly what opportunities this U.S. national energy policy might present to Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know that you would like me to go on in great detail about this meeting, but for brevity in question period I will make it brief. Canada is mentioned in this document in chapter 8, under Strengthening Global Alliances. There is a good awareness both that Alberta is the number one gas exporter to the United States and last year was the number two oil exporter. If you combine the hydroelectric imports from Quebec into the United States, in fact today the number one export to the United States from Canada is energy. In fact, that's what puts it on the front burner of the United States today.

They're talking a great deal about an energy crunch in the United States, and it's not one where you see cars lining up at gasoline pumps and prices rising. You're seeing one more of a duck on the water, Mr. Speaker, where it's very calm on the top, but that duck is paddling vociferously underneath to keep it going. You have an aged infrastructure. You have power plants that are producing at obsolete rates. You have an obsolete pipeline structure, an obsolete delivery system. In fact, what it does deliver is a great opportunity to Alberta, a great opportunity in two terms: one, our ability to supply the resource that we have been graced with in this fair province and, secondly, to supply the strengths of our technology sector and of the people that make their living in this industry and that can work on these projects throughout Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. I wonder if the minister could indicate if in his discussion with officials in Washington there was much recognition of the role that Alberta may play in helping the United States meet its long-term energy needs.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's clearly a need. In fact, although the members of the Senate energy committee didn't mention the Member for West Yellowhead by name, I know that

they were thinking of him because they talked about the important role of coal. They talked about the diversity of supply. In fact, at a presentation that afternoon from members of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers there was a comment made by an oil sands owner, who said: the oil sands have the capability to replace all offshore imports of oil to the United States. That really got their attention.

What we see is a real need for increased awareness of Alberta – Alberta producing companies, Alberta shipping companies, Alberta pipeline companies, Alberta petrochemical companies – with U.S. legislators, with U.S. lobbyists, with those individuals. They need to know two things, Mr. Speaker. One is that Alberta is the owner of its natural resources. We can assist in meeting their energy needs, and we have the technology and processing capability to make it happen.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question. The recent release of the United States' energy policy makes mention of the United States, Mexico, and Canada working through the North America energy working group. If Alberta resources are to be protected and Albertans to receive full benefit of their use, it appears we need to be involved in the North America energy decision. Can the Minister of Energy tell the members of this Assembly if Alberta is involved in the energy working group?

MR. SMITH: It is a good question, Mr. Speaker, because in fact Alberta per se is not involved with this group, and the federal government is representing Canada. We are concerned about not having a presence. As the role of this group develops, it is key that Albertans need to be forceful in our desire to participate and willing to deliver our expertise to that table. Clearly, if decisions are being made about how Canada might fit into this U.S. national energy policy or even a continental energy policy, Alberta and the other energy-producing provinces of this land need to be and must be directly involved.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before the Clerk calls the next order of business today, earlier today in question period there was an intervention by the hon. Government House Leader, who advised me he wanted to rise on a point of order or a point of privilege. I also received such notification from the hon. Minister of Environment and subsequently received a note from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. So I'm going to look at the hon. Government House Leader and the hon. Minister of Environment. Would it be okay to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on this point.

Point of Order Member's Apology

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon in question period I rose to ask the Minister of Environment a question which I believed I had the facts on. It turns out that I did not. It is not my intention to make unfounded allegations against any member of this Assembly, and I do withdraw my comments and sincerely apologize to the minister for that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment on this point.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I'd just like to thank the member for her comments, and I accept the apology.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Crosswalk Safety

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, January 7, 1999, little Daniel Negash was dressed up in his very best clothes, including a miniature bow tie, and he was a very excited little boy that day because he was on his way to his very first day at a new school. He never made it to school that day, however, because as he was crossing the street in a marked pedestrian crosswalk in my riding, he was struck by a car and killed. I bring up this tragedy during road safety week to relate a serious and continuing concern of mine regarding crosswalk safety and to draw attention to a little known crosswalk safety improvement that I believe would have saved little Daniel's life that day.

I call it the modified-advance stop-bar crosswalk design. This simple \$500 improvement, designed over 10 years ago, which can reportedly reduce vehicle/pedestrian collisions in crosswalks by up to 80 percent, still has not been adopted by the powers that be in this country, nor does it appear likely to be anytime soon. I for one simply cannot understand why the delay. The simple new design does not have any negative implications that I am aware of, and I have the original pilot study from 10 years ago and the opinions of a couple of Canada's leading traffic safety experts to back that statement up. Yet we still cannot seem to get it introduced into the Transportation Association of Canada manual, the bible of the industry.

After hundreds of personal hours over several years on this issue, after protracted public discussions and arguments and my presentation of thousands of names on petitions, I have yet to hear one rational reason why such an improvement cannot be adopted. The entire experience has left me very concerned, Mr. Speaker, about the ability of the process to promote visionary and innovative improvements into safe road design, even when lives are at stake. So I appreciate this opportunity to make people aware and draw attention to the modified-advance stop-bar pedestrian crosswalk safety improvement and to let anyone know who is interested that I would be happy to send them information on this subject if they have any concerns about their children having to cross busy and dangerous crosswalks in their own community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Meridian Industries Inc.

MRS. GORDON: I rise today to bring attention to some exciting news, the unveiling last week of a \$217 million multifaceted and value-added enterprise proposed for Lacombe, Alberta, by Meridian Industries Inc. I congratulate Meridian on choosing the Lacombe site, a move I know they will not regret. Lacombe is a wonderful community situated in the midst of some of the best agricultural land in this province, agricultural land that will in the future grow much of the needed produce they will require.

It is hard to envision a project this large: seven agrifood processing plants as well as three additional manufacturing plants. The first phase, to be constructed this year, will produce ketchup, wine, juice, potting soil, pellet fuel, and fire logs. The second phase, scheduled for 2002, will process Alberta-grown vegetables and will utilize at full capacity daily 800 tonnes each of potatoes and carrots. Eighty percent of all production will be exported. Incorporating the newest technologies from Italy, this project will not only boost economics within the local community and surrounding area but will impact greatly and benefit overall the provincial economy as well, indeed

another positive example of the Alberta advantage at work.

2:40

Again, my very best to all involved. Thank you. The overall effect and the benefit provided will be phenomenal: employment exceeding 560 individuals; local farmers growing needed carrots, potatoes, and other vegetables; secondary industry spin-offs; substantive purchasing requirements procured locally; and Lacombe being now recognized as a community with a large international global presence. I look forward to continuing to work with both Meridian Industries Inc. and the town of Lacombe as this facility becomes a reality. Only by working together can we make a difference.

Alberta Teachers' Association

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, government intrusion into local teacher bargaining by setting in the budget a provincewide salary increase has been met with predictable protest from the Alberta Teachers' Association. Also predictable is that the standard criticisms of the ATA by detractors will now be given another airing. Before they rush to condemnation, those detractors might pause and reflect upon the history of the organization that they criticize.

The year 1918 is considered the birthday of the Alberta Teacher's Alliance, the year the organization received a charter from the Alberta government. The conditions the alliance sought to remedy then and in the ensuing years were draconian even by standards of the day. Teachers were forced to pay exorbitant board bills, sometimes for teacherages that were no more than shacks, or be fired. Kickbacks were being extorted from teachers' salaries by a system of double contracting. School board members threatened teachers as a matter of routine. School positions were filled by auction, with positions going to the lowest bidder. There were two salary scales for the same position: one for men and a lesser one for women.

Any insistence that those days are gone forever needs re-examining. Today the government treats teachers in ways that are just as arbitrary. Where is the logic that insists that teachers must pay for smaller classes for our children with smaller salary increases for their families? Where is the logic in awarding other helping professions double-digit salary increases while insisting that 4 percent and 2 percent over two years will suffice for teachers? Where is the logic in setting figures in the budget for teachers' salaries, then insisting that teachers bargain with local school boards?

Yes, the Alberta Teachers' Association can be tough at the bargaining table. I know; I've been there. But any fair evaluation of that organization needs to be just that. It needs to be fair. Better salaries help make teaching the attractive profession we all insist it must be. The work of the ATA on behalf of children and teachers over an 80-plus year history deserves more than a disparaging knee-jerk reaction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Debbie Muir

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is hard to miss many local functions and meetings because of our commitment to be here while the Legislature is sitting, and I understand that expectation, but tonight I am missing a very special evening personally for a very special Albertan who is also my constituent, the internationally respected Olympic synchro swimming coach and mentor and Alberta sports hall of famer, Debbie Muir.

I wish to share the letter that I have written to Debbie, and she'll be reading it tonight.

Dear Debbie,

I am very regretful that, as your MLA for Calgary-West I am not able to bring personal words of recognition tonight . . . as many of your swimmers, friends and supporters in synchronized swimming gather in Calgary to celebrate your official retirement from the sport and, better yet, celebrate your numerous accomplishments, from local to international levels. As a "synchro parent" for many years with the Calgary Aquabelles Synchronized Swimming Club and then as judge and Provincial Association V.P., I have hundreds of proud and stressful moments I will always cherish.

Debbie, you are to be highly commended and respected for your exceptional leadership qualities. It was very hard, but I picked three most notable qualities:

- First, for your commitment of 25+ years in the sport of synchronized swimming, balancing such challenges as being mother, traveller and coach-administrator.
- Second, for your ability to set and achieve lofty goals – for yourself, your swimmers and those around you – and to stay focussed on the task and to motivate your swimmers to even higher levels of performance.
- And third, for your ability to stay true to your values despite all the international acclaim over the years.

Debbie, I am personally very proud of your leadership qualities – these and many more – and also of your exceptionally positive influence on so many women over the years. As they mature in life, they will appreciate your influence even more! Especially as they become leaders in their [own] communities!

The Provincial Government sincerely thanks you for your totally impressive contribution to the sport of synchronized swimming and wishes you continued success and good health in the future! Congratulations!

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this afternoon we were given notice during the earlier part of the Routine of a notice of motion under Standing Order 40. This is the first time we've had such a request made in this session, and for members who are with us for the first time, this is a unique opportunity when a member can stand up, ask for unanimous consent for a motion, and if all hon. members in the Assembly give support for this request, then the ordinary business of the session is adjourned for the remainder of the day as we deal with this particular motion. So I am now going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to briefly move his request under Standing Order 40.

Teachers' Collective Bargaining

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to stop making decisions that could provoke provincewide job action by Alberta's teachers, interfere in free collective bargaining, and have already raised serious concerns on the part of school boards.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. I would like to move that the motion that I read earlier in the House be approved. There are two main reasons. I'll be very, very brief.

The first reason for urgency is that the government's decision to limit salary increases for teachers was made after the House business for this spring session was finalized. The only way that debate in this Legislature can be held during this spring sitting on this very important issue is if members allow an emergency debate to proceed. In the interest of forestalling any job action by teachers, it is imperative that this debate take place here and teachers' concerns be addressed.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, as MLAs responsible to our own constituents we can't afford to wait until a fall sitting, which would likely not commence until mid-November in any case. By then, province-wide action, job action, could already have commenced. The important job of educating our young people could by then already be disrupted through provincewide job action. I urge therefore all members to allow a debate on this matter to proceed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading**

Bill 207 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 16: Mr. Knight]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to speak in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. Over the last few years this government and the people of Alberta have worked hard to make this the best place in Canada to live and to do business. Government has provided sound fiscal policy and a friendly tax environment, and Albertans have given the hard work and determination. This partnership has resulted in a strong and ever expanding economy which has benefited all Albertans. We have come to call this the Alberta advantage.

The advantage is ever strengthened by the efforts of many new Albertans who have come here to benefit from what our province has to offer. While many have come to enjoy the Alberta advantage, there are people who are seeking even greater ways to appreciate the prosperity that our province has to offer. Our youth want it, and this is why I am addressing the Assembly today.

I believe we must examine ways of expanding the Alberta advantage, especially for our young, and I believe that Bill 207 would be a fine start. Not only will the bill give our youth entering the trades a helping hand, but it will also help to attract more people to our province who have been so instrumental in making Alberta the place it is today.

2:50

Bill 207 would create a tax credit that would be available on money spent on tools above a \$500 threshold to accredited members of any of the 50 apprenticeship trades or crafts in the province. This credit would allow tradespeople to obtain the tools they need to conduct business so they can set up shop and begin their careers.

First, Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would benefit our youth immensely. Our young people are frustrated by the lack of support offered for them to get starts in the trades. Many employers expect a new worker to provide all of their own tools, and for most people this can be a formidable expense and a severe obstacle. If they do not have the financial resources to purchase the equipment they need, they probably won't be able to begin their career in the trade of their course.

You know, I'm speaking from personal experience. My son, Scott, is a recreational vehicle technician in Calgary and has just finished his first year of instruction at SAIT. A local firm in the city,

recognizing his talents, offered him a position in the field, but for Scott a major problem has been acquiring the tools he needed to work on his job. For my son there are no great surprises as to what he receives for his birthday or his Christmas presents. Simply put, he receives tools. Scott is fortunate though, Mr. Speaker. Our family can afford to assist him in getting the expensive tools he needs. This is not the case for all of our youth in our province. Many of Scott's young friends in his field have expressed their frustration at the fact that there is no support for them to obtain the costly tools they need.

Bill 207 would let these young people in on the Alberta advantage. It would greatly assist them and help them to get going in their respective trades. Also, Mr. Speaker, I believe this bill will attract youth to our province from all over North America. As mentioned by other members of the Assembly, there is a shortage of skilled workers in several parts of our province, most notably in our rural areas. In order to bring these valuable entrepreneurs into our community, we must try to identify new ways to help them get started. I believe that offering a tool tax credit to journeymen tradespeople is an important way to assist these folks to get going in towns and villages. Bill 207 would be a valuable asset to all in our province, not just our youth and our new Albertans.

The government has always shown a commitment to providing an environment that lets Albertans thrive. We have demonstrated considerable courage in taking steps to expand the prosperity for the people of this province. Bill 207 would further the Alberta advantage, and I urge all members of the Assembly to support it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join in the debate on Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tool Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001.

I first would like to commend the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for introducing this bill to the Assembly. I'm surprised it wouldn't come from a locale such as Leduc. My statistics tell me that Leduc has the highest percentage of tradespeople per capita anywhere in the province of Alberta. I don't know why so many tradespeople congregate in Leduc; perhaps because of the international airport. Not only can they fly to the northern parts of the province and other parts of the province but internationally as well, because Alberta tradespersons are recognized for their excellence in virtually every area of the world.

This bill is, I believe, a step in the right direction. It's an issue of fairness in my view. There are many people that already have this luxury in their profession, in their occupation, but tradespeople do not.

At some point in the debate perhaps the hon. member can clarify for me in particular – the purpose of this bill is to allow a tradesperson as defined under the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act to deduct the cost above \$500 of their tools used in employment. Now, is that above \$500 annually, or does it include hand tools? Because above \$500: that is open to a lot of discussion. For instance, a B welder with their own rig: would there be a total deduction for that? I doubt it. Hand tools: there are certain trade qualifications. I believe the electrician is a compulsory trade where each electrician as they come to the job is to appear with a pouch filled with hand tools. Instrument mechanics is another trade where the person is expected to come to the job with quite a wide array of tools, including electronic meters to do loop checking and whatnot. These can add up into the thousands and thousands of dollars, and as technology changes, so do the meters. So there's no doubt that

this is a bill that would help apprentices and tradespeople of over 50 different trades in the province.

I think it would be in a lot of ways a good bill because it would help enforce the trade qualifications in this province. It is my view that trade qualifications are not being enforced rigorously in this province. I look at what happened in Swan Hills where shoddy welding occurred. No one in this Assembly has proven to me that the welders who worked on that job were qualified.

We go across to the university: last year before Christmas I was reading in the university newspaper where there was some work that certainly didn't meet the standards. It was structural steel, and there were cracks in it. It had to be redone. Now, were those individuals qualified?

I'm assuming here that one has to present their certificate from the province when they do their taxes if this bill were to become law. I would have to say that I would think that any tool cost, whether it be above or below \$500, should be included here, because if I were an electrician apprentice or an instrument mechanic apprentice and I was to buy a pouch and buy all the appropriate hand tools – both of these trades are in short supply – those costs as an apprentice starting out would be below \$500.

Now, there's also the issue of auto mechanics. I believe this was where the hon. member was coming from when he introduced this bill, because auto mechanics have thousands and thousands of dollars in tools. Some of them estimate the value of their tools in excess of \$50,000. With this chronic shortage – another hon. member said earlier if we are to encourage Albertans to enter an apprenticeship, whether it's a compulsory or an optional trade, then I think this would be a step in the right direction.

I certainly would like to hear – and perhaps in second reading or in committee we will hear from the hon. member who proposed this bill – whether there has been any consultation with the automobile dealers' association, because each one of those dealers would have perhaps 20, 30 auto mechanics or technicians on site, and some of the equipment that they would have to use in their daily work would be specific to certain makes or models of cars or trucks. A tax deduction would, I think, benefit those individuals.

3:00

When you think of the cost of tools as a factor in a young person's decision whether or not they will enter a trade, I think the hon. member's purpose for bringing this forward is a very sound one, Mr. Speaker, realizing that there was a similar bill introduced at the federal level in the House of Commons this past year. However, as I understand it, the bill dealt exclusively with automotive mechanics, and this bill, Bill 207, is much larger in scope, impacting upon 50 trades under the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act.

The 50 trades that are in the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act I believe should be the only ones that would be covered in this, not individuals who are going to the minister or to the Department of Learning for whatever reason and trying to pare off sections or duties or responsibilities of trades in this province. I strongly disapprove of that. It's a way of cheapening our rigorous standards, standards that have been developed over 50 years.

In my opening remarks I talked about the respect and the recognition that tradespeople in this province get internationally, particularly in the oil industry. If we were to start this idea or notion that somehow we could take for instance the welding trade and pare off one part of it, one discipline – let's use electricians, for example. We're going to take the electricians and allow a certain group who are permitted from a minister to pull tech cable and do nothing but pull tech cable on construction sites. By that I mean install a tech cable from one instrument to an electrical panel, maybe back to a

control room. That's all they're going to do. These people – hopefully they're apprentices – are going to get no more on-the-job training than that. They're going to have these hours built up where they can challenge for their journeyman test, but they're not going to have any experience, Mr. Speaker. In that way they're going to, I believe, diminish the reputation of Alberta tradespeople and the reputation of the province of Alberta as well.

That's why I would like to see this designed so that it is only for the 50 compulsory or optional trades that are indicated. You go through this, and you think: well, maybe it should be just for carpenters or ironworkers or insulators or millwrights or sheet metal workers. But I see in the paper where cooks from Alberta are winning awards in Europe and France, as a matter of fact, in Paris, France, for the quality of their culinary talents. [interjection] Yes, it's an optional trade. A topnotch cook, maybe a sous-chef – or what do they say in Paris: a saucier? – has a need for copper pots, and they're very, very expensive. The hon. member's bill would go a long way to starting off one of these young Albertans in the right direction. I believe that if you are employed in a hotel, one of the requirements is that you bring your own saucepans.

Not only should we think of construction workers and the construction trades, but there are certainly other trades as well. We could think of a barber. How could we forget barbers in this Legislative Assembly?

MR. MASON: We haven't forgotten barbers.

MR. MacDONALD: Oh, okay.

For instance, barbers are a trade, certainly. Barbers need scissors. For instance, if I'm a left-handed barber, I may need special scissors, and I have to order those scissors. The hon. member's tax deduction could go a long way towards that.

We look at water well drillers. We look at roofers. We look at power linemen. They're certainly going to be needed in this province. Whether it's a union or a non-union trade, I think this bill, particularly for auto mechanics, would go a long way to resolving a lot of their issues when they complain about the high cost of tools.

In closing, again I would like to say that I believe the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan is on the right track, and I'm surprised that the hon. Member for Leduc didn't come up with legislation such as that in recognition of the demographics of that constituency. I look forward to hearing what other hon. members of the Assembly have to say about the legislation. It is legislation that I certainly would consider supporting when you consider the number of Albertans who could benefit directly from this. They could perhaps at the end of the year have a little bit more of their hard-earned money for themselves.

With those comments I would like to cede the floor to another hon. member of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak in support of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, introduced by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I'd like to bring forth a point that I don't think has been directly touched by my colleagues yet this afternoon.

The trades professions, Mr. Speaker, are unique careers that have a rare amount of independence and responsibility. This bill recognizes this unique quality and provides a means to improve the efficiency of these occupations given these unique qualities. Trades careers are distinct in the amount of individual decision-making that

exist in them on a daily basis relative to other service careers. Tradespeople will determine how they will attack their assigned project and to some extent what types and how much material will be used. Most importantly tradespeople very often determine what tools they are going to use at their tasks.

Now, in most cases tools are first acquired during the process of training in whatever specific trade someone might be pursuing, be it construction, plumbing, mechanics, welding, or even barbering, as our member opposite has mentioned. Even in large shops tools are often owned by the worker in part because this automatically encourages workers to look after tools to the best of their abilities and in part because it's difficult to loan out tools as employees move from one task to the next. In a sense, then, all tradespeople, whether they own their own business or not, are entrepreneurs. Their skills and their tools are what they own and bring to the market. They are given a task and use self-direction and initiative to get the job done.

It makes sense, then, that Alberta should treat tradespeople as entrepreneurs and encourage them to fulfill their potential with self-initiative. The nonrefundable tax rebates on tool ownership does just that. It allows our tradespeople to take part in the Alberta advantage by decreasing taxes. As our Premier has said so often: the only way taxes are going in this province is down.

Mr. Speaker, I have many oil companies in my riding. Some of these include large trucking companies that move heavy equipment from site to site. When these companies need new tires for their trucks, it is a direct write-off as a business expense. Bill 207 would treat tools bought by tradespeople the same way it treats a trucking company that purchases new tires for its fleet. Just as the owner of the new tires, the tradesperson, the owner of new tools for work, would now be eligible for a work-related tax credit. This credit would serve as an incentive to do more and to do it better. I believe that this credit would also serve as an incentive for our tradespeople to buy all of the latest tools. It would promote the retail purchasing of some of the latest tools by our tradesmen and tradeswomen.

Mr. Speaker, I think that all members of this Assembly should support any bill that promotes lower taxes. Some have expressed an objection towards this bill, suggesting that in offering a nonrefundable tax credit for tools, the bureaucratic costs will undermine the economic benefits that this bill would bring forward. These critics suggest that it would be complicated to enforce this bill because tradespeople would have to keep their receipts and tax administrators would have to verify claims and it would be difficult to determine if tools had been converted to personal use. This argument, however, is weakened when one considers that all this bill is doing is treating tradespeople as entrepreneurs.

3:10

Already businesspeople have to collect receipts to make claims for tax returns and already administrators have to determine whether these claims are valid. If critics are suggesting that tradespeople would not be competent enough to collect receipts, as businesspeople are already doing, that is outright insulting to practitioners of trades-related jobs. I happen to think that tradespeople are very intelligent, very organized and systematic people, and that they would do a very good job at collecting their receipts and collecting their tax credits.

Critics may suggest an already existent bureaucratic infrastructure cannot be extended for tax credit claims of tradespeople, but again I disagree.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would encourage tradespeople to be innovative and to be productive in their careers. It would encourage young Albertans to enter the trades and to fulfill their potential. As I said, it would promote the retail purchasing of all the latest tools by

our tradesmen and tradeswomen. For all of these reasons and many more that my colleagues have already put forward, I urge all the members of this Assembly to support Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASYK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 207 is a bill we have to look at through the eyes of people that are involved in the apprenticeship program. When you buy tools, you look after them, and it encourages people to buy a better grade of tool such as Snap-on or Mack with a lifetime warranty. [interjections] Mind you, everybody, I don't sell the tools. I buy them, and I know from experience that they're about three times the amount of money.

It goes even further. You look at people in the fatigue inspection business. They buy a pickup coil, a black light to check drilling stems and drilling collars and different things for cracks and fatigues, but they come out a fairly hefty price. Some of the market in that area, whether it be Leduc or Red Deer or wherever you service this industry the best – if you can get these tools and have a remote type of system, you could probably go right to the pipe rack and inspect the tools right on sight, and that would incur employment.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of automotive mechanics we're not expecting them to buy a big diagnostic machine worth a hundred thousand dollars. However, when they go looking for employment, they bring along with them a toolbox full of wrenches and different gauges and a handful of things. They go to their employer and they open up the box and say: well, I can start work today; here's all the stuff that's required. It encourages the employer to give employment to this individual so he can start his practice of mechanics.

The same with plumbers. In the plumbing industry the way things are nowadays you piecemeal your work out. The journeyman would go with his hardware and his tools to a site, and he would tell the general contractor: well, I can rough all this in for X number of dollars. The general contractor would probably ask: well, what do you have for equipment? And he would say, "Well, I have all the necessary tools," by way of this bill being passed. That would incur more employment, and the chances are that within a year or two he would continue to fill his tool chest full of different things for larger jobs. Therefore, he would have more people to work for him. So probably within a couple of years he would in turn be a general contractor and have two or three people working under him and apprenticing. That's what we have to look at. That's actually the bigger picture that people tend to miss: what it's going to spur off, these opportunities for other people.

The same again with electricians, Mr. Speaker. Whether it be a house or a housing complex or if you go right to the battery, a lot of things are depending on the project. Then you look at it, and the contractor would say: well, I mean, if you want to rough in the box and rough in the wiring – like the hon. member says, you know, you would string tech cable or you would string Lumex on the different sites. You would do that to get a feeling of what the whole industry is about. That's like sweeping the floor at the stockroom, but within a few years of hard work, like most of us are aware, you become the president of the company at some point in time. It depends what you have your sights on.

Mr. Speaker, by having your sights on different goals, what that does is spur a lot of economic development, and that takes in a lot of different ministries in the government. They can hold their heads up high and say: well, this is what's happening; we're not short anymore. Right now the way it's looking, every industry is shorthanded. That's not a very good feeling, and it's not encouraging. So by passing Bill 207, we go from a pessimistic type of view

to an optimistic type of view. We look at things from being not so favourable to being extremely encouraging.

Mr. Speaker, to deduct tools for a tradesperson makes a lot of sense, because what it's going to do is get the shop people who sell the tools, the warranty people who fix and rehabilitate the tools – I can say from my personal experience that I apprenticed for electrical and for welding, but I had a corporation and was able to write off everything: the welder, the rods, the gasoline, my lunch as a matter of fact. I never finished either one of them, welding or electrical, just because neither one of them was my thing. Anyway, I ended up with a welder, I ended up with a whole pile of electrical equipment that I was able to write off 100 percent for my tax year. These things that go to the tradespeople – they have their eye on what they do, whether it be the plumber or the electrician, whether it be the welder, whether it be the fatigue inspector. The list goes on and on.

I think, Mr. Speaker, there were some comments about people who are looking at the area of being a journeyman and the tools are expensive. Well, there's a hoisting or a crane operator. It is a journeyman ticket, but to have somebody buy a million dollar crane to write it off as their pocket tools, well, I think we have to use common sense to think that we're not going to write off a crane or a picker or a dragline because the fellow has a craning ticket as a journeyman.

I think it's the hands-on types of tools that we're focused on, and what we're doing is trying to encourage it and spur economic development. A lot of people that will support this bill will see it through the eyes – and you really do have to step back and look through the eyes of people who are actually buying the tools, who are actually sitting in the tech schools about to graduate in their particular vocation.

Mr. Speaker, once all that is achieved, then I think that things could proceed very economically. I think, like I said earlier, that common sense would prevail. A lot of people that are buying these tools may not find employment immediately, may be not able to afford the fifth or sixth year of experience, but they could probably venture into the lower industries. But if you take agriculture, I'm sure a farmer would probably hire a first-year or a second-year to help him fix his tractor. When he's building a shop, I'm sure they would help him, you know, plumb it or wire it.

Things like that, Mr. Speaker, are what this government is about: to help people, to take care of these individuals. I think it's our duty and our obligation to step forward and step to the plate and say: yeah, we do appreciate you coming forward, and we recognize the shortage in Alberta. That's why bills like Bill 207 do come up, to spur encouragement.

Mr. Speaker, on that note I would like all the members to really have a look at it through the eyes of the people who are sitting in the classroom or listening to their instructor wondering what they're going to do when they finish in a month or two and give them some direction and some insight on what they want to do.

I'd like to close and ask everybody to look at and support Bill 207. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act.

Mr. Speaker, for the last several years this government in Alberta has worked very, very hard to make our province the best place in Canada to live and to do business. Government has taken an active role in providing a tax environment that lets Alberta and businesses

thrive. We have come to call this the Alberta advantage. The impact of this advantage is visible all over our province. Edmonton, Calgary, and many other communities have seen some large, substantial growth in many sectors of their economies. Every day people from all across Canada and indeed all over the world come to Alberta to find opportunity and employment. However, there are parts of Alberta that deserve further attention in order to expand the Alberta advantage.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

In my own constituency of Dunvegan and in many communities in the northern half of our province there is a great need for skilled workers in all the trades. We need tradesmen to build our homes, wire our businesses, and work on our oil and gas rigs. As proposed by Bill 207, Mr. Speaker, a tax credit would be available for moneys spent on tools above a \$500 threshold to accredited members of any of the 50 apprenticeship trades or crafts in the province. This credit will allow tradespeople to obtain the tools they need to conduct business as they set up shop and begin their careers.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 207 would have a positive influence on Alberta and especially on northern Alberta. First of all, it would help our towns and villages keep our younger people who are interested in pursuing a career in the trades. Second, it would help us bring in new tradespeople who wish to open businesses in our smaller communities. For many years our small towns have seen an exodus of youth as they leave to go to the larger cities. Simply put, a sad fact is that our young people have to live in larger centres in order to pursue employment. Many of them would prefer to stay in their own hometowns if only there were similar employment opportunities. We must consider ways to address this situation. These young Albertans are frustrated at times that they must move to find employment and by the lack of support offered to them to stay in their communities. Bill 207 is one step that would help to address this problem.

Simply obtaining the tools necessary for many trades is an expensive endeavour and presents a prohibitive cost to many young people, Mr. Speaker. For example, an auto friend of mine has estimated that just to get the most elemental tools to work in his trade, he would have to spend at the very least a few thousand dollars, and it seems that's just for a basic set of tools such as wrenches, screwdrivers, and ratchets. That figure is also assuming that he would be working with a mechanic who already had some of the more expensive and elaborate equipment. Another friend of mine who is a locksmith by trade has told me that the base complement of tools for his position can also be in the thousands of dollars.

I believe the tool tax credit as proposed by Bill 207, Mr. Speaker, would have a direct influence on those young people who wish to enter the trades and also want to stay in their home communities. It will help to significantly lower the financial barriers for our youths interested in a trades career. Also, as I mentioned, there is a shortage of skilled tradespeople, especially in the north. In order to bring these valuable individuals into our communities, we must try to identify new ways to help them get started. I believe that offering a tool tax credit to journeymen tradespeople is an important way to assist these folks to get going in our towns and villages.

As I already mentioned, the start-up costs for those entering the trades are extremely expensive, Mr. Speaker, but the costs do not stop there. In order to stay competitive, tradespeople are often required to purchase additional and updated new tools on a regular basis. They must keep on the cutting edge of advances and innovations in their trades and have access to the latest equipment. Bill 207 would help our tradespeople address this concern. This bill would

be a significant shot in the arm to our small communities trying to keep youth interested in the trades in our towns and to bring other tradespeople in. While I realize that this bill alone will not solve all the problems facing our communities, it would be an excellent way to help those who are looking to enter the trades in those towns.

Mr. Speaker, we have worked hard as a government and as a province to develop the Alberta advantage. This bill will only further support the hard work we have all done and will truly be an aid to our rural communities. I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise in support of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. There are two points I wish to make about this bill this afternoon. First, I wish to demonstrate that the bill is consistent with the vision of fiscal conservatism that characterizes this government. The bill calls for nonrefundable tax credits. This government has already established that tax reduction is a positive goal for . . .

Speaker's Ruling Private Members' Public Bills

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt a new member, but it's necessary to sort of just review for a moment that these bills are private members' public bills. If they are either supported because it's government or opposed because it's government, that misses the point. They're private members' public bills, so if you could just keep that in mind.

Debate Continued

MR. OUELLETTE: This government has already established that tax reduction is a positive goal to work toward. Bill 207 does not detract from this broad mandate at all. Rather, it serves to fill out this vision to an even greater extent.

Secondly, Bill 207 will help Alberta attract and keep tradespeople. Alberta has had enormous growth in trade-heavy employment sectors over the past few years: construction, forestry and logging operations, and oil and gas, to name but a few. This province needs workers in these sectors, and it needs them now. This bill, in offering tax credits to people in these targeted sectors, will provide a tailored solution to attracting the skills we need in this province.

This Assembly needs no lecture about the benefits of general lower tax rates. We know that lower taxes put money back in the hands of those that have worked hard to earn it. We know that we can trust Albertans with their own money, and they don't need government to tell them how to spend it. We know that lower taxes provide a positive incentive for strong investment and growth. That is why over the past few years this government has brought in policies such as the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, which will give Albertans the most competitive income tax regime in the country. Bill 207 is in tune with this vision and philosophy of putting money back in Albertans' pockets. It complements the changes that have been made to put Alberta on firmer fiscal footing.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, Alberta needs tradespeople in volumes like it has never needed them before. This bill would help to satisfy this overwhelming demand by offering an economic incentive for people to enter the Alberta trades labour market.

Alberta's economy has grown by leaps and bounds over the past

five years, at the furious pace of over 4 percent a year. A large part of that growth has been in the trades areas: constructing housing, installing pipelines, and maintaining machinery. In the election campaign I heard from a number of small businesspeople looking for ways to get and keep skilled employees. With their businesses growing rapidly, they need people from apprenticeship programs to enter into the trades right away. The people I met in the campaign are not isolated examples. The need for tradespeople in this province is very real. Statistics from last summer show that demand for employees in trades, transport, and equipment operating and related occupations was red hot. In June the unemployment rate in this category was at a mesmerizing low of 3.8 percent, far below the average unemployment rate for all occupations, which stood at 5.7 percent. For many . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I really do apologize for interrupting the hon. member yet again, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has expired, and you'll be able to pick up next day if you so desire.

I wonder, before we begin the next part, whether we might briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:30

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like at this time and I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three guests in the members' gallery this afternoon: Carleen Brenneis, program director of the regional palliative care program, Capital health authority; Dennie Hycha, palliative care program co-ordinator for the David Thompson health region and also president of the Palliative Care Association of Alberta; and Mr. Brian Hlus, director, government affairs, for the Capital health authority. Would these honourable guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Palliative Care

506. Ms Kryczka moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify palliative care as a core service in each regional health authority to ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services for end-of-life care with access to palliative community services (palliative home and hospice care), acute care, consultation services for physicians, staff, and patients, and tertiary care.

[Debate adjourned May 15: Ms Kryczka speaking]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to continue with the debate on Motion 506. As I have only eight minutes, I will conclude by highlighting the issues, recommendations, and opportunities of Motion 506. The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross and others will be providing critical background on provincial palliative care programs and the wonderful vision being developed.

Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight several issues. First, the cost of

palliative care to the patient is somewhat inconsistent across provincial regional health authorities. For example, daily accommodation costs in palliative care settings vary from region to region. The Capital health region charges \$13 per day for a palliative bed in a long-term care setting, while in another region, the CRHA for example, the daily accommodation fee for a hospice bed is \$25 and \$28.60 for a palliative bed in long-term care.

For palliative patients at home receiving support under the palliative care drug program, they must cover the cost of their own prescriptions to a maximum of \$25 per prescription. This can become very expensive. If a person is taking 13 different prescriptions, for example, the individual could be responsible for up to \$325 per month. For some this is much too expensive. For palliative care patients in acute care facilities all costs are fully covered, so the costs of staying at home, therefore, can be a disincentive for many terminally ill patients, who would rather stay in an acute care facility as everything is paid for. This discrepancy in costs creates excessive pressure on acute care facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the second issue arises with funding going to the regional health authorities in one envelope. This means that the regional health authorities decide on their funding priorities. Some programs in smaller regions, however, may not get the amount of funding that a similar program receives in larger regions due to the size and population and the priorities of the regional health authorities. If regions want to increase funding to provide a fuller range of palliative care services, they will have to shift resources from other programs.

Palliative care was identified as a key priority in many of the regional health authorities' business plans for 2000-2001. If it is a key priority, are these regional authorities receiving adequate funding to provide quality palliative care in their region? Is this government emphasizing enough that end-of-life issues are truly important and that all regional health authorities should be pursuing the vision of a provincewide network for quality palliative care? My research indicates that many formal caregivers providing palliative care services in the smaller regions in particular have insufficient training and education about end-of-life care. The smaller regions find it difficult to give palliative care the focus needed as there is a lack of financial resources and trained specialists.

The third issue, Mr. Speaker, is that larger regional health authorities are better positioned to offer a full range of services, while the smaller ones have little chance of offering an equal level of service. The larger RHAs need provincial leadership, however, in their efforts to develop an effective regional support network with the smaller RHAs, ensuring that the proper level of palliative care services can be given throughout Alberta.

The fourth issue with palliative care is that the cost to the informal or family caregiver is immense both monetarily and spiritually. For the spouse or adult child providing care to a dying loved one, there is no legislated palliative leave or guarantee of job security or even of position or even of continuation of benefits during a work leave. This issue is one of national concern, which I have evidenced in my work with the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. The family caregiver also needs mental and spiritual support after losing a loved one, as there are understandable psychological implications that must be dealt with sooner rather than later.

Mr. Speaker, I have four recommendations on how we can improve end-of-life care in Alberta. The first is that there should be a philosophical debate on palliative care and very soon. I strongly believe that palliative care must be openly included in the debate on public health care. Everyone should become aware of the very successful network or support system that is developing in Alberta. We must discuss this issue because at some point every one of us

will require some degree of palliative care. Why do only 30 percent of Albertans know about palliative care? We must focus on the whole continuum of care from childbirth right through to end of life.

Secondly, I recommend that the government provide leadership in developing and implementing a provincewide system of standards of RHA accountability for palliative care with flexibility within individual regional health authorities. Currently there is collaboration between a number of regional health authorities to develop a network of palliative care across Alberta. Provincial government MLAs should be aware of the benefits and the roadblocks in the development of this provincial system in their constituencies in particular and should also support a government leadership role in this regard.

Third, in the vital area of education and research support this government needs to endorse the regional model developed by the Capital health authority and now the CRHA, and it should also collaborate with the federal government. For example, the federal government recently announced that a Calgary program has received \$250,000 in funding for Pallium, a continuing professional development initiative in palliative care. Pallium aims to improve the care of terminally ill patients in the prairie provinces and the Northwest Territories through a research partnership led by the University of Calgary with the universities of Manitoba and Alberta and regional health authorities centred in Yellowknife and Inuvik. Mr. Speaker, why not establish a provincial centre of distance education or a 24-hour assistance line?

My fourth recommendation is that as a government we must take action now. We have a window of only 10 years to prepare before the baby boomers start retiring in large numbers and demanding quality services, including palliative care. Also, new invasive cancer cases in the CRHA, for example, are expected to increase 41 percent by 2010.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with the hon. members two of the most important opportunities this motion would give the government of Alberta. By providing Albertans with a system of quality palliative care, whether in the home, community-based hospice, long-term care, or tertiary setting, more beds would be available in acute care facilities for other seriously ill patients. The best possible quality of life should be provided to the end of one's life in a comfortable, loving, and secure environment. However, a network of support must be there for terminally ill patients and their caregivers, whether professional, family, friends, or community volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, palliative care is a very important health service that is presently undervalued in our province. We will all benefit from future discussions on increased awareness and leadership action in support of a strong, provincewide palliative care network system. I strongly encourage all members to support this motion today.

I'd also like to extend a sincere thank you for co-operation to Pam Brown, who is program director of the regional palliative care program of the Calgary regional health authority; to Dr. Jose Pereira, medical director, tertiary palliative care unit, Foothills hospital, CRHA; and to Sharon Tell, senior operating officer, community care and public health, Capital health authority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to speak briefly to this motion around a corollary issue or perhaps an overriding issue with palliative care. That's the issue of dementia and Alzheimer's. Now, I know that as a result of the long-term care report and the impacts of aging report, the government has

been working on some different streams, following through on developing some of the recommendations that came out of those two reports. My concern and specific to what's being proposed here with a governmentwide strategy for palliative care and recognizing it as a core service is that I think exactly the same thing should be happening with dementia and Alzheimer's. For individuals over 85 years of age, 50 percent of them will have some form of dementia, which of course includes Alzheimer's. We don't seem to be recognizing that and integrating it into what we're doing.

3:40

I'm seeing the Alzheimer's strategy being developed as a health care strategy rather than a cross-departmental strategy, and when I look at what's being proposed here by the Member for Calgary-West under Motion 506, again, it's being developed as a health care strategy under the regional health authorities. My concern is that we need to be building more of a matrix structure when we're dealing with these issues.

You know, dementia affects more things than just the kind of care they're receiving through the health system. It affects things like housing. It affects things like transportation. It affects things like how our medical professionals are trained and what sort of spaces are available through the Department of Learning to move health care workers in. If we're saying that we need X number of health care workers specializing in dementia, do we have the spaces open in the universities to be able to receive these people?

When I actually start looking at this issue in the context of what's being proposed by the Member for Calgary-West, I'm actually, without trying too hard, looking at three different ministries here. We've got a Seniors ministry, a Health ministry, and a Learning ministry. Again, this is part of my concern here, because the member is proposing that it be cross-departmental, but it's still being housed in the regional health authorities. Maybe I'll just read the motion into the middle of my text here.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to identify palliative care as a core service in each regional health authority to ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services for end-of-life care with access to palliative community services . . . for physicians, staff, and patients, and tertiary care.

When we're looking at palliative care, especially obviously for seniors, we know right now that 50 percent or better of the people that we're dealing with will have some form of dementia. To my eye what's being proposed here by this member in Motion 506 has to be taken into context in a much wider cross-governmental stream of how we are planning to deal with and how we're allocating resources overall for dementia and Alzheimer's.

Some of the other issues around that are respite care and the standards of care, and I note that this is the same member who brought forward private member's Bill 203, which surprisingly to me was not supported by the majority of members in here. That bill was around establishing a committee that would develop standards of care. I was shocked that that wasn't supported by the House, because it's something that we so obviously need here. So once again she's looking at standards of care being incorporated into what she's proposing with this motion.

So I'm more than willing to support this motion, but given what I've seen go on already with the support for Bill 203, with the insistence that things like palliative care and dementia be dealt with solely as a stream falling under health care, I think we're going in the wrong direction here. I understand where the Member for Calgary-West is trying to go with this motion, but I think we have to take a step back and be much clearer in how we're putting in place these different streams of action resulting from the long-term care

report and the impacts on aging report, because we are going to create an awful lot of cracks in the system through which people can fall. There needs to be more of a matrix structure when we're dealing with a number of these different issues.

Finally, when I look at housing, I'm getting increasingly frustrated. Someone I met with recently brought up to me that the government spends twice as much on a child in care as we do on a senior in care. That's pretty chilling to me. I'm definitely not saying that less resources should be dedicated to children in care, but certainly we can and we need to be looking at committing more resources to seniors that are in care. I think that's a question of how much we value our seniors. There's a lot of talk, a lot of rhetoric, a lot of pretty pictures and pretty brochures about how much we value our seniors, but when I actually look at the programming, especially when I look at the programming that's being targeted in the future, I'm not seeing that value translated and manifested in what's being proposed.

There are a number of other programs that are possible here around early apprehension of Alzheimer's that I'm not seeing show up at all. Those programs should be in place long before anyone is needing the services of palliative care.

Part of what this person was bringing up with me – and I think it also relates to what's under Motion 506 – is that we must be dealing with the fee codes and how doctors are paid for the care that they're giving. I talked earlier about recruiting medical professionals and medical workers into the area of dementia and into the area of palliative care. It's darn hard for us to do that when we don't have a fee code that accepts and understands that more time needs to be spent with these patients. So that's another area to be looking for.

I just wanted to raise those points. I know that the member has lined up a number of her colleagues to speak in favour of her motion, so thank you for the opportunity to raise those points. I hope she will consider and integrate the issues that I've raised around Alzheimer's and dementia.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 506, proposed by my colleague from Calgary-West, is really quite powerful. I think it offers a catalyst for change in the way in which palliative care in our province serves the community but more importantly how that service is delivered.

I was honoured to be asked by my colleague from Calgary-West to speak to her motion. She's become known over her years as an MLA with incredible wisdom in regards to seniors' issues, which is one of the reasons why I believe we have this important motion before us today. My colleague's role as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council has shown all of us that a true reverence and compassion is essential when seniors are involved.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 highlights a topic that many either do not understand or are afraid to discuss, and that is because it relates to death and dying. Whether it is terminally ill children, AIDS patients, or the elderly, my colleague is attempting to bring understanding and change for those coping with their own fears or the deaths of their families, friends, and loved ones.

The essence of this motion is that palliative care become a core service for all of the RHAs in our province. As I was sitting in my backyard yesterday writing this speech, my husband and son asked what I was writing about, Mr. Speaker, and I said palliative care. Well, you can imagine my surprise when they both asked me: what is that? My explanation was simple. It is highly specialized care of a person whose illness no longer responds to treatment that is

designed to cure them. Palliative care is provided to people who are extremely ill and are making their transition from life to death. It is care that provides people at this stage in life with as much comfort and dignity as possible, and this is accomplished through a network of support which includes physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort.

3:50

Most often, Mr. Speaker, palliative care is administered through the comfort and warmth of the individual's own home with the assistance and support of family, friends, and community care agencies. The programs are flexible and can be altered to meet the unique care needs of each individual. In fact, as their symptoms change, a person can move from one palliative care setting to another. These compassionate services can be provided in the home, in a hospice setting, in a long-term care facility, or in the hospital as acute or tertiary care. As the patient moves toward more institutionalized settings, a greater percentage of the costs are covered by existing health care programs.

Mr. Speaker, I understand from my colleague from Calgary-West that 70 percent of seniors live in homes that they own, and the majority of seniors, even those over 85 years old, are expected to remain there. The ability to administer palliative care at home will enable more of our elderly to remain comfortable at this stage in their life. They will continue to receive the best and most complete care available surrounded by love and given respect, dignity, and affection.

Mr. Speaker, this important service significantly decreases the cost to our health care system. However, the cost to the individual and their family increases dramatically as more and more services are provided in the home. In fact, an ongoing problem with home-based palliative care is the significant time and monetary cost borne by the primary caregiver, who is often a family member. However, most family members do not complain because they know that by having their loved ones at home during life's last stages, they've said goodbye with love and are at peace.

The motion before us today by my colleague urges the government to identify this vital service as a core service in each regional health authority so that no Albertan is denied the best possible end-of-life care available. As stated, this motion will ensure the availability of a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services. This includes access to community services such as palliative, home, and hospice care, as well as respite care.

Home health services refer to those health services which must be available or reasonably accessible to every person who needs them. "Available" means the service is provided within each region, and "accessible" means that if the service is not provided within a region, it will be available from another region or through a program that serves the entire province. Currently palliative care is defined as a core service by Alberta Health and Wellness. So that means, Mr. Speaker, that it's a core service that's defined by Alberta Health and Wellness. I think this is where it gets a bit confusing. At least when I was writing this speech and I was going through it, I thought that.

It's a core service through Alberta Health and Wellness, yet it's delivered through the RHAs to terminally ill patients and their families. Now, the RHAs are responsible for the decision-making within their region, but they still work within an overall provincial framework. The identification of core services is intended to ensure that all regions offer a similar mix of services to Albertans. Funding is provided to the RHAs in one envelope, and they are responsible for allocating the dollars to fund the various services provided in each region.

In general, core services encompass the complete range of services needed to protect and promote health, prevent illness and

injury, and provide diagnosis, treatment, care, and support. I think that this last point is particularly relevant: providing highly specialized care and support to the terminally ill is what palliative care does. Providing this service is a recognition that death is a part of life's natural cycle and that care and support to individuals and their loved ones is a fundamental health care service that our system should be providing at this important stage of life.

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 seeks to increase the importance of palliative care to a level that is equal to that of other services provided by the regional health authority. Motion 506 encourages the government to standardize policies relating to palliative care within the local autonomy of each regional health authority. I think that's a very important point. As well, my colleague had made that one of her four recommendations which were put before the Assembly earlier. That will ensure that all Albertans are receiving adequate care options.

Mr. Speaker, the Royal Victoria hospital and the St. Boniface hospital in Winnipeg opened the first palliative care units in Canada 27 years ago. They provided a new perspective on how people making their transition in life should be cared for. All of the provinces used the insight gained from these first palliative care units to develop their own and have continued to expand their method of delivery and resources.

In Alberta we have outstanding caregivers working in this critical area of medicine, and some were introduced to our Assembly today. You do magnificent work and thank you very much. To talk with them about the care of the dying is more than just informative. It is inspirational. These caregivers see the challenges of delivering the health care service that they believe to be essential within each RHA's jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, Sheila Weatherill, the president and CEO of Capital health, believes that the public is unaware of the first-class program that is available in the Capital region, and this is causing the program to perhaps to be under valued. In addition, Mrs. Weatherill has indicated that she believes we can develop provincial standards and still maintain local autonomy within the regional health authorities.

According to the Canadian Palliative Care Association, the Capital health model for palliative care is world-renowned for its excellence. Here in the capital a regional program was developed to integrate the services provided to those needing palliative care and allows easy access to different levels of care based on the severity of an individual's condition. These services are provided by a team of specially trained physicians and nurses who provide consulting services and support the region's primary care physicians and nurses in looking after the terminal ill.

Services are delivered both in the home and in continuing care settings. I understand that there is also an acute palliative care unit at the Grey Nuns community health centre which admits and cares for the terminally ill with severe physical and/or psychosocial distress. This continuum of care allows individual treatment by utilizing the services and care locations that are best for their personal circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, people in rural and urban communities require access to specialized palliative care services. Motion 506 will ensure that these services are available for all Albertans, regardless of where they live. We must encourage the creation of a provincial network for the delivery of palliative care services. Large regional health authorities have greater financial resources and as such are able to offer a full range of services that would not be practical in regions which do not have large populations. The building of a provincewide network for delivering palliative care services in Alberta I think should be encouraged for the benefit of everyone. Under such a network, patients from one region could easily access services available in another region.

To have even one family disadvantaged because they could not access appropriate palliative care would be a great tragedy. It is precisely during these difficult times that we need to ensure that proper care and treatment is available to everyone, regardless of where you live. We cannot allow people in any region to be denied full and comprehensive access to these essential and vitally important services. Compelling each RHA to recognize the importance of palliative care services will enable everyone to receive the critical care they need when they need it.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to identifying palliative care as a core service, education and training are required for primary caregivers, which include family physicians, local community nurses, and other community care providers. They are the first line of care and are compassionate, understanding, and humane when caring for those who are dying. In order to assist ill people and their families in making informed decisions, we need to provide the primary care providers with information about the programs and services that are available. Everyone will then be better able to meet the challenges that may arise.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, Motion 506 also attempts to raise public awareness of palliative care services already available in Alberta. It makes our end of life as important as the beginning of life. People need to become aware of the services that are available to them so they can make educated decisions about the care that they receive or their family members will receive. The more informed Albertans are, the more qualified they become to make difficult decisions relative to life's transition.

Mr. Speaker, we should also recognize that by bringing forward Motion 506, my colleague from Calgary-West is addressing the needs of an aging population and the services they are going to require, and she does this by making it a standardized service in each RHA. I understand from my colleague that by 2016 the percentage of seniors in Alberta will have increased from around 10 percent to nearly 15 percent of the provincial population. This means that the actual number of seniors will grow by 60 to 70 percent, which I believe requires the development of long-term strategies that allow the elderly to live the end of their lives in comfort, with dignity and with respect.

The service should be standardized because people requiring palliative care also live in all corners of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I believe that palliative care relates to all age groups, but understandably seniors are the largest population that the service is provided to. While approximately 60 percent of seniors live in Edmonton and Calgary, many smaller municipalities have higher proportions. Camrose is composed of approximately 20 percent seniors, and 16 percent of Drumheller residents are seniors. In addition, many villages and towns, including Mundare, Viking, and Two Hills, have senior populations in excess of 30 percent. You can see why, due to our aging population, we cannot afford to ignore the issue of palliative care.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-West for sponsoring this motion. You can see from the detail in the motion that was debated in the Assembly today that it has been well thought out and carefully researched by my colleague from Calgary-West. I urge all of my colleagues in the Assembly to support Motion 506 and take another step towards the development of a viable palliative care system here in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in support of this motion and commend the Member for Calgary-West for bringing it forward. It think it is very, very concise and deals precisely with the elements that need to be addressed. That is that palliative care should be a core service offered in every health region in the province, and it recognizes that this is simply a continuum of care, that the object of medical services is not always to save life. There comes a point when that is no longer possible, and then it is as important to provide compassionate care in appropriate settings for people who are beyond the reach of treatment.

I think, Mr. Speaker, this is a very progressive motion, and I'm pleased to support it. I don't intend to speak for more than a few seconds on it, but certainly I'm pleased to support it and am pleased to find that there are indeed some progressives amongst all those conservatives opposite.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and address the Assembly with regards to Motion 506. I would like to extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Calgary-West for bringing this important health care matter before us. Not only is it health care, but it deals with seniors as well. I think, having known the hon. Member for Calgary-West, that she certainly is taking note of what others in the Assembly are saying, and I'm sure she's very receptive to some of the remarks coming from the opposition as well.

I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, who has an extensive past history in nursing and dealing with seniors, talked about the need for this to happen not only today but in the future because as time goes on, the number of seniors in this province will increase and increase drastically. It is time today to start thinking ahead to what will happen when the baby boomers do reach that age when they will need some help, love, and understanding.

This motion aims to address the state of palliative care in the province of Alberta. What it essentially does is seek to achieve to urge the government to implement a standardized system of palliative care throughout Alberta.

Currently, palliative care is listed as a core health service here in our province, but unfortunately its status as a core service is just not enough to ensure that each Albertan has access to the same high standard of palliative care across this province. This motion would ask that the government recognize palliative care as an essential service to all, and we heard the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross talk about the lack of understanding. If you really want to understand the benefits of palliative care, talk to family members that have in fact utilized palliative care and some of the health professionals trained to administer and work with these people. They will attest to all of the good things that can happen when this is implemented in communities.

Albertans, regardless of where they live, want to see some of these services take place. I think that it is important to look firstly to the regional health authorities. They have now been going for some time and have worked over the last several years to implement new and different programs that utilize the professionals that are available to them and take into consideration the needs in their own area. So possibly the difference in what is needed in palliative care could be incorporated as well into their overall business plans.

The regional health authorities, as was stated just a few minutes ago, certainly are to be commended, and certainly one that I'm familiar with, as many of you in this room are, is the Capital regional health authority. Over a period of time they've been

recognized across Canada, if not throughout North America, for some of the very innovative programs which they have put together and are now implementing. One such program is palliative care, so I think that we don't need to reinvent the wheel. I don't think that we need to spend a great deal of time trying to figure what should be done. There are many, many examples, not only in Alberta but in other provinces as well, of things that would work and things that the community would embrace as well as the professionals delivering them.

Throughout our system of the regional health authorities we do see different levels of care that take place in many areas and pricing differences, as well, from region to region. We heard here a few minutes ago about some of the smaller communities today having 30 percent of their population as seniors. This over time is going to increase, and the needs are going to increase. So I think that it's prudent for us today to start looking at this in the long term.

One thing I do have to commend the Member for Calgary-West on. Time and time again, through her experience as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council, she brings to this Assembly in the form of bills or motions some of her concerns and concerns of her constituents to do with seniors.

Now, one thing I'm very pleased with is that after the election the Premier did make some changes and has put in place a minister responsible for seniors. I think this is very, very important. Possibly as we move ahead, we can see things like palliative care being taken into consideration, not only on the health side of the issue but also on the seniors' side of the issue, so that possibly there can be palliative care delivered in any number of settings, whether that setting be a person's home, whether that setting be a seniors' complex, or whether that setting be a long-term care or an acute care hospital. Palliative care must be delivered in a caring and sensitive manner, and today there are many, many people, health professionals, that are trained exclusively to deal with seniors and dying as well as seniors' families and dying.

4:10

We spend a great deal of time, effort, and dollars looking at life from conception till end. Many, many dollars are spent even before a child is born, at the moment of conception, and I think it's very, very important to help people deal with their death, if not so much for the individuals themselves, because many are very, very sick, but their families, their loved ones, their spouses need some help.

One thing that I have found, coming from a smaller rural community, is that many, many organizations and associations, wonderful community groups and service groups like the Kinsmen Club, the Lions, the IODE, the Rotary, will oftentimes take some part of the health care facility, some piece of equipment or some room in the hospital, and raise dollars to furnish it and work very hard to bring the community together to fully understand and appreciate the need to do this.

One such area that I think many service groups would be willing to work towards and with in rural Alberta is palliative care, so I think we could look to our communities. I know our Rotary Club is to be very much commended in Lacombe. They spend considerable time on a weekly basis driving many, many seniors to appointments to make sure that they see their optometrist, that they see their dentist, that they see their doctor. Over a period of time they have furnished many, many rooms not only at the Lacombe community hospital but at the seniors' or nursing homes as well, and I know this is one more project that they might consider taking on to ensure that the entire community knows the importance of palliative care.

I think what the member is proposing here is to develop a seamless network for the delivery of palliative care across the

province. As a result of this network, there would be a co-ordinated continuum of care and support services available to address the needs of the persons who are at the end of their lives and their families. The motion would give palliative care the recognition it deserves. This is an essential health care service in this province, and it would ensure that the implementation of a comprehensive network would be examined by this government.

The goal of provincewide palliative care will be achieved based on the world-renowned model developed and implemented, as I said, right here in the Capital health authority, and I know Mrs. Weatherill and her people work together very closely. The board and members of her team would be more than willing to sit down with anyone and discuss what can happen with palliative care. I think Edmontonians can be very pleased that they have such an exceptional health authority and are receiving some of the best care in all of Canada. I think each and every one of us in this room can ask for some assistance from them in this regard.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I regret that I have to interrupt the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request unanimous consent of the House to deal with Motion 505 at this time.

[Unanimous consent denied]

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

507. Mr. Cao moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that assured income for the severely handicapped recipients transferring to a nonexempt income such as the Canadian pension plan disability program retain medical benefits until similar income limits are reached that disqualify medical benefits to partially exempt income earners under the assured income for the severely handicapped program.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to rise and introduce Motion 507 to the Assembly today. This motion concerns a pressing matter, because the assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH, recipients who receive nonexempt funding from other sources exceeding \$855 are automatically removed from the AISH assistance and therefore lose the medical benefits that AISH provides to them. This is especially disheartening because people on AISH are the Albertans who are most in need of our assistance, and when we take away their medical benefits because they have received more than \$855 from other sources, we take away one of the most integral forms of help that we can provide to them.

Before discussing the details of the motion, I'd like to take a moment to clearly outline the difference between exempt, partially exempt, and nonexempt funding under the AISH framework. Exempt funding is any funding coming from outside of AISH that a recipient can earn without having deductions taken from his AISH

benefits. Some examples of exempt funding include GST rebates, child allowances, and CPP death benefits, as well as others.

Partially exempt funding is the money that an AISH recipient can earn and that is not deducted dollar for dollar from his or her AISH payments. There are many forms of partially exempt funding. For example, dividend income is partially exempt as is net employment income after all statutory government deductions are taken. Partially exempt earnings are usually derived from employment. The first \$200 of earned wages cause no reduction in AISH income benefits, and then 75 cents for every dollar earned thereafter is deducted.

Talking about the nonexempt income, these incomes are those which are deducted dollar for dollar from the AISH payments. I will discuss the many forms of nonexempt income later in the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I have introduced this motion out of a concern raised by one of my constituents. This person approached me and told me that his AISH medical benefits were taken away from him when he was granted Canada pension plan disability funding that exceeded \$855 per month. Without the medical coverage that accompanied his AISH funding, he had to use his CPP funding, which amounted to \$860, merely \$5 more than the AISH limit, to fund his living expenses and his medical expenses. Clearly, he would have been better off without the extra \$5 but with the medical coverage. I do not see why we could not have given this person medical benefits to go along with his CPP disability funding. He's a disadvantaged person who is in need of government assistance to maintain a quality standard of living and is a person with medical needs that far exceed those of average Albertans. The system did not work for him. We can make this work for him if we pledge today to ensure that the AISH recipients who receive above \$855 in nonexempt funding are allowed to retain their medical coverage.

4:20

My constituent is not the only person to find himself in this situation. The list of nonexempt income sources is wide and includes Canada pension plan disability payments, workers' compensation, employment insurance, pension and retirement income, payments from Veterans Affairs, mineral royalties, land claim settlements, support payments from a sponsor for sponsored immigrants, spousal support from a former spouse, or inheritance income. While this is not an exhaustive list, it is clear that many of these sorts of payments do not come with medical benefits, and this means that many more Albertans are likely facing similar problems as those of my constituent. If any of these nonexempt income sources provide AISH recipients with more than \$855, they lose their AISH money. I can understand that. However, they would lose their AISH medical benefit too. That I cannot understand.

Alberta has always made sure that we take care of our vulnerable citizens. Through our various legislation and regulations we ensure that those who face extraordinary health challenges are given every opportunity to live quality lives. We ensure the safe care of our elderly, stringent health regulations in our hospitals, and efficient provision of health services throughout the health care system. The needs of Albertans are not ignored by this government. Rather, we have made giant strides in guaranteeing that our health and social care systems are the best in Canada.

AISH is another of these generous programs. AISH ensures that support is there for those who need it most. The Alberta government is committed to supporting and improving the lives of citizens with disabilities through AISH and other targeted programs. AISH is one of the best and most generous programs of its kind in Canada and supports more than 25,000 Albertans who are in need of assistance. This number is expected to grow to over 30,000 over the next three years.

People who receive AISH are those with severe disabilities that inhibit their ability to earn a living. These disabilities that they have are permanent, and there's nothing that can change their physical condition. People receiving AISH already find themselves at the lower end of the economic spectrum before being granted government assistance. AISH is therefore an essential part of their ability to take care of themselves and in many cases their families.

These are Albertans who with little assistance are able to live productive lives. They have by nature or by accident been dealt a different hand than the rest of us. The assistance that AISH provides, both monetary and medical, helps them with many things that we take for granted. By providing these Albertans with assistance, we afford them the firm footing required to live with dignity and respect. AISH medical coverage provides recipients with coverage for necessary services like ambulance care, drug coverage, psychological counseling and treatment, and home nursing. However, unexpected loopholes always pop up. For example, consider one concerning my constituent.

Now, I would not ordinarily have known that such a loophole existed, but when I am faced with a constituent who has fallen through the cracks, I feel it is my duty to work on his behalf to make sure that neither he nor anyone else in a similar position falls through that loophole again. In the larger picture this is the duty of everyone in this Assembly. The best way to make sure that the health of my constituent and the health of others is adequately safeguarded is to stitch up the loophole with the thread of sound legislation. I urge the government to create this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, before I continue today, I would like to note that I do see an upper limit. For example, a single person who receives partially exempt funding outside of AISH can receive up to \$1,340 monthly before they are ineligible for AISH monetary funding. For every dependent child an AISH recipient can add \$400 to this upper limit. For example, an AISH recipient with two children can earn \$2,140 per month before he or she loses all AISH monetary funding. Further, a single AISH recipient can earn just over \$20,900 annually in partially exempt funding before his or her medical benefits are discontinued. For every child after the first child that is dependent upon an AISH recipient, \$2,000 is added to his annual limit.

I propose that while keeping an amount of income needed to become ineligible for an AISH payment of \$855 per month, we allow all persons eligible for AISH benefits, even those who receive funding from nonexempt sources, to continue receiving the medical coverage until they reach the upper threshold as prescribed by rules governing the partially exempt income. By doing this, we will ensure that the person eligible for AISH will not only be able to take care of their day-to-day expenses but will also continue to receive medical coverage.

What is at stake here is fairness. At \$855 per month AISH provides severely handicapped persons with \$10,200 per annum. If a severely handicapped person receiving money from nonexempt sources earns any more than that amount, he or she becomes ineligible for AISH income and medical benefits as well. This hardly seems fair when someone with similar problems but with different sources of income can earn up to \$20,900 before their medical benefits are discontinued. Why would we drastically disadvantage one group?

Mr. Speaker, it should not matter where the funding comes from. It should only matter that all persons who need AISH medical care are able to get it. The medical benefits that these persons are entitled to should be theirs until they reach the higher income level, such as the \$20,900 threshold, regardless of how they get that money. Also, we would make the care of the severely handicapped in Alberta more fair by equalizing the medical benefits received by AISH and by CPP disability recipients.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I regret that it's necessary to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, but the time limit for the consideration of this item of business on this day has concluded.

4:30

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Second Reading**

Bill 15

Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move second reading of Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

What a great pleasure it is for a new MLA to speak to a bill that will have such a significant, positive effect on so many Albertans. What rookie politician anywhere wouldn't want to introduce a bill that lowers the tax rate, increases tax deductions, and puts more money in peoples' pockets?

There are three significant parts to this bill. I'd like to speak to each part. The first part is the reduction of the Alberta single rate of tax from 10 and a half to 10 percent. This change reduces income tax for all taxable Albertans. The biggest winners are the 200,000 low-income Albertans who are completely removed from the provincial income tax rolls.

This bill increases the value of tax credits. The tax credits benefit specific Albertans. Several credits are increased to match federal increases; others are adjusted for inflation in a very simple manner. Some examples. For the in-home care of a relative the credit goes from \$2,386 to \$3,500. The full-time education tax credit doubles from \$200 a month to \$400 a month. The age credit goes from \$3,531 to \$3,619. This change indexes this credit to the rate of inflation as per the CPI.

Albertans at every income level will pay less tax than they did in 2000. In Alberta single-income families will be treated fairly. The spousal amounts will match the basic personal amounts, and their income will no longer be pushed into a higher bracket. The province will not punish these families for making the decision to have one parent stay at home with their children. Minimum wage earners working up to 2,300 hours per year will be treated fairly as they will not pay any provincial income tax. Single parents will benefit from the significant enhancement made to the equivalent-to-spouse credit. This credit was more than doubled. Two-income families will pay less tax. Families with two children who earn less than \$33,500 will pay no provincial income tax after the Alberta family employment tax credit is taken into account. Seniors will benefit from the large enhancements to the basic and spousal credit amounts. In addition, Alberta will index both the age and pension income credits, protecting seniors against bracket creep.

The second change to this act, Mr. Speaker, is a reduction in the fuel tax on locomotive fuel. It reduces this fuel tax from 3 cents a litre to 1 and a half cents a litre. This reduction in railway fuel tax will ensure that Alberta farmers, resource exporters, and other businesses have access to low-cost, high-quality rail transportation services.

The third part of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is intended to maintain the same tax collection abilities for the Crown that have been in place for many years. Exempting the Crown from the Limitations Act for the purpose of tax collection will ensure the Crown's established abilities to collect taxes within Alberta remain whole.

Now, I shouldn't have to urge members of the Assembly on both

sides to support a bill that lowers taxes. Needless to say, it's a great step forward for the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker, for an opportunity to speak to Bill 15, Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001. There are a number of issues that are raised by this. Certainly Alberta Liberals are always willing to support a bill that reduces the tax burden on Alberta families, but this bill is again raising the issue of whether or not a flat tax is a fair tax for Albertans.

I spoke strongly against the previous incarnations of this, that it was really shifting the tax burden onto the shoulders of the middle-income earners in Alberta. I don't feel that it is a fair tax system when we have reductions in the double digits for the high-income earner elite and a significantly less percentage of reduction for middle-income earners.

I think the plan that was proposed by the Alberta Liberals around a fairer tax system in fact would have given greater savings and would've been much more fair. What we were looking at was a 0, 10, 12 plan that would give all Albertans a significant tax cut. It was a zero percent rate for income earned to \$13,569, a 10 percent rate for between that amount and \$79,999, and a 12 percent rate for every dollar of income earned above \$79,999, so \$80,000 for all intents and purposes.

We were looking to increase the personal tax exemption from \$7,231 to \$13,569, and we were also looking to increase the spousal and equivalent-to-spouse exemption from where it was to \$13,569 so that families with stay-at-home spouses are treated the same as families with two incomes from outside of the home. I still believe the 0, 10, 12 tax plan provides a more fair and sustained tax relief for all Albertans.

One of the questions that came to me as I quickly looked over this bill is: why is the government introducing legislation that would cut railway fuel tax in half when in fact this was a recommendation that was brought forward and was rejected by the Business Tax Review Committee? What's happened between when that idea was rejected by the Business Tax Review Committee and now, when we see it coming forward ensconced in Bill 15? Has there been some lightbulb go on somewhere, some lobbyist that's not registered that we're unaware of? What's happened here? Well, tell me: what was the change? We had it rejected previously; now it's in legislation. So what allows for that change? The member sponsoring the bill spoke very briefly, and perhaps he can arrange for one of his colleagues to stand up and explain that as part of the debate as we go along.

There are some good things in this bill, as I've said. It is reducing the tax burden, although we think there is a better way to do that. It is also working with the tax credit increases provided for people that are providing home care for relatives. We've spoken about this issue in a lot of other contexts where people are giving up their time and their earning ability to care for relatives in their homes. There needs to be some recognition of that. Indeed, it is one of the tax credit increases that is in this bill. That would also capture people that are providing care for children with physical and mental infirmities.

There's also an increase in the education credits, although I still believe the best way to deal with encouraging people to participate in postsecondary education is to work to lower the tuition fees all the way around. The education credits may not be the incentive that we're looking for if we really wish to follow through on that, but I'd rather have them than not have them.

An increase in the amount that is deductible for persons that are

over 65. Now, as the Official Opposition critic on seniors' issues, my colleagues in this Assembly have heard me get up on a number of occasions and talk about how seniors are really feeling that their sweat-soaked loonies are being pried out of their pockets with alarming frequency, especially with the increase around user fees and also the continued insistence from the government on having seniors pay for health care premiums and their Blue Cross coverage. So this increase in the amount deductible for seniors is welcome. There's still much more that the province could be doing that would be even more helpful.

4:40

Now, when we start looking at more specifics of what's being offered in this, we see that it's amending the Alberta Corporate Tax Act by stating that "the Limitations Act does not apply to the Crown with respect to any matter arising under this Act." So, in other words, when it is found that a business owes the government corporate taxes, there's no limitations on when the Crown can bring this claim forward. A good thing, say I. I think that's perfectly appropriate because when we're all contributing, both individuals and corporations, to the revenue base in the province, I'm always seeking equity and fairness.

Certainly the government has proven to be most vigilant in pursuing recovery of moneys for the government from individuals. For example, with a SFI overpayment or an educational grant overpayment they're voracious in the intensity with which they pursue individuals to vacuum that money back out of their bank account. I think it is perfectly appropriate that that should apply to industry as well, and certainly I'm glad to see that there are no limitations on when the government can be pursuing owed corporate taxes from businesses.

The act is also covering individuals by saying that "the Limitations Act does not apply to the Crown with respect to any matter arising under the Act." In other words, when someone owes the government taxes, there's no limitation as to when they can bring that forward. So that's capturing the individual. In the earlier section we're dealing with being able to pursue corporate tax, and there's another section that's able to pursue individuals.

Now, the big one that everyone is most familiar with is decreasing the flat tax from 10.5 percent to 10 percent. This is the second reduction that we've had of this flat tax rate. I remember when it was brought in with much ballyhoo – streamers, champagne corks a-poppin' on the other side – at 11 percent. Then the federal government brought down their budget. And, oh, my goodness, that all of a sudden put the Alberta flat tax in a very poor light because in fact those on the lowest end of the spectrum would have been paying more.

I think what it did in having the federal tax lower is that it really pointed out that that flat tax acts almost as a wringer. It torques, and those on the higher and lower end of the tax spectrum – it's like wringing a dish rag. You know, the part that gets rung the most intensely and where the water flies off is the two ends. So when you have the federal tax lowering and when we looked at the Alberta flat tax, those who would have been paying significantly more were the very low-income earners, and those who would have been saving significantly more, would have been taking home more were the high-income earners, the very wealthy elite.

Nothing pointed that out more clearly than having the federal government come down with their budget so very quickly. If my memory serves me, I think that even before this act was originally brought forward, they had to change from 11 percent to 10 and a half. We've now had another federal budget, and what do I see when I look at Bill 15? Well, indeed, we are now going down to

10 percent. So this is not through any sort of magnanimous gesture on behalf of the government. I believe it's because the federal program in fact points up how inequitable this Alberta program is and how it does torque on both ends of the income spectrum. They are now having to reduce it to 10 percent.

We've got a number of other sections that are dealing with the in-home care of relative credits, which I've already spoken about, plus the tax credits for those who are taking care of children with infirmities that have to be cared for in their homes, the section increasing the amount for people over 65.

Then we do have one section that is dealing with a very slight change in the formula for calculating medical expense credits. Combined with that is an increase in the tax credit for people suffering from a prolonged mental or physical impairment which is restricting their daily activities.

We have the education tax credit, as I spoke of. Now, there is a section in here that's really interesting. The government is changing what students can do with their unused tuition and education credit if they made no income to deduct against the credits. Well, a nice idea. Glad to see it. But I don't know how many people this is really going to be helping out, because every student that I've run into – I have a lot of students living in Edmonton-Centre, and my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview certainly has the university in his constituency and a lot of people living in that area. I don't think either one of us has met a student that isn't working at least one job.

Certainly many of the students I've had through my office are working three jobs just to keep up, and they're having to extend the amount of time that they're in fact in university. So if it was a three-year degree they were going for, they're now doing a three-year degree over four years, and they're still working three jobs, most of them a combination of part-time and full-time jobs and, obviously, most of them in the service sector, where they're not being paid a lot of money.

So a nice idea, but I don't know how many students are able to go through postsecondary education in this day and age and not hold down some kind of job where they are having some kind of earnings. This is only going to apply to students that have no income to deduct against the credits.

There is an amendment that deals with a calculation, also for tuition and education tax, that can be transferred to another person.

I notice that there's also a change in the overseas employment tax credit. For those people who earn overseas income, they currently get to deduct 40 percent of that amount that the individual is deducting under section 122.3 of the federal act for the taxation year. This is being reduced to 35 percent, so this actually increases the income tax payable because the tax credit has in fact shrunk by 5 percent. I know that for some of our oil field workers and those that have experience in that area that get snapped up by a company, sometimes Canadian companies that are operating overseas, this is certainly important to them because they often feel that they're getting fairly severely taxed.

There's a possibility here of a section that might be increasing the deduction for business income in Alberta. It's allowing a person to use their pension credits, unused tuition and education tax credits, the transferred credits, deductions for taxable dividends, overseas employment tax credit, foreign tax credit, political contributions, and royalty tax credits in calculations for determining their allowed deductions from business income in Alberta. So we'll see what the effect of that one is. It's allowing them to add up everything in their personal life, basically, and then look to see whether it could also apply on their business income.

I know that one of my colleagues had also wanted to speak to this

bill. Again, as I said when I started, the Liberals are not going to have any objection to the lowering of taxes. It certainly does follow through on the government's earlier promise.

I still find that railway tax credit odd, and I'm looking forward to hearing from the sponsor of the bill or someone else who can explain why there was a change in direction there or whether the Business Tax Review Committee was discredited in some way. There must be a good story behind all of that. I'd love to hear it. [interjection] Oh, good. It sounds like the Minister of Energy might be looking to speak. I'm looking forward to that. Maybe he'll be able to answer some of the questions that I've raised instead of just commenting from the sidelines.

4:50

As I was saying, I'm really pleased to see . . . [interjection] Oh, there's another minister going to get involved. We're getting lots of people engaged on this really important and exciting bill today, Mr. Speaker.

I think the provisions that have been put in dealing with the Limitations Act and being able to pursue people for both back corporate and back individual taxes is a good one. I'm glad to see that that's been put in there.

So those are the issues that I really wanted to raise and the questions that I wanted to raise in the context of debate in second reading on this bill. As I say, in principle I'm certainly willing to support it, but I look forward to the other issues that are raised during debate and to what the answers to the questions are that I have brought forward.

Thanks very much for the opportunity.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a few brief comments at this time on Bill 15. I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti discuss the merits of this legislation this afternoon, and I listened particularly with interest to the discussion since, the discussion by the Member for Edmonton-Centre regarding the locomotive fuel reduction. If it's good for the locomotives, I would like to bring to the attention of the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti in particular that if I was to go to Grande Prairie, I could stand on a street corner and not five minutes would go by and there would be at least one pickup truck come along with at least a 200-litre propane tank in the back.

Unfortunately, there's a 6.5 cent a litre propane tax levied in this province. Last year – I looked it up – we received \$14 million in revenue from that tax. This year, according to government projections, there's going to be a \$9 million sum realized from taxes on propane at the retail pump. Now, that's a reduction of \$5 million in government revenue. I look at Ontario. Ontario has a 4 and a half cent a litre tax on propane at the retail level. Quebec eliminated theirs.

Now, I think of the revenue that's lost because of this tax. People are not getting conversions anymore because there's no cost saving here. This is an environmentally sound fuel, and I would urge at some point in the future – perhaps it's a little bit too late for me to amend this legislation at this time – all members of this Assembly to consider it. I'm not talking about having a lobbying effort on the Minister of Finance, but certainly if government members, for instance, were to go to Wainwright on a caucus retreat, it's something they could all discuss together.

This is a tax. If it was eliminated, I think it would increase the consumption of propane as a fuel in this province for delivery trucks,

for farm trucks. I think it is a sound thing to do. You look at other provinces and what they have done and the fact that members of this Assembly are very fond of comparing the tax regime here to the tax regime in Ontario. Well, in Ontario currently there are 2 cents a litre less tax on propane. Also, considering the fact that so much of the production of the western Canada sedimentary basin is from Grande Prairie and north right to the border, all this propane has been shipped from here to Toronto and to Ontario. I believe the latest figures I had were that there was a 17 cent a litre price reduction in Ontario. I don't know what it is in Grande Prairie, but I know what it is in Edmonton.

I would urge members of this Assembly to consider in the future eliminating the propane tax as a fuel tax. I think it is a good idea. Can we survive without the \$9 million in revenue in the budget of this province? I think we can. We can start with things like the risk management fund. There was money spent on that. We can ensure that that's not done again. That's almost 10 percent of the savings right there. There are ways to save money, and I'm sure we can get along without this.

In closing, I would like to remind members of the cost of the conversion to propane and the cost of the tanks. If this 6.5 cent a litre tax on propane were eliminated, it would demonstrate to the consumers, the motoring public of this province who want to choose propane as a fuel, that the government is serious, that this is a fuel not only for now but also for the future.

At this time, I would like to thank all hon. members for listening to my pitch to eliminate the 6.5 cent a litre tax on propane. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to close debate.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta government is committed to maintaining the most competitive overall tax regime in Canada. We believe that a simple, low, and fair tax system is the most competitive. Lowering the single rate of income tax from 10 and a half to 10 percent is proof of that commitment. Alberta has one low rate of 1 and a half cents per litre for all aviation fuel, and now the same low rate will apply to railway fuel. It's just another example of this government's commitment to lowering taxes.

With that, I'll conclude. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a second time]

Bill 11

Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 15: Ms Blakeman]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm anxious to participate this afternoon in the debate on Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act. This is certainly a long time in coming. You know, I've heard many politicians across this province, some of whom are in this Assembly, discuss family values, and finally I can see that the family is being put first with this legislation.

To support this bill is quite easy, because it is good legislation. When it comes, again, to supporting this, you have to consider the families, the young families of this province and the parents. This legislation gives legislative force to maternity and parental leave regulations passed in February, and later on perhaps I'll talk a little

bit about that. It also gives entitlement to up to one year of unpaid job-protected employment leave to care for a newborn baby or an adopted child. Unlike federal and other provincial legislation distinction is made between fathers and adoptive parents, who are entitled to 37 weeks. Adoptive parent groups, as I understand it, are opposed to policies that differentiate them from other parents, and that is understandable. I don't feel that there should be any difference between birth parents and adoptive parents.

5:00

Now, in February of last year the federal government doubled the duration of maternity and parental leave under the EI or employment insurance program to 50 weeks, and that was effective, of course, after Christmas, in January of this year. This gave parents the opportunity to spend more time with their newborn and newly adopted children. Again, that goes back to family values. I'm not going to go into any detail on this whole concept of family values and how on occasion there's just lip service, in my view, paid to it, but again this is a positive step.

I can remember getting a call about three years ago at the constituency office from a mother in Calgary. She was a professional. She had moved to Calgary and had taken a job and had to have maternity leave. She phoned in utter disgust at the law in this province and how she felt it was inadequate. I understand the persistence that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort has provided on this issue. Perhaps that member also received a phone call from that particular individual, because she made her points very well and for my benefit compared our leave schedule here with other provinces. It got to the point in the discussion where she said that if she had realized this, she probably would not have taken the corporate transfer to Calgary. That was amazing in my view, because we have to ensure that there is an attraction to workers to this province.

Now, while the federal government decides how long EI is paid out for maternity or parental leaves, the federal government can only compel employers governed by the Canada Labour Code. This is why this legislation is so important to Alberta parents now. Why have we waited so long? Who knows? At least it's come forward. It may not be letter perfect, but it is certainly a big step in the right direction.

Several provinces passed legislation matching or exceeding the federal extension. In fact, the province of Quebec, as I understand it, offers 60 weeks. Although the provinces had plenty of notice and while the federal legislation took effect, as I said, after Christmas this year, Saskatchewan and Alberta were the only holdouts. Previously, as discussed in the phone conversation I had with the professional person from Calgary, Alberta law had protected jobs for only 18 weeks.

Now, it appears that the government has finally listened to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, and this extension on parental leave is going to improve all workplace relations in this province. Small businesses certainly had reservations about this, but I think that when you think of satisfied and content employees, I'm sure it's going on.

Both private- and public-sector corporations in this province are on recruitment drives. For instance, if whatever regional health authority is to go on a recruitment drive for registered nurses, the registered nurses, Mr. Speaker, the majority of whom are female, that may be a question they would ask a recruiter: how many weeks of maternity benefit leave could I expect in your province? It may be easier as a result of this legislation for the recruiters to attract not only registered nurses but professionals of all sorts. Perhaps the civil service in the province is going to be on a major recruitment drive.

When we think of extending leave provisions to the federal

standard, I believe it also can benefit small businesses. A company that has to hire and train someone to replace an employee on maternity leave for 18 weeks any way – that was to be the length of time. So why not 50 weeks? It might actually be easier to recruit someone to a job, and perhaps if the economy continues and unemployment rates stay as low as they are, well, that person after that leave can find themselves in an advantageous position and find employment in the corporation, in maybe that department or some other department, because as the economy continues to expand, it might be easier to recruit someone to a job.

This is a bill I think that is generally supported by the majority of Albertans. I can't understand why people would have difficulty supporting this, but an additional argument in favour of the 50-week extension is that parents will be able to work part-time while receiving benefits. Now, if that is to happen, it will help businesses whose specific needs are difficult to fulfill. You know, there are niche careers, or there may be difficulty in recruiting someone full-time. Well, that will help out.

But when we think of job experience and the demands of the workplace and the demands of the workplace on family, we need to understand that parents who are better able to balance the demands of work and family experience less stress. There is a lower rate of absenteeism from the job, therefore more productive workers. Alberta is noted for the productivity of its workforce. A recent Canada Health study estimated that 19.8 million workdays at a cost of \$2.7 billion, Mr. Speaker, per year were lost in 1997 due to work/family conflict and stress.

This bill as it was introduced by the minister was turning regulation into legislation. It was the final step, it states here, in protecting the rights of working parents and employers.

Now, the consultation process with this went on for some time. There were employees, employers, working parents. Maternity and parental leave provisions had to strike the right balance between providing parents with the flexibility they need to care for their young families and ensuring employers have adequate time to make good hiring decisions. Well, I think all of that has been done with this bill.

Under the Employment Standards Amendment Act, Mr. Speaker, mothers and dads and adoptive parents are entitled to 37 weeks of parental leave, and birth mothers will also be eligible for 15 weeks of maternity leave. The leaves are available to parents of children born or adopted after December 31, 2000.

5:10

Now, why did we wait so long in this province? Many people have brought this to the attention of the Assembly, but we waited and we waited and we waited in this province. The only thing I can say is that it is well worth the wait, I suppose, but I'm a little disappointed at the speed, but there is very little that can be done about that. We can talk about family values, and we do talk about family values, but when you look at some of the cautions that one has to consider when debating this bill – it's a rubber stamp. It's a whitewash, because we had the regulations. They were announced in February, and they were announced in conjunction with the election, and now we wait for the legislation. One can only bring those concerns forward to politely remind all members of this Assembly just exactly the importance that should be put on legislation. Regulations should come a distant, distant second.

In closing I would like to remind the minister that there is more work to be done on the Employment Standards Code. This is one amendment, but I look forward in the future to amendments to change the Employment Standards Code so that there is rigorous enforcement of all Employment Standards Code rules and regula-

tions, because unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, it is anywhere between 75 percent and 82 percent of Albertans who rely on the Employment Standards Code to govern all the workplace rules and regulations, and there have been just some dismal failures in enforcing one of the most important statutes. All statutes in this province are important. I'm not saying that. But when you consider the size of the workforce that relies on the governance or by the commitment of this government to enforce this law, whether you're working for an oil company in downtown Calgary and you're applying for maternity benefits or if you're working for a car wash in downtown Calgary and you're not getting the hours on your paycheque that you worked for, it should be of concern to the government.

Now, the current minister has taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, with enforcement of the occupational health and safety rules and regulations, and I expect to see the current minister do the same with the Employment Standards Code. I'm looking forward in the future, Mr. Speaker, to other amendments to this legislation to make the minister's job much easier, because when you think of someone who is earning \$6 an hour, they should be entitled to every cent that they earn. Earlier in the Assembly we heard that low-income Albertans – and many of those are earning \$6 an hour and \$6.50 an hour – are going to be experiencing total tax relief, I think was the description used, provincial tax relief. If individuals are working for that, they're entitled to every penny, and they're not getting it.

There are other examples besides the car wash industry. There's the hospitality industry. You have young people entering the workforce, some of whom are entering the workforce for the first time, and they are being exploited. One thing we are doing by not enforcing the law is that we are building a confrontational relationship, and I am strongly opposed to a confrontational relationship between employer and employee. If you go into the workforce for the first time and you've got to fight like a badger, if you've got to go to the employment standards office to get what's rightfully yours, the wages that you worked so hard for, you're going to have a suspicion towards all employers in the future because you just can't rely on them.

You know yourself that if you've punched the clock or whatever – your time was taken – and you're going in to work for three hours in a restaurant but suddenly the restaurant is not willing to pay you your time because there are no customers, that's wrong. The restaurant should have the management skill to be able to put you to work in another productive capacity. I can't believe that in this province we tolerate that sort of activity.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, is if one restaurant, for instance on one end of the street, is abiding by the Employment Standards Code and another restaurant, a competitor down the street, is not abiding by the code. Each of them have, say, a range of between 15 to 20 either part-time or full-time employees. How can the restaurant which is abiding by the rules – paying the wages, paying vacation pay, holiday pay, overtime pay, all those rules in the Employment Standards Code – compete on a level playing field with another enterprise of a similar size and in the same market up the street who is not abiding by the rules and is ripping off the employees? It is unacceptable that we allow this to happen.

I look forward – I'm sure it's coming – to further amendments to the Employment Standards Code to deal with this issue of chronic repeat offenders of the Employment Standards Code in this province. Whether it's in the hospitality industry, whether it's in the car wash industry, whether it's in the construction industry, or whether it's in the dry cleaning industry, it is very, very important that the hon. minister take a look at this. I look forward to these amendments as they come before the Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is well known for its focus on people, prosperity, and preservation. I'm very happy to commend the Minister of Human Resources and Employment for bringing Bill 11 forward, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001. I'm very pleased to join the debate on the bill as it relates to my focus on people, the human factor of our Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, in my constituency work I have encountered many cases of hardworking parents who need parental leave. For instance, in the case of a young, hardworking family after the birth of their first child, the mother and the baby were not in good health, and the father could not take leave from work to care for them. In order to do so, he had to quit his job, and having quit the job, employment insurance would not cover their income.

In another situation, Mr. Speaker, a young mother had to stay home longer than the minimum employment standards, at that time 18 weeks, to take care of her infant. She had to quit the job and lost all seniority benefits with the company.

In yet another situation a working couple wanted to build a family through adoption. They had to wait a long, long time for the child. The adoption process exhausted their very limited financial resources and all their time for leaves long before the child arrived. So once the child arrived in their family, they did not have leave time left to familiarize with and to take care of the newly adopted member of the family.

5:20

Visiting a few child care facilities, Mr. Speaker, regardless of their superb services, I saw very young infants lying lonely in their cribs without warm, motherly care. I also know that there are many new parents who are in distress because of demands at work and the natural parental feelings for their infants.

As the chair of the Employment Standards Regulation Review Committee in 1999 I discovered that the minimum parenting leave in Alberta was at that time the lowest of all Canadian jurisdictions. So in the year 2000 these were my motives in designing my private member's Bill 209, proposing a change in maternity, adoption, and parental leaves. I approached the situation not from the point of view of benefits for the mother or the father or the employer. I considered the issue from the perspective of a newborn Albertan, of a very recently adopted child. From the perspective of that infant the very best thing possible is, without doubt, to spend as much time as possible with a loving and nurturing parent. Once sitting in the Chamber during the debate of my private member's bill, I had the thought that if all members were magically turned back to our infancy time, all those babies would have voted for their parents to stay with them.

I believe that all Albertans take pride in caring for our children and all good businesses take pride in caring for their staff. After all, what are business successes for if not for our family and our children?

As the fall session in the year 2000 came to a close, my private member's bill was stalled, but I was very, very pleased that the Minister of Human Resources and Employment announced on

December 18, 2000, that a committee would be established to study the issues and report its findings by January 31, 2001. The committee included Sue Evison, a professional engineer, the president of APEGGA, a consulting engineer, and a working mother with two teenagers. Joining her on the committee were members Corinne Pohlman, senior policy analyst, Canadian Federation of Independent Business; Co Vanderlaan, director, Christian Labour Association of Canada; Shannon Wyatt, a lawyer returning to work after maternity leave; Audrey Cormack, president, Alberta Federation of Labour; and the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, currently the Minister of Gaming. To those who have helped and participated in the subject matter, my sincere thanks.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 does everything and more than I proposed in my private member's bill last year. First, with the recent extension of the federal employment insurance to pay for parental leave for the entire year, it allows parents to enjoy the EI entitlement while doing the hard and dutiful work of parenting. Secondly, the bill allows parents the freedom to determine which one of them will stay home with the child and for how long. Thirdly, the bill extends its new parental leave provision to adoptive parents as well, giving them the same rights as other new parents, other new mothers and fathers. Adoption should be encouraged to meet their needs and to help those unwanted children or the children in government care.

I feel the potential benefits of the bill are clear. Study after study shows that the early relationship between parent and child is one of the most critical factors in determining the future health and happiness and success of a child. Parenting leave's impact on Alberta's tremendous prosperity is likely to be minimal, and the potential impact on the future of our children is so great.

Before concluding I commend the Minister of Human Resources and Employment for taking this initiative forward. I also want to thank the staff of Alberta employment standards for working hard behind the scenes to bring ideas for changes to fruition.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that Bill 11 will codify the maternity and parental leaves in law, not just in regulations. I urge all member colleagues to give the bill your full support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a second time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now adjourn and reconvene at 8 p.m., at which time we'll reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Passed.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/22

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

head: Main Estimates 2001-02

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister to open debate.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, it's a great pleasure to stand before you as the first Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development for the government of Alberta. I'm really pleased to present the estimates for this new department.

As I travel across the province, aboriginal leaders and northerners tell me how pleased they are to be recognized in this new ministry. Responsibility for aboriginal affairs was transferred to this stand-alone ministry from International and Intergovernmental Relations, and responsibility for the Northern Alberta Development Council was transferred from Alberta resource development. Our business plan and budget have been amended to reflect these changes. I will address aboriginal affairs first, and then I will discuss important northern issues and the key role of the Northern Alberta Development Council.

We may be one of the smallest ministries, but we are also one of the most active and dynamic. We deal with a full scope of issues, and we are championing one of the four cross-government priority initiatives. In order to do the job, however, Mr. Chairman, we rely on the good efforts and co-operation of every government ministry. We facilitate solutions rather than just managing problems. We work with aboriginal governments, communities, and organizations to ensure that their requests and views are heard within the Alberta government. We also work with other Alberta ministries to develop strategies to address the needs of aboriginal people. This includes providing guidance on appropriate protocol and ways to consult with aboriginal communities. Our ministry also has knowledge of and sensitivity to aboriginal issues and culture in Alberta.

In the year ahead our key goal, as set out in the government of Alberta's business plan, is to support aboriginal people and governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being. We will be pursuing this goal through the implementation of Strengthening Relationships: The Government of Alberta's Aboriginal Policy Framework. In addition, the ministry will also contribute to the other priority government goals through both an aboriginal and northern development perspective.

The framework was conceived by the Hon. Dave Hancock and supported by ministers like the Hon. Mike Cardinal. Their support, that was instrumental in the development of the framework, and involvement will be needed as we move forward through the whole process of implementation of the aboriginal policy framework. Addressing aboriginal issues requires co-operation and teamwork of all ministries. It is not my responsibility alone. We will be relying on their continued support and all other ministries that are also part of this process.

The vision of the framework is a future in which strong, sustainable aboriginal economies support self-reliant First Nations, Metis, and other aboriginal communities and people. The framework

consists of two goals. The first goal focuses on well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal people and communities. The second goal addresses federal, provincial, and aboriginal roles and responsibilities. The strategy is not to provide handouts but to provide a hand up through the development of relationships, participation by aboriginal people in the economy and programs that affect them, and cross-cultural awareness that works for both aboriginal and nonaboriginal partners.

I will soon announce a collaborative process through which the province, aboriginal communities, and industry will work together to develop an aboriginal capacity-building strategy. In the meantime, we have been working with aboriginal communities, including the Grande Cache co-operative enterprises, the Cold Lake First Nation, and the Kapawe'na First Nation on specific capacity-building initiatives.

There are a number of cross-ministry initiatives that were completed last year that merit recognition. An aboriginal high school, the Amiskwaciy Academy, was established in Edmonton. An Alberta First Nations gaming policy was announced. The First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act was passed, the first legislation of its kind in Canada. A Provincial Court with an aboriginal judge, court workers, and a peacemaker program was established on the Tsuu T'ina reserve. An oil and gas consultation pilot project was initiated with the industry and the Dene Tha' First Nation, and a natural resources initiative and petroleum employment training pilot project have graduated trainees in land administration, oil and gas field workers, and oil rig work.

We are also starting discussions with aboriginal communities on developing best-practice guidelines with respect to traditional-use studies. My ministry staff and I will work hard to fulfill the promise of the aboriginal policy framework and the aboriginal policy initiative.

A key concern for the ministry is to continue improvements for the Metis Settlements governing structures, systems, and accountability. Our main objective is to enhance the settlements' capacity to be self-reliant and self-regulating. We are working with settlements representatives to develop proposals for revised legislative and long-term financial arrangements to further these ends. We'll be reviewing this proposal throughout the summer.

This year is the final year of operation for the Metis Settlements Transition Commission, an organization that has been assisting with the development of the settlements' governance systems. The commission will dissolve on March 31, 2002, and its essential functions, such as the Metis Settlements land registry, will be transferred elsewhere. With the dissolution of the commission the settlements will be fully responsible for their own administrative affairs.

A significant focus for this fiscal year will be to ensure that appropriate accountability mechanisms such as community-approved three-year business plans are in place for each settlement. The Metis Settlements Transition Commission has implemented a revised performance measurement system that focuses more on the results actually achieved. We are also working with the Metis Settlements to examine additional ways to address the need for greater accountability.

The ministry continues to make progress in the settlement of outstanding aboriginal land claims. Since 1986 Alberta has been instrumental in settling 11 treaty land entitlement claims. Our record is one of the best in Canada, Mr. Chairman. The settlement of these claims has created greater certainty for all parties. The financial compensation and opportunities provided by land claims settlements provide the means for First Nations to truly benefit from Alberta's thriving economy and increase the role of aboriginal Albertans in the

province's economy. This ministry will continue to strive towards settlements that are fair and equitable for all parties.

Over the past year we have seen an improvement in relations on aboriginal issues with the federal government. I do not want to give the impression that there are no problems. However, there is greater co-operation among federal and provincial ministries on projects that produce specific and meaningful results, as indicated in goal 2 of the framework. To this end the Canada/Alberta partnership forum has been established to work with First Nations and Metis organizations to develop partnerships that will lead to improved participation by aboriginal people in the Alberta advantage.

As well, Alberta participated with the federal government, other provinces, territories, and national aboriginal leaders to develop a national framework to increase aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy. This document supports our own provincial initiatives and our framework. An essential theme of the federal/provincial framework and Alberta's aboriginal policy framework is the need to recognize and develop solutions for including the rapidly growing aboriginal youth population, who could address future labour force shortages. As part of the implementation of a national aboriginal youth strategy, a conference involving 120 youth from across Canada will be held in Edmonton this year from October 26 to 28.

I will now briefly focus on the northern development work within the ministry. Under the leadership of my colleague Gary Friedel, MLA for Peace River and chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council, the council continues to work on the advancement of the north by communicating northern interests, both private and public, addressing development opportunities, and promoting skill development for northern youth and adults. The ministry's aboriginal initiatives complement the work of the council, and the work of the council supports the ministry's initiatives. A key initiative for the NADC will be the preparation of a strategy that further advances northern development.

I would be remiss if I did not mention NADC's work on interjurisdictional initiatives. We will be hosting this year's northern forum in Edmonton this summer. This international forum brings together delegates from around the world to discuss northern issues. For the first time this fall Alberta will be represented at a meeting for northern development ministers from across Canada.

I am also looking forward to assuming the Alberta co-chair position for the implementation of the Alberta/Northwest Territories memorandum of understanding for co-operation and development. Our neighbour to the north is entering an exciting period of development that is expected to have a positive impact on Alberta. The department looks forward to addressing these northern opportunities as well as challenges.

In terms of staffing, our ministry is relatively small, with a complement of 60 FTEs, which includes 15 within the NADC and seven within the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal. The total budget for the year ahead is \$30.2 million. The department's budget is based on the budgets for aboriginal affairs and NADC with minimal cost increases over last year. In order to maximize the resources of the ministry, we will be implementing a human resource plan with the priority focus on leadership development and success in planning.

Finally, a brief outline on the performance measures. We will report on the strategies outlined under the government of Alberta's business plan aboriginal goal and the aboriginal cross-ministry initiative. We are developing cross-government performance measures for these activities. We will work with all ministries to improve the number of data sources for aboriginal-specific data and the quality of data. Improved data will be used by ministries to

report progress on improving the well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal people. The department will undertake the development and the evaluation of pilot projects, and we will also conduct a client satisfaction survey. These measures will help us track our progress in meeting our goals in both an accountable and efficient manner. The new business plan for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development lays out in more detail how we will meet the priorities for our province in the year ahead.

I look forward, Mr. Chairman, to listening to what the comments will be from my opposition critics as well as finding out how they can improve the system in order that we can satisfy the needs of aboriginal Albertans and northern Albertans.

8:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a privilege to rise to speak to the issues concerning a brand-new ministry, and I congratulate the government on setting up a separate department for aboriginal issues: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. It's undoubtedly a very important area. The minister and I already briefly chatted, and I'm going to encourage that her budget be doubled next year. But if that doesn't work out, I've got some other thoughts as well.

I noticed the overall trend. As you compare expenditures in these areas from when it was under a combined department to now, it looks to me like the pattern in spending is very stable, and the intentions are that spending will remain stable. In fact, if I read the figures correctly – and I'm going from memory here – looking over the next three years, I think that in the business plan there's very little increase in spending anticipated. I would expect that once one were to account for inflation and a growing population, actually the minister will be dealing with a shrinking budget, which may bring various problems and issues of its own.

I did notice in her opening comments the emphasis on interdepartmental co-operation. I think that's tremendously important. If there is one thing that this department can do that would be of great help to all Albertans and to all aboriginal Albertans, it would be to act as a catalyst to bring together in a focused way the efforts of departments such as Health and Wellness, Learning, and other departments to address the concerns of the aboriginal population.

My suspicion and my experience would suggest to me that too often, especially when it comes to provincial affairs, the aboriginal people fall through the cracks, between programs, and their particular needs get left in between other departments and other programs and are not adequately addressed. It's probably aggravated by the fact that the federal government has such a major role in this area and things tend to get pushed off from one level of government to another, either between the provincial and federal governments or between provincial, federal, and municipal governments, or local governments, when we're talking, for example, about urban concerns. So if this department and this minister can succeed at pulling together and focusing the efforts of each of those other departments on aboriginal concerns, it would be a great success for us all. Of course part of that is working, as she noted, on the community collaborative process, bringing the local people together in a true program of community development, listening from the grassroots level and responding at that need, rather than bringing solutions down from above.

I noticed a few particular initiatives that were mentioned. The repatriating of sacred objects, a very, very difficult subject or a very difficult area to sort out. I commend this government for its

initiatives, I think probably groundbreaking initiatives, in repatriating sacred objects. I'm aware of the struggles that can occur between museums and their legitimate interests in preserving objects for the very long term and safeguarding them and studying them and, at the same time, the legitimate claims of the people to whom those objects belong to use them and to use them as part of their own culture to sustain and develop that culture. I think this government probably has handled that about as well as any government will have done.

I also noted her comments on judicial reform. Again, a very difficult area. I'm sure we're all aware that the aboriginal population is overrepresented in our judicial system and that there are great cultural frictions between the European-based, the British-based judicial system and the traditional aboriginal judicial system. There's plenty of room for innovation there, so I would encourage the minister in that direction.

Before we get into specifics, the general areas that I see as needing most attention are all interrelated. Employment, the very high unemployment rates among aboriginal people is a serious concern. Of course, then, not surprisingly, so is poverty, poverty and unemployment going hand in hand. In so many of our situations now I suspect that with our aboriginal population there's a multigenerational pattern that's been established, and it will be a real challenge for us to break. Along with the unemployment and the poverty go persistent health problems, and those will have, I'm sure, some aspects of them specific to aboriginal predicaments, whether those are on reserves or in cities. Lack of education or inadequate education again raises problems that relate back to unemployment and poverty and health. I think there are some innovations occurring in education, but those could certainly be extended and encouraged so that they offer hope of breaking the cycle that so often we see our aboriginal people caught in.

Finally, one other area that may not get as much attention as perhaps it deserves in this discussion is environmental issues. I'm concerned with the great burgeoning of development across this province, whether it's in the northeast, in the huge areas of north-eastern Alberta around the oil sands, the whole development of forestry along, for example, the Athabasca river, or the problems over the long term in the Peace River delta right down to recent proposals in southeastern Alberta for water damming or certainly in southwestern Alberta and the Oldman River dam. Everywhere we turn, the natural environment is under pressure, and certainly historically the stewards of that environment were the First Nations, the people who managed to survive and create a culture in this environment that was sustainable not just for generations or centuries but for millennia. I think that we need to be very careful as we look at how we manage our environment, to learn all the lessons we possibly can from our First Nations people.

So those are some areas – employment, health, poverty, education, and environment – that I think I would certainly encourage attention to.

Shifting now to a little bit more specific material, the whole notion of breaking out a separate department for aboriginal affairs, as I said earlier, is probably a far-sighted one. It will take some particular care to manage that properly so that the new department will perform as efficiently and effectively as it possibly can. I'm wondering what work is being done in that area and what analyses the government did to reason through or to think through its decision to break out this separate department. Presumably it's a reflection of a shift in government priorities, and it would be useful to know what that shift is. How have the priorities changed now that we have a separate department as opposed to the time when aboriginal affairs was under the minister of intergovernmental relations?

Among the three programs under the department there is aboriginal relations, Metis settlements governance, and northern development. We'll talk to those just one by one and then keep going into more and more detail.

8:20

I would have to look at the figures to ensure that I've got them correct here. It looks like there may have been a real drop in spending in the area of aboriginal relations. The gross comparable actual figure two years ago was about 11 and a half million dollars, and it's budgeted this year at \$8.3 million. That's a drop of about 30 percent. That's a pretty marked decline, and I'd be interested to know what's caused that, if it's a transfer of activities to other departments or what's going on there. It's notable for its size.

Also, in the Metis settlements governance program there is a substantial decline, I think a difference of about, if I'm correct, 16 percent. A similar question there: what accounts for the marked decline in those areas?

Again, in the third area as well – no, I guess there wasn't a drop in northern development. Anyway, there are a couple of trends in spending there that are surprising for the decline in spending that's occurring there. It's probably easily explained, but I'm curious to know what it is.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development focuses its goals around the three core businesses: people, prosperity, and preservation, which has a nice alliteration to it. I'm not precisely sure what the preservation refers to. I like particularly the phrase I saw. The department's key goal is "to support Aboriginal people and governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being" and then somewhere else ensuring that "the well-being and self-reliance of Aboriginal people will be comparable to that of other Albertans," which seems to be a goal entirely justified and perhaps difficult to achieve but certainly something to strive for. Until we reach that level, I don't think we can say that we are as socially fair and just a society as we ought to be.

Many of my comments actually address some of the questions around key results. I talked about emphasizing the co-ordinated approach to Alberta's relationships with aboriginal people, the interdepartmental co-ordination, and increasing the self-reliance and well-being of aboriginal communities and people. That could of course include some of the areas I've mentioned, education and employment and also economic development in aboriginal communities, which can include businesses based within those communities.

The original entrepreneurs of Canada were the First Nations people. The First Nations people were the original traders, and if you look at the historical trading patterns of the Blackfoot or the Cree, they covered huge areas. They were very successful at trading within their nations and from one nation to the next. Of course, with the arrival of the Europeans the trade expanded. We so frequently forget that heritage and underplay it, and if we could do something to encourage and stimulate the entrepreneurial, to use a very European kind of word, heritage of the aboriginal community, it would be a big step forward. I think it would be important for developing and increasing their self-reliance, their self-respect, and reducing some of the concerns around poverty and poor health.

Given the stability of the budget over the period we're looking at, except for those questions I had going back a couple of years when there were the big drops in spending, I don't have extensive comments on the budget.

I am however noticing some issues around the performance measures and performance indicators, particularly numbers 3 and 4 under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Number 3 is "survey of clients and partners." I generally

have a lot of difficulty, as I know some of my colleagues do as well, with performance measures that are based on surveys of satisfaction.

Surveys are easily manipulated. They're easily shifted. It's difficult to be sure exactly what they're measuring, and frankly satisfaction is important, but it's only one facet of the whole issue we're looking at here. So I would much prefer something meatier and – what would the word be? – more reliable as a performance measure than a survey of clients and partners. Certainly you don't want your clients and partners to be upset with you. You want a good working relationship, but as a performance outcome it's not going to convince me.

I have similar comments also about performance measure indicator 4, "public polling data." Public polls are, like surveys, very easily manipulated. Public opinion can shift dramatically over a period of just a few days as issues flare up or die away. I can easily imagine public polling being done immediately before or immediately after a particularly vivid incident, perhaps revolving around First Nations people, incidents such as those that have occurred in other provinces, at Oka or elsewhere, wildly affecting the results of public opinion polls and throwing the value of public opinion polls as performance measures right out the window. So as with surveys of clients and partners I find public polling data as a source of performance measures to be very weak, shall I say.

The work of the Northern Alberta Development Council has been ongoing. It seems to me it's been around for 25 years or something. My memory goes back at least that long with this council. Obviously, to the extent that it can take responsibility for the economic development of the northern half of the province in the last couple of decades, it's been doing something right. Far and away the largest portion of major industrial development in Alberta has in fact been Edmonton and north over the last 10 years and will be even more so over the next 10 years.

I would encourage the Northern Alberta Development Council to take whatever steps it can to guarantee that the economic development of northern Alberta doesn't just go to people who newly arrive or recently have arrived to northern Alberta but rather to the people who have lived there the longest and whose heritage is the deepest in the north, whether those are the First Nations or Metis or the long-term European settlers. These are people who may have come here as agricultural people, as homesteaders, as trappers, as First Nations, and they are easily steamrolled in the process of industrial development of the north. I would encourage the Northern Alberta Development Council to take whatever steps it can to ensure that all people in Alberta from Edmonton north participate in the economic development of the north.

I see that my time is just about running out here, so I will take my seat and wish the minister the very best. Thank you.

8:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to participate in the estimates debate this evening for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. Contrary to my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview, the budget of this department and the size of this department and the expansion of the cabinet to 24 ministries, including this one – I'm not so certain that we needed this large cabinet. These are very worthwhile and noteworthy initiatives that are being proposed in this budget, but at this time I don't know if it should be a stand-alone ministry. But certainly the goals and strategies – there's so much work that needs to be done here.

The department's key goal is "to support Aboriginal people and

governments in achieving self-reliance and enhanced well-being." Well, certainly that is, to say the least, commendable. We look at some of the Third World conditions that exist in our communities with our First Nations' people. There have to be improvements, and I certainly wish the minister well in her leadership and her department well.

There are rates of child poverty, there are suicide rates, whether it's with adults or with teens, there's alcoholism, there's drug abuse, there are issues of malnutrition, there are issues of inadequate housing all across Alberta, not only in northern Alberta but everywhere. These issues have to be addressed. There is the entire issue of policing itself. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview mentioned the disproportionately high number of inmates in our justice system who are First Nations. That is all the key performance measures that this member needs: to see that there is so much work to be done. I would certainly like to see and hear from the minister in due time.

In the business plan there was a discussion about collaboration not only with the federal government but also with the Northwest Territories. I would like to understand a little better the relationship between – I know it's a federal police force – the RCMP, the province, and the Territories in regards to recruitment and retaining of First Nations' officers. I think an increase in the hiring of young First Nations' persons would be beneficial for the entire justice system. Now, at what pace this is going on, I don't know, and if the minister could share any initiatives that have occurred, I would be very grateful.

The minister also in the business plan – well, this fits into the enhanced well-being. Hopefully the days when First Nations' members are going to be on slashing crews and skid hounds on pipelines are finished. There's going to be on-the-job training. There are going to be apprenticeships. I know there are unions based in Edmonton here, the northern Alberta Building Trades Council, quite willing to foster a relationship and ensure that members of First Nations are trained in the skill trades. Again, hopefully the days of just going ahead and slashing a cut line for a seismic crew or for a pipeline project are over, and there's going to be an improvement so that once the projects are completed, northern Albertans have jobs and the better paying jobs as well.

At this time I would like to talk about the Northern Alberta Development Council. I'm just having a quick look at the business plan here, and I see northern Alberta, certainly, and we seem to forget about that. I don't know if we can call Edmonton the south, but certainly it's what's affectionately called "the city" by northern Albertans. They're going to go to the city. To all hon. members from Calgary, well, I'm sorry, there's only one city in this province, and it's the capital city.

Now, 60 percent of Alberta's land mass is in the north, 10 percent of the population only.

It is resource rich, with 90% of Alberta's forests, 100% of Canada's oil sands development, nearly 40% of Alberta's conventional oil and gas activity, and 20% of Alberta's agricultural land.

Well, at this time I would like to inquire if the Northern Alberta Development Council has done any sustainability studies on Alberta's forests – I would be very curious to know – and particularly on what species of trees there has been any sustainability studies done. We all hear every now and then that there's going to be further development in the north, and I'm curious to find out if the wood fibre is there to meet the long-term requirements of those developments.

Certainly 100 percent of Alberta's oil sands are in the north. I would like an update, please, on the Peace River/Shell project. This was a pilot project that I believe started about 15 years ago. I think

that the Peace River tar sands are a little deeper than the ones over to the east in Fort McMurray. Shell had a very successful pilot project there. I know what this would mean for the development of northwestern Alberta. Earlier this evening, Mr. Chairman, I attended a standing policy committee, meeting as an observer, and I noted . . .

DR. MASSEY: Not as a participant?

MR. MacDONALD: I was not a participant, no. I was an observer.

I noted a question from an hon. member regarding the proposed development that was going to go on at Fort Kent by a subsidiary of Koch oil of Minnesota, and in the discussion this particular member was concerned about the development and the pace of expansion in Fort McMurray: would it be possible to slow down the development in the north so maybe the people of Fort McMurray could catch their breath? Perhaps a solution to this, if it is a problem – I don't know if it is a problem. I was listening to the reassurances of the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. Perhaps the next stage of the development of our synthetic crude resources could occur in the Peace River district. Shell certainly is building an upgrader at Scotford. It has capacity, I believe, for a hydrogen cracker. So that would be worth exploring by the Northern Alberta Development Council.

Further on we see that the hon. Member for Peace River chairs the 10-member council, and there are members from Fort McMurray, Kinuso, Athabasca, Cold Lake, Whitecourt, Peace River, Grande Prairie, and Fort Vermilion, which is fine, but I notice that no one from High Level is on that committee. As a frequent visitor to High Level over the years I'm curious about that. I also see over in the strategies in goal 1 that there is to be an increase in consultation in northeastern Alberta through the new Northern Alberta Development Council office in Lac La Biche. I may have missed it somewhere, but I'm wondering if there is a regional office also over in the Peace district, and if not, why not. I think I'd have to put a pitch in for one at High Level and Peace River. I'm told now that there is an office in Peace River, and I think that's a good place for it.

8:40

Now, I can't remember the exact details, but I believe there was an order in council shortly after the cabinet expansion to increase the salary of the hon. Member for Peace River to chair this council, and that salary increase, I think, was \$1,970 a month. Fair enough. But when you add it up, it's, like, 20 grand a year. And who knows? There could be a vehicle with this appointment. I would like to know where in the budget that 20 grand plus is going to come from. You know, that's a significant amount of money. I'm sure I saw that in an order in council, probably the end of March, first of April. Where that money is coming from I would be very grateful to find out.

Whenever we think of northern development, the first thing we think of is roads. I can recall not getting a satisfactory answer before in this Assembly when inquiring about road construction, the development of roads. There is a proposal, as I understand it, to come across from Fort McMurray west to the Peace district with an all-weather highway. Now, I don't know whether it's going to go as far south as Wabasca or not or whether it'll be further north, but when you think of that, I think it would be prudent to study the construction of that road, not just a lease road but an all-weather road across there.

The trade pattern there I think would be very interesting with all this development that's going on in Fort McMurray. There is talk of further diamond exploration in that immediate area. Well, it would certainly be beneficial to the oil and gas industry. Right now you've got to come fairly far south from Fort McMurray if you want to

move machines or trucks or crews around. I know it's not very far by air, but a lot of people cannot afford that. I think it would be an initiative to benefit all northern Albertans.

The cost of this I don't know. I know there's some muskeg there, but if in this modest budget there is a study, I would love to see this, because again I think it would be a noteworthy project not only for diamond exploration but oil and gas, and there are some tar sand deposits further west there as well. I don't know how far below the surface they are, how much overburden there is, but this is where a road would come in really handy.

Now, is the Northern Alberta Development Council also studying the whole idea of local content in the contracts to ensure that local citizens can have a fair shot at the jobs that are created? If there are local fabricators, for instance, local welding shops, local X-ray firms – I can go on and on and on. Is local industry being given a fair chance at developing their own businesses to meet the demand, or is all this work coming from outside? I think one way to develop the economy is to encourage local citizens to be entrepreneurs and to help them out along the way.

I have a few other questions at this time that are specific to the Slave Lake area. We all hear the talk and the questions around the quality of our water. Certainly with what is called the brown rivers – those are like the Athabasca and the Peace rivers – that is the term put on them by scientists. The quality of water in the brown rivers as the north becomes industrialized – is the Northern Alberta Development Council doing any studies on the quality of the water in the rivers?

Also the Slave Lake; sometimes we forget just how big the Slave Lake is. Just to the east of the Slave Lake is the Mitsue oil and gas field, and that was a real nice find in its time. It's been a producing field and continues to produce rather well. I believe Chevron has a major play there. Is the Northern Alberta Development Council working with the oil industry in regards to drilling in the lake itself? I realize we can go a fair distance with directional drilling, but what exactly are the plans for any oil or gas that is under the lake itself?

Are there any initiatives by the Northern Alberta Development Council with Tourism Alberta to promote Pelican Lake? For that matter the beaches at Slave Lake, too, but Pelican Lake is noteworthy, for all hon. members, and it is a great place to go camping with your family.

DR. TAFT: Why?

MR. MacDONALD: Because the lake is very aptly named. The pelicans are there, and they are also raising their young in the summer. It's noteworthy and is a rather unique place.

I'm just wondering if it's going to be part of any Travel Alberta promotions, because I think it certainly would be a very modest promotion. I think it would be worth while. Particularly now that gas is expensive and the Canadian dollar so low, maybe Edmontonians could visit the Slave Lake area more frequently. There's a folk festival in Slave Lake. It's an old country fair, and it's a good one.

I have one more question, and that is also in the business plan, again on cross-government strategies. This one is in relation to gaming. As I understand it, there are going to be increased opportunities for First Nations' people to set up casinos in our fast-developing gaming industry. I wonder what measures are going to be employed by this department to check on this initiative.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to my colleague, and I look forward to more questions later on. Thank you.

8:50

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to take part in the discussions this evening of the estimates for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I'm pleased to congratulate the minister on her appointment. We have a bit of a history that precedes our work here in the House, and I know she'll do a fine job of the responsibilities that she's been assigned. I think it was a very appropriate appointment, and I wish her well. Having said that, I do have some questions. Given who the minister is, some I find somewhat surprising, and maybe the minister would comment on them.

As I look at the business plan on pages 42 and 43 and read through the Vision, the Mission, the Core Business, the Clients and Partners, the Goal and Strategies, I come away with the feeling that things are being done "to" the aboriginal population rather than things being done "with" the aboriginal population, and I say that, I think, with good reason. If you look under the core businesses, one of the first is to "provide leadership in the management of Alberta's relationships with Aboriginal governments, communities and organizations." So those organizations are set aside, and we have that juxtaposed against Alberta.

If you look down a little further to the key services provided by the department, at "coordinating Alberta's strategies relating to Aboriginal relations," it seems to be sort of us against them in this front piece to the business plan. I think there are other examples in this text that would bear that out, and I wouldn't mind the minister commenting on that observation. There seems to be – and the minister underlined it in her opening comments – a great emphasis on teamwork with everyone else, yet for instances where the teamwork involves aboriginals, you have to start and look for them, at least on this front page, although there are some examples on page 44 where they talk about "working with" the aboriginal community. I guess it was that kind of language that I expected to see in this business plan with this minister, and, as I said, I'm somewhat surprised that that's not what we see here this evening.

The minister talked about the aboriginal policy framework. It's mentioned a number of times in the business plan, and it's mentioned again on page 52, the last page of the business plan. The minister mentioned the work of at least two of her cabinet colleagues in the development of that policy and there is reference to some other groups that were included, but I wonder if we can have more information on who exactly was involved in that policy development. What was the nature of public input, wide public input? How aware, I guess, are Albertans that that policy exists? What was the invitation to Albertans to be involved in the development of that policy?

While I'm on collaboration and teamwork, the minister indicated that there would be a collaborative process that would be announced. Just what does that involve? Who is going to be part of that collaborative process? What's the time line on the announcement? What is going to be the substance that the individuals involved will address? So some more information, if we might, on the collaborative process that the minister remarked on in her opening comments.

One more while I'm on the business of public involvement and wider public involvement, and that is the reference to land claims in the documents. We're all aware of the controversy brewing in British Columbia about the settlement of land claims and the election of a new government that at least before the election indicated that there would be greater public involvement, that in fact there would be plebiscites held, I take it to approve any land claim agreements. The documents before us talk about the success we've had in Alberta in settling aboriginal land claims, but I wondered if the minister feels comfortable that the general public as well is aware of what's involved in those settlements and the implications

of the settlements, because I have a feeling they aren't. I wondered if the minister has given thought to that and whether it's an issue that has to be addressed.

The record seems to be good, and maybe we shouldn't play with something that seems to be working well, but I think the red flags have been raised in our province to the west and that we'd be wise to heed the warning that comes from there in terms of the backlash that there seems to have been by the general public in terms of the settlements that have been reached and the lack of public input into those agreements.

I'd like to move on, then, if I might, to some of the goal 1 strategies. There's one in particular, and that's strategy (f), to acquire, prepare and distribute Aboriginal-specific data for internal use by provincial departments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, other governments and agencies, the private sector, academic institutions and the public.

I have a word of caution in terms of the kind of information that is gathered and then distributed. I use as an example the work that was done in terms of rating the success of schools in the province based on achievement and diploma test results. That information was widely circulated, and I've heard from individuals involved with aboriginal education that that did more harm than it did good. Certainly the problems in schooling in some aboriginal communities are severe, problems of attendance and problems with completion rates, but the treatment of the data, the way it was handled by the agency that gathered it and the information made public, did nothing but hamper the work of those who are involved in trying to improve aboriginal education and to work towards excellent programs in those schools. I think the information may be valuable and may be useful as we do some planning, but I think we have to be careful why we're gathering information and what use will be made of the information to assure ourselves that it's going to be used to improve conditions and not, in fact, cause further problems. So just a caution as we move into acquiring that kind of information for planning purposes.

I was also a little surprised that, on page 45 under key result 1.3, the key result expected is "accountable, self-regulating, and self-reliant Metis Settlement governments." The first strategy, strategy (a), would be to

assist the Metis Settlements General Council to develop and implement business plans, including the reporting of accomplishments through appropriate performance indicators.

I can't think of a more worthy strategy, but it would be one where you would think that the department would lead by example. Certainly that's not the case in this budget. In fact, it's a rather curious collection of text that one finds when one looks under the performance measures and indicators of the department. Page 45 of the business plan indicates:

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development has several methods of measuring its performance, including the following:

1. Reports on Department Performance
2. Secondary Indicators
3. Survey of Clients and Partners
4. Public Polling Data

Then you go over to see each one of these better defined or extrapolated, and there's only one performance indicator, which is an "approval rating on Aboriginal relations." Even that one is really very questionable.

9:00

If you look at the reports on the department's performance, again where are the measures? Attention to aboriginal affairs has been part of this government's operation since at least 1993 that I know of, and you'd think that by now with the great emphasis the

government has had on the development of business plans and the admonitions of the Auditor General, they would have had performance indicators honed to a fine level at this point, yet they aren't here, and one would have to question why. Why are they not here at this stage in our development? It's like this has just been created, and we have nothing to go on.

Under secondary indicators again why aren't there the indicators that we would expect to find there? If I could make a plea, I would hope that some of those indicators, when they are developed as promised, will include some education indicators. What exactly is happening in terms of education, and what is the performance of the government or this department in helping to promote high school completion rates and participation in postsecondary programs or postsecondary training by the aboriginal community?

The survey of clients and partners again I think is interesting, but this business plan, like many others that are contained in this document, asks other departments for an approval rating. So here we have every department asking every other department: do you approve of the work we're doing? I really question the validity of the information that you'll gather from those kinds of surveys, that you won't end up with you pat my back and I'll pat yours kind of information. I also question having to focus so heavily on it throughout the entire budget documents. Surely competency of a department is something we should assume, and only when things go wrong would you expect to hear about it.

"The Department will undertake to develop and implement a satisfaction survey." My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview has made some comments about satisfaction surveys and the value of the surveys, again good public relations – people like to think they're being asked – but in terms of usefulness, in terms of program planning I think rather limited. I say that out of experience in public education with the annual parent surveys that indicate, for instance, that 90 percent plus of parents who send their children to public schools are satisfied with the programs that their children receive. Well, that's not really very surprising, and it's not really very useful information, but it's very good information, I guess, if you're waging a public relations campaign and trying to convince people that you're doing the job that you're supposed to be doing.

On page 47 the public polling data I thought is interesting in that the department seems to be satisfied with such a low performance and that they use as the standard the four-province average. Just because those four provinces are at 29 percent, somehow or other we're supposed to feel good at 43 percent. As far as I know, 43 percent in most situations is not considered a satisfactory performance. So why would you pick such a low standard? Why would you not set goals that were higher than those that have been established in the document that we have here?

I'd like to move on to the Northern Alberta Development Council business plan and ask a couple of questions there. On page 50, goal 3, "to increase northern skill levels," I wondered what part Campus Alberta plays in this effort to increase northern skill levels. Is Campus Alberta part of this planning? If it isn't, why isn't it? It seems to me that it fits into the goals quite nicely and that seamless movement of students through to postsecondary institutions. As I understand, Campus Alberta is part of their plan. So is Campus Alberta part of this planning is my question.

I looked with interest at the bursary recipients return service rate, and I think that's a useful measure. The actual is 74 percent. I think it's really quite good. I've done some work in the north with teacher education, and if we had a 74 percent return on those programs, we would have been ecstatic. So I think that this is a good and useful measure to have and points to some success.

I wondered about other measures. Do we have participation rates

for students in northern Alberta in terms of taking part in postsecondary education in the province or postsecondary training of any sort? Do we have program completion information that would tell us how successful those students are when they complete the programs that they're enrolled in?

If I could move on to the next page, there are a number of items under expenses. One item that I would appreciate some explanation on is the Metis settlements legislation. It's \$10 million in 1999-2000, \$10 million in 2000-2001, and then it's \$10 million, \$10 million, \$10 million, \$10 million. What does that include? I assume it's an estimate, but I would be interested in what it includes. If you add it up over that time period, it's a tremendous amount of money unless I'm not reading this correctly. Is there any allocation for this in, say, the Department of Justice's budget or other government departments?

If I might ask about Metis settlements governance. Just what is included in that? Can we have a breakdown of some of the items that that would include?

On the last page of the document I have just a couple more questions. I've referred already to the aboriginal policy framework. It was approved by cabinet in 2000, and I already asked what the involvement was of the public in that policy other than interest groups. Was there a wider distribution asking for input?

A further question. I think it's something that maybe the minister can address. That's the difference between the performance measures that are included in the business plan and . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, you've run out time.

Before I call upon the hon. minister to close debate, is there anybody else who wishes to speak?

The hon. minister to close debate.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all the members who participated in this evening's discussion. I really appreciated getting the good questions and the comments that were raised. Although I'd like to answer all the questions that were asked tonight, I'm not able to do that with the amount of time we do have. However, I want to make a few comments.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for his comments. He had some really kind words, and I appreciate that. He made some recommendations also that I'm sure we'll look into and try to figure out what we can do in relation to that.

There was a question, however, that he asked about a drop in funding in aboriginal relations from 1999-2000 and 2001-2002. That was the result of land claims settlements in 1999-2000. So that was why it dropped in terms of the amount that he saw in aboriginal relations.

9:10

I really want to address his concerns in terms of some of the areas that he has identified, and one of them, of course, is that in my opening comments in response to his concurrence – we do serve as a catalyst with government for both aboriginal and northern issues, so I think it's very important for us to be able to identify what it is that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is doing, which is to make sure that we do work with other ministries as well as aboriginal governments to ensure that we continue to work as that catalyst. That's an important perspective.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, I was really disappointed with you in terms of your comments relative to the stand-alone ministry. I thought you were always concerned about aboriginal people, but it appears that you really don't care when you're talking about some of the things in terms of saying that this is not needed in terms of an aboriginal

affairs ministry. I was really taken by that, and I think that's an important comment for me to remember as we move forward in the province. But I liked the idea of you bringing forward the collaboration and how we can do things within the departments and how we can do that with the various aboriginal governments as well. So for me that's a very important part.

Edmonton-Mill Woods, you targeted your comments very well, and I appreciate the fact that you were talking about identified measures. Those are important in northern Alberta and making sure that we continue to work in that vein. I can't answer all the questions, but I really appreciate the fact that you do that. I will answer them to you in writing and make sure that we continue to ensure that everyone understands that the establishment of this ministry reflects government's commitment to resolving the issues raised tonight as well as others throughout the province as I've traveled. We want to make sure we resolve these issues as we are a catalyst, as I identified, within government, and we are currently in discussion with aboriginal leaders throughout the province as well as industry and other stakeholders to make sure we continue to implement the aboriginal policy framework.

Of course, we'll answer any questions that we can have answers to to the members that asked questions. I can't do this alone, Mr. Chairman, so tonight I have staff in the public gallery, and I'd like to introduce them because they are a very big part of what I do in aboriginal affairs. I'll start out with Paddy Meade, who is my deputy minister, and some of you may know her. Ken Boutillier is the assistant deputy minister of aboriginal relations. Martin Hanly is director of project resourcing. John McDonough is executive director of strategic services. Tom Baldwin is executive director of the Northern Alberta Development Council. Ken Borch is the senior financial officer. However, this is his last official duty tonight, and I appreciate him coming. He's leaving as of tomorrow and won't be back to the government. Thank you, Ken, for all your hard work. My acting EA is Donna Hickey. It is with them that I'm able to carry out some of the projects that have been identified, and I know we look forward to a really good year coming up and in the future dealing with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:	
Operating Expense	\$20,210,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Innovation and Science

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister to open debate.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. I am pleased to present to you this evening the 2001-2004 business plan and the 2001-2002 estimates for the Ministry of Innovation and Science.

With today's rapid pace of change it makes it challenging to plan ahead, but I believe that the activities and investments outlined in the plans presented tonight will help to create a framework for sustainable prosperity for all Albertans. One of the keys to economic success in this era of change is innovation. We must continue to embrace new ideas if we are to become leaders in a global knowledge-based economy.

Thanks in large part to the growth of technology and knowledge-based industries, Alberta has made great strides in diversifying its economy. As Minister of Innovation and Science I'm committed to continuing that work to diversify the provincial economy, particularly in the information and communications technology, life sciences, and energy sectors.

Referring now to the 2001-2004 business plan, our vision is to have Alberta

recognized locally and globally as a world leader in the development and application of science and technology that improves the well being and prosperity of its people and improves its communities and natural environment.

Innovation and Science consists of several elements, the first being the Alberta Science and Research Authority and the research institutes that fall under it; namely, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, which is co-chaired by the Member for Wainwright, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, which is co-chaired by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute, which is co-chaired by the Member for West Yellowhead. There are also two provincial corporations that are part of ASRA, those being the Alberta Research Council, commonly known as ARC, and ICORE Inc., which refers to the informatics circle of research excellence.

The second element is the Department of Innovation and Science, which includes the components of information technology services, the chief information officer, and of course Supernet. In addition, the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research report through me to the Legislative Assembly but are not included in the business plan or voted estimates for Innovation and Science.

Innovation and Science has two core businesses. The first is science, research, and development. This involves providing strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta, promoting a science culture in Alberta, applying science and research to improve stewardship of our resources and environment, and increasing the application of technology throughout the economy.

The second core business is government information technology. This involves ensuring that the government of Alberta is exemplary in the efficient and effective use of information technology in providing services to all Albertans. It accomplishes this through a number of means: one, co-ordinating the effective use of computer technology, voice and data networks, and information systems within government; secondly, establishing cross-ministry policies and standards for information and communications technology to improve the efficiency and flexibility of government; thirdly, identifying, facilitating, and providing cross-ministry solutions for ICT; and fourthly, identifying and promoting best practices through cross-ministry initiatives.

As you are aware, Alberta Supernet will be initiated in this fiscal year, 2001-2002. This project is a significant initiative under this core business, and when complete, Supernet will make broadband Internet and network access available in 422 communities across Alberta. Lethbridge will be one of them.

Our business plan outlines long-term goals and strategies that will support activities in Alberta's research community and nurture the innovative spirit that will make this province a prominent and

recognized leader in the global economy. Our business plan is focused on ensuring that Albertans have the skills, incentives, and tools they need to succeed and thrive in a knowledge-based economy, in a knowledge-based world. Our six goals focus on the development of human resources, infrastructure, access to financial capital, a supportive business, social, and political environment, and ensuring that we effectively manage our human resources within the ministry.

9:20

I'm now going to refer to the 2001-2002 fiscal plan. In order to obtain these goals, the goals I referred to in terms of the previous goals, we need to ensure that sufficient funding is available. The government recognizes this need and over the past several years has increased its support for research, science, and technology. Our 2001-2002 voted estimates are \$204.5 million, and this includes \$90.8 million in lottery proceeds. This total funding is split between our two core businesses: \$105.5 million for government information technology and \$94.6 million for science, research, and development. In addition, \$4.3 million has been allocated to provide support to these core businesses.

Programs within information and communications technology are co-ordinated and delivered by departmental staff. Within this program \$50 million will be allocated to develop Alberta Supernet, \$53.7 million will be allocated to working with ministries to carry out the corporate strategic direction for information and communication technology applications and infrastructure and ensuring that quality ICT and telecommunications solutions are provided through shared services and/or the private sector, and \$1.8 million will be allocated to the development of resource policies and standards as well as corporate strategic direction for information technology applications and infrastructure.

The science, research, and development program's main component is an \$89.6 million grant to the Alberta Science and Research Authority, commonly known as ASRA. ASRA and its various entities also attract significant funding from the private sector and has a total budget of approximately \$140 million. ASRA is an independent board made up of key members from the business and research communities in Alberta appointed by the Lieutenant Governor who seek to enhance the contributions of science and research to the sustainable prosperity and quality of life of all Albertans. I might add, Mr. Chairman, that the people that are involved in that particular independent board contribute an enormous amount to the well-being and success of our province, and we can't thank them enough for their involvement in that process.

As the senior science and research body of the government of Alberta, ASRA's two core activities involve, one, developing and promoting informed and practical recommendations to the provincial government with respect to science and research policies and priorities, investments in science and research, and science and research infrastructure and, secondly, facilitating the identification, development, and implementation of strategic, high-value science and research initiatives. The ultimate goal of ASRA is to increase the socioeconomic benefits of science and research investments in the province of Alberta.

The following are some highlights of the budget allocations made by ASRA in 2001-2002: \$25 million to support research infrastructure and research activities at Alberta universities and research hospitals; \$10.9 million for strategic investments in science and research activities; \$10 million for ICORE – the goal of ICORE Inc. is to attract and grow a critical mass of outstanding researchers in the fields of computing science, computer engineering, physics, mathematics, and other ICT-related disciplines – 3 and a half million

dollars to support the retention of top-quality faculty at Alberta universities and research hospitals; \$2.4 million to promote the application of technology in electronics and microelectronics, telecommunications, and information networks, computer technology, multimedia, biotechnology, advanced materials, and manufacturing with the ultimate goal of attracting IT business to the province; \$68 million in spending by the Alberta Research Council to support the provision of applied research to small to medium-sized Alberta enterprises that enables Alberta firms to enhance their global competitiveness; a \$1.5 million grant to the Alberta Forestry Research Institute; \$8.6 million to the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, your time has elapsed. The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You can't fault enthusiasm.

I'd like to start by thanking the minister. The minister was courteous enough to invite me to his office after he was first appointed to the cabinet, and he was frank in sharing with me his vision of his department and where he would like it to go, but he was also frank in sharing his trepidation as a new minister. I have to admit that I was impressed, and I think you'll notice that we haven't asked the minister a question this session. I'm not sure the two are related, but that's the way things have developed. I do wish him the best, and I'm sure that he'll serve the ministry well.

I'd like to start off with a number of comments, if I may. On page 231 there's a reference to priorities. One is "a focus on education"; two is "public relations and stewardship issues." I wondered if we could have some more information in terms of exactly what public relations involve. From reading the document and the thrusts that are there, I think I have an idea, but public relations is usually used in a different context than it's used within this budget document, so I wondered, when the minister has an opportunity, if he might comment on that priority as it's outlined in the document.

The minister – and this is a bit of an aside – when I visited his office shared with me a report from the Alberta Science and Research Authority. I looked through that document, and I came away unclear – and it may be my problem – as to the relationship between that authority and the ministry, because in the report they list the Alberta Science and Research Authority and do in fact list the ministry as an equal entity. It was my understanding that the research authority was subsumed under the ministry, and certainly from the budget documents that would seem to be the case. Oh, I found the part I needed.

On page 40 of the report the Alberta Science and Research Authority is listed. The Ministry of Innovation and Science is listed. Then the Alberta Research Council, the informatics circle of research excellence, the Alberta Agricultural Research Institute, the Alberta Energy Research Institute, and the Alberta Forestry Research Institute are listed as almost parallel or separate entities. I think it's misleading. I had sort of a picky question, they used to call them when I was on the school board, about the Alberta Science and Research Authority having the money to put out a report which is as luxurious as this one is. I know a bit from preparing annual reports that when you have embossed covers, when you have ghost leaflets, when you have the quality of paper and the binding used in this document, the price tag is fairly hefty. I noticed in the document that they said the report was posted on the web, so I wondered about the need for such a showy document. But it is picky, and I'll set it aside for more important questions, Mr. Chairman.

9:30

I've had a bit of a discussion with the minister about the Supernet project, and I'm still a little concerned about the technology changing so fast. The minister indicated that wireless technology was going to be used at the extremities of the network, where it wasn't possible or it wasn't feasible to have hard wiring. I wondered if there's more information on that. He talks about 422 communities being served by the high-speed network band, and I have a question with respect to the measure that's being used. I think the project is mentioned on page 233. There's a performance measure on page 243. It has as the heading, "Number of communities where residences are using high-speed internet access." So 422 communities have access to high-speed network bandwidth. But how many residences are there actually involved? How significant is the fact that there are residences there in terms of the total population or the total number of residences in a community? It seems that without that further information, just saying it's there isn't very useful.

The same with the second indicator: businesses "are using high-speed services." The information has yet to be collected. I would be interested to know if the data being collected would tell us the extent of the user service in a community. I think it would be interesting to know and it's an index worth pursuing, because the access is available in this city, yet I know a number of individual residents who are reluctant to sign up for it, given the cost. Getting access to cable is about a \$50 bill a month for a residence. I think it would be interesting for our own community in terms of how extensive that service is being used. It seems again to me that low-income families may be excluded from this. So any information on that use objective I think would be interesting in terms of trying to judge the success of the money that's being spent on it.

There's a strategy under goal 1 that would "support graduate students through project and program funding." The graduate students across this province have made their voices very loud in terms of the need for more assistance. This is one way that the assistance available to them can be increased. I would appreciate some more details in terms of that particular program.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

I wanted to move again to page 238, "increase the awareness and promotion of science and technology to K-12 students so that they will consider science and technology as a viable career opportunity." That's a great goal. I think schools have other objectives that supercede that one in terms of why they want students to have access to the technology, but I'm also aware that schools are really struggling with finding appropriate funds for software and finding appropriate money for the hardware. Evergreening is becoming a huge problem for them, as it is for the rest of us that use the Internet in our daily lives, and I have this vision of the schools all having access to the Internet yet not having the money to pay for the machines and the software to access it. So this is an objective, and I guess my question is: how well co-ordinated is this with the efforts of the Department of Learning to ensure that schools aren't left in that position?

On page 239, where the strategy is to "adopt standards and best practices across government," one of the strategies, the fourth strategy, the fourth bullet, is to

identify opportunities in IMT for shared service approaches, standards (e.g. common platform and tools), best practices and cross ministry initiatives to reduce duplication of effort/investment and collaborate with ministries to implement solutions.

Further, the next bullet is to

lead government in the planning, standardization and ongoing

development of a compatible, secure infrastructure for information management and ICT.

I was looking back at the *Hansard* for November of 1999. A previous minister made comments about the problem of developing common standards and common platforms across government. The minister indicated at that time that the "issue is being handled by the chief information officer," and he further went on to indicate:

I believe we have four or five different e-mail platforms inside government, and some of these e-mail platforms can't talk to each other. Well the question is: why? So that's one of the issues. We have a whole series of different desktops across government, and these desktops can't talk to each other.

That was in November of 1999. We see the same item here. Although the minister did indicate at that time that this was going to take a number of years to resolve, to get the common standards in place, I wonder what kind of progress has been made to have all the departments working from common platforms and using standards that bring some uniformity to government operations.

There's a further reference that I wanted to track too. It is on page 240. Given the minister's comments at that time, where the desktop standards are indicated, there's e-mail: nothing for 1999-2000, so a standard wasn't set; 85 percent for 2000-01. Then it goes on to list some of the other kinds of standards they're working on. I'm surprised, given the information that was here in 1999, that there isn't the information available for the 1999-2000 budget year and that the goals are still rather modest in terms of the hardware baseline.

9:40

I'd like to move on to the government survey of Innovation and Science employees and raise the same point that I raised in the previous estimates, and that is this business of the government asking employees or employees of other departments how satisfied they are. Again, in terms of all the key performance measures that could be included in a business plan, I wonder about the extensive treatment being given in this business plan to the Innovation and Science employees.

The information is interesting, but it raises another question that I have, and that is: how do you decide what information you're going to include in the business plan and attach it to dollars and what information do you include in annual reports? I looked back at the Department of Learning, for example, which has a fair number of measures that are useful within the context of the business plan and that are attached to dollars. Their annual report is much more extensive in terms of the performance measures they include. So if you look at the business plan, you have a good idea of how the dollars are being targeted, and if you want further information, if you want some of that information interpreted more widely, you can go to the annual report eventually to see a wider range of performance measures. It seems to me, at least in some cases, that is becoming closer to the kind of thing the Auditor General has commented upon so often in his report and has been so critical of government, in terms of the performance measures that are not there.

There's a line question I have on page 244 in the ministry expenses, and that's ICORE, the informatics circle of research excellence. If I read that, there was \$855,000 spent in 1999-2000, and there's \$10 million for the next number of years included in the budget item. There are some chairs that have been dedicated at postsecondary institutions, and I wonder if we could have some expansion on that item. What else is intended to help attract and keep high-quality researchers in the province? This is an important initiative coming out of the Cloutier report a number of years ago that indicated there was a brain drain and that government action was needed. I'm delighted to see this in the budget, but I would

appreciate some more information in terms of what is exactly going to be included and does it include more than dedicated chairs.

The office of the chief information officer shows the budget remaining about the same. I wonder, given that the work of standards over the next number of years will eventually be completed, why there is not a decrease eventually shown in that budget. Or is it just the nature of technology that there are always going to be new problems to solve and that this is going to be an ongoing budget item that remains at that level?

I had some other questions on some of the specific budget lines, but I think I'll leave those for now and conclude with those remarks. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted to make my comments on the estimates of the Department of Innovation and Science. I listened to the minister's introductory comments, and I appreciate his enthusiasm and his commitment to the department and to the task at hand. I notice he's having a nice increase in budget that will help him and that I'm sure contributes to his enthusiasm.

But as I listened to him, I felt like I wanted to put up a caution, thinking back to efforts along these lines starting in 1976 and going on through until the late 1980s. There was a department of technology, research, and telecommunications. There have been variations on this current Department of Innovation and Science for years either as a stand-alone ministry or as a subset of some other ministry such as Economic Development.

I'm sure the minister is well aware of the pressures he's going to face, but he's now got a substantial budget here, and it's large enough and growing rapidly enough that it's going to attract and create all kinds of pressures. People are going to be after him for money. As they say, honey attracts flies. There's a lot of honey here, and he's going to have a lot of people coming to him to get a piece of it. My concern, frankly, is that keeping control on expenditures is going to be difficult, and exercising wisdom in allocating those expenditures is also going to be very difficult. All kinds of enthusiasts for different projects are going to be coming his way, and it makes me nervous to see governments getting into these kinds of areas. At the same time, I will admit that it's necessary. It just requires a great deal of caution. A great deal of wisdom is perhaps the way to put it.

As I mentioned already, it's a department which is experiencing a rather generous increase in its budget, I think over a 26 percent increase from the budget of last year, and that's obviously not a sustainable sort of pattern. I'm not sure what the trends are expected to be over the next two or three or four years, but a 26 percent increase in one year may be fine once but it's clearly not sustainable. So, again, that reinforces my sense of caution with this department and for this minister.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Part of that trend, the department's capital investment, is budgeted at nearly double last year's estimate. This year it's expected to be \$8 million, and last year it was about \$4 million, so that again reflects the pattern of rapid increases in expenditures.

I'm also noticing the commitment to strategic investments and various research initiatives, whether it's the Supernet or the research infrastructure in universities and teaching hospitals or commitments to promote economic development through commercialization of research. Again, these are areas that are so prone to commercial

pressures and to the pressures that will come when leaders of projects see this as their last resort for getting money and put intense, intense political pressure on the department to pay up. I feel very nervous for that \$204 million.

The biggest jump, I think – it's certainly one of the biggest – is in program 2 of the department's operating expenses, information and communications technology, which is getting a 28 percent increase and now will surge to over \$105 million this year. So given that program 2, the information and communications technology or ICT area, was actually about 15 percent under budget last year, I'd like to know how the department justifies a 28 percent increase in spending for this year. How is that justified? What are they spending the money on? Why the big jump? Indeed, what do they foresee for next year and the year after?

9:50

Given my concerns over spending, I'm going to ask for more detailed information from this department than I have from most others. I would like the minister to provide a breakdown of the ministry's gross operating expenses for the year by object for the following components: salaries for permanent positions, salaries for nonpermanent positions, and salaries for contract positions as well as travel expenses, advertising, telephone and communications, and hosting expenses. There are areas in there where we could see all kinds of expenditures slipping out of control: hosting expenses, travel expenses in these high-tech areas could quickly get beyond our reasonable controls which we are expected to respect for the taxpayers of Alberta. If the minister would also provide a breakdown of where the additional 28 percent in expenditures for program 2 is going and how that spending will meet the department's stated core businesses and goals, I for one would appreciate it, and I think all Alberta taxpayers would.

The \$50 million that is budgeted for the Supernet this year alone is a tremendous amount of money. Fifty million dollars is a perfectly round figure. I wonder what the plans are for the next four years and how they arrived at exactly \$50 million. It is a suspiciously round figure, and I'd be interested to have more details on that.

Has the department done a cost-benefit analysis on the Supernet project to determine whether it will really be worth while and, as my other colleagues have mentioned, whether it's technology that will even be up to date by the time this project is implemented. I'd be curious to know beyond simple buzzwords how exactly the Supernet will make Albertans more competitive in the world marketplace. What's the direct tie between that \$50 million expenditure and the goal of making Alberta more competitive? I'm not sure that it holds up if you become critical on the buzzwords.

If on the other hand it's meant as a sign of commitment to bringing most Albertans onto the Internet in the same way that there were the rural electrification programs in the '50s and the programs of Alberta Government Telephones decades ago to bring telephones to all Albertans, if it has a social component to it, I'd like to know that. What steps will the department take to ensure that all Albertans will have access to the benefits of the Supernet? Could it be in fact that it will undercut local businesses if a bookstore owner in a small town, say Lac La Biche, suddenly is facing a lot of competition from the big Internet suppliers? Is that really something we want to have? If these things are thought through, are we sure they are going to be as beneficial as the promoters of them want us to believe? I'm also interested, once this system is in place, in what the costs will be to maintain it. Has the department done any in-depth studies on the administrative and maintenance cost associated with the Supernet? So there are a lot of questions around the Supernet. I know my colleagues have raised those from time to time, and they will be raised again.

The goals of the department are worth mentioning here, not only

for what they include but for what they do not include. The goals as listed in the business plan are:

1. Maximize the international competitiveness of Alberta's science and research system.
2. Promote effective technology commercialization, adoption and investment in Alberta.
3. Promote effective application of science and research for improving the stewardship of Alberta's resources and environment.
4. Promote the benefits of science and innovation within Alberta.
5. The Government of Alberta will be a model user in the application of information, knowledge and technology.
6. Effectively manage human capital within the Ministry of Innovation and Science.

Those are laudable. My concern is that when we are into an area like innovation and science, things happen so quickly and there is often so little forethought that the big picture is sometimes forgotten. So while I note, for example, that goal 3 does refer to "improving the stewardship of Alberta's resources and environment," that's about as close as the entire business plan comes, as far as I can see, to addressing any questions around the ethical implementation of new technologies and the ethics surrounding innovation and science.

We are seeing ethical questions rise all over our society from these areas, whether it's in the medical area and the ethics of new medical technology, whether it's in the wisdom of committing to unrelenting innovation and the stress that comes from a rapid change in society as we are forced and driven to innovate and innovate and innovate. We see reports out of Calgary, done by the Calgary regional health authority, that Calgarians are under intense stress. They're some of the most highly stressed people in the country.

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you think it's the traffic there?

DR. TAFT: Traffic is part of the problem.

The speed of change in that society is part of the problem. The suicide rates in Calgary are among the highest in the country, and indeed the suicide rates in Alberta are among the highest in the country. How many of those relate to the unrelenting pressure of innovation and change? It's certainly worth some consideration in this department. Where is the wisdom going to come from as we bring in more and more of these technologies and create more and more change and pressure in our society? So I would encourage this department, and I think it would indeed be of fundamental importance to the success of this department in the long run, to actually set up an office for ethical issues around new technologies.

With those comments, I'll move to some of my reactions to the major strategies. I read, for example, the second strategy, "make strategic investments to help modernize the research infrastructure at Alberta universities and teaching hospitals." How will this operate? Who is going to determine the priorities? I'm sure every department in every hospital and every faculty in all the universities and colleges has ideas for improving their research infrastructure. I'd like to know how this is going to be implemented, how the priorities will be determined.

The strategy relating to ICORE Inc., attract and grow a critical mass of outstanding researchers in the fields of computer science, electrical and computer engineering, physics, mathematics and other ICT-related disciplines, raises the question, of course, of how that will be done and who will do it. Is this something the department will largely delegate to universities and colleges and institutes, or is it something the department and the minister plan to have a direct say in?

"Promote economic development through the commercialization of research in existing and emerging industries." A strategy here, a

major strategy of the department, sounds very much like getting back into the business of choosing winners and losers, something that we have struggled mightily to extricate this government from. Yet here they are, moving in with a burgeoning budget and a growing department, back full scale into the notion of picking existing and emerging industries and presumably channeling public money to them to promote economic development. It sends up all kinds of red flags for me. How is that going to be done? How are we going to avoid the pitfalls of these kinds of initiatives of the past? How are we going to ensure that we don't end up backing the NovAtels and MagCans of the world yet one more time?

10:00

Further down the list of strategies: working with key Alberta science, research, and technology organizations to "enhance the science culture and literacy within the province." Who are those organizations? I'd be interested to know. Are they universities? Are they schools? Do they start in kindergarten? Do they include organizations like Access television, which maybe can undertake science programming for schools? Would they include something like sponsoring and encouraging greater participation in science fairs among elementary and junior high school students? So some more detail on those areas would be of real interest to me. My concern consistently is that in the fast-paced, overhyped world of high-tech innovation, the taxpayer is going to be fleeced or runs an increased risk of being fleeced and that the pressures on the minister and his senior officials to avoid that will be intense.

Continuing through the strategies:

\$39.4 million will be allocated to provide strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta through the allocation of funding to ongoing science and research activities, research infrastructure and the retention of top quality faculty at Alberta universities and research hospitals.

A laudable goal. I'd be interested in how it will be implemented. When they talked about providing "strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta through the allocation of funding," whose leadership? Is this the minister's leadership? Undoubtedly he will have a host of advisors, but again it resonates with the old problems we got into of picking winners and losers. I would like to see how this will be implemented and what safeguards are going to be in place for that.

I also read with some skepticism the strategy that says that \$45.6 million will be allocated to ensuring that the Government of Alberta is exemplary in the efficient and effective use of information and ICT in providing services to Albertans; coordinating the effective use of computer technology

and so on. I am concerned that information and communications technology within government can be a bottomless pit and that we can end up pouring millions and millions of dollars into IT systems that are frankly often of very disappointing value. I reflect back on experience that I've had and have observed directly in the government over the last years with spending huge amounts of money on information systems that in the end were very disappointing indeed.

Moving along to indicators of success, I notice R and D investment. An indicator will be "\$2 billion total R&D investment from the province, federal government and business by 2005." I'd like to know: what portions do they anticipate coming from each of those levels, from the province, from the federal government, and from business? Of that \$2 billion, which of those three groups will be putting up how much money?

Under Business Innovation again I'm concerned about getting into very high-risk areas when we're talking about putting Alberta taxpayer money into promoting "the Internet to sell goods and services."

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, your time has elapsed. The chair now recognizes the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to get a chance to participate in the debate this evening on the Innovation and Science department. I listened with a great deal of interest to the minister's initial remarks. I, too, would like to echo my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods and wish the minister the very best in his career as Minister of Innovation and Science.

Now, there are the core businesses that are outlined here. The goals are certainly, I think, very important. You can just go down the list here. Science, research, and development involves "providing strategic leadership for science and research in Alberta." That's an excellent goal.

"Managing and funding strategic investments in science and research." That, too, is noteworthy, but there were cautions expressed by my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview.

"Co-ordinating government science and research." There is a real need for government science and research, and there's also a need to ensure that if there are to be commercial applications for the science or the research, the taxpayers benefit as well as the commercial enterprises.

"Promoting a science culture in Alberta." As a parent of three elementary schoolchildren that is also very important, and I can't stress that enough to the minister. There is also the fact that as you work in Alberta industry and you see young people coming out of school and you're working with them either on the job or in a supervisory capacity, you can notice straight away those that have had their curiosity tweaked, so to speak, Mr. Chairman, by science and how readily they are able to adapt to the workforce. You can really see that. I don't know – and perhaps the minister can explain this – how the department is going to promote a science culture in Alberta. I suppose I may be getting ahead of the issue here by assuming that it's going to be in schools. It could be a lifelong learning initiative. I don't know.

"Applying science and research to improve stewardship of our resources and environment." I'm going to hopefully get a chance to talk about that a little later on.

"Commercializing the results of research." Well, that's fine again, Mr. Chairman, but let's ensure that the taxpayers are also going to be beneficiaries of that.

"Developing the 'knowledge industry' component of the Alberta economy." We have to realize – and time is running out as our resources are being exported – that there's more to this province than, as they say, rocks and trees, and there's more to this country. The development of this knowledge industry: well, that's fine, but let's ensure that it continues and that it's just not more sloganeering.

Now, "increasing the application of technology throughout the economy." Again, I'm not going to dwell on this. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods asked some very pointed questions about the Internet and Internet access for Albertans. Everyone was very excited with this initiative. Students told me that it's fine that we've got high-speed Internet, but they can't afford a computer because tuition fees are high. The farmers: well, they were very excited about this, but unfortunately with the price of commodities they cannot afford a computer. So the farmers are not going to have to worry about getting any dust in their laptop. It's not going to happen this year. Hopefully, it may happen next year.

10:10

There are some research initiatives that I would like to talk about specifically. I have some questions around the Alberta Energy Research Institute. There are three different research institutes, but

at this time I want to talk about the Energy Research Institute. Now, just exactly what is going on there? I would like to ask the minister a couple of direct questions, Mr. Chairman. The first is: is that department doing any research into semiconductor activity? For instance, let's say nitrogen is going to be the core of our electricity transmission lines. Naturally it's going to be very cold, and there's going to be very little resistance on the high-voltage lines. The reason I ask this is that there's talk now of more power lines to export electricity to America. There are limits that have been put on the main transmission line that's running north/south, and this is something that I think we need to do some research on.

In many transmission grids there is at least a 7 percent loss, and I think it's greater in Alberta. I'm having difficulty getting the statistics on Alberta. For some reason it's easier to get American statistics than it is Canadian statistics. It's easier to get data from the NEB than it is from the EUB. You know, there seems to be a veil of secrecy. The old cone of silence is over the province. Anyway, in America it is 7 percent of electricity that is lost in the high-voltage transmission lines. There is nitrogen being used to chill the line, and zing, there's no electricity loss. There's no line loss. Now, I don't know what the commercial applications are of this technology. Are the individuals at the Alberta Energy Research Institute doing any such research on this?

It's unfortunate that the hon. members in this Assembly who have large deposits of coal in their constituencies – I'm sure they're all interested. It's the Member for West Yellowhead, yes. I was looking over there, Mr. Chairman.

Now, clean coal technologies. Unfortunately, clean coal technologies do not exist in commercial applications, because there needs to be more research done. The cost has to be lowered. Clean coal technology is more than throwing a little bit of lime in the snuff box of a power boiler. There's a lot more to it than that. I was at a standing policy committee this evening where the Minister of Environment expressed concerns about CO₂ emissions in Fort McMurray. We have to develop these clean coal technologies. We need to ensure that clean coal technologies are developed. I want to know how much research is going on in the Alberta Energy Research Institute to develop the clean coal technologies.

George W. Bush, the current President of the United States of America, has also expressed reservations. He was shocked and appalled to realize that clean coal technologies do not exist in commercial applications. I have a report sitting in my office that indicates that we're at least 10 years from that, Mr. Chairman. This is another project I would like to see research done on in this province.

I had the pleasure of being at an Alberta youth forum with the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, and in his remarks he instructed the Alberta youth that there's a project on CO₂, I believe it was, in Fort McMurray. In the next 10 years this was going to be reality. It was going to be piped . . .

MR. HERARD: What?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, that's what I thought: what?

Now, it was going to be piped to central Alberta. There are coal seams down by Sylvan Lake that run west to Nordegg, and this was going to be used as a catalyst to develop methane coal gas beds. I would be very interested to know how far from reality this is and if any research is being done by the Alberta Energy Research Institute.

I would also be very curious to know from the hon. minister, please, Mr. Chairman, if there is any research being conducted regarding the efficiencies of natural gas fired electrical generating stations. Is there anything that can be done to increase the produc-

tion of those facilities? Is there some little thing that has been missed over the years in the burners that could increase the efficiency? As far as that technology exists, what can be done?

Getting back to the coal-fired generating stations, to reduce the grams of carbon particulate in relationship to the generation of a megawatt of electricity – now, that is a measure that's routinely used by American researchers. I would be very curious to see what's going on here in Alberta.

Now, the Alberta Forestry Research Institute. That department has a lot of information, and much of it must be vital to the economic prosperity of the West Yellowhead region of this fine province. I would be curious to know if there is research being done as to the sustainability of our forest cut or our timber harvest. This is vital. I was after the same information in the last series of estimates, so I won't go into detail on this, but I think it's important for the long-term view of the province.

Getting back to commercializing the results of research, we'll have to go to the Alberta Research Council. I have to ask the minister at this time if the Alberta Research Council – I may have missed it here, and I apologize if I have – has any formal ties with the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority. I'm very curious about this because there is so much research needed to be done to ensure that we can get every barrel out of the tar sands in a safe environmental fashion or method. Whether the tar sands are in Fort McMurray or Cold Lake or over in the Peace district, it doesn't matter. What is the relationship between, again, the Alberta Research Council and AOSTRA?

10:20

The Alberta Research Council. I think there was a \$56 million line in the budget, but I can't see it here. Anyway, I may have missed that, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize to the minister and officials if it's not \$56 million. The Alberta Research Council, of course, was involved in the whole pine shakes scandal, the untreated and treated pine shakes scandal. The Alberta Research Council was an accredited certification agency for a while.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is it still?

MR. MacDONALD: No, no. They were very anxious to let other third-party agencies be involved in the inspection and certification of the pine shake product.

Now, the rotting pine shake is a fine example of what can go wrong with research. The Alberta Research Council, to their credit, started some long-term durability testing on both the treated and untreated pine shake. I still have outstanding questions about the durability of the treated pine shakes in these field tests, but they were responsible enough to start field testing. There's no doubt about that.

This field testing went on and on for intervals. I believe it's going to go on for another three years up in Whitecourt, and there's a lot of rain in Whitecourt. There's a lot more rain in Whitecourt than there is in Calgary. We need to have a good look at these field studies, and I don't think that has been done to date. Also, at the farm down by the Ellerslie rugby pitch the Alberta Research Council had some battens set up with pine shakes on them, and none of the homeowners either to the north of that development or in Calgary or anywhere else in the province had the opportunity of having a look at those detailed field studies.

So hopefully that's been a lesson learned by everyone in the province. Not only do we have to do through research and development, but we've got to do it before we commercialize the product. Even as I was driving down here at 8 o'clock, I could see on 98th

Avenue where there were lots and lots of residential homes, Mr. Chairman, that had the pine shakes removed and cedar shakes put on, and they had large reroofing bills to deal with. However, it reminds one of the quote that came up in this Assembly – and I forget which hon. minister it was at the time – about how the gray weatherbeaten look of these pine shakes was an example of Alberta entrepreneurship. This was the quote. This quote originated in a committee similar to this one. Of course, we all know that is not the truth. It's simply not the truth. This product is just one headache after another for Alberta homeowners, and it is a fine lesson.

Now, the Alberta Research Council certainly does notable research and development, and I would like to see that continue. We all learn from our mistakes, and I'm curious: are there any sorts of liability contingencies set aside? Or is there an insurance policy in case the Research Council is at this court case that's going on? Now, maybe other members of this Assembly know more about that court case than I do. What's the status of the Alberta Research Council in relationship to the fact that the government may at some time be found guilty of authorizing and promoting this shoddy building product?

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'm curious about this office of the chief information officer. I would like some details on that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. minister to close debate, is there anybody else who wishes to speak on these estimates?

The hon. minister to close debate.

MR. DOERKSEN: Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity, and with the five minutes I have to close debate, I can't possibly answer all the questions this evening but will commit to do written answers.

I do want to recognize some members from Innovation and Science who have come tonight. I want you to know that I have encouraged all the staff at Innovation and Science to stay home, fill their emotional tanks, and prepare for another exciting day tomorrow, but even here at 10:30 at night we have members of our finance division who have come to see the proceedings and help me out. I do want to introduce Brian Fischer, who is a senior financial officer, Sophie Kwan, Clem Benoit, and Byron Nagazina, who have come tonight. Thank you very much. I appreciate your attendance here.

I do want to make a couple of points and finish my opening comments, as I never had a chance to do that. First of all, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about not having asked me a question in question period yet. I know that eventually he will get around to doing that, but I realize he has had other conflicting priorities that have more compelling urgency. So I respect that.

The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talked a lot about the Alberta Energy Research Institute. I did want to refer in my opening comments, and didn't get around to it, to the \$8.9 million grant to that institute to support research on efficient and economical recovery and processing of oil sands and related products and the development of technologies that will ensure economic and sustainable energy production from currently underutilized resources such as oil sands, clean burning coal, and coal bed methane.

There was a simple question about the relationship of ASRA to the minister. I would point out to the hon. member that if he would review the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Act, it really gives legislative authority to that particular board and shows you what the relationship is. Just in review quickly, the authority gives advice to the minister respecting science, engineering, and technology. It stimulates research and development and technology activities in Alberta. It develops and recommends

science, engineering, technology, and research policy and priorities. It conducts an annual review and evaluation of all government science, engineering, technology, and research policy, and it goes on. But quite clearly that relationship is established within that particular act.

As far as Supernet is concerned, there were a number of questions about Supernet. I just want to point out that the primary benefit of Supernet – well, that should be, too, what I will call the extended network or primarily to the rural or remote areas – is eliminating the digital divide in Alberta, one of the few jurisdictions actually that has taken the initiative to eliminate that disparity between, if you want to call it, the haves and the have-nots. It will provide access at equitable pricing across the province, thereby giving the economic initiative and incentive for those communities in use of that particular technology.

With those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the questions, and actually there were some suggestions which I appreciate as well. We will commit to get back and table those responses at a later date. So with that, I will take my seat.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Innovation and Science, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$204,458,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

10:30

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the Committee of Supply now rise and report and beg leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: operating expense, \$20,210,000.

Innovation and Science: operating expense and capital investment, \$204,458,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:32 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 23, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/23

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly officers of the Salvation Army, an organization that has given so much to so many in both Alberta and in the Dominion of Canada over the last 100 or more years. The Salvation Army is widely recognized and is loved and respected for its unconditional, compassionate, and spiritual commitment to those in need, regardless of circumstance. In your gallery today are commissioners Bill and Gwen Luttrell, territorial leaders for the Canada and Bermuda territory; lieutenant-colonels Doug and Lorraine Moore, leaders of the Salvation Army for the Alberta and Northwest Territories division; majors Jim Champ and Ray Rowe; and captains Brian Venables and Eddie Vincent from the Army's divisional headquarters here in Edmonton. The Moores are retiring at the end of June after having given some 45 years of dedicated service to the welfare of others. I'd ask all our visitors to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Bill 19

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce Bill 19, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

The bill makes minor changes to six pieces of provincial legislation, including the Animal Protection Act, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, and the Legislative Assembly Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to questions asked of me on Tuesday, May 15, by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark,* I am pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of specific projects being funded this year under the Alberta municipal water/wastewater partnership. Included in that is a list of all projects that have been approved to date since 1992.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter from Black Gold regional schools in which they express some serious reservations about some of the provisions of Bill 16.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter from the Red Deer public school district on behalf of Red Deer-North and Red Deer-South concerning Bill 16.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of tablings. The first tabling is an action alert issued by the Alberta Wilderness Association. This deals with the following:

The Alberta government is finalizing plans to turn the management of a large portion of the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserve . . . including the Kananaskis, Ghost-Waiparous and Burnt-Timber forests, over to Spray Lake Sawmills through a Forest Management Agreement.

The second is a set of three letters, all dealing with this proposed FMA, and they are written by Mr. Guy Greenaway of Calgary, Mr. Will Gadd, and a third one is from Jeff Perron, all addressed to the Premier, asking him to stop this FMA from proceeding.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a document outlining statistics from the police in Calgary outlining the increase in hate and bias crimes in that city.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the information of all Members of the Legislative Assembly a letter dated September 27, 1999, that I received from the Minister of Alberta Environment. This is regarding documents, correspondence, and soil tests relating to the Hub Oil facility.

The second tabling that I have today is a document that I received through freedom of information. It's a site map of Hub Oil. It's dated October 1992, and in the northwest corner someone has drawn in "Cap'n Jakes treasure," and it has the skull and crossbones attached.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies of a letter addressed to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness from a businessman in Lethbridge who is very upset over some correspondence from the health insurance commission over premiums.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of Ann-Marie's bicycle safety program at St. Matthew school. Ann-Marie St. Jean was tragically killed as an eight year old due to an accident. The St. Jean family has agreed to have St. Matthew school create a bicycle safety program in honour of her and to help as many children as possible become safe riders.

Thank you.

*See page 736, left col., para. 9

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege of meeting with three very important Edmontonians who are members of the Greater Edmonton Foundation responsible for housing for seniors, as we all know. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly as I call their names. The first gentleman is Nick Hertz, the chair of the board; the vice-chair, Dennis Vasquez; and the alternate vice-chair, Maureen Hemingway Schloss. I do thank them for an excellent meeting.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a visiting Rotary student. With us today in the members' gallery is Tuulia Valiheikki, a grade 12 student visiting Edmonton as part of a Rotary International youth exchange program. Tuulia is a Rotary exchange student from Finland. Since arriving in our city, Tuulia has attended Victoria composite high school – the high school, I might mention, is where the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is still the principal – and has been active in our community. Accompanying Tuulia is Dorothy Hollands, president of the Edmonton Glenora Rotary Club, which is sponsoring her visit to Edmonton. I'd ask Tuulia and Mrs. Hollands to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young man whom I had the pleasure of hosting for lunch today. Kyle Franz is from the town of Brooks, but he's probably known more among members of my caucus, in particular, as president of the PC Youth of Alberta. This young man I think exemplifies the adage that if you want to get a job done well, you find a busy person to do it. In the course of our lunch he talked about a role that he's playing in the Brooks Chamber of Commerce. He's involved in the local theatre group as well as getting his life organized for something that is very particularly pleasing to me. He'll be transferring to Medicine Hat College in my constituency this fall as well as carrying on his responsibilities as president of the PC Youth. So I would ask that Kyle, who is seated in the members' gallery, now rise and receive the recognition and welcome of all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

1:40

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and honour to introduce two fine gentlemen to you and through you to the members of this Assembly, one being Mr. Manuel Leon Vazquez, who is an Albertan but for a number of years has resided in Spain, and today he is visiting us from Spain. The other one is a resident of Castle Downs who is quite known in Castle Downs for a great deal of volunteer work. He has been involved in such fine and noble causes as getting me elected to this Assembly as my co-campaign manager. If I may ask those two individuals to rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today with great pleasure I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature two friends from Calgary. First, Mr. David Gaskin,

who has chosen Calgary, Alberta, as his home from many places around the world, even from his birthplace in the United Kingdom. Mr. Gaskin has been very active in his professional years in major cities around the world. He was a financial controller of many international corporations. He's now active in community organizations promoting international relationships, understanding, and co-operation. With Mr. David Gaskin is Mr. Yunchao Sun, a young man from Beijing, China. He's here to study at the internationally known Mount Royal College, a testimonial to Alberta's high-quality learning system. He's here to observe the democratic system of Alberta. May I ask the two gentlemen in the members' gallery to stand and receive the warm welcome from the Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly today four members of the Calgary-West Special Places Committee, to which the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow and I are advisors. The committee was formed some two years ago at a very well attended community forum on the environment and historical resources. Today they have traveled to Edmonton from Calgary to meet with the Minister of Community Development. Gloria Wilkinson, who is a constituent of Banff-Cochrane; Steve Meadows, a constituent of Calgary-West; Tom Baker, a constituent of Calgary-West; and Hugh McGill, a constituent of Calgary-Bow. Would they please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly here today four very good friends of mine and constituents. They are members of the municipal district of Mackenzie, from the farthest northwest corner of Alberta. The members here are the reeve, Mr. Bill Neufeld, members of council Pat Kulscar, Frank Rosenberger, and Wayne Thiessen. They're here today to hone their persuasive skills with a minister and a couple of members at meetings earlier this morning. I see they're already standing, so I'd ask the Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Dr. Penny Albright, vice-president, government and health economics for Janssen-Ortho Inc., and Mr. Chris Halyk, managing director of Ortho Biotech Canada. Ortho Biotech recently made a \$1 million donation to the Health Smart Solutions campaign. Dr. Albright and Mr. Halyk are in Edmonton to receive recognition from the Capital Health Council of Foundations for their generous donation. Dr. Albright and Mr. Halyk are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the following gentlemen from Agricore. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'll ask them to stand as I give their names. First is Neil Silver, president; next is Gord Cummings, who is the chief executive officer from Agricore's head office in Winnipeg; and Phil Hyde, who is corporate services representative from the Red Deer office. I would ask that members give these gentlemen our usual warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Eric Szmurlo. Eric is returning to work in my constituency office of Calgary-Glenmore for a second summer and will be returning to his second year at Queen's University this fall. Eric is here in Edmonton today of course to see the good work that government is doing for the province of Alberta. I'd ask Eric to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Soil Contamination

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Residents of the Lynnwood Ridge community in southeast Calgary are wondering how approval was given for their homes to be built on a former oil refinery site. My questions today are to the Minister of Environment. Who is responsible for certifying that soil or water contamination on an industrial or commercial site has been cleaned up to standard?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, in regard to approval of homes being built, as the member has asked, that approval of homes is clearly the responsibility of the municipalities. Only municipalities approve homes.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the question was: who is responsible for certifying that soil or water contamination on the site of an industrial business is safe before the homes are built? That was the question.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, in this particular case, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe it was certified before the subdivision was built. In this case this subdivision was built in the 1980s, and the site was cleaned up in the late '70s and '80s. Things were done, quite frankly, differently then. Standards were different then.

Now, what we're talking about here is lead contamination. Right now our standard in Alberta is 140 parts per million. The EPA standard and most other standards across the country are 400 parts per million. So as we've made our standards more stringent – we've reduced the numbers, which has made them more stringent – then that of course changes the conditions around Lynnwood Ridge.

DR. NICOL: To the same minister: what role does Alberta Environment play or do they have any role at all when an industrial site is abandoned or given up for reclassification by the local municipality? Does Alberta Environment have any role whatsoever to play in approving that site for an alternative use like residential?

DR. TAYLOR: We don't have a role in approving that site for building homes, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on that, does the government assume any responsibility for any houses being built on industrial sites that may not have been appropriately cleaned up, or is this all local municipal responsibility?

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, let me say, to start, that of course the

safety of the people is first. Certainly I visited Lynnwood Ridge on Friday of last week and saw the area. As I said in Calgary on Friday, we will enforce – we will enforce – our environmental standards. Once again, the municipality is the only one that subdivides. The municipality is the only one that can grant permission to build homes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Who should be responsible for the cleanup and loss of property value: the homeowner, the previous business owner, or the government, in this case local or provincial?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister. But not into opinions.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I can see you want me to be brief. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of the municipality and the company involved, Imperial Oil. It is very clearly their responsibility to clean up the area, bear the costs of the area. We actually wrote to the city. We have given the city a short-term plan. We said: "You have to tell us what you're going to do in one week. You have to develop a remediation program by the 30th of June, and we will enforce it."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final follow-up on that: is Alberta Environment in any way responsible for testing industrial sites for environmental pollution or environmental contamination from things like lead or other heavy metals?

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As these situations arise, we certainly will test. You know, in the '50s and '60s things were handled in what was thought to be appropriate methodology of the '50s and '60s. As I said earlier, our standards have changed. We're not going to go on a treasure hunt all over this province trying to find contaminated sites, but as sites show up, as individuals raise them to us, we will certainly go out and test, as we've done in Ponoka, as we are doing in Calgary. As sites are brought to our attention, we will definitely go out and test.

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

Hub Oil Company Ltd.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year Alberta Environment indicated that the Hub Oil site in southeast Calgary would cost millions of dollars to clean up because of extensive soil contamination. In fact, the site may never be fit for habitation. My questions this afternoon are for the Minister of Environment. Why did the Department of Environment agree with Hub Oil officials during the renewal of the licence to operate in 1996 when Hub oil stated that the decommissioning costs of \$500,000 were excessive, suggesting the fee remain at \$150,000?

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: I'm not quite sure what the question was there, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that in regards to the Hub Oil situation it was certainly a very serious situation, and we recognize that. There

were charges placed against Hub Oil in August, so that's where the situation is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that in 1993 the city of Calgary's city and community planning division stated that the \$150,000 security bond would not cover reclamation costs at Hub Oil, why did the department fail to act upon the city of Calgary's recommendations?

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: Okay. I think I understand his question finally, Mr. Speaker. Essentially what he's asking is: why was the bond not large enough to cover the reclamation? I can tell you that right across this province this is not a unique case. Right across this province there are a number of instances like that. One of the things I have instructed my department to investigate is: what level of bond and what level of security do we need to make sure that each of these industrial sites can and will clean themselves up if there is some horrific accident?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Environment. Given that in July of 1995 Alberta Environment officials themselves expressed concern about the \$150,000 security bond – they felt it was insufficient and should be increased – why was a 10-year licence to operate granted in 1996 to Hub Oil when there was no increase in the security bond to cover contamination?

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I've already answered that question, if you'd bother to listen. What I said was that there were situations in the past where the bond did not cover the possible cleanup costs. So listen. I have very clearly instructed my department to examine all these cases across the province and come up with a solution to the problem.

Increase in Hate Crimes

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, today I tabled statistics from the Calgary Police Service showing that hate crimes in Calgary have risen by 56 percent in the last three years. While this information is troubling, to say the least, what is more troubling is the government's neglect of this issue. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Is the government concerned about this 56 percent increase, and what plans do they have to deal with it?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I wasn't aware of the increase in so-called hate crimes, but I can assure you that I will look into that. It is a very serious situation, quite obviously. I would say, though, that we have the Alberta human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund that does provide moneys toward educational purposes which help all of us learn more about individuals with backgrounds different than ours. It's a very aggressive education program that I think will yield some results toward stemming any of these so-called hate crimes, should they be racially, culturally, or religiously based.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, if the government's educational program is so successful and so aggressive, why is there an increase of 56 percent in hate crimes in the city of Calgary over the last three years?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, I'm not sure what the basis of that so-called proven or unproven fact might be, but I would say, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of other organizations that we assist who help carry out this program. This is not something that just the government alone is involved in. There are many volunteer organizations, one of which is the NAARR group, the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, who every year bring to our attention some of the atrocities that occurred in Sharpeville and elsewhere. We're very cognizant of these facts. What we are trying to do is to not only stem these kinds of racially motivated crimes or slurs or what have you, but we're also very pledged and committed to reducing and eliminating them totally. It is a long-range plan, and it's not something that we can accomplish overnight, but we are doing what we can to help out in that regard.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that the Edmonton police do not track hate crimes in the same systematic fashion as the police in Calgary, will the Minister of Justice and Attorney General act to ensure that uniform tracking of hate and bias crimes exists throughout Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a very good question and I think one which I actually have been active on in a broader sense than just hate crimes. In terms of developing criteria and having police forces across the province work together so that they can report crimes in a common manner, so that they're understandable across the province and can be compared across the province, we do have a committee, actually, involving the RCMP, the city of Edmonton police, and the city of Calgary police, and our department in talking about how we can develop a common set of reporting criteria and statistics on major crimes. I can't tell the hon. member whether hate crimes fall into that list of crimes that we're developing the statistics on, but I will certainly check on that and go back to it.

Mr. Speaker, I would also want to mention that when we use percentages, we have to be very careful. We talked today about a percentage increase of 50 percent in hate crimes reported over a period of time, but we should also note that by the statistics on the tabling that was made today, the number of hate crimes that were calculated in the city of Calgary, which, as I understand it, has in excess of 900,000 people, was 133.

Now, any hate crime is abhorrent. Any hate crime should not be tolerated, and we certainly want to reduce the amount of intolerance in our society. But you have to put it into perspective: a 50 percent increase from 85 in 1997 to 108 in 1998, 119 in 1999, and 133 in the year 2000. While it's important and significant and needs to be taken care of, the 56 percent increase suggests a much larger problem than is suggested by the actual numbers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Fish Conservation

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We live in a world with many stresses and very important concerns such as environment and health care. In order to remain healthy mentally and physically, we need to balance our hectic lifestyles with rest and relaxation. We also need to recognize the importance of leisure activities to our health and to our economy. One of the greatest leisure activities of

all time and perhaps one of the oldest professions in the world is fishing. My questions are for the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. My constituents and interest groups have informed me of the concerns about the decline in the walleye population in the province and the desire of Albertans to catch and keep some of these fish. What is your department doing in response to these concerns?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll try and give the right answer. It is, of course, like the member says, a very important issue, and it's a concern to all Albertans. In about two months or so I will be taking through the normal approval process a rationalization of the sportfishing and the commercial fishing and the domestic fishing industries. We have a good walleye management plan in Alberta of course, and this plan will go a long way towards addressing the issue of the declining walleye population.

2:00

In addition to that, we have other management tools; for example, closing commercial fisheries and sport fisheries during April and May, the high spawning season for walleye and pike. The other area is improving the natural spawning areas for walleye, and another important one is trying to manage the domestic fishing industry by closer monitoring of that particular process. The other one is to manage commercial fisheries by zones, possibly by tolerance limits and also by looking at gear restrictions, how and what types of gear fishermen may use to limit the catch.

MRS. JABLONSKI: To the same minister: can our current commercial fishery be sustained as it stands?

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to healthy sustainable fisheries in Alberta, and that is why we're dealing with, for an example, the natural spawning grounds that are out there right now. I believe that in the past number of years the natural spawning grounds have changed. I've given instructions already to my staff to look at improving that particular area. Of course, the other one is enhancing our stocking programs for walleye and other species. I will be touring the fish hatcheries, in fact, in Calgary, Blairmore, Cold Lake, and Caroline. I believe they are the four areas where we do have fish hatcheries. I will be touring those in the very near future to determine as to how we may enhance that particular industry.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member?

MRS. JABLONSKI: No. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Children's Advocate

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government announced a review of the Child Welfare Act, including the role of the Children's Advocate. Public consultation is to begin at the Children's Forum this fall. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that the 1999 forum recommended that the Children's Advocate answer to this Legislature and not to the minister, why was that recommendation ignored?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that forum identified over a hundred recommendations which were separated into theme areas and

examined by the Alberta children's initiative, all of the partners that are at this front bench that look after children's needs through various ministries. We determined what was practical and feasible to do.

The issue of having the advocate account directly to the Legislature is a matter for some legislative change and contemplation if it should ever occur, and we're looking at not so much how to look after the checks and balances but how to get the children's services delivery system right. That was the focus for the commitment to action and the task force report following the Taber incident. So although this is something that is still on the shelf, has been reviewed again by the Chan Durrant report, has been duly noted, I have committed to the hon. member that prior to the end of this legislative session, if at all possible – and we're working very hard to identify what responses to the advocate's report will be appropriate to table now, what will have to wait for further consultation and perhaps legislative amendment through the Child Welfare Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the 1999 forum recommended that an advocate for all children be appointed, why was that recommendation ignored?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. It's not so much a matter of ignoring a recommendation, but let's consider children's services today. The 15,000 children that are in the child welfare system, half of which are supported in their homes, half of which are under temporary or permanent guardianship, reflect a very small percentage of Alberta children. Alberta children comprise about 750,000 youth. If an advocate or an advocate's role is going to take the responsibility of advocating on behalf of all children, what is the role of the parents, what is the role of the guardian, and what is the role of the community? If you broaden that advocate's role, it certainly talks about government-based resources, community-based resources, which may better be expended in actually looking after all children well that require that need through the child welfare system and allowing parents and families to do the job that in most cases is being very well done by themselves: looking after their own families, advocating on behalf of their own children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that the past recommendations concerning the Children's Advocate have been ignored, isn't this fall's consultation really a sham?

MS EVANS: I'll forgive the hon. member for that question. I will also respond that every time we are in consultation through the forum, we deal with many and complex issues. The advocate's role in response to the communities, in response to Albertans, and in response to the Legislature is one that we're not intending to dilute. Rather, we're intending to focus it in the best way possible. We have tabled reports. Quite honestly, I have done my very best to respond to those issues of resources where appropriate. I think the hon. member is ignoring that in the last two years we've moved to a community-based child care delivery system which is showing a great deal of success, even in this capital region.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Sustainable Workforce

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final report on the governmentwide study on the impact of an aging population identified as two of its eight themes the need to prepare for financial security and the need to provide more flexible options for work and retirement. In Alberta we are already facing a huge employment shortage. The mandatory retirement age is 65, and we have an Alberta corporate attitude to retire employees, especially management, much sooner than 65, yet we have a real shortage of workers in many sectors with large numbers of employees retiring within five years or less. My first question is to the Minister of Seniors. What is happening in your ministry to address this issue?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As everyone knows, seniors are a high priority with this government, and as a result the government has made one of its four cross-ministry initiatives seniors, and that's entitled the seniors' policy initiative. Hopefully that's one group that will be looking at this issue, which is a very significant one. In addition, I'll be asking the Seniors Advisory Council and the Alberta Council on Aging for their input and their opinions on what should be done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Seniors. In many sectors retired employees on company pensions are limited to a maximum number of hours they can work if rehired before their pension received is reduced. Is there any way this government can resolve this disincentive to return to the workplace?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I may not have a complete answer, but it is my understanding that people who return to work in the same field may be penalized on the pension that's given in that field, but nobody who has a pension and chooses to work in another area would be penalized. For example, a teacher who chooses to do something else would be able to collect their full pension and also work elsewhere. I think the equalizer here, however, is something called income tax, because the more you earn, the more you pay, but this is another issue that we'll be having a look at. For the areas that need help, for example the teaching profession, it's within their bailiwick to change that particular provision if they so choose.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Is your department involved in developing opportunities for older people to gain skills or to upgrade present skills in order to participate in the workplace?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, yes, we are. We're in a situation here in Alberta for a lot of reasons, most of them good, where we're really trying to find ways to expand our workforce, and certainly we do it out of necessity. Also, of course, we're not going to get into ageism in this province. There's an opportunity for people to come forward at whatever age they are that want to develop skills, want to get into our skills development programs, or need postsecondary education. We look at all of that. An older worker can truly be not

only a compatible worker but also a very loyal and competent worker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, whose birthday it is today, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

2:10

Women's Shelters

MS BLAKEMAN: Nicely done. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The placement of women's shelters under Children's Services was dismissive of women in general and women in need in particular. The situation is aggravated when children's authorities cut funding to women's shelters. This recently occurred in the Sun Country jurisdiction when the Pincher Creek women's shelter had their budget cut by \$17,000, or 8 percent. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why are close to a thousand people, 300 Pincher Creek and area women and their 600 children, being put at risk through these budget cuts?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, the proposed reduction in that budget has not received the approval of this ministry or this minister. We've increased the budget for women's shelters from \$11 million to 13 and a half million dollars in this year's budget.

There are a number of points that should be made, however. There's not only one new shelter being added to that child and family services authority down in region 1, but there are at least two that have expanded. There is some very serious review that's required by the child and family services authority. I will personally be visiting on Saturday to talk with the members of the board to review the expenditures that have been outlined by the chief executive officer to a number of agencies, such as this particular shelter. I will be reinforcing what I do in this House; that is, there is a priority on not only sheltering women who are victims of violence but finding second-stage housing and finding programs that prevent violence in the first place. So we will be looking very carefully not only at the proposed funding reductions but what the priorities of this ministry are.

I'm going to point out one more thing. There has been at least \$5 million in additional funding to Sun Country provided over the last two and a half years, which is a larger percentage increase than anywhere else in the province. Although this may not be deemed relevant, it is relevant in terms of the overall population that's served. There are a number of reductions that have been proposed by this particular child and family services authority which we are reviewing in the context of the accountability for our service delivery plan. We will be doing that not only on Saturday, but I intend to visit the proponents of those shelters throughout Sun Country in the month of June.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Could the minister tell me how many women's shelters in Alberta are being put at risk because the department is not approving the local children's authority budget?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, nobody is being put at risk. We are in fact examining with community partnerships the best way of delivering programs for women that are at risk. We have 19 shelters. We have not only provided some additional funding for some of those shelters with our partnerships, but we've been looking at other ways to make sure that the community combats family violence and

works to protect not only the mothers but the children and looks at other ways of nurturing.

Mr. Speaker, there has been no intent by the department to put at risk anybody in need of shelter. In fact, with those authorities we are looking at prevention and looking at other ways to house women where shelters don't exist in other parts of this province.

MS BLAKEMAN: The minister mentioned a review when she is in the south tomorrow, I think. I'm wondering if the minister will review the administrative costs of the authority to ensure that the bureaucracies and boards are not consuming money better spent on at-risk women and their families.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member raises a very serious issue. It will be Saturday that I will be there, and I'm well aware that the particular shelter in question sat in a hearing in front of the board and heard several administrative costs discussed. They were neither with the final approval of their board nor was it through the approval of this ministry. We will be reviewing the administrative costs. I believe there was a suggestion that administrators attach themselves to the four pillars of the child care delivery system. We'll be looking at all aspects of the administrative costs, and I really thank the hon. member for her concern.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Alberta Teachers' Association

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Last Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the Alberta Teachers' Association convention at the request of the minister. I came away from the meeting concerned that teachers find themselves through their association in a catch-22 position. On one hand, they rightfully advocate in their own self-interest as regards salaries, pensions, and benefits. On the other hand, at the same time they advocate on behalf of students and the learning system in general. My question: would the Alberta Teachers' Association not be more effective as either the bargaining agent or the professional certifying body but not both?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister, and we're not into a debate.

DR. OBERG: I wouldn't debate that, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, in answering that question, I'd like to go to the experience that has been across Canada and the experience that has occurred. There are some organizations where the professional body and the union body are separate. I believe that our province is well served by having the Alberta Teachers' Association as both the professional and union bodies.

When you take a look at what has occurred in other areas across Canada, what you have is some pure unions that have advocated strike action to a much greater degree than what is presently advocated in Alberta. By having the professional association as part of that, I believe it allows them to do a better job in advocating for children, as the hon. member has stated, as well as tempering some of their demands when it comes to the union side.

MR. McCLELLAND: What, then, is the government doing to ensure that the adversarial relationship resulting from the collective bargaining process does not spill over into the professional relationship between the Alberta Teachers' Association, representing teachers, and the government, representing Albertans?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I must point out that the collective bargaining arrangement is between the school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association. The provincial government does not enter into the collective bargaining arrangement.

I feel that the Alberta Teachers' Association continues to advocate on behalf of the students, on behalf of the kids that are in the system, and I think they do a good job at that. They certainly raise concerns to me on a relatively frequent basis about some of the things that have been happening in the school system, and on many occasions we have attempted and indeed have changed things at their request. So I believe that they continue to advocate on students' behalf.

I believe that the collective bargaining position is best left between the school boards and the Teachers' Association, and we'll see what comes from that relationship.

MR. McCLELLAND: Given the circumstances, then, surrounding education with school boards, with the Alberta Teachers' Association, and government, how is the government going to convince the Alberta Teachers' Association and others of our commitment to public education?

DR. OBERG: That's a fascinating question, because lately there has been some question about whether this government is really committed to public education. I guess, Mr. Speaker, that the proof is in the pudding. We just added \$250 million this year for public education on the K to 12 side. I now spend \$3.8 billion, and that's a lot of money. We are definitely – and I can't say this loud enough; I can't say this often enough. This government is definitely, 100 percent committed to a public education system in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ambulance Services

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ambulance workers in Edmonton are taking steps towards strike action in part because of the level of salaries and compensation. My first question is to the minister of health. In light of the precedent set by the province for increases in health care professionals' salaries, shouldn't paramedics receive comparable treatment?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that emergency medical services are not the responsibility of the province. They are the responsibility of municipalities. This matter is being reviewed in an overall context by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo with respect to emergency medical services. However, it is not for me to say as it does not fall strictly within the purview of my responsibilities.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the government expect municipalities to increase local taxes to deal with shortfalls in provincial funding for ambulance services?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm surprised that the hon. member wouldn't be asking this of the mayor or of his city councillor. It is the responsibility of municipalities to pay for the services that they provide, including emergency medical services. That is a question that is appropriately put to somebody else.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Yes. Well, considering, Mr. Speaker, that the government does provide grants to the municipalities, my final question, then, will go to the minister of human resources and development. What proactive steps is your department taking to avert a strike by Edmonton's paramedics?

MR. DUNFORD: I think he wants me. I'm not sure. This is just that little shuck and jive that they do. He said human resources and development.

THE SPEAKER: And it should be Human Resources and Employment. Hon. minister, you're recognized.

MR. DUNFORD: I'm going to take it that's it me, so we'll do a little shucking and jiving.

We have very good mediation services in this province. We've been working very, very actively with both parties, the city of Edmonton and the ambulance drivers, represented by their association. I think it's very important that we all keep in mind that this is a very, very important service, but there is an obligation on the part of both parties to bargain in good faith. The information that we have is that that is what's taking place at the present time. I, perhaps like you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly all Edmontonians as well as all Albertans hope that the two parties will come to a quick and satisfactory agreement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Spray Lakes Forest Management Agreement

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is once again negotiating a forest management agreement behind closed doors. This time the government is preparing to negotiate away thousands of square kilometres of public land next to Kananaskis Country and Banff national park to a company called Spray Lakes Sawmills. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. How can the minister justify ignoring the thousands of Albertans who want a say whether to transfer thousands of square kilometres of valuable wilderness and recreational lands into the exclusive control of a single forest company?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to clarify one issue. There is no such thing as transferring public lands to a company for exclusive management, because that is not a fact when it come to forest management areas. We have four different types of allocation of timber out. We have the local timber allocation to smaller companies that want to utilize timber. We have the commercial timber permits, which are a bit smaller operations that access the commercial timber permits on a year-to-year basis. Then we have the quota system, which could run up to 20 years.

The fourth one we have is the forest management agreement, Mr. Speaker. The forest management agreement basically gives the rights to manage and harvest the resources of a specific area of the forest. In the case of Spray Lakes, the negotiations are only underway. There was no final decision made yet as to if the transfer will take place to that particular company. What it does is give the company more responsibility. The plan in the Spray Lakes FMA is that it does not harvest at this time any more than what they were doing with the existing quota. It also doesn't cover any extra area of public lands.

The other thing. We've had FMAs since the early '50s in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, and it's a good way to manage our forests in a balanced

way, keeping in mind that there are environmental needs and there are also job creation needs. The forest industry is a very, very important industry in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then why is the minister and this government prepared to sign an FMA that will intensify logging, allow smaller and younger trees to be clear cut, all in an environmentally sensitive area with tremendous wilderness value?

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of misunderstanding. Of course, like I said earlier, the forest industry is a very, very important industry in Alberta, very, very important. It's an \$8 billion industry that employs over 50,000 people. It is the backbone of a lot of our communities in Alberta. In fact, it's the third largest industry in the overall economic action plan of Alberta. On the other hand, as the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development I also have to ensure that the public lands and resources are protected. You can be assured, as we move forward, that we are only negotiating the agreement with this company at this time. There is no transfer that has taken place.

When the public hearings will start, Mr. Speaker, is once the agreement is signed with the company in the forest management area. The public hearings will start once the company files their operating plans. The public will have full participation in the process. In fact, through the FMA process the public has the opportunity to be involved more than in the quota system.

DR. PANNU: My final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the minister. How close is the government to holding public hearings, or how close is the government to signing the agreement in question?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, like I said earlier, we are at the negotiation stage with the company at this time. Once the agreement is signed, if it is signed, then the company will have to file their operation plan. This could be a five-year operation plan. There is opportunity for the public, including the opposition members, to input each year when the company reviews their five-year operation plan. So the opportunity for public participation is there.

In relation to the Kananaskis area, the company has been logging that area since 1950 in a planned, managed way.

Three Sisters Resorts Wildlife Conservation Easement

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, today there is a public meeting being held in Canmore regarding the draft conservation easement that would run through the Three Sisters Resorts' property in that community. This is to address a very important concern about how wildlife can pass through the sensitive area of the province. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development: can you tell us how effective the conservation easement is when it comes to facilitating wildlife movement through the corridor?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this again is another important area. One thing I'd just like to advise the public and the members of the opposition here in the House and our colleagues also is that there is a lot of area that is protected in the whole eastern slopes of the Rockies: the national parks, provincial parks, wilderness areas, and also the prime protection areas. We are in a good position.

Specifically to the very sensitive area that's mentioned, the Three Sisters development, we are committed to very careful management of the wildlife. Of course, we have a conservation easement in place,

which is very effective. Under Alberta's environmental legislation it gives legislative authority within the wildlife corridor. But this doesn't end there. Alberta has a very capable team of biologists, experts who are doing very important work throughout the corridor development. Not only are we looking at the corridor development itself and the Three Sisters development, but we are going beyond that to ensure that the corridors are protected and our wildlife is protected, at the same time ensuring that the project moves forward as planned.

MRS. TARCHUK: Also to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The conservation easement may look good on paper, but obviously animals can't read easement policies. How can Albertans be assured that it will work in real life?

2:30

MR. CARDINAL: Well, Mr. Speaker, like I said earlier, we have a lot of areas that are protected. In fact, the zone 1 area has over 4,000 square kilometres protected. Again, as I mentioned earlier, this is a very sensitive area of the province, and we are moving very carefully as we move forward. We drafted the conservation easement plan based on the 1992 design report of the Natural Resources Conservation Board, and we are now bringing forward this plan to the public. That's why the public meetings are being held. We will follow very closely the guidelines that are established. In fact, I will be touring the area on June 4, I believe, to ensure that I'm comfortable that areas are being developed the way they should be developed and also that areas are protected for the movement of wildlife throughout the process. We can do both.

MRS. TARCHUK: Lastly to the same minister. I understand that there is some concern that the easement may be appropriate for elk movement through the corridor but may not consider all species that use the area. Can the minister tell the House whether the draft easement addresses other species?

MR. CARDINAL: Yeah, I believe it does, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons why I'm touring the area firsthand is to ensure that this happens. The terms of reference for monitoring mention specific animals: the grizzly bear, the bear, wolves, cougar, elk, deer, snowshoe hare, and other small animals. I believe there is some comfort in the direction we are going in this process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Health Care Insurance Premiums

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are prompted by a letter I tabled earlier from an upset Albertan. A few weeks ago I asked the Minister of Health and Wellness if the dramatic jump in health care insurance premium write-offs last year from \$29 million to over \$50 million was a result of some Albertans having more difficulty making payments. He said and I quote: no. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: why is there such a huge and unbudgeted jump in health care insurance premium write-offs?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in previous years the Auditor General has indicated that he has disagreed with how the Department of Health and Wellness has estimated uncollectible accounts. In response to the Auditor General the department conducted a review of its uncollected accounts, and it increased the estimate in the year 2000-2001 by \$21.7 million to \$50.4 million. That is a change in practice

in how these are recognized. It does not represent a difficulty, as near as we can estimate, in people being able to pay their health care premiums.

Mr. Speaker, the action taken by the department is consistent with what the Auditor General's recommendations were. It will more accurately reflect what the government may actually collect. I should note that premiums for low-income Albertans and for seniors are partially or fully subsidized. As of March 31, 2000, there were nearly 500,000 Albertans who received a full or partial premium reduction. This is out of a total of roughly 2.9 million Albertans that come under the Alberta health care insurance plan.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In situations where it is difficult to collect, how much notice does the Department of Health and Wellness give Albertans when they fall behind in paying their health care premiums before commencing action to recover those premiums?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we are aggressive in collecting our unpaid accounts. That is only fair to those Albertans who do pay them on time. We of course look into circumstances, and this letter tabled by the hon. member may be one of those circumstances where the individual has indicated that they believe that their premiums are paid up. If it is determined that the individual is correct, then of course we would make the correction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering how the minister cost justifies his department threatening Albertans with legal action, including action in the Court of Queen's Bench, plus notice to the credit bureau, plus forcing them to pay all related legal expenses over bills smaller than \$250.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should note at the outset that no Albertan is ever denied services for health care because of the inability to pay the premiums. We have premium subsidy waivers, premium subsidy programs. We tell Albertans about these programs through notices in their bill, on the Internet, and automatically mailing an application to them when their account is past five months overdue. You know, this is a good program, and it is important that we do collect – and we do collect aggressively – from those individuals that are not paying on time. If an individual is not able to pay, that is quite a different issue, and they may fall within the purview of the programs that I indicated for a subsidy or a waiver of their premium.

Coal Supplies

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, not all coal concerns are in West Yellowhead. In Whitecourt-St. Anne I have constituents that have had problems purchasing coal from the coal suppliers. Their homes and their businesses have coal-fired burners, and for their farm use they have coal-fired burners. Is there an obligation on the part of the coal producers, Mr. Minister, to supply coal to these people?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Mines and Minerals Act has been around in Alberta for a long time. In fact, the good work of Premier John Brownlee in 1930, as a result of over

seven years of work, ensured that resource ownership belonged to all Albertans. That includes coal. At that time Alberta was characterized by a great number of rural communities. Towns like Barrhead and Sangudo were just growing, and there were people who used coal in their furnaces on their farms. In section 67(1) of the Mines and Minerals Act there is a requirement that

the lessee of a coal lease who operates a coal mine shall make available for sale at his mine to Alberta residents the coal they require for their own domestic household needs.

So there are large coal mines, and these coal mines will provide stoker coal for houses. Now, unfortunately this past year a plant called Wabamun 4 up in the Keephills area, in the Wabamun area of Alberta was down. This 280-megawatt generator was down, and there were less requirements for that type of coal. Because of that, less was mined, and that made less of that particular type of coal available for those households not only in Edson but in areas like Whitecourt that could be used for personal consumption.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Minister. To the same minister again. Many furnace suppliers are promoting the use of coal. We know it's good, clean energy. We know that it's a good resource. Is there any incentive to these homeowners to expand the use of coal to fire their furnaces and their boilers?

MR. SMITH: Well, there has been a real return to an interest in coal. There has been a real return to an interest in generating electricity from clean, coal-fired combustion. This will continue. It's a North American phenomenon. One of the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that it is on the increase and of more and greater interest to individual homes is the fact that the price of natural gas has increased. That price of natural gas in Alberta is one that is set by market forces. There is some shielding for Albertans in recognition of the ownership of the resource, but the mere fact that the price of natural gas has risen provides the market incentive to move towards coal-fired furnaces and boilers where appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before the Clerk calls Recognitions in the Routine, hon. Minister of Transportation, did you want to make a clarification of facts?

Point of Order Clarification

MR. STELMACH: Definitely, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I inadvertently, in tabling a response to a question raised May 17, did say "the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark." Quite frankly, it's the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.*

Thank you, sir.

2:40

head: Recognitions

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

No Bull Organization

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to recognize and congratulate an outstanding young man, 18-year-old Ken Stretch from Spruce Grove composite high school, who has been honoured as one of 20 Canadian students to win the TD Canada Trust scholarship. He has been awarded \$50,000 towards any

Canadian college or university. Ken was chosen because of the excellent program he started on behalf of community development in his school called the No Bull organization. Two years ago Ken realized that silence was not the answer to dealing with bullies in school. He banded together with a few other students to start the organization to raise awareness about the effects of bullying in schools and educate groups of younger students on the best way for an entire school to deal with the problem of harassment.

Ken Stretch is one of many outstanding youths in my constituency. The No Bull organization has dramatically improved student life at Spruce Grove composite high, and I hope Ken's commitment to ending student harassment serves as an example to us all.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Bob Maskell

MR. HUTTON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great thrill and a privilege today to recognize a very special gentleman. He is a colleague, a friend, a great educator, and a great administrator. On Thursday, May 17, Bob Maskell was recognized at Victoria school's commencement ceremonies with the first ever Victoria school lifetime achievement award. The award was designed to honour the alumni of Victoria school who through their actions have worked to improve the society and the lives of the people they have touched. He was presented with an award, a gold pin formed in the Victoria school logo and with a diamond appointment. Bob was recognized for his work in creating Victoria School of Performing & Visual Arts and, in doing so, enabling so many students to live their dreams.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Junior Forest Wardens

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize the junior forest wardens program. This program gives young people the opportunity to develop an awareness, appreciation, and respect for the natural environment and promotes responsible use of the environment. The roots of this incredible program were planted back in the 1920s in British Columbia when some young boys reported a forest fire to a forest warden. This story was published in *Forest and Outdoors* magazine, an official publication of the Canadian Forestry Association. The response to this story was impressive, with boys all over B.C. contacting the author wondering how they, too, could help with protecting forests.

Charles Wilkinson, the local manager of the Canadian Forestry Association in B.C., decided to establish the warden program to teach youth about forest protection. Individual clubs soon started forming throughout western Canada in 1944, and the girl forest guards were also established. In 1974 the boys and girls groups combined to form the now familiar group, the junior forest wardens. They do invaluable work in this province in maintaining our natural environment.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Canadian Actors' Equity Association

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to recognize and celebrate the 25th anniversary of the

*See page 727, left col., para. 9

formation of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association. In 1976, after massive consultation with performers across the country, the Canadians separated from the American equity association. I'm proud to be a member of Equity and, even more, proud of the professionalism of my many colleagues and friends who act, dance, sing, direct, stage manage, and choreograph the performances that bring our stories to the stage.

Interestingly, the beginnings of the American Equity came from a Canadian actress, Marie Dressler, who led a 30-day strike in New York in 1913 to create conditions of equity for the actor and for the management. The most recent change for Canadian Equity was here in Alberta, where in the year 2000 Equity was certified as a union in order to represent dancers at Alberta Ballet. On June 3 regions across the country will be celebrating Equity's 25 years with a variety of events and parties. I will be joining my colleagues for the Edmonton version, the Silver Skewer Barbecue.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Gary Bobrovitz

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize one of my constituents whom I've known for some 20 years for achieving a goal and dream of his this past weekend. Over the weekend Gary Bobrovitz, a well-known and respected journalist and investigative reporter for Global news in Calgary, competed in the Canadian national powerlifting championship in Lethbridge. Gary was successful in winning the gold medal in the men's open division 60 kilogram classification, lifting over 700 pounds, or nearly five times his own weight. Gary will be attending the world powerlifting championships in Dallas, Texas, in August of this year. I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Gary on his outstanding feat and wish him all the best in the future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Chad McConnell

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to recognize Canada's best automotive mechanic under the age of 22. Chad McConnell works in a small garage in Gibbons, located in the constituency of Redwater. Chad is in France this week for another mechanic's skills competition on cars he has never worked on before. Chad McConnell will represent Canada at the world championships in Korea this September while competing against the best young mechanics in the world. I'd also like to recognize Chad's trainer and boss, Richard Skawronik, owner of Quality Auto Care at Gibbons, for his excellent training skills. Please join me in congratulating Chad McConnell for his outstanding accomplishment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Canada World Youth Exchange

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada World Youth is once again sponsoring an exchange to Ukraine as a part of their international educational exchange. The program is comprised of nine Canadian and nine Ukrainian woman aged 21 to 29. The women begin the program in Red Deer in September with their Ukrainian counterparts. Together for three months they live with a host family and volunteer at work placements where they learn and educate on sustainable community development. In January they

arrive at L'viv, where they live with their counterpart's family for three months and volunteer together at a work placement. Work placements within the exchange deal with international and community development. Some examples include women's shelters, orphanages, educating on small business and micro enterprises, and preventative health. I would like to recognize CWY for their contributions in organizing over 26,000 youths in 30 years on international, nonformal, educational exchanges. This year they'll be joined by my constituent Rhonda Zuk, who is looking forward to contributing to her community and having the opportunity to play a role in a country in transition.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 4 and 6.

[Motion carried]

Swan Hills Waste Treatment Facility

Q4. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted. What were the estimated receipts, revenue, and net income from the operation of the Swan Hills joint venture for the fiscal years 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 as set out under article 9.7.1 of the July 12, 1996, agreement between Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta, the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, Bovar Technology, Bovar Inc., Bovar (Swan Hills) Limited Partnership, 542936 Alberta Ltd., and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Environment we are rejecting Written Question 4.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close the debate.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think this is information that is important to have available to people within the province. What we're getting at are some of the details in the agreements with the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, which is often in the media and of great concern to people who live in the vicinity, particularly downwind of that site. It's unfortunate that the government chose not to share the reasons for which they are rejecting this written question.

[Written Question 4 lost]

2:50

Swan Hills Joint Venture

Q6. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted. What were the revenue projections payable to the government for the fiscal years 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003 from the Swan Hills joint venture net income as set out under article 4.2 of the July 12, 1996, agreement between Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta, the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, Bovar Technology, Bovar Inc., Bovar (Swan Hills) Limited Partnership, 542936 Alberta Ltd., and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the Minister of Environment we are accepting Written Question 6.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close the debate.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the minister for his co-operation.

[Written Question 6 carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 11, 12, and 13.

[Motion carried]

Council of Economic Development Ministers

M11. Ms Carlson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the Council of Economic Development Ministers between August 1, 1997, and March 31, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to reject this motion for the following reasons. Many of those studies and reports were prepared for the Council of Economic Development Ministers and were done in a form of internal draft for discussion purposes only. Furthermore, a number of these reports were submitted in confidence by third parties. The rest were already made public.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close the debate.

MS CARLSON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great disappointment that we're not going to get this information. Perhaps we will now have to follow a process of FOIPing the information, and that will come with many of the lines blotted out. Certainly that would be better than nothing in terms of being able to find out what happened in terms of government preparation for the Council of Economic Development Ministers between August 1 of '97 and March 31 of 2001. If the minister has any sort of a briefing that he could provide in the absence of our having to go through that long process, I would appreciate it.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 11 lost]

Economic Development International Representation Priorities

M12. Ms Carlson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Economic Development between January 1, 1998, and March 31, 2001, relating to the development of the matrix of department priorities for international representation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good news for the hon. member. There'll be no FOIPing required. I will accept Motion for a Return 12 and do it in due course.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close the debate.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the minister for his co-operation.

[Motion for a Return 12 carried]

MLA Education Property Tax Review Committee

M13. Ms Carlson moved on behalf of Mr. Bonner that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of studies and reports prepared between April 1, 2000, and April 9, 2001, by or for the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) education property tax review committee.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yes. On behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs I'd like to point out that this is a work in progress, and in due course, when it's completed, it will be made available to the public. In view of that, the government will reject Motion for a Return 13.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to close the debate.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We appreciate that information. However, we would like some preliminary information if it's available, and perhaps the minister would be co-operative in that regard and share that information with my colleague.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 13 lost]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading**

Bill 207

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

[Debate adjourned May 22: Mr. Ouellette speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Yes. Mr. Speaker, seeing that I believe this is a very important bill, I think I'll carry on where I left off yesterday. I was just explaining how red-hot the demand for trades workers was in Alberta and a few of the stats, and I'm going to repeat them.

In June the unemployment rate in the category was a mesmerizing low of 3.8 percent, far below the average unemployment rate for all occupations, which stood at 5.7 percent. For many provinces such an eye-popping, low unemployment rate would not be cause for concern, but for Alberta it is an indication that we don't have enough skilled workers to fill the growing demand. Just as this province has been working hard to fill the demand for health care workers, this province needs to work hard to recruit and retain skilled tradespeople.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 207 would offer an incentive for tradespeople who are already here to stay and for those considering moving here to make that move. We as a province would offer an advantage that is currently not available in the rest of Canada. We would be adding one more item to the long list that makes up the Alberta advantage. So because general tax reduction is a positive goal and because this bill will provide a tax credit for an occupation that is especially important to Alberta, I strongly support Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for sponsoring Bill 207. It's a bill that I believe identifies the solution to an issue, that solution being long overdue. I think everyone appreciates and we've heard prior speakers indicate the importance that the tradespeople are to the economy of the country, this province. Any efforts that can be made through this Legislature to introduce measures that will improve the fairness to these people I think is laudable. On that basis the member has gone a long way. In most every vocation that you have, there are avenues to recover some of the costs of the tools of your trade, if you will, with the exception of people in the trades themselves, individuals.

The system as it currently stands I think is unfair. It doesn't recognize the fact that people, in order to pursue a particular vocation, have to invest money out of their own pockets in varying amounts over a long period of time to ensure that they can become employed. As a matter of fact, it's their livelihood. Yet these many cases, these same tools, if you will, if they belong to a company can be declared as expense items. I don't want to go down that path very far other than to point out that it is one of what we sometimes perceive as many unfairnesses in the tax system.

There is some concern whether or not this bill can actually be implemented. I personally share that concern. However, that does not mean that a sincere effort should not be put forward to show the people both in this province, other provinces, and indeed the federal government that we in this Legislature are supportive of a process which would introduce fairness to the tradespeople. The spin-offs of this fairness have been very well articulated by previous speakers, and it will have benefits to the economy and so on. Hopefully the positive message would go all the way up to Ottawa where I do understand there have been some efforts to address this particular issue. If this bill achieves the purpose of making the federal tax people aware and in fact implementing some, if not all, of these changes into the system, then it will have been very, very successful.

3:00

Now, we can pursue that for a moment and see what happens. If nobody advocates for this particular group of people, their concerns are never articulated, they will not be addressed, and the system will go on and on. I should point out that it would be perhaps somewhat different if in fact these same tradespeople ever had the required amount of tools to do their trades, but as we all know, they wear out, so they have to replace them. We all know that depending upon what particular area they're in, there may be new requirements which again require new investments. On and on it goes.

If you look at the bigger picture and see what is in fact here, these same tools are used to generate the income on which these individuals are taxed. So in reality if you look back on it, it's one of the costs of doing business, if you will, and as such that should be

recognized. I don't know if the bill goes far enough in terms of how much credit they receive for it, but I would say that this is a good start. Also, I don't see any retroactivity in the bill, but hopefully if things come to pass, there should be some recognition given there.

In closing, I might say, Mr. Speaker, that in the instance of this particular topic we have to appreciate that the tradesperson has to do an outlay of cash on which the taxes have already been paid out of his or her pocket to acquire these tools in order that they can qualify in this legislation for some sort of recognition for that. As such, I congratulate the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan once again and commend him for bringing this legislation forward. I would ask all my colleagues on both sides of this House to give this very important piece of legislation unanimous support to show that we in fact in Alberta care about the people who contribute so very, very much to the economy of this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the chance to support Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, in the House today. I support the bill because it is consistent with the fiscal vision of this government.

Bill 207 seeks to put money back into the pockets of working Albertans. Our government has shown that it believes in the reduction of taxes as a means of encouraging economic growth and therefore a better life for all Albertans. Bill 207 can be seen as one more step in the fulfillment of this vision.

We have taken an active role in providing a tax environment that lets Albertans and business thrive. Lower taxes spur on investment and growth and promote the incentive of entrepreneurialism for small businesses. These are some of the reasons that this government has brought in the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The tax plan implemented by our government helps make Alberta an attractive place for all citizens. However, no plan is perfect. Every once in a while some tweaking needs to be done in order to provide relief for those who need it most. Mr. Speaker, I think this is how we ought to be looking at Bill 207.

Bill 207 asks us to give tax relief to registered journeymen and apprentices working in Alberta's trades who spend more than \$500 on the purchase, maintenance, insurance, and rental of tools. This bill is important because of the high investment necessary to purchase tools for most journeymen, tradesmen, and apprentices. We are all aware that the prices of these tools make it difficult for tradesmen. Passing Bill 207 would give them the opportunity to perform much-needed and appreciated jobs in Alberta and at the same time enjoy our Alberta advantage.

Tax reduction is a positive goal, but the promotion of opportunity for all Albertans is a better goal. Targeted tax reductions like Bill 207 alongside the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act help to bring about that goal. I therefore strongly support Bill 207 and would urge the members of this Assembly to do so as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you. Indeed, it's a pleasure to speak on Bill 207. As one of the three licensed tradespeople that I know of in this Assembly I can personally speak on this from experience.

We know that fishermen, tradesmen, and politicians are the salt of the earth, and I happen to be all three, sir.

We know that supporting this bill would enable an accredited member of any of the 50 apprenticeship programs that Alberta is involved in to receive a nonrefundable credit on their tool purchases. Currently people in trades across Alberta are burdened with the requirement of purchasing increasingly expensive tools in order to perform their jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta prides itself on having the Alberta advantage. This advantage means that we welcome private enterprise and we endeavour to make it easy for companies to do business in Alberta. We also have a strong record of supporting employees and making Alberta an attractive place to work. We do this by having the lowest taxes in the country and by minimizing government involvement in business. Allowing Albertans to act in their best interest and not interfering with their decision-making enables them to work hard and reap the benefits and rewards of their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, the result is outstanding. Alberta continually leads the country in economic growth and new jobs that we're creating here in our own backyard each and every day. Many of these jobs are created in construction and trade-related industries. These industries are growing, and new projects are being developed all across Alberta. As a result, demand for skilled labour is increasing. Alberta needs to ensure that there are enough skilled tradespeople to meet the demands of our growing economy. In order to meet this growing demand, we need to provide incentives for people to enter these industries. This is what Bill 207 seeks to accomplish, sir.

Mr. Speaker, providing a nonrefundable tax credit for the benefit of trade journeymen and apprentices would remove . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan to close debate.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the support from the members who have spoken so eloquently about their experiences, their concerns, their desire to see this particular bill passed and given the opportunity to make a difference for the tradespersons in this province.

The bill appears to make sense to folks. It makes sense to those people who have told me over many years in many different circumstances how it isn't fair, it doesn't seem to be right that in any small business that you want to initiate, you can fully deduct all of your costs of tools or equipment, whatever it might be, yet when you're an employee, a journeyman or an apprentice, and you have to buy the same kind of equipment, tools for your trade, you can't deduct those. It does make sense, and in fact there are some other applications in legislation currently where deductions are allowed. I should mention those, and I'll get to those in a second.

3:10

The purpose of this bill, as has been well stated, is to give tradespeople a break on their income tax for expenses related to tool purchases or rental or insurance or replacement or repairs. As my colleagues have noted, there are many ways that the province of Alberta and Alberta tradespeople will benefit from the passage of this bill. It may help encourage young people into the trades, and that will help Alberta, because we know that there's a shortage of tradespersons.

Before closing debate on this bill, I would like to comment and bring to your attention that the Income Tax Act allows employees to

deduct among other things the cost of supplies as long as certain employment conditions are met. Some of those conditions are listed in an income tax bulletin that I received from an accountant just a couple of days ago.

(c) these expenses may reasonably be regarded as applicable to the earning of income from the office or employment; and

(d) in the case of supplies, they are consumed directly in the performance of the taxpayer's duties of the office or employment.

Those examples of supplies are limited though. They're very restrictive.

The bulletin goes on to talk about those supplies being things like pencils and paper. One example, though, is the cost of gasoline and oil used in the operation of power saws. In fact, for lumberjacks those chainsaws are also deductible from their income tax. Other examples: cellular phone air time or long-distance telephone calls are deductible. Tools used by salespersons to get income are deductible. In the case of tradespeople it doesn't work that way. Somebody else sent me a letter which I received and read just yesterday evening. Apparently, according to this person, salaried musicians are also able to deduct the cost of their instruments. So these are cases that exist currently and certainly don't exist, though, for tradespersons. Journeymen and apprentices operating in those trades deserve a break due to the high cost of the tools just like the phone calls or the cell time is deductible.

By making these changes to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, we'll make a small impact because our tax rate is only 10 percent. On the other hand, if the federal government sees that we're in favour and are moving in that direction, we can perhaps encourage the federal minister to make similar changes, which would have even a greater impact on the trades both in Alberta and elsewhere in the country.

So I appreciate the support that has been voiced during this last hour and 20 minutes or so of debate. I would encourage you in the interest of tradespersons in Alberta to support this bill, Bill 207. Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Hancock	McFarland
Blakeman	Horner	Norris
Bonner	Hutton	O'Neill
Broda	Jablonski	Ouellette
Cao	Jacobs	Pham
Cardinal	Klapstein	Shariff
Danyluk	Kryczka	Smith
DeLong	Lord	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lougheed	Stelmach
Evans	Lund	Strang
Fischer	MacDonald	Tannas
Forsyth	Marz	Tarchuk
Friedel	Maskell	VanderBurg
Fritz	Mason	Woloshyn
Gordon	Masyk	Yankowsky
Goudreau		

Against the motion:

Carlson	Lukaszuk	Renner
Cenaiko	McClellan	Stevens
Haley	Melchin	Vandermeer
Herard	Nelson	

Totals:	For – 46	Against – 11
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[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a second time]

Bill 208 Alberta Official Song Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise today to introduce the second reading of Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act.

First I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for having permitted me to introduce this bill and to thank my colleagues for having accepted the first reading of this bill and the many other Albertans who have expressed their enthusiasm for the idea of the bill. Over the last week, since Albertans first heard that we were considering adopting an official song, there has been an enormous amount of talk about the idea amongst MLAs, amongst the media, and especially amongst ordinary Albertans.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

National newspapers and radio shows have done feature stories on the topic. A local radio station has started its own serious competition to find an appropriate song for Alberta. My offices in Calgary and Edmonton have been flooded with interest from Albertans living across the province. Schools and choirs have called to see if they can submit a song as a group. Chat groups have been set up on the Internet looking for possibilities. Recommendations for songs from a wide variety of musical tastes have been pouring in. From country and western to reggae, people have sent lyrics, CDs, and tapes, beaming with pride about what they have written and hoping it might be considered to become the permanent symbol of Alberta.

Clearly the response just to the idea of a song has been enormous, but it has been overwhelmingly positive. For me, Mr. Speaker, this just proves why Bill 208 ought to be passed by this Legislature. The notion of a song has sparked the interest and enthusiasm of Albertans. Their spirit has been uplifted, and that is the main objective of this bill. Unlike most other bills presented in this Legislature, this bill does not seek resources or new programs. It does not even seek to change policy or regulations. Rather, it seeks to make life even more exciting than it already is in Alberta. It seeks to free our immense community spirit, and if the response we have seen so far is any indication, this bill will do just that.

3:30

Before I go into detail about the strengths of this bill, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to explain exactly how the bill is intended to work. This bill would establish a nonpartisan committee of the Legislature to solicit the submissions of songs that could be adopted as an Alberta official song. The bill is specific in citing that membership of this committee should come from all political parties. This detail is included to reaffirm the objective of this bill: an effort to unite Alberta, an effort to find commonalities that link all Albertans no matter what their background. Also on this committee will be members of the Alberta music community, hopefully including a wide variety of academic music experts, music industry specialists, and experienced musi-

cians. These members will compose the majority of the committee and will back up MLAs in whatever musical expertise they may lack.

This Alberta official song committee will seek submissions for songs and lyrics in any way it chooses. There may be performances; there may be subcommittees traveling across the province. The only certain rule is that submissions must be open to all Albertans, giving everyone a chance to let their Alberta pride shine. When the committee has ultimately agreed on one selection, this song will be brought forward to the Legislature to be adopted as Alberta's official song.

I think it is important to note that the Alberta official song committee will not necessarily seek a new song. Already several well-known tunes exist relating to Alberta, such as *Four Strong Winds*. Many less well-known ones, that have already been written, may surface in the selection process. The point of the committee will not necessarily be to seek an oration but to seek a work that could appropriately be deemed Alberta's official song.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is how the bill works: plain and simple, no frills, no whistles, just a clear, open process to selecting an official song for our province.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish to elaborate on why Alberta needs an official song and, perhaps more importantly, why our centennial is a perfect opportunity to adopt an official song. As most members are aware, I'm sure, Alberta has already selected several official emblems. Probably most familiar to us are our official flag, our coat of arms, and our official flower, of course, the wild rose. The official mammal is the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, and we also have the official tree, stone, and fish. So why not add a song to this list of emblems? Why not complement our set of visual symbols with something that people can listen to? It's like adding the sound to the video.

A song can help unite people. When people hear national anthems, they are reminded of the ties which bind them together. They are compelled to achieve for themselves and for others. They are flooded with pride and enthusiasm for their province or their country. People are inspired. A song can also help define who we are. It can point out the different attributes that make Alberta a unique and enjoyable place to live, including all our historical, natural, and cultural heritage. A song can point out the colourful history of our province and its memorable people. It can point out the beautiful scenery and geography that are found only in Alberta. It can point out the diversity in people, work, and interests that make up this province. A song can help search to know what it is to be an Albertan, to define, to unite, and to inspire Albertans. These are some excellent reasons why finding an official Alberta song is a worthy and admirable endeavour of this Legislature.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I wish to explain why 2005, Alberta's centennial year, is a perfect opportunity to enact Alberta's official song. Alberta is approaching the end of a century of extraordinary growth and development. Albertans have worked hard over the century to build a strong, dynamic province and build a strong and dynamic country. This is something to be proud of, something truly worth celebrating. Over the next four years the government will be encouraging and supporting Albertans as they plan and develop projects and events to celebrate the centennial. The centennial legacies program will provide funding for communities to build and renovate public-use facilities for future generations to enjoy. The centennial celebration programs will provide support for special rodeos, parades, and cultural events organized by local leaders to celebrate the centennial.

In addition to these legacies and celebration projects, the province will be involved in putting on a number of provincewide events and mementos. This might include the production and sale of coins,

plaques, special editions of newspapers. So you see, Mr. Speaker, in the year 2005 the Alberta government will be directly involved in a number of projects designed to celebrate our centennial in particular but, more importantly, also to leave a legacy for the future generations of Alberta. What could be more fitting than selecting an official song during this year for future generations to enjoy?

Choosing the song for 2005 will also serve to confirm the celebratory nature of the song. Certainly the song would be intended to be part of making Albertans proud of their accomplishments, but this Alberta pride would be in the context of greater Canadian pride, which Albertans also hold dear to their hearts. Suggestions that choosing a song of our own might be a sign of western alienation or protest would be entirely misleading if not nonsense. This I'm sure members of the Assembly are well aware of, but in selecting a song in our centennial, this nonthreatening, celebratory nature of the song is highly emphasized, limiting room for misinterpretation. If we are going to choose an official Alberta song, 2005 is the year to do it.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 208 is very straightforward in its design and intent. It will establish a committee of MLAs and respected members of the musical community to solicit and choose an appropriate official song for Alberta. An official song offers many benefits for our province. It complements a long list of other visual emblems we have, from the tartan to the flag. It offers an opportunity for Alberta to better define itself, to articulate its culture, historical heritage. It offers an opportunity to unite and to inspire Albertans. As Alberta celebrates its centennial in 2005, it will be seeking events and mementos that will be exciting and fun but will serve a long-lasting function; 2005 is the perfect occasion to select a song, to find the words and the melody to articulate Alberta's proud history and promising future.

Wouldn't it be memorable for members of our 25th Legislature to be known as the ones who established Alberta's official song? Wouldn't it be memorable for Albertans in our centennial celebration to be known as the ones who started the Alberta official song? It is time for Albertans to sing Alberta. Now, Mr. Speaker, is the time to prepare for a song.

3:40

I also would like to say that many, many lyrics have been sent to me, so I want to share with you just a few here. For example:

Alberta is where I want to be.
It's a great place to raise a family.
The pioneering spirit is still alive.
With each other's help we can all thrive.

Another example is:

Strong as the mountains.
Free as the blue sky.
Taller than wheatfields in the sun.
Growing faster the wild roses one by one.
Alberta.

This is from an 84-year-old gentleman in Edmonton. He plays music and sings too. Here are his lyrics:

Where the hills in spring are fresh and green,
and the rushing waters flow.
Where the fields of waving grain give way
to the lonesome cattle call.
See the foothills yield their colored hues.
Oh, Alberta, my homeland,
That's where I want to be,
For Alberta will always be my sweet home to me.

Also, you can have a feeling from a person, in fact a song already composed by Ben and Beth Devan. It's titled *Alberta, We Love You*, and the lyrics go:

The mountains shout it to the sky.
The woodlands whisper in reply.

The rivers murmur it as they flow by.
The breezes hum the lovely strain.
It echoes in the fields of grain.

So, Mr. Speaker, from this inspiration that I've received so far, not to mention I have CDs, tapes, and many others, I believe that this is the right moment for an official song. That's the reason why I introduced Bill 208, and I hope that all of you will join me in supporting this bill and provide a celebratory song for Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, that was a very inspirational and certainly heartfelt introduction to a bill, and I thank the proposing member for it. I'm sure that we have staff joining us in the galleries who have assisted the member in creating the bill, and I'd like to express my appreciation to them for their work on it – I'm sure they're very proud of this bill – and bringing it forward.

I don't know how people are going to vote on this, but I think, coming from the arts, I have a strong reaction to this suggestion. I appreciate that the member is wishing to draw on our strong arts community and on Albertans that have latent artistic talent that they want to make use of to give a gift of music to the rest of Alberta. I'm glad that that professionalism and that talent of Albertans is being recognized. I've stood in this House many times expressing my frustration at the lack of acknowledgment and value and, frankly, budgeting in support of the arts in this province. Over the years since the 75th anniversary we've seen almost a through line downwards of support from the government for the arts in this province, so I appreciate what the member is proposing here.

I had just a couple of questions about the setup of the bill. The member is proposing that it be essentially an all-party committee or at least not only government members and is allowing for two MLAs who are not members of the governing party to be on the committee. A little later on it says that if there are not enough of the members that are not from the governing party that are interested in being on the committee, then they can appoint members from the government backbench, but I notice that the reverse of that is not in here, that if there weren't enough people, backbenchers of the governing party that were interested in being on the committee, the rest of the seats would be filled by members of the opposition.

That's a curiosity to me, and perhaps the member can address that in his closing remarks or in Committee of the Whole. It just strikes me as odd that when the oppositions have been so vocal and forthright in their support for all good things Albertan and particularly for the arts, there'd be some sort of assumption built into this that there wouldn't be members of the opposition interested or willing to sit on the committee and that the member had to go far enough to provide for a replacement of them. So I'm just wondering why he did that, and maybe he can explain it so we can get him on record with that.

I found it very interesting when I first read the bill that the only people that are specifically listed as being on this committee are MLAs, and then it says Albertans. It doesn't give any indication, it doesn't list any organizations from which members of the committee would be drawn. It just says Albertans.

In the member's opening remarks he spoke about having most of the committee be representatives from different sectors of the arts community or from the music sector. Again, I'm curious why that wasn't actually put in the bill. Heaven forbid anything went wrong and someone or many of us are left to look at this bill years down the road and try and understand how to do this. There's nothing in the

bill that allows for or asks for musicians or representatives of people in the music industry to be on the committee, but it was in the member's remarks.

I think this is important for a number of reasons. I've sat on a lot of juries over my days, and you really need to have expertise from the community at the table. Just by way of a small example, if this committee had existed in the '70s, for instance, and had decided to go with the newest pop tune on the radio or something that was written following those lines, we could end up with a disco tune, which obviously by the time we got to 30 years later would not be something that we'd be really thrilled about. So it's important that we have the expertise. [interjection] Oh, I'm sorry. I shouldn't speak for others. Disco's coming back. Oh, please.

It's important that we have expertise on the committee that can advise as to whether the music has a quality to it that is going to surpass the current day and the current fashion and in fact whether it's a well-crafted piece of music and lyrics. I know that there are a number of organizations that are available here in Edmonton and across Alberta, and I'm hoping that the member will commit to contacting those organizations and soliciting membership on the committee from them.

For example, there's ARIA, the Alberta Recording Industries Association. Now certainly they have a lot of musicians pass through their doors, a lot of recording artists. They certainly develop an expertise as a result of that. We have the musicians' union here in Alberta. We have a number of people who've developed a very wide-ranging expertise in music as a result of the festivals that we have developed here in Alberta and which are now very long running, some of them celebrating their 20th anniversary, some their 25th anniversary.

3:50

We have people like Holger Peterson, who was one of the originators of the Edmonton Folk Festival, now with Stony Plain Recording and with a very popular CBC program. We have people like Terry Wickham, who's now programming for both the Edmonton and the Calgary folk festivals, or Maureen Chambers, who is programming for the South Country Fair and has a very progressive and a very fine ear. So that would give you some representation from different parts of the province. There are people around like Dick Finkel, one of the people that worked with the first big folk festival in Canada, the Winnipeg Folk Festival, and then came to Edmonton and ran the Street Performers Festival for 10 or a dozen years.

We certainly have a very exciting and successful opera here in Edmonton and expertise in that company that could be drawn upon. The Calgary Philharmonic is another place to go looking if we're just looking at the music itself. There is actually a small festival here in Edmonton run by Ken Brown out of Grant MacEwan Community College called the singer/songwriter festival. That is coming up shortly I think. Perhaps I can get the information on when that would be and forward the information to the Member for Calgary-Fort and he could try to attend, because that whole festival is about emerging singer/songwriters, and they're all Albertan.

So there are lots of possibilities there. I think it's important to have expertise from the community not only to acknowledge the depth that the music industry has developed but also to pull on that expertise as to what is a well-crafted piece of music or song and, further to that, to be giving advice on something that is not in this act and that has caused me concern.

There are provisions in the act for payment of remuneration and reimbursement of expenses to members of the committee, although there's something a little odd about that because then it goes on and

it's talking about "other than those who are employees of the Government members or employees of an agency of the Government." I'm looking for clarification on that because it sounds like anybody would be remunerated on this committee unless they were employees of government members, which would make them constituency staff or something or "employees of an agency of the Government," which then again gets quite specific. But that's the way it's written here. So if there can be clarification of that.

My point in this is that there is a stipulation in the act for payment of the committee members. Nowhere in here do I see a recognition of payment for the work of the artist that develops the song. Thanks to the federal government and many people who worked for a very long time, we now have a copyright infringement law in Canada which recognizes production of artistic material like songs, designs for theatre, and a number of other artistic creations as intellectual property that therefore belongs to the artist and can't be modified or used out of context without the permission of the artist, but contained in that is payment to the artist. I don't see that anywhere in this act.

Now, if the intention is that the committee itself would be establishing a royalty rate, for example, you know, so much every time this song is used, or whether they would be negotiating with the artist for a split fee up front plus a royalty or some sort of fee up front, I'd like the member to be articulating that into the record so that it's very clear. In this province we spent a lot of time and attention developing a truly extraordinary artistic community. Then we've spent almost an equally long period of time totally ignoring it and leaving the funding at stagnation. I have to say, "Where do you think these brilliant lyricists and musicians come from?" Well, we nurture them. They have to get jobs here. They have to be able to pay their rent and buy food and gas for a car or a bus pass, things like that.

There's a sort of assumption that I see coming from this government that disturbs me a great deal. I see photos in tourism brochures and in promotional material for the government that, you know, has the picture of the Edmonton Folk Festival on the hill and thousands of people in the band shell at the bottom, and I think, well . . . [interjection] Absolutely, it's super. But then those groups go to Tourism, wherever it is now, whatever's left of it, and say, "Look; could we get some help with marketing money on this?" "No. Sorry. No, no, we don't do that. Oh, no, not for festivals, not for this, not for that."

Every time the artistic community is looking for that kind of operational funding which gives it the security to develop new artists and new work, they're told no. When they look for other ways to promote their work, like through Tourism or Economic Development, they're told no. Yet the government is more than happy to take their picture and put it on brochures, and I don't think they're paying back into that organization for the use of that picture either.

MS HALEY: Is this relevant at all to the song, the bill we're on?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, it's very relevant because it's about the artists . . .

MR. BONNER: Carol, you can get up and speak.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, yes. Maybe the whip from the other side will be speaking. I'm sure she will.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'd encourage you to speak through the chair and refer to the bill, please.

MS BLAKEMAN: I am happy to, Mr. Speaker.

What's important about this is that if we're looking for the work from Albertans, we have to understand – and I'd like it on the record – that there is a recognition and a willingness to pay for the work that's done. That's also a recognition that the larger community that develops the artist and develops the work needs to be supported or we don't have those artist here, and I've already seen a number of them leave this province. This is such a wonderful opportunity for everyone, and I want it to be something that we're really proud of and with all the wonderful possibilities that we can get and work into it.

Now, the member also spoke about funding for legacy projects as part of this, and perhaps he foresees a royalty payment for this song coming from the legacy money. He wasn't specific about that. That is part of my question: do we then anticipate seeing in the budget a year that would encompass the time span being put forward in the bill, which is 18 months from when it's passing? I'm assuming we're talking the 2002-2003 fiscal year. Where do we expect to see money set aside with which the committee, I'm presuming, can negotiate a fee? Does he have any assurances from the Minister of Community Development, for example, that in fact that money would be there? Is there a hope that it will all come together, or has work been done in anticipation of that? I'd be interested in knowing.

There's also some mention of the staff from Community Development being involved, I think as a support to the committee. I'm wondering if the member can expand a bit on what's being anticipated there. The arts development sector is fairly small in the whole department of Community Development now, and I know that their staff are working flat out to accomplish the duties that are on their plates at the time, so I'm wondering where the support would be coming from. Is it from a different sector, then, or will there be additional money going in to pay for that? Is there already a line item in the Community Development budget that I didn't see or that wasn't pointed out in the budget debates that we've just done that is allowing for support for meetings and things like that, for sandwiches, I suppose, or whatever else? Where is the budget for this committee? If it's to go on for the next 18 months, where's the money? Part of it's got to be in the budget that we're currently debating. Where is it? If that could be explained for me.

4:00

So those are the few points that I wanted to raise. As I said when I started, I can see what an inspirational project this has been for the member who proposed it, and I'm glad to see that he is so excited about the possibilities. I think there are wonderful possibilities here. As an Albertan I would certainly like to see a wonderful song that we can all be proud of, whether that's a new song that's created or whether it's acceptance of a song that already exists. I think it's a great birthday possibility. Everyone knows that at birthdays *Happy Birthday* is usually the song of choice to celebrate it, so in a way this is putting into legislation the opportunity for Alberta to choose its own happy birthday song, which is perfectly appropriate.

I do support the bill. I support the member and the staff that worked with him to create this, but I feel obliged to make sure that the artists are represented in this, that I'm reassured that I can go out into the community and tell people to get involved with this, that they will be dealt with fairly and honourably, and that there's no expectation that somehow an artist would be expected to do it for free. [interjections] Oh, everybody is so excited about these possibilities. They're all singing. Isn't that wonderful?

To know that they will be treated properly – I mean, you hear a lot about: oh, will you do something for recognition? But, you know, artists can't eat recognition. It doesn't pay the bills. They need to

be paid for what their efforts are bringing them, even if it's not someone that would consider themselves a professional. Perhaps it's an Albertan out there that just has a hidden talent that's going to contribute to this for fun. They still need to be recognized for the work that's done, and I want to have those reassurances on the record.

So thanks very much for this opportunity to participate in this fun bill. I appreciate it, and I look forward to hearing the responses from the Member for Calgary-Fort.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour to rise today to speak in support of Bill 208. I congratulate my colleague on this exciting and, indeed, inspirational idea. If I could, I would sing these words for you. However, that is not advisable.

Despite what this government has been saying for the last several years, the province of Alberta has been running a deficit, a cultural deficit. It is a deficit that we have ignored and put off because we as an Assembly did not believe it was a priority to act upon, but it is a deficit that could haunt us in the future if we do not act on it now, leaving us with the questions: who are we, and what makes us special? Specifically, I am referring to Alberta's lack of an official song. This province needs an official song, and as Alberta experiences abundant prosperity entering into its second century, now is the time to find that song and sing it.

The 19th century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said that without music, life would be an error. One does not have to be a philosopher to know what he meant. The power of music is enormous. When we hear music, it resonates inside of us. I don't think any of us could explain quite how, but it evokes emotion. My granddaughter Taiya Anne at the age of seven months cannot walk, cannot talk, but when she hears music, her legs swing and her head shakes and her arms move and she giggles with delight, and that is the power of music. Even the youngest citizens of Alberta can't help but be affected by the sweet strains of music.

When a group of friends sing a song together, it's a symbol and a confirmation by action that these friends have something in common, that they are truly bound by something greater than themselves. A song is a rallying point for the people of a state, a province, a sports club, or a school. Songs stir the dormant passion inside all of us, lighting up our sense of pride. I can still remember the great high school song we used to sing at all our assemblies, and we would always sing it louder than the next person.

Mr. Speaker, music has been adopted by countries and states for thousands of years to stir allegiance, to depict a greater sense of purpose, and to unite people into common cause. Picture the images evoked by Australia's anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*.

Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia fair.

Listen to the call for peace and prosperity in the newly adopted anthem of South Africa.

Sounds the call to come together, and united we shall stand,
Let us live and strive for freedom in South Africa, our land.

There is no reason that this emotion, this appeal to the greater good of humans, this collective call to duty should not be offered to Albertans as well.

I'd like to address, though, two objections to this bill that I have heard in passing, which I believe are entirely groundless and misguided against what is really a good-natured and beneficial idea.

First, selecting an official song for Alberta will not inflame western separatist sentiment nor disturb other provinces in this country. Ontario sings:

Give us a place to stand
And a place to grow,
And call this land Ontario.

Alberta will not be the only province with a song, if we adopt one in 2005. Newfoundland has had an official tune since 1979. As well, more than 40 states in the United States proudly boast of having an official song; some even have two or three. Somehow these provinces and states have managed to exist with no apparent desires to separate from their respective nations anytime soon. Rather, the songs have become part of these jurisdictions' identities and cultures. People from other states have come to recognize some of these tunes and know to associate it with the respective state. Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*, for instance, a tune I am sure many here are familiar with, is now the state song of Oklahoma. *Home on the Range*, no surprise, is the state song of Kansas. The purpose and effect of adopting state and provincial songs is entirely good natured. If history serves as any guide, there is no reason to believe a song will ignite separatist passion.

In my opinion, in fact, I would like to see all provinces eventually adopt a provincial anthem. Perhaps Canada as a country is simply too young to have felt that its provinces deserve songs, or perhaps Canadian provinces traditionally have been more shy than our friends to the south to sing out loud about how good it is to be here. In either case, these are not excuses why all Canadian provinces and Alberta in particular cannot adopt songs now. At 100 years of age Alberta is definitely mature enough to have had many important achievements, people, passions, and dreams to sing about. Well, yes, boasting is a bad thing to do, just like our mothers always said, but this form of boasting is all in good fun. Hopefully, in adopting a song, Alberta will be setting a trend, like we usually do, for other provinces to follow.

The second objection I wish to refer to regarding Bill 208 is the idea that Albertans might not know when and where to sing our newly created Alberta song. I think the bill is appropriately designed to give guidance on this topic that is not too broad nor too specific. Currently there is very little formal protocol as to when the Canadian national anthem must be sung, except that it must be used in honouring the Lieutenant Governor. Yet Canadians and Albertans have worked out for themselves when it is appropriate to sing *O Canada*: at this Legislature, at hockey games, at school assemblies, at meetings of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. These are the times that logically call for an official song, at times of formal and informal ceremony, at times when we seek to celebrate our commonality. These are the times we sing our national anthem, and these may be the times we would sing Alberta's official song in the future. This is not to say that the official song will be necessarily sung on these occasions, but the precedent is set. If organizers and participants feel that including Alberta's official song is appropriate, then so be it.

4:10

Recently I attended a dinner sponsored by the Red Deer Public School District Foundation called Striving for Excellence. Some of our great students in Red Deer were awarded for demonstrating excellence in academics and community work. At this dinner we were treated to the beautiful songs of our children singing in a choir. One day that choir will be able to sing the official song of Alberta, helping everyone in that room to feel proud and happy about this province.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has come of age. One of the most appropriate ways we could commemorate this growth is through the adoption of an official song. The objections to a song are not strong. It will not be mistaken for a plea of western alienation, and the times when

the song will be sung are appropriately defined. The benefits of adopting a song, on the other hand, are enormous. An official song will remind Albertans and others of our exciting and intrepid past. It will evoke an image of our tenacious character. It will ask us to rise to the collective challenge of fulfilling the potential that has been laid for us by destiny.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, now is the time for an official Alberta song. I support this bill, and I encourage you all to support it with me.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, could we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a couple of fellows that worked very hard on my campaign, Jeff and Ryan Hollands. I'd like them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House. They are moving to B.C. and very sad to leave Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to introduce guests.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the Assembly it is definitely my honour to introduce three guests that I have in the members' gallery. I'd like to introduce Mr. and Mrs. Victor Chrapko from the Two Hills area. Mr. Chrapko has been a previous reeve and councillor and school board chairman from the county of Two Hills. Along with him we have Mr. Marcel Podlosky, who is with STARS ambulance.

Thank you very much.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 208
Alberta Official Song Act
(continued)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am anxious to participate in the debate this afternoon on the bill to declare an official Alberta anthem. I'm going to be brief.

The notion – and in this Assembly it's a novel notion, I must admit – that we would be willing to strike all-party committees certainly is a notion with merit. But last week I thought we could strike an all-party committee to examine retail gasoline prices, and that was ruled out. In the past we've had urging to have all-party committees on the WCB, but that did not happen. Yet we can have official opposition members on a committee to select an Alberta song for the centennial year. That is a novel notion coming from the Assembly, but it's a notion that I would like to encourage all hon. members to consider in the future, that all-party committees be struck regularly.

However, in regards to this I can't see any need for an official song for this province. Now, I think of 1988. The hon. Member for Red Deer-North spoke earlier about coming of age. If there was one event that you could say was the coming of age for the city of Calgary, it certainly wasn't the discovery of oil and gas in Turner Valley. It was important, but the 1988 Winter Olympics – I think it was probably the finest Winter Olympics that was organized, and the city of Calgary did a very good job.

MR. SMITH: Who was the mayor then?

MR. MacDONALD: That's a very good question, Mr. Speaker. Yes, that's a very good observation the minister has made, because the mayor of Calgary, the current Premier, took the flag in the closing ceremonies and handed it off to the next city that was to host the games. For that ceremony McMahon Stadium was full. There were perfect weather conditions. There was a breeze blowing, and Ian Tyson was singing *Alberta Bound* in the closing ceremonies. On worldwide television the Premier at the time, Mr. Getty, and Mrs. Getty, when Mr. Tyson went to the podium to sing *Alberta Bound* – and no disrespect to the former Premier and Mrs. Getty – had their hands in the air like teenagers. That is my view of the closing ceremonies of the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary.

I'm sorry to disappoint you, but we already have an official song, and it was the one that Mr. Tyson sang that evening, *Alberta Bound*. To see the Premier and the official party get so excited and to see the citizens at McMahon get so excited whenever Mr. Tyson sang that song convinces me that there is no need for this bill because we already have an official song. In Mr. Tyson's ballads about this province he sings about springtime in the Rockies. He sings about coyotes. He sings about cutting horses. He sings about Navajo rugs, cowgirls, pickups running like hounds over the Monida Pass. He talks about cowboys going to some of the ranching states to earn a living whenever the weather is really cold in Alberta.

So I'm not going to go any further in my remarks regarding this bill, but I would just like to remind all hon. members of this Assembly of the 1988 closing ceremonies at the Calgary Winter Olympics and the fine job that was done by Mr. Tyson and the reaction of the crowd as I observed from my living room. I'm afraid we already have an unofficial official song, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do believe we're still Alberta bound, and it's good to be Alberta bound.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to stand today and speak to Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act, proposed by my distinguished colleague from Calgary-Fort. The province of Alberta will mark its centennial anniversary on September 1, 2005. For this historic occasion the government of Alberta is committed to supporting Albertans as they plan events and programs to celebrate the centennial. Alberta's 100th anniversary provides us with the setting and the opportunity to look back on the history of this wonderful province and the progress that we've made. Our accomplishments are numerous, and our reasons to celebrate are many.

Mr. Speaker, we've transformed this province from the barren wilderness that greeted the first settlers over a hundred years ago to the modern society that we live in today. As our province has grown and evolved, we have succeeded in building and developing institutions to care for our sick, to educate our children, to protect our wilderness, and to govern our land. These accomplishments are

results of the decades of hard work and dedication to the virtues of this province.

4:20

In addition to looking back, the centennial affords us the opportunity to reflect on where the province is today and where it's going. Mr. Speaker, who would have imagined in 1905 that Alberta would look as it does today? However, I imagine the Albertans of 1905 were as fiercely proud of their new province as we are today, a hundred years later, of our Alberta home. Where will the province of Alberta be a hundred years from now? Well, I'm not sure that I'll be around to see that day, but I hope the people of that time will be able to understand and share the pride and respect that we hold for this province.

Mr. Speaker, it is in this light that my colleague from Calgary-Fort is proposing the Alberta Official Song Act. The creation of the official song will provide a tangible representation of our current culture for future generations to enjoy. A song can capture the unique cultural and social aspects of a society in a way that no other medium can. I think my colleague earlier talked about that. A song is a work of art capable of capturing the feeling and the love that we as Albertans feel for our province. Commissioning a song for Alberta on our centennial anniversary would provide a lasting impression of the people and the culture that currently make up our province. We should seize this opportunity and create a legacy that future generations will recognize and be proud of.

Last weekend many citizens of Whitecourt-St. Anne spoke to me about this proposal, and I've received broad, broad support. I'm proud to be an Albertan, and I support the use of an official song as a means of honouring the heritage and the culture of our province. It is for these reasons that I support Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act, and I encourage my colleagues in this Assembly to do the same.

Alberta bound, Alberta bound,
It's good to be Alberta bound.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am pleased to have been invited by my colleague from Calgary-Fort to speak on his Bill 208, which is the Alberta song act. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, despite what you heard earlier from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, there is not an official song in the province of Alberta, which is why my colleague has brought this bill before us today.

I think it's very fitting that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fort brings forward this creative piece of legislation. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, he works tirelessly in Calgary. He's often seen supporting many different events, celebrations, and social gatherings with that wonderful smile of his, and I believe the inspiration for this bill may have originated from all those gatherings that he's been at as an MLA over the years.

Mr. Speaker, I found this bill actually to be quite invigorating. It asks that we try something new by establishing a committee that would encourage submissions of original songs, one of which would be adopted as Alberta's official song. The plan, in my understanding from listening to my hon. colleague earlier, is that this song be unveiled during the centennial anniversary celebrations in September of 2005. I think that sounds like a lot of fun because there's absolutely no limit to what Albertans can submit. They can be creative. They can be imaginative. They can be visionary. In fact, it is so invigorating that we heard some songs back here as other speakers in the Legislature were speaking today. Great singers, my colleagues, I must say.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to celebrate centennials by leaving lasting legacies, and for me that brings to mind when the city of Calgary celebrated their centennial in 1984. The city council of the day initiated a competition for designing a Calgary flag to commemorate the event. My friend and I, along with hundreds of other Calgarians, decided to enter, and we had the good fortune of winning. This meant that red and white, the colours of our flag, became Calgary's official colours, and Premier Klein, who was the mayor of Calgary at the time, presented us with a \$1,000 prize. I was very proud when our flag was raised at city hall by the mayor and members of city council that New Year's morning of 1984.

So, Mr. Speaker, you can see why I am supporting my colleague's community-minded bill. This experience showed me the significance of celebrating historic events such as Alberta's centennial. These important anniversaries allow us the opportunity to create legacies for years to come.

What might we expect an Alberta official song to sound like? Well, that would be wholly up to the inspiration of the songwriter, and that's the beauty of the creation of Bill 208. My hon. colleague actually read some lyrics to the Assembly earlier, Mr. Speaker, and they were quite wonderful. I think we're going to have hundreds, perhaps thousands of submissions much like that.

The artist may be moved by images of our spectacular Rocky Mountain views, flowing prairie wheat fields, pristine northern forests, and expansive southern ranchlands. The natural beauty, I think, of our province provides many powerful images, and these images embody the themes to which the song may speak.

Mr. Speaker, if it is acknowledged that an official song should refer to our physical environment, then perhaps it could also represent our collective cultural identity. An official song containing references to our cultural heritage and picturesque landscape would certainly bring feelings of pride and togetherness within our Alberta community.

Just this past week my colleague from Calgary-Montrose and I had the opportunity to be at the official opening of Monterey Park elementary school. The theme of the program was Celebrating the Colours of Our Earth. Over 100 ECS and elementary students, Mr. Speaker, celebrated this theme with awesome songs and dance. As you can imagine, their music was truly outstanding and exhilarating. It united all of us with smiles and simply left us feeling good about being a part of this beautiful celebration. When my hon. colleague from Calgary-Montrose and I presented the principal, Mrs. Kerwood, with an official school plaque and an Alberta flag, I thought: wouldn't it be wonderful if the children of our community had an official song to sing as well? Those thoughts came, of course, because we have this motion, this bill, before us today in the Assembly.

I really feel it's important, when we invite the public to make submissions to the song committee, that a special invitation is sent to all our schools inviting our students to participate in this historic competition. I see my colleague from Calgary-Fort is nodding his head, Mr. Speaker, indicating that that must be very much an intent along with this bill.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Official Song Act, proposed by my colleague from Calgary-Fort, could very well produce a song of lasting appeal. I believe we should take this unique opportunity to choose a song that would then be played as a tribute to Alberta at official gatherings, events, and celebrations. I think in time it would become as much a part of our province's tradition and heritage as our provincial flag. Bill 208 is a chance to celebrate the distinct aspects of Alberta and to provide a unique and lasting gift to Albertans. It offers us a special opportunity to

celebrate the pride that we have in Alberta's hundred-year history.

I'd like to congratulate my esteemed colleague from Calgary-Fort for bringing this matter before the Assembly. I personally feel that the 2005 centennial celebrations will be a magical time for our province, and I think we should all recognize our centennial anniversary with the unveiling of an official Alberta song.

So, hon. colleague, I wish you well with this bill. I offer my support for Bill 208, and I urge all members of this Assembly to do the same.

Thank you.

4:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act. I would like to certainly commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this proposal before this Assembly.

Bill 208 proposes the blueprint for the selection of an official song for Alberta which would add to the provincial emblems that Albertans are so proud of. An official song would be an excellent addition to the centennial celebrations Alberta will enjoy in the year 2005, and the benefits of the song will last much longer than 2005, because it will serve as a symbol of our province for future generations.

In the short term an official song will provide music that Albertans can celebrate to in 2005. The official song will add a sense of grandeur to the centennial proceedings while tying together celebrating Albertans across the province. The song will continue to provide a source of unity for Albertans long after the celebration is over. It will be used at official functions, future celebrations, and wherever it is deemed appropriate to play the official song of Alberta.

The first centennial is something that Albertans will only experience once. This is why we as a government should recognize the special date in our province's history with the same Albertan initiatives, skill, and vigour that have made Alberta what it has become in the first 100 years. In this respect, the centennial serves as a perfect launchpad for the official song. The official Alberta song can serve as a commemorative tool for the 2005 celebration, as that time will provide an excellent opportunity to use the song and for Albertans to become familiar with it. As an official song as opposed to a commemorative song, the life span of this piece of music will carry on long past the centennial celebration.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta currently has several provincial symbols and emblems which serve to represent such things as Alberta's heritage, natural beauty, and even our prosperity. These symbols may not play a vital role in the way that Albertans regard their province in an everyday light; however, they do provide an interpretive guide to the citizens of this province. The emblems hold different levels of importance and meaning for each Albertan, but I think it can be agreed that music is something that we all enjoy. In effect, the official song can help to bind Albertans around a symbol that can be loved as much as our flag.

With so many emblems and symbols currently representing Alberta, you may ask: why do we need an official song to serve the same purpose? An official song will have a distinct use over and above many of our other emblems, such as the enhancement of an event, as its presentation will denote a certain level of importance to the proceedings at hand. Meaningful pieces of music instill pride in us all, going back to when we were very young. I'm sure many of us can remember times with our parents at hockey games or at school with our classmates singing *O Canada*. The song serves as

an audible symbol of something that we as Canadians cherish. We all well up with pride when we see the Canadian flag being raised over the podium at the Olympic Games and hear *O Canada*, which only serves to reinforce the beauty of the moment. An official song for Alberta could provide the same source of pride for Albertans.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that not only would this bill endow Alberta with an audible symbol, which we currently lack, but it will be the beginning of a new tradition that all Albertans will be proud of. Imagine if Alberta's official song can gain the notoriety inside Alberta that *O Canada* has achieved nationwide. That would be truly something special.

I urge all members to vote for this private member's bill. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and make a few brief comments in support of Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this matter in front of the Assembly.

Bill 208 proposes to promote the development and selection of an official song for the province of Alberta. In doing so, it would provide Alberta with a symbol unlike any other.

Bill 208 calls for the creation of an Alberta official song committee. This committee would transcend party lines as well as reserve spots for citizens of Alberta outside the government. Under the bill the official song committee is charged with soliciting and reviewing submissions and then recommending a final choice for the Assembly to adopt.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Bill 208 proposes the addition of a musical emblem to the several distinguished and unique emblems that Albertans are proud to have represent their province already. A song will allow the author to convey the splendor of this province in distinct terms that all Albertans can relate to and be proud of. To achieve that, Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt in my mind that the song would be of a country/western theme, but perhaps that's just my personal preference.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar in his comments spoke of his favourite being *Alberta Bound*, sung by Ian Tyson*, and I can certainly relate to that, being a longtime fan of Mr. Tyson and probably having the biggest collection of his music of anyone I know. Certainly *Alberta Bound* would be amongst those top choices, but I would like to remind the hon. member that we're not debating which song the official song would be here today. We're simply debating whether or not we're going to have the process of choosing a song and adopt it as the official song by that all-party committee. I'd certainly invite him to be part of that process if he would take that opportunity. Perhaps *Alberta Bound* would be that committee's choice.

As we're all aware, Alberta's 100th birthday is fast approaching, and excitement is already building about this once-in-a-lifetime celebration. To commemorate Alberta's centennial, this government has proposed to begin work on several initiatives under the centennial legacies grant program to restore several of Alberta's special historical sites. Another proposal includes the development and production of different pieces of collectable memorabilia honouring this event. I certainly anticipate that my constituents are also planning events to celebrate this momentous birthday party. From parades to rodeos and fireworks we'll celebrate in style.

What better way to add to the occasion of Albertans celebrating the 100th anniversary of the inauguration day of this province than with a song? The official song can reduce the barriers of time and space across Alberta and provide unity and coherence to the celebration across the province during our centennial. The official song's purpose can be extended well beyond the centennial celebrations that Alberta will soon be enjoying.

There's nothing new in adopting an official provincial song. It can be likened to a state song, which 44 states already have. They selected and adopted music and lyrics to embody their feelings and pride regarding their home states. It's time for Alberta to do the same.

An official song can be played on several different occasions such as official provincial ceremonies, sporting events, other competitions, and even family barbecues or perhaps while riding on the trail out in the beautiful Rocky Mountains. The song can be something that will help to unify Albertans of all cultures and heritages. It will serve as a symbol with different qualities than any of our current emblems. It would help to foster a sense of community across this province.

It's time to give the people of this province an opportunity to craft something that will exemplify and highlight the qualities of Alberta. A province with as many talented individuals as we have and can boast of surely can create a song that will inspire and instill pride in us all. This song will leave a mark for this period, this generation on Alberta forever. This is a special honour and indeed a special opportunity for today's Albertans to leave a lasting impression on Alberta.

I urge all my colleagues to support Bill 208. No one in Alberta is more proud of our heritage than the men and women in this room. An official Alberta song is an excellent demonstration of our pride and appreciation for this province that we all call home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 208. I must say that this bill, the Alberta Official Song Act, is very appropriate as we are approaching our 100 years as a province. I really feel that writing about our proud history and then expressing it through an appropriate song would bring the voices of every Albertan together and add to the joy and pride that we already feel but I know we will feel more so during that year.

There will be many, many functions we'll attend; people will have public functions. There's just a multitude of settings. I know that personally I have been at swim meets where they have the march of athletes that come in, and especially if it's Alberta athletes, why wouldn't they come in with the Alberta flag, singing the Alberta song? There's just no limit to when this Alberta song might be utilized.

I just wanted to make a comment, although he's not here, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. I think *Alberta Bound*, that type of song, is inappropriate. We shouldn't be singing it. We are already here as Albertans, and these are people who are on their way here, so that is not a good example of a song. I would refer to the Olympic song that was composed by David Foster as something that would be more exciting and have more essence to it.

I believe that this bill is an excellent addition to the noble emblems that we already have as we approach 100 years as a province. I think emblems are symbolic. What we have are great, but they're static. You wear them on a lapel or a hat. A flag again is something that is static, certainly representative. A song is

*see p. 1330, right col., para. 7, line 6

something that could be sung, whether by a single person or by a multitude of people.

We have many things to be thankful for, Mr. Speaker. As Albertans we are privileged to live in a province that holds many advantages for its people. We have an abundance of industries and resources which provide for our needs and a wealth of people who are hardworking and good community neighbours.

As a province, again, we have the emblems that remind us of what makes Alberta a special place. There are many meaningful symbols present in these emblems, such as the coat of arms, which represents strength and good character, and the Mace of our provincial Legislature is encircled in different stones to represent Alberta's name. The Alberta wild rose is probably one of the most known symbols of Alberta, and I know through my experience as an MLA that that is a very popular pin with people of all ages. The beauty and the freedom that are represented by the wild rose are important to many people in our province. Our growth as a province has given us many experiences to share as Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I think the creation of an official song for Alberta would tell our experiences in an appropriate and a heartfelt way and provide our citizens with a special mark in history. With the centennial drawing near, I think it would be an appropriate time certainly to give voice to and to celebrate all of these experiences, the ones I talked about earlier and more. In a country so young, 100 years of working together is actually a tremendous amount of history. We've grown from a gathering of settlers looking for a promise of new prosperity to the province that we are today, a vibrant province. I'm proud to say that we've struggled through our hardships together as hardworking people and have risen up because of our efforts to develop today's proud and worthy province.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the people in our province, being proud and worthy, would be well represented by an official song. We have worked so hard to stand where we do today. I talk about us, but I really mean the people before us. I believe these are important reasons to preserve the feelings that define an important part of Alberta's culture and heritage.

In looking at the centennial itself, I think we are so busy in our day-to-day work these days that we don't stop to think about down the road and place ourselves in that year of the centennial. It really will be a special moment in our history, and it will mark a passage of time that is substantial in our young country. Again, the emblems we've adopted to show our unique qualities will be beneficial, but I think the song will certainly mark the centennial itself even more.

When I first heard the proposal for Bill 208, I wondered what my predecessors would have to say about it. Just as I'm standing here today, down the road there'll be another – what do they call the second 100 years?

MR. MAR: Bicentennial.

MS KRYCZKA: Bicentennial. Thank you, hon. member.

Just as I'm standing here, they wouldn't have known of the progress that they had made in the longer period of time. We stand here today being able to recognize what they have contributed. Again, some of us have less time than others – we don't know – to know what lies ahead in the next 100 years. I'm confident that they would be very proud of how far we have taken the province and the bright future that's ahead of us. The strength of our generations helped enable us to overcome the natural hardships that only people raised in our province could know. They've overcome them to plant bountiful crops, to build valuable schools, to develop strong communities. I believe a song would give the past generations recognition of their hard work and signify a pledge to continue with success.

I also want to make a very personal comment. I have been in other countries in an international sports situation. I want to say that Canadians – I speak more on a broader base – are really very conservative in those kinds of environments. There are others where the patriotism level – and I go beyond the United States – is very high. I think it would be very special, even on just a provincial level, to see at public competitions or exhibitions a much higher level of patriotism. Certainly that could be expressed through this song.

In 2005 it will be 100 years since Albertans pledged to work hard together to build a successful future. I believe we have been successful in our goals. Our success and pride in the province we've built is shown through our provincial emblems, but again I'm saying that a song would certainly add to these emblems and give voice to our history.

I urge all my colleagues to support Bill 208, because I feel it is one appropriate way to live our history. The centennial of Alberta marks a very significant period of history, and there is no better opportunity to express our feelings of pride than through a song which will carry on for many generations to come.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to enter into the discussion and the debate on this bill today. At first glance I was intrigued by this bill. I think that it in fact does make sense for Alberta to investigate the possibility of adopting an official song. If this were the extent of this bill, I probably would have no difficulty in supporting it, but what the bill does is that it really goes one step further. My understanding is that it in fact would then make a decision. I frankly have some reservations with the process that's being proposed by the member.

4:50

Songs, regional songs and provincial songs, from my point of view tend to be something that has become adopted over time. I would think that if you're going to have a provincial song, it would make sense that you would have a long-standing tradition of the song within the area. Then the member would be coming to the Assembly and saying: you know, we've all been humming this song for many, many years and generations, and I think it's about time we make this our official song. That kind of a bill I think I could support, but that's not the case in this bill. This bill is saying, "You know, I think we should have an official song, and let's strike a committee," which really brings terror into the minds of many Albertans, striking a government committee, "and let this committee tell Albertans what that song should be."

Mr. Speaker, I think, frankly, that we've got it backwards. I think Albertans should be the ones that decide. They should be deciding by having an opportunity to adopt a song, to come to government and say: you know, this has been a tradition in this province for many years, and we think it's about time that this unofficial provincial song be recognized in some way to make it official. So that's one concern that I have with the bill.

The other concern that I have with the bill is the fact that we have a celebration that's coming up in the year 2005, the centennial of this province. I think that's something that we as Albertans can take a great deal of pride in. I think we all look with a lot of anticipation to 2005 and the celebrations that will take place in conjunction with the centennial of Alberta. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think it's absolutely appropriate that there be a song, that would perhaps even be commissioned, to celebrate 2005.

I remember when I was a youngster. In 1967 I was . . . [interjection] I was 13, hon. member. I was born in 1954. In 1967, when Canada celebrated its centennial, I think we can all remember the centennial train that traveled across the country. I know it stopped in Medicine Hat, and we went down to see that train. There was a lot of hoopla associated with that train, not the least of which was the Bobby Gimby song *Canada*. [interjection] I'll follow the lead of the member from Red Deer; I won't be singing either, Mr. Minister. That is a song that caught the spirit of the nation. It was appropriate that the spirit of the nation should be wrapped up in that kind of a song, and I think that a similar kind of a song would be absolutely appropriate as we celebrate the centennial of the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, that song, as much as it was in all our heads and in our minds in 1967 and perhaps for two or three years after that, was a song that was designed to celebrate something, to celebrate the centennial of a world-class nation, our beloved Canada. It was appropriate that we have a song to do that, but it was not a national song. It was a centennial song. I'm thinking that the same kind of thing could apply in the case of Alberta's centennial. I think it's appropriate that in the centennial activities there could be a song commissioned to recognize and to help Albertans to celebrate the centennial in 2005, but I don't think it's appropriate nor is it necessary that we pass a law in this province outlining in detail the process that must be used to select that song.

There is some confusion in my mind, Mr. Speaker, as to whether or not the purpose of this bill is to select a song that would be used in the year-long celebration of Alberta's centennial or if we are asking this committee to choose a song that would be the official song for Alberta. Frankly, I don't see those two being the same. If we're going to have a song that is the Alberta official song, as I said earlier, I think that needs to grow up with the people of Alberta. That has to be something that we all know and we all grew up with, where people come to Alberta and say: this song has been around for generations, and I think it's time that you made it official. On the other hand, if we're going to have a song that's designed to help Albertans celebrate the centennial of this province, then I think that that probably would be appropriately the type of project that you might commission someone to do.

I've heard brought up in debate the wonderful music that was commissioned and incorporated into the Calgary Olympics in 1988. That brought tears to my eyes, Mr. Speaker. That was terrific music, but it's not something that you and I could join in on. It wasn't a really hummable kind of song, but it was a very appropriate song for the occasion, just as I think there could be some very appropriate music that is composed to celebrate Alberta's centennial.

Mr. Speaker, while this bill is well-intentioned and I support the spirit of this bill, I think that Albertans would like to have some kind of song that we could declare to be official. I think that on two counts this bill fails. Firstly, I think we've got it backwards. I think the member is putting the cart before the horse. If we are to have an official Alberta song, then I think it should be something that already exists. We've got a lot of people that have unofficially considered a song to be the Alberta song and then have come forward with it.

Secondly, I think where this bill fails is that if it's to be a song that is to be in conjunction with the centennial in 2005, then I think the most appropriate song for that celebration is not a longtime song that should be enshrined in law. I think it's the type of song that we saw for the Calgary Olympics and we saw for the Canadian centennial back in '67, a song that is very specifically composed and presented and performed during the year-long celebration, and Albertans will have an opportunity to appreciate and feel pride in that song. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not something that is designed – nor should it be everlasting and enshrined in law – as the official song for Alberta.

I wish the member all success with his bill. I recognize from hearing others speak that I may not be in the majority view in this House, but I can't support this bill, simply because I don't think it's necessary at this point in time. I look forward to having all kinds of musical tributes as we move forward with our celebrations in 2005. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I think that those tributes can and will come forward without the force of the law behind them.

Thank you very much.

5:00

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act. I am proud to add my name to the list of members who have already risen to support this bill.

It seems that every time I open up the newspaper, turn on a radio, or watch some television news, I'm hearing about the bill proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. This bill has certainly captured the imagination of many Albertans and with good reason too, Mr. Speaker. It's a great idea, and the time is right for a provincial song. A song can accomplish many things. It can sing praises of how beautiful the land is. It can tell a story of the people. It can relay the pride of people's heritage. It can rally people, or it can even accomplish all of the above.

First, Mr. Speaker, a song for Alberta could tell a story of our province. It can reflect on our First Nations people's history in Alberta, how Europeans and explorers settled in the region and how this province was founded in 1905. There are many ways to tell a story of our province. The only limit is the imagination of the storyteller. A song would also tell how proud we are to be Albertans, and we have many reasons to be proud.

Several other members of this Assembly have already added to this debate and noted how wonderful a place we have that we call home. In my constituency, Lac La Biche-St. Paul, we are blessed with a magnificent countryside. There are beautiful lakes, rolling hills, thick forests, splendid fields, when it rains, offering a range of crops, and acres and acres of ranchland.

We are blessed with a diverse community of people. Lac La Biche-St. Paul offers a rich distribution of cultures and languages. We have a strong and diverse First Nations, Francophone, Ukrainian, Russian, British, Lebanese, and many, many more communities in our area. [interjections] And Dutch and Irish people. You can't miss any.

This can equally be said for Alberta, Mr. Speaker. Just as my constituency has a wide range of land features and people, the rest of the province can offer all of these and even more. I think a song of this province should be crafted keeping in mind the diversity of our environment and peoples.

A song of this province also should be a testimony to how lucky we are as Albertans. When I stop and think about how simply amazing this province is or how endless the opportunities seem, it really makes me thank God that I am fortunate enough to be here in Alberta.

We have a province that provides a setting for almost any endeavour, Mr. Speaker. As a rancher I can speak from firsthand knowledge that this province has ranchlands that are second to none anywhere in the world. I also know that most farmers would rather farm in Alberta than anywhere else in the world. We have a bounty of clean and fresh water. We can boast of lush and deep forests – we're just a little short on the grass this year – and tall rugged mountains.

The business community has also noticed this, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta is a place of choice for a wide array of interests, from high-tech companies to oil sands exploration firms. Most of all we are attracting people, our most valuable resource. Clearly we are fortunate.

It might be hard to write, Mr. Speaker, and possibly a song praising this province's peoples and its opportunities could go forever, but I am sure that some talented person or group of people could master that feat, even Ian Tyson.

Also, Mr. Speaker, there is another reason I would like to offer as to why we should have a provincial song. Songs are rousing and compelling. It is hard to imagine going into a sporting event without hearing *O Canada*. Whether sitting up in the bleachers or down on the field ready to play, it is really a piece of music that can bring people together and give a team the courage to compete at the highest level. It gives us that encouragement before every week of session here in this House. Pride to represent our province is of the utmost relevance.

Mr. Speaker, for a Kodiak that left home to compete for Alberta in the national championship, it would be very honourable to have an Alberta song. For the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to be able to stand in front of the Viking Cup opening and to sing an Alberta song would also be very much an honour. Representing your university or representing your province would be an honour in all national championships. Can you imagine being a Red Deer Rebel in a couple of days, after they win the next two games and are in the final and are able to stand on the ice and listen to the Alberta song?

We need to remember to reflect most of all and appreciate our fortune and our pride. We need a song for Alberta that could give us an incredible magic when our provincial teams play across Canada. When our teams take the diamond, take the field, take the court or the ice, they should have a spirited song to help them rise to a level of competition that is unsurpassed in the upcoming game.

This song should be a source of motivation for our athletes. We need a powerful piece of music that will invigorate our athletes and inspire them to play at the highest level possible with the pride of knowing that Alberta is behind them. When we send a provincial team to the Canada Games or any other national competition, let's give our boys and girls and men and women something to rally around.

It can also give inspiration to our entrepreneurs who travel and move to other parts of the country to have a song to reflect on their homeland. I'll give you an example today, Mr. Speaker. Today we have the Chrapkos with us in the Assembly and their boys, leaving here to go to Ontario as entrepreneurs to sell their software. Can you imagine them being in Ontario and being able to have an Alberta song to reflect on Alberta?

For those of us who have ancestry that comes from other areas of the world, our parents and our grandparents still reflect with passion on the songs of their homeland. Would it not be nice for us also to have that liberty? We should have a song to express to all who sing and hear it how proud and fortunate we are to be Albertans and to warn whomever we meet on the field of play to watch out, because here come the Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all the members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this Bill 208, the Alberta song. Thank you.

5:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start out this afternoon by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this bill forward, this very unique idea. I, like others before me, want to thank him. I think we're very lucky to have the Member for Calgary-Fort. He is one of the most enthusiastic members we

have, and he does a very good job of representing Alberta across the province and with his constituents.

I have to tell you, hon. member, that I had the opportunity last week to talk to one of the gentlemen from the press that's in this building, and he told me that he did a short piece in one of the daily papers regarding your bill, and it generated so many faxes, telephone calls, and comments, probably more than anything else has in the time that he's been in the press gallery in this building.

I think this tells us several things. I think it's been stated over and over that now is the time for this to happen, but it also tells me that Albertans are proud, proud individuals and that they want a song that reflects why they're here, why they love this province, and why they plan to stay. I also think it talks about: they want to be happy, they want to look to the future, and they want to remember all of the good things. We've been part of those good things. We've helped work towards making this province the very best province in Canada. So I think Albertans want us to put together a song, and I think your idea definitely has merit, and it's something Albertans want us to do.

I think back to a lot of things we've done to recognize Alberta. We have an Alberta animal. The animal is the bighorn sheep. My predecessor, the Member for Lacombe at that time, the hon. Ron Moore, was the person that brought through that bill, if my memory serves me correctly. We also have an official fish. I'm sorry, hon. member for Red Deer; it's not the walleye. We also have an official tartan. The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore made sure that we felt very strongly about an official tartan last year.

We have a flag that I know I'm very, very proud of, and I know all of you are. I do know that when I give a flag away, people actually ask me if I will please donate a flag to a fund-raising function or whatever. People want our flags, people pay good money at fund-raisers for flags, and we're very proud of flags.

Speaking about flags, I remember when I was a director on the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. Of course, once a year they have the big convention with the towns and villages and cities attending from all over Alberta. One of the first things they do at their opening ceremony is parade the flags, and each and every municipality in this province has an official flag of their municipality. Now, who would have thought years ago that that many municipalities could come up with an idea and incorporate it into a flag? They certainly could have used some of the expertise shown by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, but they weren't offering a prize of \$1,000, hon. member. But it is a very impressive ceremony, and I know many, many people in this room have been part of that opening ceremony with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and the flags will continue for many years to come.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat talked about: would this song be forever? Well, folks, nothing is forever, because through the capabilities of this Legislative Assembly we are able to amend and delete legislation as time goes on. So if somewhere down the road, 10 years or 15 years, some other big celebration happens to be of importance and the song needs changing, it can be done. So I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort would be very receptive to the idea that the song that he wants is for our celebration in 2005. I commend him for that.

I also do have to say, though, that like one of the hon. members back here, I have always been an Ian Tyson fan. It must be an age thing. I also remember Ian and Sylvia. I won't say how old I was in 1954, but I would encourage Mr. Tyson to submit a song, and what better song for Mr. Tyson to submit than *Alberta Bound*. So there's just a thought.

We have a lot of talent in Alberta, and I think that we will see some very creative songs and music come forward as this evolves. I think Albertans want to be very, very proud of the very important year that we'll be celebrating in 2005. We already have a flag that

has stood the test of time. We have an official fish, an official animal, an official tartan. What better thing to do than have an official song?

Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Please, members, support this bill. Mr. Tyson, I hope you're listening.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can hardly believe that I'm standing to speak in support of a provincial song, because in our particular family my wife has all the musical talent, and I have absolutely none. However, when the hon. member decided to bring this song bill forward, Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act, I mentioned this to my wife, who is a music teacher, and she thought that it was a great idea.

She talked about it with her grade 6 students, and she went around through her archives and found some old songs from way back when and dragged them out and taught them to her students. In fact, the other day they were singing them, and when it was time to end the music class, the kids were saying: can we sing those again? They were all enthused about these Alberta songs. I asked her for the music, and in fact she sent a tape to the member. Perhaps he listened to it and found it interesting. I checked the sheet music, got a copy of it, and looked at it. You know, when you look at some of these phrases, they're really quite encouraging. Those kinds of terms have been mentioned here by many members. It builds enthusiasm for our province and recognizes our great province.

One particular one that my wife came across was from an Alberta government motion picture called *Under the Sun*. Now, this goes way back to the '70s sometime.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's a long time ago.

MR. LOUGHEED: Way back.

If you consider the words of these songs, they're really quite inspiring:

With our eyes upon tomorrow
And our faces to the sun,
We're partners in a dream.

I'd hesitate to sing it myself, as members are encouraging me, but the phrases used in this music are great, Mr. Speaker. I think that as the member is bringing these song ideas forward, these are things that we can consider.

Another part of it:

With our eyes upon tomorrow
And the wilderness we've won,
We're building on a dream we share.

That certainly speaks to our Alberta advantage and our heritage and our thinking in this province currently.

5:20

Some other parts to this, if I may belabour the point just a little bit – and there's something that I'm looking for here, Mr. Speaker. I seem to have misplaced the part that I was seeking to have. We're looking at:

We're partners in a dream,
Our eyes upon tomorrow,
The wilderness we won.

And the refrain goes on about Alberta.

Another part:

Our eyes upon tomorrow,
We've only just begun.

Those kind of phrases, Mr. Speaker, are enthusiastic. Certainly the students, in going through these songs, thought: those are great. They in fact were eager to embrace this idea of having an Alberta song and move towards having it part of their competition process, something they could contribute to and something they would be really excited about having.

So I certainly commend the hon. member for bringing this forward, and I would encourage all members to vote in favour as well. With that, I'll conclude my comments, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the hon. member is about to close.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to close the debate.

MR. CAO: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. members, for the excellent thoughts, the positive thoughts as well as the thoughts that triggered some improvement. I would just want to conclude that in fact in front of me there are stacks of material, CD tapes and letters that I received. In fact, I received one from Mr. Quint Freimark from Medicine Hat, and here's what he said: "I don't want to miss out on something I've been dreaming about for a great long time." That's his submission on the idea of a song.

I just want to illustrate something from his lyrics here.

Sittin' on a ridge lookin' out over the Cypress Hills
With a cool breeze blowing cross our backs
and down into the draw
The golden glow from the east will soon light up my Alberta
And as the sleepy pines awake, for us the day begins.

Mr. Speaker, those are the examples that I have received and also that the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler has mentioned.

I would just want to thank you. This is second reading, the principle of the bill, and I have a feeling that this is the good essence of the bill debated today. I just want to conclude by saying thank you very much for the opportunity.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene this evening at 8 o'clock, we do so in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: Will all hon. members in favour of the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, say no. The motion is carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 23, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/23

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: Good evening. I wonder if we could call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: Main Estimates 2001-02

Revenue

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin the evening, we will call upon the Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to be able to stand tonight and talk about the best department of all of the government departments. I'm certain that every member here tonight after this riveting speech is going to agree with me about how great this department is. Furthermore, I've got to introduce three of the most outstanding individuals in all of the services. [interjections] When you speak the truth, it evokes all those great feelings and smiles and laughter. I'd like the House to acknowledge Eric McGhan again as the Deputy Minister of Revenue; Bonnie Lovelace is corporate secretary; and Richard Shelast, budgets and financial statements. We certainly welcome them here with us tonight. [some applause] I'm certain that we could do a little bit better round of applause for them than that. We could get some emotion into this. And if that wasn't convincing enough about how great this department is, you'll be riveted to find out the rest of the information I'm about to tell you.

Actually, I think it's very timely that we have an opportunity to see that the Treasury Department has been divided, as everyone knows, into two different departments of Finance and Revenue. We're entering an era in Alberta with deficits and debts about eliminated, both of them, that we have another, I would say, opportunity and chance to review the revenue streams of the government. We can look to the long-term sustainability of revenues, what those mixes might be, what varieties of taxes we might look at, how much in tax we might look at, rather than just focusing on expenses. I'm surprised, when we speak in the Legislature and we present our estimates, that there's very little focus on the revenue streams, very little discussion even when we hear in question period about all of the moneys that come into the government, and they are from hardworking Albertans. [interjection] Well, please do.

It certainly is a stewardship of ours to ensure that we take in no more than is ever required. The Premier's comments I think are right on. We want to continue to ensure that we have a very competitive, low tax base in this province and that the only way the taxes would go would be down. We want to see that we keep the pressure on Albertans to see that we manage their affairs appropriately. [interjection] The speaking notes don't say that.

The other I would say very significant part to this department is not just looking at a revenue framework. This will be one of the significant tasks that we will engage in over this next year to two years, to look across departments and look at the revenue flows, be they from royalties, be they from taxation, be they from gaming, but we also have to look hard and close at our investment management decisions. Today we have a heritage fund of \$12.3 billion. We also manage a number of other different funds – the medical research

fund, the science and engineering fund, the heritage scholarship fund – and in addition to that, all the short-term, day-to-day cash flow management of the government, plus the investment management division is involved with managing a number of pension funds. In total that division manages and oversees investments of close to \$37 billion to \$38 billion, a very significant portfolio, and it's critical that we ensure that we have the ability to manage that and maximize the returns for Albertans.

In '95 it was asked of Albertans what we might do with the heritage fund. Rather than liquidate it to pay down debt or otherwise, Albertans came back in a very significant endorsement to say: "Keep the heritage fund. Use it, but change its purpose from investing in capital works projects to maximizing its return. Invest it like you would expect of a pension fund, and invest it that you would show a return for future Albertans from those funds." So that has shifted the mandate of the investment management division to ensuring that we have a long-term sustainable income generation from the heritage fund. So we would have that same stewardship of the other pension funds that we administer.

In the core areas, in addition to a revenue framework and investment management framework, there is a significant aspect of ensuring that we administer tax and revenue programs fairly and efficiently. If you're going to be able to service the programs of health and education and infrastructure and all of the services that Albertans require, there has to be a means to fairly collect and account for and to ensure compliance so that all Albertans would have a fair chance to contribute to those services and that those that might wish to evade or avoid, they too should have that opportunity of contributing through means of compliance.

I would like to say also that we're fortunate in this year that there's been some redesign of the tax systems, both personal and corporate, a very significant change in our personal income tax stream. We've gone to a simpler, single rate of tax, a whole redesign but a very substantive reduction in tax. We do actually expect that despite this onetime reduction of this year, the base is broadening. The growth in Alberta continues to be strengthened by it. It is attracting and bringing people to Alberta as a result. In short order we would think and believe that the revenue stream through reductions will actually be a broader tax base with higher growth and will actually offset experiences in other jurisdictions. We may find that our tax base is actually increasing. So in both our corporate and our personal taxes we've seen and taken measures, but it doesn't stop there.

We have many other sources of taxes – tobacco and fuel taxes – that we collect. Part of the work will be to make sure that we've justified the appropriate measures of collection, whether they are the fairest methodology of collecting those taxes, whether they are the taxes that we should actually continue to have in place. With a postdebt era coming at us, those will be the questions that we will ask and require.

Another area of importance is the Alberta Securities Commission under this stewardship. As we know, it is a quasi-judicial body to ensure that the capital markets operate efficiently and effectively and that there is an access to capital. It's very important, if we want to look to the growth of industry in Alberta and the prosperity of people, that there are capital markets. So they have to be effectively run. There has to be a means of compliance and testing and ensuring that the regulations would protect the public if they are investing their dollars and at the same time allow for the free flow of exchange of investment in the businesses in this province. So we will continue to work with the Alberta Securities Commission to ensure that those rules, those procedures are the best that we can have not only in this jurisdiction, but we would find the best climate for attracting capital

here in Alberta from any jurisdiction throughout North America.

With those comments I look forward to the comments that the opposition might have, and we'll be delighted to get back to them with responses to any questions that they may have.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise tonight to speak to the estimates of the Department of Revenue. I want to start by welcoming the staff up in the gallery for helping out and thank them for the work they've done in the transition to the new ministry and all the work that comes with separating out those responsibilities.

We have to deal now with looking at, I guess, some of the issues that come up in terms of both the comments that were made just now and the materials that are presented to us in the budget documents and the business plans. As I was listening to the minister talk, just toward the end of his presentation he mentioned that there was some discussion about his role in selecting tax policy and being involved in deciding what were the appropriate taxes and how that worked. It was interesting because during the debate with the Minister of Finance there was an attempt made at that time to claim jurisdiction over the idea of the tax policy being still in the Ministry of Finance. I guess what we need to do as we evolve this new structure is get a little bit more clarity involved in how the two ministries relate to each other and how they function from one side to the next and go on dealing with that. But that was just an interesting issue that arose as the minister was making the initial preparations.

8:10

Mr. Chairman, as I start through the budget document and that, I think I want to start initially with some comments on the business plan, because this kind of gives us the focus to go back, then, and address the specific line items that come up and deal with the specific allocations of the dollars and the reported activities that come up under the minister's budget.

As I read through the business plan here, we started looking at some of the goals that were there and some of the strategies and the performance indicators, and one of the things that came out was the idea that in the goals they talk about maximizing "investment returns subject to client-defined objectives and policies." I guess what I would like the minister to do is kind of define a little bit what he means by "client-defined." I thought the client here was, you know, the people of Alberta or the government, and it gets defined through the policy process of the government in terms of the decisions that are made with respect to the number of dollars that are in the particular funds, the management of those particular funds.

When we start talking here about "client-defined objectives," I get the sense that maybe there's somebody else becoming involved a little bit in dealing with the issues of how we put in place our investment strategy that gives us some kind of target return or mix that will provide us with an investment return. I don't know whether the intent here is to name as clients the relevant advisors and management teams that are associated with each of those funds that are managed in that investment portfolio or whether it's some other indication of a different group, so I would ask for some clarification there.

We also get down in the goals: fostering "a fair and efficient capital market" in Alberta. I know this is a lot with the Securities Exchange. It also goes over into the Alberta Opportunity Company. I guess what I would ask is: how do we co-ordinate this with the federal government as we deal with issues that come up in terms of interest rate setting by the federal government? That becomes a very

important factor in how we deal with our capital markets here, because as they change the interest rate at the federal level in their monetary policy, that creates different incentives for international or inner flow of capital, and we have to deal with that. I guess the question I was leading to here is: does this particular goal relate specifically to the Securities Exchange, or does it have other implications and other areas that it has to deal with as well?

The other thing that we get looking at here: under the strategies they're talking about maximizing "long-term return on the government's investments to generate sustainable income to support the province's financial position." This, I take it, is in reference to the funds that we invest. We have to look at the long-term investment strategies, the mix that is there, to give us the cash flow coming out of them as an income that we then have available to use.

I guess when we look at the funds that are included under the umbrella of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, being the medical research fund, the scholarship funds, the new science and technology fund, these kinds of things, is that the extent of the kind of investments that we're talking about here? Or does this include, you know, investing the day-to-day, the month-to-month residual that's in the general revenue fund to maximize the day-to-day cash flow and revenue part that comes out of that? Are there different strategies associated with those day-to-day types of investments, because the capital, in essence, has to come back and be part of our general revenue cash flow? So a little bit of clarification there.

I guess the other thing I would just kind of caution on is under Highlights for 2001-02. On the very first line you've got "\$16.4 million for the collection of corporate taxes, consumption taxes and other revenues." Mr. Chairman, I guess in the community that I move in, when they see the words "consumption tax," the first thing they think about is sales tax. I know that's not a sales tax here in Alberta, but when we talk about these, we might want to change the term there to prevent that association coming up in a lot of cases and to talk about it. I guess when I look at this, I kind of wonder what they've got in that group that they're calling consumption taxes. Is it the hotel tax, some of these kinds of things that are associated with tax on the use of a service? If that's what they are, maybe we should call them something a little bit different than a consumption tax, because that has a reasonably strong association with sales taxes, which are not a popular thing to be talking about here in Alberta.

The other strategies and goals, Mr. Chairman, I think are quite adequate and quite consistent with what I would look for in terms of the ministry and how it works. When we look at some of the key performance measures, on the bottom of page 371 there is kind of the benchmark profile and the index weight mix that they use for targeting their endowment portfolios. In the little box there at the side they say that this was changed effective as of this year and that as of April 1 they've got a new target group. I guess the questions I would ask are: how often is that changed, how often do we look at a new benchmark mix for our portfolios, and what factors would come about that would change these kinds of portfolio weight factors? Would it be the relative performances of, say, interest rate versus equity investment, this kind of thing?

When we go back and look at it, these are basically cash-generator investment funds. If we want to make sure that we do have some long-term opportunity there as well as some growth potential, I guess I would ask how often that mix does get changed and again, as I said, the parameters that would trigger the change. I don't remember noticing in the last couple of years that little box where they've talked about the indexes being changed when it was all under Treasury. I will admit that at that time, not being the critic responsible, I wasn't probably paying quite as close attention, so I passed that off onto other people to manage and look at.

I guess as we start through some of the individual line items, then, what I'd like to do is just raise some initial questions. I'm starting kind of at the back, but we'll deal with that. On page 374, under the department statement of operations, there were some other issues that came up here. When you look at the comparable 1999-2000, the preliminary actual for 2000-2001, and then the 2001-2002 estimates, I guess some questions come up on a couple of these areas.

8:20

We can start by looking at the hotel room tax. It seems unusual that in effect the hotel room tax revenue of \$47 million, the preliminary actual, is exactly what the budget was. Yet when you look at all the other revenue sources there, you know, there's enough off to be subject to some of the conditions that come up in varying the economic performance, the revenue levels that would affect those. I guess if the actual estimate that was made at the beginning of the year and put in the budget of \$47 million was actually the predicted experienced level of \$47 million, Mr. Chairman, I think most of us in the House here would like to know who the modeler was that came up with that estimate, because we've got a lot of other things we can model and start making some pretty good investment decisions based on that kind of accuracy. I think this is something that we want to look at.

You know, the fact that it transfers over into this year's budgeted amount seems reasonable. You're going to use about what you had last year for next year, but this seems kind of interesting in the sense that we keep talking about economic growth, tourism growth . . .

MR. MELCHIN: That's a close enough estimate.

DR. NICOL: The minister across said, "That's a close enough estimate." But you still want these things, when they're estimates in our budget, to be based on some kind of an expectation of the performance of our economy.

If we're talking about an increase in tourism, an increase in people coming here, and with the Worlds coming to Edmonton this year, we should have an increase in the capacity of our hotel rooms in the province on a percentage basis this year. So you would think that there would be some kind of an estimate or some kind of a projection that would say, you know, even \$5,000 more of taxes this year or maybe \$10,000. I think I'm going to be a little bit more optimistic and suggest that the Worlds coming here this summer would probably give us a significant change in that particular item.

I guess as the minister gets used to the new structure of the Revenue department, we need to review and look at some of the modeling that goes into estimating these funds rather than just dealing with them off what was there last year. We've got to be able to look at them in the context of a viable predicted amount or an amount that actually shows some relationship to where the actual numbers are going.

When we look at another one there, the personal income tax, it's interesting to note that there is a \$100 million difference between what we were going to get last year and what we're predicting next year, yet we talked about these significant tax cuts. When you go through this, what we're saying here basically is that, yes, individuals experience a tax cut, but we as a province, because of the growth, because of the increased employment, because of the increase in wages, are going to come out basically not being affected because of that income tax. This is a good indicator, Mr. Chairman. I'm not making any derogatory comment about that. It's a sign that our economy still is robust in the sense that we can give tax cuts and still come back with the same tax revenue because of that increased vibrancy in our economy. I think that speaks well for Alberta.

I've got a couple of others, but I think I have to flip back to the beginning. On page 379, under the Alberta risk management fund, the expenses there on the programs. I guess these are basically the payouts that come associated with the operation of protecting Alberta. As an observer looking at that, I would ask the minister: is it possible at some point to give us an idea of the different categories of payouts, like fire, theft, damage, these kinds of things, so that we can see basically how the risk management fund is actually being used and applied in the context of protecting our public assets?

I want to just go back now to the beginning, where we talk about the operating expenses in program 1. The thing that comes out here is quite interesting in the sense that when we look at last year's budget and this year's, it seems that we basically had approximately a \$100,000 increase in operation of the minister's office and about a \$117,000 increase in the operation of the deputy minister's office, yet a lot of these expenditures would have been transferred out of the original Ministry of Finance. What we're seeing is that a lot of the increase in expenditures of the Finance department occurs at the administrative level rather than the service level and the operational level that goes into the actual implementation of programs responsible. I guess in the end we're going to have to ask: is this additional administrative cost justified in terms of the operation of the ministry?

The other one, as I close out with just a couple of minutes left to go, is program 3, investment management. I guess I would just ask for a clarification on my part. I looked at this table and I thought: okay; there's about a \$7 million expense there for investment management. What's the dedicated revenue? Especially when it's in brackets, that usually indicates a net loss. So what you've got is expenses of revenue that's a negative, and it doesn't add up. Are the brackets there an indication of something that I don't quite understand? It would have balanced out a little differently if we would have read them correctly as a number, unless we're reading all of the materials there as expenses and this, by being in brackets, becomes a negative expense, which is a revenue.

What revenues do we get out of investment management other than the revenue that's associated with the interest return or the return on those investments? But that shows up at different places. Is that actually the \$6 billion of money that we made by having those investments?

Mr. Chairman, I think I've not got enough time to continue with another point, so I'll sit and let someone else raise some issues. I've got a couple more if time permits, but we'll deal with those as we see.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to have an opportunity to participate in the debate this evening.

First of all, before I get to the notes that I have here, I would like to respond to some of the comments that the minister made in his opening remarks. He may feel that he has the best department, but with all due respect and as much as I like this particular minister and believe that he brings the highest level of integrity and work ethic to his department . . . [interjections] They don't like it when I compliment them. I still have to believe that the splitting of these two ministries between Finance and Revenue was a make-work project. So he's definitely got a high-paying job, and I have no doubt that he will do a good job of it, but taxpayers are paying through the nose once again for the Premier being able to hand out a few more candies on the front bench. We have to take the opportunity to respond to that.

No doubt the minister is right when he says that he has some of

the most outstanding individuals in the government in his department. I'm sure that he does. I haven't had an opportunity to meet them or work with them in any regard, but I certainly take his word for it and know that he'll be there to back them up and to answer the questions that we have with regard to this department this evening and over the coming years.

8:30

My first question on these budgets is in response to some of the comments he made with regard to forecasting and starting to develop the investment in revenue frameworks for the future. Why are they doing real-time forecasting, Mr. Chairman? You know, in the corporate world, which is where this minister comes from, organizations wouldn't do the kind of forecasting for revenue projections that this government does. What they do now is make the yearly forecast and then announce the surpluses whenever they feel it appropriate to do so. What about quarterly budgeting here and quarterly forecasts? Let's treat this government in a more accountable fashion than it is. So I have a real problem with the way they do the forecasting in this department, and I think it is not a fair representation of the revenue flow that comes into this province. In fact, I would go so far as to say that it's misleading people in terms of how they move forward on that. I'd like to use a different word than that, but I'm not quite sure what would be the most appropriate thing to do there, so I'll leave it at that.

The minister talked about long-term sustainability of revenue streams, and it's good that this department is starting to talk about this and that the government is taking this issue seriously, Mr. Chairman. My question to him is: what are they thinking of in terms of options at this time? We know that oil and gas is on its way out.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, if we could visit in a more quiet fashion. The noise was beginning to drown out the hon. member. She's the only one that's officially recognized, so we'd ask the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to continue, hopefully with the cooperation of everyone else.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

What I was talking about was oil and gas revenue streams available to the province and that they're running out, gas likely within 10 years and oil likely within 25 years. What are the replacement revenues going to be?

Some talk in the communities now that royalties on coal may be ultimately where this government goes for part of the resource-dependent revenue streams they take a look at. I'd like to know if the minister is talking about that in the long term. I know in the short term what we're probably going to see with these new generation facilities coming onstream is some sort of tax credits or incentive program. I don't support that. I think that in a level playing field they pay their share of the freight and that's the way it is. In fact, for heavily polluting resources like coal is, perhaps they should pay more than their share of the freight and help bring us to a point in time where they help support building an infrastructure of alternative kinds of heating sources. So I put that out there for people to respond to. I certainly would like the minister's comments on that.

In the long term, Mr. Chairman, 10 or 15 years down the road, I'm putting my money on there being some sort of coal royalty in addition to what's effectively in place now, because this government

is going to need revenue stream replacement. Why? Because I don't think they're going to be doing the kind of planning and looking at replacement options that they could be at this stage. I know that in some part that's what the Future Summit is about, and I'll get to questions on that a little later in my questions. But for the time being, I would like to hear what the minister has to say about that.

When we take a look at replacement revenue streams, well, the obvious option for this government is to take a look at something that occasionally gets floated out there, which is what my colleague had talked about, and that's a sales tax. I know this government has been adamantly opposed to that, but I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, that they do use consumption taxes now quite effectively and increase those rates substantially year by year; those would be user fees. So I would like the minister's response on that. Does he have any comments on these kinds of consumption taxes? What difference does he see between that and a sales tax? And his justification for why he wouldn't see user fees as a tax. Certainly we have court documentation to prove that user fees that charge an amount that is over and above the actual replacement cost of a service they're using is in fact a tax. So I'd be interested in hearing some comments there.

There's always room on the user fee side with a government with this kind of mind-set. I would like from the minister and his department an exact forecast from now until 2004 of what kinds of additional user fees they see coming forward and what kinds of increases they see coming forward in those following years. So if he could give us that information.

The minister talked about taxes a little bit, and I'm wondering what happened to the Tax Reform Commission report. You know, they're going to redo a lot of this work in the Future Summit, or they may come out as a recommendation to look at total tax reform and redo what happened on that last commission. So my question there is: why haven't we seen the implementation of the key recommendations that were in that report? What's happened to it? Does it ever get referred to any more? What's the point in going out and asking people for their opinion if you're not prepared to use it, which is the premise for the Future Summit. It doesn't seem like this government has a very good track record of actually using the information when they get it.

Now, I thank the minister for the information he gave me the other day on the Future Summit just in terms of us trying to really figure out when it's going to be and part of the mandate. I know that this is a work in progress at this stage, but I would like the minister to formally reply, if he could, on what preparations have been made by the department with respect to the summit at this stage. When it's available or when a public portion of the information is available, can he give us a copy of the department's plans and objectives for that summit?

I'd also like to know some of the mechanics of how that's going to be organized, Mr. Chairman, things like how the views of Albertans will be heard during the summit, what kind of role they will play, who will be participating at that level, how the government will solicit information or send out invitations, what kind of cross section of people they are taking a look at being represented at the table, that kind of information.

I think the government did a good job on one of the ones that I most recently attended, although that was a couple of years ago. That was on climate change. One of the major outcomes of that was Climate Change Central, which is taking its time getting off and running but is working, Mr. Chairman. I think there was a lot of valuable information made available for government during that weekend, some that the government didn't want to hear, quite frankly, but they did hear it, and they took a lot of it into account. I think some of the directions they've been going in in this past

while are reflective of that. A little slow but certainly not a bad start.

So I'm taking a look at this Future Summit being the same kind of format, I'm hoping, and with similar kinds of outcomes. With that, can we know what the major themes are that the government is outlining for that summit? How does the government intend to carry out the recommendations from the summit?

The growth summit: not much happened there. It didn't go very far. Lots of good information, lots of reasonable information, but not much happened with it.

Some of the other summits have been a little more proactive, and I'm hoping that this, too, will turn out to be. I guess time will tell on that. Certainly I'm looking forward to some good information coming out of that and the government being able to use it.

We'd like to know what the projected costs are for holding the summit and the exact time lines in terms of when the plans will be ready, when it's going to occur, the time line for gathering and processing the information, for reporting back to the people and to the Legislature, and for acting on any of the recommendations or actions that are outcomes from that summit. If we could get that information, that would be good.

8:40

The minister in his comments, Mr. Chairman, talked about tax, that the revisions to the corporate and the personal tax systems are simpler and have resulted in substantial reductions. I give you the simpler reductions on the corporate side and simpler on the personal side, but we still have an issue with the taxation rates and who pays the freight there. Substantially, it still falls on middle-income people, so I'd be interested in the minister's feedback on that.

He talked about the tax structure being attractive in bringing people to Alberta. I'm certain a low tax structure is, Mr. Chairman, but I would like to know how they're doing the tracking on that. If in fact it is bringing people to Alberta, then the department must have some form of tracking that information and being able to base it on fact. So whatever is available there, we would like the information on that. I think that would be excellent and definitely something that would be informative for us to see on both the corporate and the personal sides. Which is more attractive, the corporate reductions or the personal reductions? How did they collate that information? Who did they gather it from? Where is it available? Are they doing surveys? Are they doing – I don't know what they're doing to get the information, so whatever they've got, we'd like to know.

The minister also talked about stewardship and that part of the role of stewardship for this government was to take in no more money than what was required. Well, how true can that be, Mr. Chairman, when we see billion dollar surpluses? Really, that's hard to believe, that that would be – maybe that's your personal mandate, but it's not this government's mandate, because if it were really your mandate, the instant a surplus occurred, the money would be returned to the people as a direct refund. So it isn't really the mandate. It may be where you'd like to get to, but it's not what's happening right now. We wouldn't have surpluses if that were the case, or the surpluses would be marginal. So I would like the minister to expand on that a little more completely. Then we'll see where we go on that particular issue, because it isn't what's happening here.

They're not taking in any more than what is required. They're taking in a great deal more than what is required, Mr. Chairman. Other than those small energy refunds that we've seen this year, I haven't seen any money going back to the people. Maybe they plan to change that in the future, and gee, that would be dandy. They'd get voted in forever, I'm sure, if they did that, but it doesn't look like that's what's happening at this time.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to spend just a little bit of time talking about the business plans of the department because we have some concerns with those as well. It seems the same as what happened in Treasury and it seems to be not that unusual, because they were the same department just last year. There's no information for 2001-02-03-04 in the plans for gross operating expenses and capital investments by program vote and subprogram vote as was last provided in the Treasury spending profiles which we saw way back in, I believe it was, 1995. So that's a concern. I would like to ask why that is occurring, if the minister could answer that. You know, if you can't get these ready for budget time, maybe you could roll them out sometime during the year so that we could take a look at them. There are lots of opportunities for us to review them and ask questions on them, and that would be helpful.

Also, the only information we've got on expense projections, as I see them, are presented in the consolidated statements. We need the comparables between the programs and the subprogram votes. They're not here. Could we have that? I think what would be helpful, and perhaps even help in the commitment the government has stated to their three-year fiscal planning, is if we could have comparable three-year projections for the Ministry of Revenue in this main estimates book and the three-year ministry income statement found under the business plan. This minister knows – that's his background exactly – that you need comparable figures. You need information that you can tie down. We don't get it. I believe there must be a reason why we don't get it. So if the minister could respond to that, in terms of why we're not getting it and why we got some of that information in years past and if he expects to present it to us in the future, I think that would be very helpful.

Can the minister also tell us why this business plan still doesn't provide the three-year expense profile by program and subprogram? Those ones we had even back as late as maybe '97-98, that year. Once again, you know that figures just thrown on a page are no good for us if we don't have any comparisons and more detail is better than less detail. In fact, you'll find that with more detail we have fewer questions and the questions may be better questions, questions that enhance your ability to do your job. Give us the tools to work with here. We don't always choose to be difficult. Lots of the questions that we do ask are reasonable questions and should have answers to them and should be information that's available to the public. So if the minister could address that, that would be really good.

What would be helpful with this and I think would assist the readers of these plans is if we could have a three-year spending profile, too, of the department by program areas for future years in some detail. Where do you expect the money to go? It would be helpful to us and I think not that big of a deal for you to do.

Now, in terms of information we'll ask the same question I think we've asked for every one of these departments, and that's information on the FTEs and the expense breakdown. We ask this question every single year in every single department, and I don't know why you just don't put it into the income statements, because it would just be helpful and eliminate some of the issues.

It looks to me like FTEs, if I see this correctly, are not going up by much. It doesn't look like there's much of an increase here at all. Fifteen, if I read this, one in the department, nine in securities. So that's kind of interesting. The minister talked in his opening comments about refocusing a bit on income stream and how that money is coming in, and I'm assuming that's why they're beefing up their staff in the Alberta Securities Commission, and I'd like him to confirm that if it's true.

Also, how is it going in terms of recruiting people and keeping them? This is a hot area to be employed in, and I'm wondering if

the department is having any trouble keeping their staff. I'm sure they're paying competitive salaries, but perhaps there are other bonuses or perks that they're not matching in terms of what's offered in the marketplace. So if he could respond to that, that would be great.

You know, when we talk about the breakdown of the expenses in the department, we really want some detail on everything: salaries, hosting, telephone, advertising. If we could get the salaries broken down between full-time, part-time, contract positions, that information would also be helpful.

One more thing. You know in your goals, in goal 2, you talk about maximizing "investment returns subject to client-defined objectives." I have a problem with calling them clients. They are Albertans, or they are constituents, but they are not clients.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by raising the question of the division of the departments of the government following the recent election. Like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, I have great respect for the minister here, but the question really is the advisability of making the division that has been made between the Finance ministry and the Revenue ministry. Of all the moves made by the government after this recent election to enlarge the provincial cabinet, this is perhaps the most puzzling and the least justifiable. I know of no other jurisdiction in the country that has created this kind of two-headed monster.

8:50

The decision to split the Treasury ministry in two is a different situation, for example, at the federal level, where there's a Minister of National Revenue separate from the Minister of Finance. At the federal level it's clear that the Minister of National Revenue is a junior minister, and the Minister of Finance is in charge of both fiscal policy and taxation policy. Who is in charge of the Alberta government's taxation and fiscal policy? Is it the Minister of Finance, whose budget estimates we reviewed last week, or the Minister of Revenue, whose budget estimates are being dealt with this evening?

This is a serious question, Mr. Chairman. If you look at the goals of the two ministries, there's clear duplication and overlap. For example, the Ministry of Finance has a goal of "a fair and competitive provincial tax system." That's on page 181 of the estimates book. The Ministry of Revenue has a goal of "a fair and competitive provincial tax system managed efficiently and effectively."

There's duplication in other areas as well. The Revenue ministry isn't even responsible for all the revenue sources that the Treasury minister used to be responsible for. For example, investment income from the heritage trust fund falls within the Ministry of Revenue, and that's on page 373. Investment income from the general revenue fund and income from commercial operations like the Treasury Branches falls within the Ministry of Finance, and that's on page 184. Each ministry has staff to manage these investments. The Ministry of Revenue is responsible for regulating capital markets. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for regulating financial institutions and insurance companies.

How do you decide who gets to read the budget speech? Do you flip a coin? The Finance minister delivered the budget speech this year. Does that mean that the Revenue minister gets to do it next year?

Dividing the Treasury ministry is creating employment at the top, and that's for sure. The combined expenditure of the two ministers'

offices is going from \$330,000 per year to \$530,000 per year. Spending on deputy ministers' offices between the two ministries is going from last year's \$346,000 to this year's combined \$616,000. Those are on page 178 and page 366. How can the government, on the one hand, call for fiscal restraint for folks like social assistance recipients and teachers and, on the other hand, justify these obscene increases in spending at the very top of their ministries?

To conclude this section of my remarks, Mr. Chairman, why is there a duplication and overlap between these two ministries? When it comes to managing the province's finances, two is really not better than one.

As part of his responsibilities the Minister of Revenue is responsible for collecting personal and corporate income taxes and, I presume, for developing policies governing the collection of these taxes. Most years personal income taxes remain the single largest source of provincial government revenues. Last year for the first time in many years the government received more revenue from oil and gas royalties than it did from personal income taxes. However, energy revenues are highly variable depending on the prices received from the production of oil and natural gas.

Last year the government made radical changes to the personal income tax system, increasing personal and spousal exemptions and levying a flat tax on all remaining income. The net effect of the flat tax is to provide a greater proportion of tax relief to those on both the low- and high-income ends of the tax scale while shifting more of the tax burden onto middle-income earners making anywhere from about \$30,000 to \$100,000 per year.

Alberta stands alone in its support of a flat tax on personal income. All other provinces, including Ontario, have maintained a progressive income tax system. My question to the minister is a simple one. Does the flat tax shift more of the overall responsibility for paying taxes onto middle-income earners? If so, how can this be justified?

On corporate taxes the government has embarked on a four-year plan to cut corporate income taxes roughly in half. The first reduction came on April 1 of 2001, when the general rate for larger, profitable corporations was reduced to 13 and a half percent from 15.5 percent. My question to the minister is this: should oil and gas prices go down, would the government consider postponing, or delaying, years 2, 3, and 4 of its corporate tax reduction strategy? If not, does the government place a higher priority on cutting corporate taxes than it does on providing adequate funds for schools and hospitals?

My next questions deal with the heritage savings trust fund. Last week the Ministry of Revenue put out a news release saying that the heritage fund was 25 years old and the picture of health. The fact is that virtually all the asset growth of the heritage fund took place in the first 10 years of its existence. In the past 15 years the heritage fund has been stuck at the same \$12 billion asset level. As a result, due to inflation the earnings of the heritage fund have been declining as a percentage of provincial government revenues. This year in particular the earnings of the heritage fund are expected to further decline to just over \$580 million. This is all located on page 373, for those of you that are avidly following along. It's hardly the picture of health, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased that the future of the heritage fund is up for consideration at the so-called Future Summit this fall, because it's pretty clear that the government has run out of ideas in terms of what to do with it.

I'd also like to raise the other possibility, and that is a revenue stabilization fund for oil and gas revenues. It seems that given the volatility of those revenues over an extended period of time, it would make sense to take about half the revenues you get from the fund that are surplus to the government's needs and, instead of using them

to pay down the debt, put them in a stabilization fund. So when you have higher than average revenue from natural resources, you build up the fund, and when you have lower than average revenue from oil and gas, you can draw down from the fund and thereby stabilize revenues for the provincial government. That was just a suggestion, and I'd be pleased to hear what the minister has to say about it.

My final question deals with the future of the Alberta Securities Commission. Now, I'm aware that the commission's \$15 million in expenses is offset by \$15 million in revenue generated from those looking to sell securities in this province. Canada's stock exchanges are in a period of consolidation. Last year the Alberta and Vancouver stock exchanges merged into the Canadian Venture Exchange. Now the Canadian Venture Exchange is in the process of being taken over by the Toronto Stock Exchange. My question is: how much of a shelf life does the Alberta Securities Commission have as a stand-alone entity? Has the time come for us to consider merging it with the security commissions in other provinces, in particular in other western provinces?

I'd be very interested in the minister's responses to these questions, Mr. Chairman, and that concludes my remarks on the estimates this evening.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of the Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to continue with a couple of the issues that I didn't get covered at the start and look at some of the ideas that we wanted to talk about.

I was at ministry support services, on page 366. I guess the question comes up in terms of the relationship with the communications estimate and how it went from \$205,000 a couple of years ago down to \$161,000. Why is it back up to \$213,000? Is it because of the division of the two departments and the creation of the new Ministry of Revenue? If so, what kind of communication initiatives will be undertaken to justify the increase in the dollars?

Then when we look at program 2, it's interesting that the whole idea is tax and revenue administration under 2.0.1. The title is Rebates, yet what we've got here is no place where there's a net rebate number reported. Within the ministry's mandate last year or in the coming year will there be no rebate programs put in place?

I guess the other question I just wanted to ask is under program 4, risk management and insurance. Again, here, I take it that under Members' Services or somewhere there is another one for the risk management fund for the MLAs. It doesn't show enough of a change from one year to the next year to really deal with the issue of the big payment that was made with respect to the Day claim last year or this year even. One or the other should have been up, because in essence the numbers we're reporting there are no different than what would have been that one claim. If that's kind of a continuing item from year to year, then what we have to look at is how we're reporting and dealing with this so that we can get issues put in place to justify or to illustrate how these funds are used and how the payouts come about.

9:00

Mr. Chairman, one final set of questions that I'd like to look at is associated with the government reports as we see them here. I think I raised this one other night as well. What we've got is a situation where as we go through a lot of the departmental materials and you get in to start looking at the information that's put out on the web site – and a lot of them are really excellent web sites and give a lot of information to Albertans. I guess the question that comes up is in

the context of how they're managed. How do you deal with the private-sector links that are attached to some of those web sites?

Specifically, on the minister's web site there's one place where he provides some links to a whole series of different types of items in the area of insurance. When it gets down to the area that deals with brokers and investment banks, Nesbitt Burns and Scotia Capital markets are listed. How did those two get selected to be linked there? Are they making payments for that link, or is it just that they were picked out of a hat and put on there? There are an awful lot of other similar kinds of private-sector firms that provide the same service. I guess the question comes up in terms of: what policy is there to talk about how the particular links show up?

Mr. Chairman, I'm not implying here that we shouldn't have those links. This is good information. It's illustrative of the kind of information that's available to someone looking at Alberta's web site and the Finance minister's information. But what we need to do is, I guess, have a little transparency in how we go about setting them up, how we identify them, and if there is a revenue associated with them to the government, this needs to be pointed out – I'm sure that some of those companies would very gladly pay for the link associated with the Alberta government page, especially in areas in connection with finance and revenue – so that we can see what options are there. There's a whole series of them there, and I don't want to really go through a lot of them. I apologize both to Nesbitt Burns and to Scotia Capital markets for having picked them out of the list, but it was the shortest list that I got to look at, and I didn't want to have to read a long list into the record. That's kind of the final question that I wanted to raise.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to close by saying that as we move into this new framework of having Revenue and Finance split out under separate ministerial responsibilities, I would encourage the minister to look at how Albertans can be informed about the benefits of having this dual ministry associated with it. I've looked at the performance indicators and dealt with some of them. Much more so than with a lot of the other departments, I see there is some actual relationship in terms of the performance of our investments and that to industry standard. It's fairly accurate and fairly well related to the activity of the minister, so from that perspective, you know, and that one set of performance indicators there, right on. It actually deals with issues that you're responsible for, whereas some of the other ministers that we've dealt with and had review of their budgets have got performance indicators in there that are not responsive in any direct way to the action of the minister. So thank you for having those performance indicators that deal with specific performance and specific management measures and quality measures of the performance of the ministry.

Again, just in conclusion, I think we need to convey to Albertans a real, justified reason for having divided these two. Otherwise, how do we justify the additional dollars that are required to operate and man two different ministries when it used to be done under one and there was a lower overhead or administrative cost associated with it?

In the meantime I'd encourage the minister to try and look at some additional performance indicators, maybe in terms of our risk management fund, you know, the fire, theft, and damage types of claims that go out against that fund. How do they compare to other commercial and industrial – probably mostly commercial – claims systems? Are we paying out appropriately? Are we paying out in an effective way and in essence lower than what we would if we were buying commercial insurance? Is there the kind of indication to Albertans that we as a public operating our own self-insurance program through this fund are dealing with something that, in effect, is cost-effective and a benefit for Albertans because of the lower total cost?

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat and let us move on to the next part of our debate. If not, even if that means a vote, that's great. We can move on.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Revenue to sum up.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot of comments have been said tonight. We'll be more than pleased to respond to all of them in short order. I would say, just as a concluding remark, that one of Premier Klein's statements made early on with regards to the division of the two departments was: in light of the growing complexity and the size of the revenues of the government, it created an expanded and greater need to have to look at the scope and mandate of our revenue streams and, therefore, creation of a Revenue department.

The confusion as to, for example, a budget statement. The Finance department certainly has the responsibility for the three-year business plan and budgeting process. There's no duplication between the two departments. The tax and revenue administration division of Treasury has now become the tax and revenue administration division of Revenue. The investment management division and all of those staff are now part of the Department of Revenue. There is not a duplication and hiring of more bodies to do that work. Those were actually very cleanly separable areas.

With regards to finance policy in the Department of Finance the overall policy for the fiscal direction of the government includes all the departments. Looking at the fiscal projections of the spending and of the revenues of all of the departments is the mandate of a three-year business plan that the Department of Finance is responsible for pulling together. We can be of tremendous help, under the mandate of the Department of Revenue, in assisting in taking a harder and closer look and working to provide great information to the Department of Finance in accumulating those three-year budgets as we look forward to the planning and administration of revenue streams, the investment management division. So there's a great need for this, and it's a perfect time and opportunity for it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Revenue, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$30,114,000
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THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

9:10

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Solicitor General

THE CHAIRMAN: To begin this evening's deliberations, we'll call upon the Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to

present the Alberta Solicitor General's 2001-2004 business plan. I'll take a few minutes at the end of the hour to respond to some of the questions raised by the opposition, and I'd be happy to respond in writing to other questions that I'm unable to answer today.

The Alberta Solicitor General strives to implement commitments made related to recommendations from the 1999 justice summit, and we will continue to consult with Albertans through initiatives such as a review of policing in Alberta. As our provincial economy remains strong, the number of people coming into Alberta from other provinces and other countries remains high. Changing demographics present challenges for the judicial system, including a great fear of crime amongst Alberta seniors. We see continued public concern over perceived increases in crime, and we see concerns about the needs for a higher level of local policing. Advancing technology provides new challenges. It has resulted in complex global economic organized crime and Internet-based crimes such as illegal gambling and child pornography. Through our programs and services the Alberta Solicitor General is committed to building a democratic and prosperous Alberta based on the respect of law, a province where all Albertans are safe in their homes and communities.

I'd like to very briefly outline the core businesses that make up our ministry's \$253 million budget. We will encourage crime prevention and ensure adequate and effective policing to all Albertans. We will provide effective and efficient correctional programs. We will work to support the rehabilitation of offenders into communities as contributing members of society. The Alberta Solicitor General will continue existing efforts to ensure that victims are treated with dignity and respect. Our common cross-ministry goals are a key part of the way the government does business. These are goals based on the needs and priorities of Albertans.

We recognize the importance of building strong partnerships with the judiciary, the legal community, aboriginal communities, and our stakeholders in policing, community organizations, and local governments. We will continue to measure our successes in the important areas by asking Albertans how safe they feel in their homes and neighbourhoods and how satisfied they are with policing.

Two other key measures that we will use to access safe communities are the provincial crime rate and the victimization rate. We anticipate that the provincial crime rate will remain higher than the national rate, as has been the case historically. What crime rates tell us is often unclear. For example, Alberta has a crime rate higher than the national average but a victimization rate lower than the national average. This would seem to reflect effective and proactive policing rather than a higher incidence of crime. Further, national rates are based strictly on population, and they're not adjusted for demographics. This should be taken into account when selecting our performance measures. That said, we will strive to achieve a crime rate equal to or lower than the Canadian average and a victimization rate lower than the national average. Our goals related to providing services to victims of crime will be measured by the number of community initiatives we partner with and client satisfaction with our financial benefit program.

We have done considerable work already with our performance measures in the area of offender rehabilitation. Most people who come into contact with our correctional system return to the community in a short time. Therefore, it is important to identify and deal with the root causes of crime and encourage offender rehabilitation and a successful return to the community. We have selected two measures for our goals of facilitating the rehabilitation of offenders. These measures will indicate compliance with court-ordered sanctions and our record of selecting appropriate offenders for participation in work and rehabilitation opportunities in the community.

The financial content of the business plan provides a major increase for funding for essential police service, increased support for victims' programs and children's mental health initiatives, and a consistent level of support for other core programs. The spending profile on the last page of the business plan shows our spending targets of \$253 million, \$259 million, and \$267 million over the next three years. That represents an increase of \$25 million, or 11 percent, for 2001-02.

The major component of the increase is \$16.4 million for provincial policing. The provincial police service agreement provides RCMP provincial policing in municipal districts, Metis settlements, and every town, village, and summer village that has a population less than 2,500. Alberta pays 70 percent of the provincial police service cost; Canada pays 30. Increased funds will allow Alberta to meet its commitments under the agreements for RCMP service. The Alberta government will spend almost \$110 million on policing and crime prevention in 2001-02.

I would like to take the members through some key Solicitor General initiatives. Crime prevention programs are most effective when developed and implemented at the local level. We have budgeted \$1.3 million for project grants to community organizations and for contracted crime prevention services provided by aboriginal and other organizations with their respective communities. In addition, an MLA committee has consulted with Albertans to review current policing issues, including potential changes to the Police Act. The committee will present recommendations to help Alberta police forces take on the challenges of the 21st century.

We will continue to implement our provincial strategy to fight organized crime. We will strengthen our partnership with provincial and national justice stakeholders to co-ordinate resources against organized crime.

We will continue to support the federal DNA Identification Act. The ministry will also develop a strategic plan for policing in Alberta in consultation with police executives and police commissions. The process will position Alberta as a Canadian leader and contribute to safer communities.

We heard very clearly from Albertans that victims have an essential role in the judicial process. To achieve this, we will review current legislation from a victim's perspective. Funding for victims' programs and initiatives has increased by \$1.9 million. Available grants/funds for community victims' services organizations have increased by 39 percent, to \$2 million. The growth in funding permits increases in grants to programs we have helped in the past, and it allows the victims of crime fund to assist other organizations providing victims' services.

Community justice partners have helped develop local response to crime, especially in recent years. Enabling legislation and policy decisions have encouraged this. Through this plan we will restate our commitment to supporting community justice. We intend to work with municipalities, communities, and community agencies to make restorative justice approaches more widely available in Alberta. A key part of the success of restorative justice is that it encourages the victim, the offender, and the community to be directly involved in resolving conflict through dialogue and negotiation.

Youth justice in Alberta focuses on greater co-operation and communication between partnering groups. The Solicitor General is committed to providing appropriate sanctions for youth crime while working with young offenders to help them on the right path. To support this commitment, we'll explore other nontraditional sanctions.

The budget includes a \$2.3 million increase related to children's mental health initiatives.

The Solicitor General remains committed to enabling First Nations police services to provide law and order in the community.

With the increasing emphasis on interdepartmental teamwork we will be actively involved in several governmentwide initiative and partnerships with stakeholders. We will be a partner in the aboriginal policy initiative. We will provide our support for the development of governmentwide and department strategies to improve the well-being of aboriginal people in Alberta.

We are also a key participant in a number of children's priorities. This includes child prostitution, youth justice committees, domestic violence, expanded mental health and addiction programs for youth, and staff and offender education initiatives regarding fetal alcohol syndrome.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my comments for the 2001-2004 business plan for the Alberta Solicitor General, and I will be happy to answer any questions regarding the plan.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. [The members sang *Happy Birthday*] Thank you so much to my colleagues for celebrating my birthday. I really appreciate it. That's very kind and generous of you. I'll try not to be so acerbic now in gratitude to you all.

All right. Here we go. A couple of things came to mind as soon as I looked at these estimates. I understand that we're covering the core businesses of policing, crime prevention, victims' services, and corrections, but when I look at the strategic objectives on page 317 of the business plan, there seems to be a disconnect between what's being said and reality. For example, the first bullet is talking about augmenting "crime prevention initiatives by expanding the Provincial Crime Prevention Strategy and supporting the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention." But when I look at the budget itself on page 401, crime prevention increased by only \$5,000, so obviously there's not a lot of money that's going into augmenting "crime prevention initiatives by expanding the Provincial Crime Prevention Strategy." What exactly are the specifics, then, on how you plan on doing this?

9:20

Then I looked at the second bullet:

A Policing MLA committee has been appointed . . . This committee will consult with interested Albertans and make recommendations for changes to policing and the Alberta Police Act.

But I'm sure that the government has already claimed that those consultations were over in January, prior to when this book was released. Well, the minister is shaking her head, so I know she'll be responding to me at the end. I'm wondering then: are the consultations continuing behind closed doors or with invited stakeholders? And who would that be if we're no longer doing a community consultation? If the consultation has indeed ended, then I'm looking for the recommendations. Where are they, and when can we expect that they would be tabled in the House or released? If the government is following on the number of other initiatives that seem to be waiting to be released until after the session, maybe she can give us an idea of when that might be.

Then I looked at the fourth bullet in which the ministry is talking about developing

a strategic plan for policing in Alberta in consultation with police executives and police commissions [providing] a strategic vision for the work of both the Policing MLA committee and the Policing . . . steering committee.

Now, the policing MLA committee was struck in September of 2000. The public submission deadline was December of 2000, and

you're just now developing the strategic vision for the committee? Isn't this the reverse of the way it should be, where you develop what you were looking to accomplish and then you go and do it? Was the announcement of the review rushed in an attempt to do what? To get it out and started early for some reason? It got out there ahead of when the ministry was actually developing a strategic plan for it. Did this have something to do with the election? Why do we have the committee in fact having already been out there, the submission deadline long since past, and now we're going to look at a committee or a ministry developing, one presumes over the next three years, between 2001 and 2004, what this committee was supposed to do? So perhaps the minister can clarify that one.

Now, specifically under policing we have increased funding for the RCMP, and both the Premier and the Minister of Justice have signaled that the establishment of a provincial police force is not in the cards. So what other initiatives are being looked at, then, by the ministry? If we've already had the kibosh put on a provincial police force, then what else is this money being used for, or what else is being considered by the department?

Perhaps I could also get the statistics, obviously in writing after the fact – I don't expect the minister to have this off the top of her head. How many new police officers are being anticipated or planned for in Alberta? I'm also interested in what the ratio of citizens to police officers is, and if we can get comparatives on that going back a few years so that we can see in fact if we are decreasing that ratio or increasing that ratio. Is there a specific target that the ministry is looking toward in that relationship between police officers to citizens? What is the ministry anticipating here, or what are they going for?

I've been concerned – and others have certainly brought it up in the House – with an increase in the use of private security forces by a number of different entities including municipal and provincial police services. Now, I would like to hear very specifically the philosophy behind this from the minister. I'm wondering if there is an intent to create a larger market for private security and if that may be coming about because of underfunding or perceived underfunding, certainly by the municipalities. We've seen the example set by the government in underfunding in education leading to private education and in health leading to private health. This is the third area that I'm seeing this in, and I have a great deal of concern around this. So I'd like some specifics about exactly what's anticipated by the ministry.

How much support for this is there? What philosophy is behind it? What strategic directions are being involved here? Do you have performance measurements around how many are being used or how much money would be spent on this? Is there any direction forthcoming to the municipalities or others?

In fact, we have private security now on the Legislature Grounds. There's one security staff here in the building, and there's a separate one on the grounds and a separate one for the Annex. I mean, right here we have an example of where money is being expended on private security firms. We've also had a problem with those private security firms. I can talk to the minister in more detail about that later.

So I'm very interested in exactly where the ministry thinks they're going with this or what they're anticipating. Or if the minister is not in favour of this, then let's hear it, and let's hear what the plan is around this. Is there a "No, we won't go beyond this amount of money or this number of contracts"? Let's hear it.

The minister is inheriting somewhat here from the setup of the Ministry of Justice prior to the election, but I note that there was a strong signal sent out – or perhaps it was just election timing; I don't know – with the Minister of Justice providing funds for a start-up

fund for a helicopter for the Edmonton Police Service. I'm wondering: is the province planning additional onetime funding in support of this helicopter? Are they planning longer term ongoing support for this helicopter? Was this an initiative or a philosophy that was being followed by the department that's now been cut off and inherited by this minister? What was the thinking behind the onetime funding on that helicopter, or was it just timing that was important there? I think that's of great interest to the citizens of Edmonton and certainly to the Edmonton city council. So I'm interested in what other plans there are around funding or support, whether it's financial or otherwise, for that helicopter.

I appreciate that the minister is new in a new ministry, but in listening to her opening remarks, it was long on enthusiasm and short on specifics. So I'm looking for quite a few more specifics.

I've already pointed out a number of inconsistencies between what was written in the strategic objectives and in fact what has happened, where they don't always mesh. So can the minister provide additional statistics or information on the extent of organized crime in Alberta? How big an issue is this? Is it small? How much of the budget is the minister looking to dedicate to it?

When I actually look at budget breakdowns – for example, you get page 407 in the estimates book. Basically, you've got five breakdowns and that's it. It's not broken down by any significant subvotes underneath. I have no way of knowing what the minister is expecting to expend out of any one of those given vote lines. So I'm looking for specifics about what programs are anticipated to be paid for out of that vote line, whether there's an increase or a decrease, how it compares to what was happening before. We have a five-line item here and can't get any more information from that.

9:30

Back to the extent of organized crime and, specifically, what is the government looking to do around that? That was very much in the news and in the Legislative Assembly a year ago. We're not hearing so much about it now. What programs are there? What is anticipated to be done? I'm not picking up a particular strategic focus out of the objectives that are stated here. Has it just dropped off the edge of the table? There's no interest in it? What's happening?

I'm wondering if the ministry has done anything specific – commissioned any research, done any reports, done a literature review of similar jurisdictions across Canada or other places in the world – around money and gaming, particularly through the casinos. I used to work a lot of casinos for various nonprofit groups, and it was sort of common chatter as you worked in the cash cage that money in fact was being laundered through casinos. People would come in and would buy a bunch of chips. Then they'd go and cash them in at the window and they could have some sort of proof that they had money from the casino, but in fact it was being laundered. What has happened around that whole issue? What's being worked on there? What's being anticipated? How does it fit into your strategic plans? Is there any money under any of these votes that is covering that?

We have a gaming review going on that supposedly has a freeze on activities. That's expected to come off this summer. People are lining up at the gates for more casinos and more possibilities around that. What's the Solicitor General looking at as far as pre-emptive action there? In fact, where's the baseline? Where are we starting from? That's the first information that I'm looking for. What's the minister aware of now? What is our benchmark, and where is the plan to go from there?

I'm wondering if there is a global budget, provincially or cross-departmentally, to combat further expansion of organized crime in Alberta. I mean, we still like to think of ourselves and I think we

still conduct ourselves as a fairly open and honest society. I don't know that we leave the doors of our houses open anymore, but we like to think that we could. In some ways I'm wondering if we aren't a bit naive about what's out there and how much is out there and how it affects what's going on. This is a very minor version of this, but certainly when we look at the number of scams and fraudulent schemes that are being run, those are definitely on the increase. I mean, that's a very minor version of what I'm talking about. Nonetheless, what are we doing there? That is a form of organized fraud, if you will. What specific targets are happening there? Those are certainly crimes with victims attached to them.

Still under the heading of organized crime, we've had a number of very unfortunate incidents here in Edmonton and I think in Calgary as well. I'm aware from the communities representing many cultures in my constituency that new Canadians and specifically new Albertans are victimized by organized crime in their community, and it's really important that we have community police officers that are able to communicate with and gain the trust of citizens. I suppose that even if there were to be some sort of undercover or informational gathering, it would be important to have officers who were capable of infiltrating gangs or organizations, so we do need to have a police force that's reflective of the composition of the community. Could the minister give me the benchmark on that?

How many members of the police service in Alberta are members of visible minorities? Do we have a target about what we'd like to get to? What is the ratio that should be expected here? When the minister is signing contracts, working with and negotiating with the individual municipalities that have RCMP contracts, is there any sort of incentive that is being offered to ensure that there is a better composition and reflection of the communities that the officers are working in? I know at one point that was a focus for the Edmonton Police Service, and I did know some folks that got involved because of that, but I haven't seen much of a focus on it recently. I think that's part of the key to working with organized crime, particularly coming from other cultures.

In the health care field we've now come to understand the importance of – what are they called? They're special health care workers that speak different languages, multicultural health brokers. We've come to understand how key they are to taking information about health programs into various ethnic and cultural communities and helping to get the information out, but also they're there to identify problems and help bring those individuals or those families to some kind of assistance that's available. Is there any kind of program that's looking at mirroring the multicultural health brokers? Are we looking at multicultural policing or corrections brokers? Are we looking at providing language training, particularly in the larger centres? Perhaps the minister could supply a list of how many languages are in fact part of the services being offered by the Edmonton Police Service and the Calgary Police Service and other forces that are large enough to be dealing with those kinds of communities.

Now I'm going back to the strategic objectives. Under the enhanced services for victims – and, again, the minister mentioned this in her opening remarks. I'm wondering how long it will take to review legislation from a victim's perspective. I've now heard the government talk about an aboriginal lens that they're going to view legislation and programs through. This is talking about a victim's perspective, like a victim's lens, that they would be viewing legislation from. Can the minister give an indication of how long that will take and if there is a cost associated with it?

I'm aware that I'm coming to the end of my time, so I look forward to a second opportunity to be asking questions to the Solicitor General. I would like to thank the staff that have accompa-

nied her tonight. I appreciate the work they're doing. It's not easy to set up a new department, and I'm sure they're being of great assistance to her and will be of great assistance to me in answering the questions. So thank you for this time, and I will look forward to part two.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to be able to participate in these estimates as well. Once again we have a department which has been split up. Maybe the minister here can address why this split was done and how the government sees it as being more cost-effective to now run two departments. I would be interested in hearing that.

Most of my comments are around the issue of crime and crime as we have been experiencing it in my constituency, Edmonton-Ellerslie, and the greater constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods, which is really southeast Edmonton and is one quadrant of this city. We've had a series of incidents in southeast Edmonton which have brought to all of our attentions the need for a variety of community-based solutions to solving the issue of crime. Some of those I would like the minister to address within the framework of what she's doing with budget dollars in the next year.

9:40

Certainly we hear from the municipalities that policing is a big issue. What people in Mill Woods have asked for is a greater police presence. We have a community station there now, but what they really want to see is something akin to the old beat cops. Well, no municipality has the kind of funding these days to supply that kind of service, so police in the area have reached a form of compromise in that they do a lot of their paperwork in their cars now so that they can be on the street, be more visible, and act as a deterrent on the one hand and provide some sense of security and safety for residents on the other hand. So if the minister could address what's happening in terms of the downloading of municipal grants around the issue of policing, we'd be happy to see that.

In our ongoing discussions with people in the police department, street cops and those at higher levels within the department continually ask us to do whatever we can to try to bring the issue of lack of funding to the province's attention and ask them to respond to it, so I am bringing that question and that issue forward. Can they expect more dollars? Why are they being squeezed in the way they are? What can the minister see to solve those issues in terms of municipal funding? So if she could do that, I would be very appreciative of it.

My colleague from Edmonton-Centre talked a little about multicultural policing. I'd like to talk about that too, because of course in southeast Edmonton we have a wide variety of cultures represented. Many of the people in the area are first-generation Canadians whose first language is not English. That can result in a number of challenges in terms of policing. One is the cultural expectations they bring with them around policing. Many of them are very frightened of the police and are resistant to dealing with them at any level. Often there are language barriers, so those are issues too.

I think the Edmonton police department has done a very good job of getting cultural representation within their departments and certainly in then assigning people with appropriate backgrounds to appropriate areas of the city where they can be most helpful. That's been very helpful in Mill Woods; there's no doubt about that. So I would like to applaud them for that and also give credit to the ministry for any responsibility they may have in that regard and for

any support they provide, be it intrinsic or actual dollars or support in terms of training. That's really a good tactic and way to go on that.

I know that judging is not part of the mandate of the Solicitor General, but I'd like to speak about it here, Mr. Chairman, with the hope that this minister will lobby her colleague. One of the key issues that is an outcome of the meetings we've had in Mill Woods is around the Young Offenders Act. When we start to peel off the layers on that issue, a great part of the issue is what happens in provincial courts. There seems to be an agenda of warehousing these kids like cattle and running them through the system as fast as they can. What that subsequently results in is deals being made on a constant basis, so the kids are not fulfilling sentences at all. They're back out on the street in hours often. The kids know this. There's no incentive for them to not be involved in crime, and it's very much a problem for people who live in the community.

So if the Solicitor General could talk to the Attorney General and address the issue of what's happening with the prosecutors and judges within the system, that would be excellent, because there is a real issue there. Likely it's underfunding in two areas I would suspect: not enough prosecutors, and secondly, not enough incarceration facilities. Incarceration facilities do come under this minister's mandate, if I am correct. So what's the problem here, Mr. Chairman? Do they need more money? Do they need more facilities? Do they need more outreach programs? Maybe they need all those things, but I think what they also need is more preventative dollars.

The minister in her comments talked a little about crime prevention being most effective at the local level. I certainly agree with her and commend all efforts there. I personally don't think she has enough money assigned at that particular level, not through any fault of her own, but I think that's an issue. My questions to her on that are: does she think she has enough money? What does she think she can actually accomplish in a year? What are her long-term goals in that regard? How is she benchmarking those and measuring success?

The bigger question is prevention in other areas, Mr. Chairman. How is she strategically integrating with other ministers and their departments to provide that kind of preventative support, to provide the linkages that are needed? She knows this issue very well. I know through work she's brought forward in this House and discussions I've had with her over the years that she believes that prevention at many levels is very important. So where are the linkages – I'm sure she has them; either formally or informally, we'd like to know on both fronts – with Children's Services, with social services, with the education system, and with the health system? I think those are all frontline ministries that deal with frontline preventative issues, whether we're talking about teaching parenting skills, providing early intervention in the home or in the school, identifying ongoing or potential crises within the education system, identifying kids at risk from drugs or family situations, and crisis intervention.

We have serious social problems within families because of addictions: gambling, alcohol, drugs. So how are those being addressed? What happens with these kids once they get into care? If you read the Children's Advocate's report, you would see that there are many issues outstanding with children in care at this time, many of them directly relating to this minister's responsibilities and some of them connected to other areas. So how is that working in terms of integration? How much money is dedicated to that kind of prevention? Is there a kind of global working group that this minister's knitting together with these other ministries to try and actually seriously address this issue? Put the dollars up front where they're needed so that we can save them at the incarceration stage,

which is the output of her responsibilities. She has a strong input responsibility, and I believe she also has a strong enough will to pursue this kind of agenda. It would be very forward moving, and it would be something that many people throughout the province could applaud if they actually saw it put in place.

So those are primarily the concerns I have with this ministry. I think they're very important. They're fundamental to our success as a society and to her success, ultimately in the long run needing fewer dollars. Let's see some of that money well spent up front. Let's see some successes benchmarked and measured. Let's see the outcomes from them. I look forward to hearing about her integrated activities on the prevention side with other ministries.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to rise this evening and make a few comments in regards to the Department of the Solicitor General and also to congratulate her on her position with the new ministry and thank the department for being out tonight.

MS CARLSON: I forgot to do that. Could you do that on my behalf?

9:50

MR. BONNER: Yes. I'd also thank the department and the minister on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. She forgot to do that and asked me to do that on her behalf.

One of the areas that I wanted to focus on I know is a concern of the department and many people here in Alberta. When we look at planning in Alberta, particularly what's coming down the road in the way of demographics, certainly our population in Alberta is aging. In that regard, I think that will certainly lower our crime rate. As well, when I'm looking here in the business plans, on page 314 I notice that "Canada's Aboriginal population is growing twice as fast as the country's total population and it is proportionally younger." I think that when we do look at crime statistics, we will see that through all segments of the population crime amongst younger people is higher. So, again, if my assumption is correct in that regard, then certainly when we look at the aboriginal population, this would also hold true there.

I also notice here in the business plans that

between 2000 and 2011, the Aboriginal population is projected to increase by 22%, versus 12% for Alberta's total population. In Alberta, Aboriginal people represent approximately 6% of the total population and 36% of the prison population.

I know that a major goal of the minister and the department is to reduce that, but in looking at that and looking at public security – and I'm referring first of all in the budget to line 2.2.3, First Nations policing – I see here that even with this huge increase in the population of aboriginal communities, the net expense for 2000-2001 was 4,936,000 and the net expense for 2001-2002 is only \$5,048,000. So we have here in the neighbourhood of roughly a hundred thousand dollar increase, yet we have a huge, huge increase in population. As well, when we are looking at the demographics, we certainly see that this is a younger population.

Therefore, what we have to do, then, Mr. Chairman, is wonder why we have such a limited amount here in First Nations policing, yet we do have an increase in younger people, and as well we have an absolutely unacceptable percentage of 36 percent of the people in prison being aboriginal. So, again, it is a problem, and I know that in the final Alberta Summit on Justice report of April 1999, the

aboriginal and the Metis communities did make a number of recommendations where they felt that programs could be changed, which would certainly reflect more of their needs, and these programs would be tailor-made and focused to their particular groups.

I see that one of the recommendations on First Nations, Metis and Inuit justice was that

as an alternative relating to civil matters or disputes within the Metis Nation of Alberta, the Metis Judiciary Council be empowered, operated and recognized by Alberta Justice as an alternative (in-house matters) to the courts, within the guidelines established by the Metis Nation of Alberta.

Also, here under that same list of recommendations is recommendation 4, that "equitable funding be provided to all police services across Alberta." Now, when I see a statement like that, what I would like the minister to clarify for me is: is there equitable funding for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit justice as with other police services across the province? If she could please clarify that when she is providing us with the answers to our questions.

As well, I notice on page 402 – again I'm referring here to line 3.4.2, and this has to do with native court workers. I see that our estimate for net expense for 2001-2002 is \$1,920,000, and for the year 2000-2001 this was \$1,868,000. So we have roughly a \$50,000 increase there. Yet in looking at the recommendations, the whole idea here is not to focus more on the courts but to develop programs which are community based and more available and less intimidating to our aboriginals.

I also notice here, Mr. Chairman, that under the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit justice they want more funding allocated "through the Aboriginal Justice Initiatives Unit to better enable settlements to access federal justice initiatives." So, again, I would think that if the federal program has something to offer which enhances what we are presently doing here in the province, then every effort should be made to allow these groups to access funding. Certainly I don't see under what I've looked at in the budget so far those funds being available. There has to be perhaps some shifting in priorities in the budget that will free up money for this particular recommendation.

As well, I notice that one of the recommendations in the final Alberta Summit on Justice report for the Metis Settlements of Alberta is to "provide rehabilitation and support programs that are geared specifically toward Metis incarcerated in provincial jails." Again, if the minister could please tell us what work has been done on this recommendation so far, what is going to be provided specifically towards those Metis who are incarcerated in provincial jails, and when they can expect to see these support programs initiated.

Another recommendation here was to "increase funding for Native alcohol and addiction treatment programs." I don't seem to be able to find that anywhere in here, and again just a huge, huge concern of those communities. Certainly when we look at the issue of fetal alcohol syndrome, we do need some intensive programs to help children who have been subjected to fetal alcohol syndrome to get them on the right track and to keep them there.

Under recommendation 6 another recommendation was to "increase funding for Aboriginal justice programming." Again, the whole idea here is that aboriginal people will be allowed to develop more and more of their justice programs, keep them closer at hand, and be more in control of what is happening with those programs but not only with those programs. What they also want to do is identify specific programming and servicing dollars for aboriginal peoples. So those are some of the concerns I have under recommendation 6.

10:00

I just want to finish off with recommendation 8: "The Treaty 6

First Nations of Alberta recommendations be supported." I want to focus in and zero in on one here: "The development of restorative justice initiatives through consultations with First Nations." These of course would include "community-based peacemaker/mediator programs." It would also establish "treaty-based youth and adult healing facilities to reflect First Nations differences." Their third recommendation was that they would have "community-based diversion programs."

So if the minister would please tell us, then, at what point these recommendations are at this particular time, if these communities, the aboriginal communities, the Metis communities, can look forward to a huge shift in their programs, in their financial support. Certainly this figure of 36 percent, as I mentioned earlier, is too high. For the benefit of all society we would like to see that figure much more representative of the total population.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat for now and listen to other hon. members.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to rise to address the estimates of the Solicitor General. I would just note, although it's clearly a done deal, our continuing concern with the division of these departments. Some of my comments with respect to costs in the previous estimates I think could apply here. Although I will admit that the division of these departments between the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General is a more traditional type of division, the additional costs are something that remain a concern.

As I understand it, the core responsibilities of the new Solicitor General ministry are policing and crime prevention, victims' services, and corrections. I have two questions pertaining to policing. One is the growing inequity between those parts of the province that depend on the RCMP for policing services and those cities that have their own municipal police forces. The province provides a greater level of support to those areas policed by the RCMP than it does to those areas that are municipally policed. To correct this imbalance, until the mid-1990s the province provided policing grants to those municipalities with their own police forces.

Over half of Albertans live in communities with municipal police forces, and as recently as fiscal year 1992-93 over \$33 million in policing grants was provided to those municipalities to offset policing costs. Is consideration being given to reinstating policing grants, and if not, why not? Reinstating municipal policing grants is particularly important because of cost pressures facing all police services. The government is responding to these pressures by increasing funding for RCMP policing by almost 20 percent this year, thereby increasing the disparities between those municipalities policed by the RCMP and those municipalities with their own police service.

In the same connection, Mr. Chairman, I want to deal a little bit with the whole issue of leadership of policing in the province and would like to talk a little bit about community policing as an excellent way in which to conduct policing and suggest that we need strong leadership from the minister in order to maintain and strengthen community policing in Alberta. Particularly Edmonton but also to a certain degree Calgary were the first exponents of community policing and for a number of years were considered leaders in policing in the entire North American continent. People came from around North America and even from Europe to visit the police in Edmonton and in Calgary to learn how things were being done.

Community policing has been very successful. It has reduced

costs. It has had a very strong impact on rates of crime. It has enhanced public confidence in the police, and it has reduced fear of crime in the community. It's based on Peel's principles, and the first one of those is that the police are the community and the community is the police. It's based on problem solving. It's based on the principle that instead of going to the same location eight or nine different times to respond to a call for assistance, you go in and work with the community and with the people in the neighbourhood to resolve the issue that is resulting in the calls for service in the first place. As a result, it has the impact of eliminating those sources of calls for police service, reducing crime, and involving the community in problem solving to reduce demand for police services and to increase public safety.

There has been in recent years a serious erosion of community policing in Alberta. I have a certain knowledge of the situation in Edmonton, and I think it is a matter of very serious concern. So I think that it would be beneficial if the department would use its resources in order to promote and support community policing.

The traditional macho police culture has reasserted itself in the police force as far as I can tell. That's my assessment. We're now not inviting people from North America to study community policing in Edmonton, but we are studying the California model. So we've reverted now to American styles of policing, and it is a trend that I think is very dangerous. We see more things like helicopters and tasers and more focus on the use of tactical squads.

I need to comment a little bit, Mr. Chairman, on disturbing recent events, including police shootings here in Edmonton, all of which are a matter of serious concern and indicate to me at least that we ought to be very concerned about the direction of policing as it is now. I will give you an example. I know that police are now looking at the use of tactical squads and the training of tactical squads in schools in case of an incident that could occur. At the same time, the number of schools that are served by community resource officers is being reduced. I would ask: what is the best way to secure the safety of students in schools other than having police officers in the schools who know the children, who know the kids and know what's going on? They can take preventive action in advance of an incident rather than having to send a tactical squad into schools after a very unfortunate and terrible incident has already occurred.

So I believe that action is needed on the part of this department and this minister to show leadership in Alberta in community policing. I would suggest a number of things, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I think the government could provide funding for research, education, and training of police officers in Alberta in community policing and further develop the community policing model. I would suggest that we establish a centre of excellence here in Alberta in community policing so that we once again become the centre of advanced police procedures and techniques.

Also, we need to deal with antigang activity, and the province needs to support police forces in that regard. I give an example of how gang activity has worked in the communities that I've represented. A few years ago we had a fairly notorious youth gang developing called the North Side Boys. The police got involved with them, and they made a number of arrests.

What they did that was proactive I think was the important thing, Mr. Chairman: they got involved with the young people who were most at risk of joining the gang. They organized things such as basketball tournaments. They raised money to take kids to Calgary to play in a basketball tournament. They basically intervened with the most at-risk children to prevent them from becoming victims of the gang. As a result, that gang is almost completely broken up.

You contrast that with the approach of putting these young people

in an incarcerated situation, where all they're going to do is come into contact with much more experienced criminals, be recruited to more serious gangs, and come out, as they almost all will do, as much more experienced, hardened criminals. That approach only gives a little bit of temporary and illusory protection from gang activity. So a community policing model is essential, in my view, to deal with gang activity.

10:10

I think the government should take a look at providing additional assistance to help police with urban aboriginal programs. I see that there is a good focus on First Nations' policing, but we need to address the issues of urban aboriginals and the issues that police need to address around that.

I think there's a very strong role that can be played, also by Community Development and Children's Services, in developing a comprehensive model of community policing and establishing it as government policy and establishing it as the model of policing that the Solicitor General is going to take a lead in in this province in order to achieve all of the goals of community policing which are outlined in Peel's principles, which I believe are still printed on the program of the graduation of at least Edmonton city police graduates.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat. I think it's important that the Solicitor General address the issues of large urban cities in her portfolio and that the estimates ought to reflect the urgent need to deal with emerging problems in some of the larger cities, not just additional money for rural policing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MS BLAKEMAN: Good point. Actually, just before I lose that thought, one of my colleagues has just raised the information that was in the newspaper this morning that in some jurisdictions in Edmonton the 911 calls weren't able to be answered and have cars dispatched. Now, I think part of my issue here is not a complaint about the Edmonton Police Service but once again a notation that the government no longer supplies funding through to the municipalities of Edmonton and Calgary for their policing. I know that's a real struggle for them.

Just a couple of other points that I wanted to go over in the few minutes that we've got left here. Under the community justice approaches that are noted on page 318, under the strategies here I'm just wondering: what is the status of the community justice initiative? The minister mentioned it in her opening remarks. Exactly what's going on, and where are we with this? Also, a question about whether the restorative justice programs will be expanded. Is that anticipated in this year, or is it anticipated in the next year or both? What's the scoop here?

Offender labour. It's noted that "over one million hours of offender labour [is] provided annually to non-profit community groups." Are we able to get a breakdown of which community groups and the number of hours that are provided to each of them? I'm also looking to find out whether this offender labour is also provided to government departments or to those providing contracted-out work to government. So if I could get something in writing answering those two questions.

I'm interested in the cost of operating the community service programs. Also, how many hours of community service were logged last year, and how many does the budget anticipate will be logged this year?

I'd also appreciate an update on the Calgary domestic violence court. I recognize that that hasn't been running very long, but you must be monitoring it fairly closely. What are the impressions or any statistics that have been gathered thus far?

Youth justice is, again, on page 318. Will the province be

increasing its share of the funding in this budget for this year, or do they anticipate next year or both? Again, what's being done here?

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

Very quickly looking at the performance measurements that are noted on page 320. For the victimization rate, this is measuring the number of Albertans that "have reported being a victim of crime." Do we have any estimate to go on about how many crimes are going unreported? An equivalent example is with the women's shelters. We know how many were served by the shelter, and then there's some idea of how many were turned away by the shelter. So how many people are we not servicing? Is there any measurement that the department has used or is looking to develop to use around this one?

Under corrections intervention do we have any measure of recidivism after completion of the program? I would think this is the one of more concern to the public.

I know that this department has now been sort of created again. Having had the Solicitor General and Attorney General put together in the mid-90s, now they've been split apart again. I'm curious: was there no performance measurement that existed under the Justice department that could have been transferred to the Solicitor General? Almost everything in here is a new measure, and I'm curious about that.

How much new funding is expected to be received from the federal government under the new Youth Criminal Justice Act? Is it correct that Alberta is going to be a big winner in this? How much is expected?

Finally, the ministry support services budget. I noticed when I went back and looked at the '99-2000 Justice annual report that there was about \$11.3 million total on ministry services. Now, when I look at the Justice and Attorney General department this year, it's at \$12.5 million and the Solicitor General ministry support services is at \$5.7 million. So we're now looking at \$18.2 million for the running of the minister's and the deputy minister's offices, which is a significant increase of some \$7 million. What was the benefit that was anticipated by splitting up these two departments?

In this instance and the instance where we split off Seniors from Community Development and one other example where departments were split, in each case it seems to be costing us between \$5 million and \$10 million for the running of the new ministers' and the deputy ministers' offices, which seems like a substantial amount of money to me. If I could get an explanation on what exactly that money is being spent on and whether this was in fact anticipated. I certainly wouldn't want to think that this was some kind of make-work project, but I do have to start asking the question when I've seen it happen three times in these budget debates.

So those are the questions that I had, and my timing is perfect tonight. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: I'd call on the hon. Solicitor General for her concluding remarks.

10:20

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate hearing all of what the opposition has to say, and I indicated earlier that we will respond to them in writing.

I'd like to, if I can, please, introduce some people that are in the gallery with me, some troopers that have had an early morning and are still here tonight. The Deputy Solicitor General is Jim Nichols, my deputy minister. Arnold Galet, the assistant deputy minister, known to me more as the big guy. Robert Dunster is the assistant deputy minister for public security. Dan Mercer is the assistant deputy minister for strategic services. Bronwyn Shoush is the director of aboriginal justice. Jean Olynyk is director of communications, who's been busy for the last couple of weeks with all the issues we've been dealing with. Rita Lauterbach is the executive assistant to Jim Nichols. Debbie Malloy is my executive assistant, who is also celebrating her birthday today. I'm pleased they're here, and I appreciate them putting in a long day and sitting here listening intently to the questions that have been put forward.

I appreciate what the opposition has said tonight. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and the proposed estimates for the Department of the Solicitor General, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$241,418,000
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THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the votes and seek leave to sit again.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following departments.

Revenue: operating expense and capital investment, \$30,114,000.

Solicitor General: operating expense and capital investment, \$241,418,000.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:25 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 24, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a very important and dedicated group of people who have done good service for the province of Alberta: the Unified Family Court Task Force. First I should mention that they are accompanied today by the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta, Judge Ernie Walter. In addition to the members in this Chamber, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who chaired the task force, and the members for Leduc and Calgary-Montrose, the additional task force members who made such a wonderful contribution are the Hon. Justice Marguerite Trussler of the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta; the hon. Assistant Chief Judge of the Provincial Court, family and youth division, Jan Franklin; Michael Benson of the Native Counseling Services of Alberta; and Rhonda Ruston, a family law lawyer and a bencher of the Law Society of Alberta from Lethbridge. They are joined by Geoff Ho from the Department of Justice, who was the secretary and resource person to the committee.

All members of the task force have now been suitably acknowledged by the Legislative Assembly, and I'd just like to publicly and on the record say thank you for the incredible work that they have done for us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly His Excellency Ingvard Havnen, the ambassador of the kingdom of Norway. He is accompanied by Mrs. Elisabeth Havnen and Mr. Roar Tungland, the honorary consul of the kingdom of Norway here in Edmonton, and his wife, Mrs. Marilyn Tungland. I'd ask that they rise, please, and be recognized by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the Member of Parliament for the constituency of St. Albert, Mr. John Williams. He is accompanied today by Mr. Syed Yusuf Hossain, the controller and Auditor General of Bangladesh; Mr. Syed Sajedul Karim, the controller general of defence in Bangladesh; and Mr. M.A. Sabur, the first councillor of commercial in Ottawa. They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask them to please remain standing and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this afternoon I introduced the members of the Unified Family Court Task Force. Back in March of last year we struck a task force to recommend how access to the courts could be improved for those having family law problems. The task force has come back with 17 recommendations to improve our justice system for family law litigants, including the establishment of a unified family court in Alberta. I'd like to table the requisite copies of that report for the benefit of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies that I'd like to table with you from Palliser regional schools regarding the Bill 16 provisions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies from the Grande Yellowhead regional division No. 35 on Bill 16.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Gordon McIntosh, a resident of Edmonton-Ellerslie. He is concerned about violence in the community and would like all levels of government to work together to find a solution to this problem.

The second tabling is five copies of a letter from the University of Alberta Student Liberal Association. This group is concerned about the lack of a properly functioning parliamentary democracy in Alberta. They offer several suggestions about how this situation could be remedied.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first one is a memorandum from the Alberta environmental protection department dated July 24, 1995, concerning security bonds in place at Hub Oil.

The second one is a city of Calgary memorandum from December 7, 1993, also discussing the same issue.

The third tabling today is a letter from Hub Oil Company Ltd. dated February 6, 1996, to Alberta environmental protection, and in here is a discussion on the decommissioning costs of \$500,000, that it's an excessive fee.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a letter from the Family Ties Association in Lethbridge, Alberta. They are expressing concern about the recent announcement by the Sun Country child and family services board proposing that 8 to 10 percent of funding will need to be cut from the business plan submitted to Children's Services.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling is from the Alberta Society for Pension Reform. This would be a membership form for all retired members of the Alberta teachers' retirement fund, the public service pension plan, and the local authorities pension plan.

My second tabling is also from the Alberta Society for Pension Reform. This is a cost analysis of how much pensions for these three sectors are going to be reduced for the lifetime of the pensions due to changes in the Pension Fund Act.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a letter I received from Mr. Keith Brown of High River several weeks ago. Mr. Brown is urging the government not to grant permission to log, run a sour gas pipeline, or allow for oil development in the Bighorn wildland park north and south of the David Thompson highway.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, and it is a copy of information from the Alberta Wilderness Association pertaining to the Meridian dam proposal.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure and an honour for me today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 43 very bright and pleasant French immersion students from the great high school of Lindsay Thurber in Red Deer. They are accompanied by their two teachers, M. Carl Malenfant and M. Ron Alleyne. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm greetings of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be able to stand in my place today and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature a friend of many in this Legislature, in fact a former colleague who served from the 18th to the 21st Legislatures. He's currently chairman and president of Webber Academy, and of course I'd be speaking about Dr. Neil Webber. He is accompanied by approximately 20 students, who frankly looked very, very smart when we were doing the pictures because they were all in class uniforms today, also extremely well behaved. He's accompanied also by Miss Janice Chan, a teacher, and parent helpers Mrs. Barbara Marshall and Mr. Ed Smid. I would ask that they rise in the public gallery and that we accord them the warm welcome we accord our visitors.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS. HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me to be able to introduce to you and through you to the

Assembly a really good friend of mine, Mr. Bob Anderson. Bob served as a councillor for the MD of Rocky View for a number of years. He is currently on our General Insurance Council, but more importantly than that, he's also a member of my Progressive Conservative Association board and helped us to achieve a 79.98 percent victory plurality. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Speaker, you must be thinking that my timing is impeccable. As fires are raging in your constituency, I am pleased to rise and introduce some 40 junior forest wardens who are visiting our building today. These fine people have planted over 80,000 trees to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Alberta Research Council. They are today accompanied by Mr. Bob Young, the provincial co-ordinator, and Mr. Ernst Klaszus, chief warden. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 32 bright students from the Wetaskiwin composite high school who are visiting the Legislature today. They are accompanied by three adults: Miss Alva Holliday, Mr. Doug Tarney, and Miss Paula Marshall. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise at this time and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today and introduce someone who I feel is a true Alberta success story. After finding herself on her own, she scrimped and saved and went back to school, and within a month she will be graduating as an RN. I'd like to introduce to you and to the rest of the Assembly Ms. Sharla White. I believe she's in the public gallery. Would you please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Hazardous Waste Inspections

MS. CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environment recently conducted spot inspections of 27 metal-plating companies in Edmonton and found that over half violated environmental regulations. These spot inspections were only conducted after one company was found to have been leaking cancer-causing agents for over six years. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why did it take his department over six years to respond to an Edmonton company leaking chromium into the ground and storm sewers?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I'm very pleased to talk about this program, Mr. Speaker. We started last fall with a program of education as to how the plating industry right across this province should handle some of the chemicals that they use in their industry, and it was a very well-received program. It's our philosophy that we should

provide educational opportunities first to let people know what they should be doing and then go on and enforce the laws as stated.

MS CARLSON: Can the minister explain why information on the proper storing of hazardous waste, or his education program, by metal-plating companies was sent out only after the company had been found to be leaking chromium for over six years?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, once we find the problem, we know there is a problem. We realize that this is a big industry in Alberta, and we felt we needed to educate the whole industry, not just deal with one particular company, and that's what we did.

MS CARLSON: Then, Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why a problem has to occur first before the department will conduct spot inspections on the storage of waste? We have many problems in this province.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not true. We conduct spot inspections all the time. We do spot inspections on water treatment facilities. We do spot inspections on all sorts of industries across this province.

I would like to point out that she said in her preamble that about 50 percent of the industries were found to be in violation, but most of these, Mr. Speaker, were minor violations that were readily and easily correctable. There was one major case that we have dealt with and will continue to deal with.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: can the minister tell us whether any spot inspections are being conducted on metal-plating companies outside of Edmonton at this time?

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have conducted spot inspections all the way to Fort McMurray.

MS CARLSON: Will the minister tell us if the department is conducting unannounced spot inspections of waste storage at industrial sites in Alberta as a matter of policy now?

DR. TAYLOR: We will continue to conduct spot inspections in all sorts of industries in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. But that wasn't my question. My question is: will Alberta Environment continue these inspections beyond this current round of inspections and conduct them as a matter of policy?

DR. TAYLOR: Yes.

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

Hub Oil Company Ltd.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a government of Alberta news release on August 8, 2000, the government announced that it was charging Hub Oil under the Occupational Health and

Safety Act for the 1999 explosion that killed two men and injured five others. That news release noted: "The matter remains under investigation by Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Alberta Environment and Calgary Police Service." My questions this afternoon are to the Premier. Have additional charges been laid or will additional charges be laid under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and/or the Criminal Code?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that I really don't know, and perhaps either the hon. Minister of Environment or the hon. Solicitor General can shed some light on the two questions that were asked.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I can comment, Mr. Speaker, on part of that question. I can read exactly the charge that was laid.

On or about August 9, 1999, in the City of Calgary, in the Province of Alberta, [Hub Oil] being an employer, did unlawfully fail to ensure that all equipment used on a work site, to wit: the Number 2 Distillation Unit, Number 2 Heater, heat exchangers and all associated piping, pumps and vessels, were maintained in a condition that would not compromise the health or safety of workers using the equipment, contrary to section . . .

And it goes into a lot of information on the sections. I will ask the Minister of Justice to respond on any further charges.

THE SPEAKER: No. We're going to move on here. If there are charges laid, this is public information.

The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Environment: is the minister stating that in the almost two years since the explosion nothing else has come from the other investigations?

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, a lot has come from investigations. This particular case is in the courts, and I can't comment further. Perhaps the Minister of Justice would like to comment.

THE SPEAKER: He can't either.

The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question, then, is to the Minister of Justice. Why did Alberta Justice in August 2000 support only one charge being laid under the Occupational Health and Safety Act? No other charges, just the one.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't directly answer that because the question of what charges are laid and what charges are proceeded with is in the discretion of the prosecutors who have access to the investigating file and the evidence that they know they can put before the court. What I can tell the House is that prosecutions as they go forward have to meet a test, which is essentially the test in all cases, which is: do we have sufficient evidence which, if proved, would result in a conviction?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Teachers' Salaries

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to show its ignorance and neglect of Alberta teachers' concerns. It has played cruel games with thousands of teachers by raising

expectations and then suddenly crushing them on the budget day with a 6 percent salary increase over two years. My questions are to the Premier. Given the deep disappointment that has been expressed by teachers, will the Premier reconsider his government's decision to impose this unfair policy of wage controls on Alberta teachers?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this government has treated teachers with neither ignorance nor neglect. As I've said in this Legislature, we value our teachers and we respect our teachers, to the extent that a line item was put in the budget guaranteeing the teachers of this province at least a 6 percent wage increase. That is, to say the least, a very unusual but very generous gesture relative to the compensation of teachers in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the Premier will benefit from a reality check. Let me make a challenge to him. If I make all the arrangements necessary, will the Premier commit to joining me in spending one whole day with a classroom teacher to get a firsthand look at how hard public school teachers work in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's the hon. leader of the third party who needs a reality check. The reality of the situation is that the teachers of this province are guaranteed at least a 6 percent wage increase. I can think of no other segment of the public sector that has been given that kind of guarantee.

Relative to spending a day in the classroom, Mr. Speaker, I would venture to guess that every member of this caucus, perhaps the Liberal caucus, and what remains of the ND caucus has spent time in the classrooms. It's part of our duty, our responsibility, to visit schools from time to time. I know that I've had the opportunity on a number of occasions to attend schools and speak to classes, and I'm sure that all my colleagues have had the same opportunity. You know, I can't recall visiting a school where I met a mad teacher or where the students weren't being given quality education and where there wasn't enthusiasm for the school and pride in the school. So we've all been there.

Now, I can't speak for the hon. leader of the third party, whether he's been there, but I'm sure that every member of this caucus has been in a classroom to enjoy the students and to appreciate the quality of education they are being given.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has turned my challenge down, I wonder: what does the Premier have to fear from spending one whole day with a schoolteacher?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have just said that virtually every member of this caucus spends some time in the classroom, and I spend most of my day with many teachers. I think there are maybe 12 or 13 teachers in our own caucus, so I have the opportunity of spending a lot of time and quality time with a number of quality teachers. They are still teachers. They'll always be teachers. I look at the hon. Minister of Community Development. I look at the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. I look at the hon. Minister of Environment. You know, I myself taught in the vocational system. I look at the hon. minister of aboriginal affairs. I look at the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I mean, it goes on and on and on.

Electricity Rates

MR. McFARLAND: Through you to the Minister of Energy I have a question, Mr. Speaker. Until September 2000 a rural power customer in Little Bow and other parts of southern Alberta would receive a power bill every two months from TransAlta. If there was a question or a problem, they simply picked up the phone and called TransAlta. Today, after at least two name changes on the billing letterhead, some of these same constituents are confused and upset with the quality, the accuracy, and sometimes the abruptness of utility company staff in responding to their inquiries. To the Minister of Energy: why should the utility company staff tell irrigation customers in my area and other parts of the province that they don't qualify for the 3.6 cent per kilowatt-hour rebate under the regulated rate option?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset of a very good question that as the new competitive market model came into place, TransAlta sold its customers to Utilicorp, which then sold the customers from Utilicorp to EPCOR. In fact, these three companies did not do a good job of customer relations, and I think they have to look closely at the marketing equation, the fundamental business equation, where the customer comes first.

Mr. Speaker, the balancing pool allocation regulation does set out the amounts of payments to both residential and nonresidential customers for the year 2001. All residential customers are eligible for a payment of \$40 a month in 2001, and nonresidential customers receive 3.6 cents per kilowatt-hour. Farmers, in fact, receive both of the credits. The residential versus nonresidential criteria are set out in the regulation and available on the Energy web site.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The second question to the same minister: why should utility company staff tell some of my constituents that, quote, power prices aren't going to fall below 11 cents per kilowatt, so get used to it, end of quote?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. In fact, the rate has been set at 11 cents for 2001. There is an opportunity for customers of the regulated rate option provider to approach the Energy and Utilities Board, because there is a process of review under way, and argue that the soft price cap is either too high or too low.

It is difficult, Mr. Speaker, to provide accurate forecasts of market prices. However, the weighted average for the month of May to date is 9.4 cents and the 30-day rolling average is 10.7 cents per kilowatt-hour. So in fact maybe we could just stop for a minute at the customer level, take that extra time as a customer relations representative and be able to put the accurate information in front of the customer and not use the age-old phrase: I don't know, but I think it's the government's fault.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final question on behalf of my constituents is: how many cents per kilowatt markup are these utility companies making on the initial 11-cent energy charge?

MR. SMITH: This is under analysis and is only completed under the regulated rate option with the approval of the regulator, who determines if costs are reasonable and prudent. There are 22

retailers interested in doing business. We need to see the retail market increase in size. We also need to I think take a further and closer look at the other charges, not only directly in the cost of electricity but the rate classification, load profiles, administration costs, all that ancillary basket of charges that in fact might be conceivably loaded onto the charges at the consumer level.

Mr. Speaker, as you get into the early sides of a new competitive market model, both from the department level and from a regulator level, we're looking at the issue very, very closely.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

2:00 **Underground Tank Remediation**

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question today is to the Minister of Environment. Is it the policy of this government that polluters should pay to clean up their own mess?

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It is the policy of this government or of this department that polluters do pay in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that the government supports a concept of polluters paying, why is your department subsidizing the cleanup of industrial contamination through the underground tank program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The underground petroleum tank program, the remediation work that's going on, is an \$80 million fund, and I can assure this House and all Albertans that there are no free rides in this province for anyone. To supplement what the previous minister had commented, we are committed to remediation to make Alberta and continue to have Alberta as the best environmental community and province in this country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the \$70 million for underground petroleum tank remediation only for oil companies and businesses to clean up their property, or will Albertans who are living on contaminated land have access to this money also?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The priority of this government has been dealing with a variety of remediation actions. One of them, first and foremost, is on orphaned sites that have remained unattended, and I am pleased to say to this House that the province is dealing with those orphaned sites in a very productive manner. The stakeholders we're working with are very pleased with the environmental remediation that we're taking action on as we speak.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Drought Assistance

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Bonnyville-Cold

Lake constituency has experienced very dry climatic conditions for several years. Water dugouts that store water for cattle are dry or nearly dry, and local streams, rivers, and lake water levels continue to recede. Farmers are presently replenishing the water in their dugouts if they are close enough to these local rivers and lakes. My question is to the Minister of Environment. In the Cold Lake water basin I am aware that there are industrial use moratoriums for drawing water from lakes and rivers. Mr. Minister, are there similar moratoriums for agricultural use of water?

DR. TAYLOR: No. At the present time, Mr. Speaker, there are no moratoriums for agricultural use in the Cold Lake basin, which includes not just Cold Lake but a number of lakes in that basin. We also have that lake and that whole basin managed on a long-term plan. It's called the Cold Lake/Beaver River long-term water management plan, and it is managed on that long-term plan. This plan does set limits, however – we must know that it does set limits – at which once lakes fall below a certain limit, then water withdrawals will not be allowed.

This is a very serious situation. We had a serious situation in Okotoks just today, Mr. Speaker, and yesterday about water in the Sheep River being at a level so that really Okotoks is in short supply of water. Now it's back up and flowing today, but with these dry conditions in the province – it's three years in 130 years, I'm told, that these conditions have occurred – we are going to face serious situations around this province for water supply this year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the minister of agriculture. If farmers are having difficulties filling their dugouts by pumping from local sources because of reasons such as distance, are there any plans in place to help farmers with a water hauling program?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we have offered water hauling programs in the past. It is one of the options that certainly we are looking at. When it appeared this spring that there could be a drought condition in this province, the Premier made a commitment, as did in fact this government caucus, to monitor the situation and to respond appropriately. Certainly what we have been doing, with the help of my colleagues in the House, is talking with farmers and ranchers from across this province, trying to get the intelligence from them as to what program we might put in place that would be the most helpful to them. Up to this point we have provided the \$3 an acre on pasture, which can be used certainly for that. We have provided \$10.29 an acre on cultivated land, which producers are free to use in any manner they see fit.

We're going to continue to talk with them and try to put something forward that would alleviate the problem in the majority of the areas of this province. But I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have not ever seen, at least not in many, many years, dry conditions that cover as much of this province as we do today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Gaming Expansion

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry of Gaming claims that while they review their regulations and policies, a freeze is in effect in gambling expansion. Yet while this freeze is in place, talks are being held regarding the proposed development of

a new casino in Sherwood Park. My questions are to the Minister of Gaming. Has the department given the Sherwood Park casino developers some sort of indication that gambling facilities will be expanding in this province after the review is complete?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December of 1999 the previous minister put a freeze on gaming expansion in the province, and since that point in time there has been a gaming policy review undertaken. It's anticipated that that review will be completed this summer and government will be making its policy known in that regard.

As it relates to the Sherwood Park matter, it's my understanding that there is a group that has been working in Sherwood Park with the municipality there, dealing with regular municipal matters. There has been no contact with the Ministry of Gaming relative to that particular site. We are not taking applications, and no offers or indications have been given to that group or any group with respect to expansion in the province at some future time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Can the minister tell us how many applications his department has received which are currently on hold for either new gambling facilities or for the expansion of existing ones?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated in the previous answer, there has been a moratorium with respect to expansion since December of 1999. Accordingly, the ministry and the AGLC are not receiving applications.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. When the freeze is lifted, will the minister commit that any increase in the number or size of gambling facilities in the province will be met with a corresponding increase in funding for gambling addictions?

MR. STEVENS: I think it's fair to say that a gambling addiction is one of those things that this government takes very seriously. In fact, the AADAC budget is funded entirely through the Alberta lottery fund, and some \$3.7 million for this fiscal year is being put into gambling addiction problems specifically. We continue to see that as a very serious issue, and this particular minister is committed to ensuring that the appropriate funding goes to gambling addiction matters.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Emergency Hospital Services

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans who have had experience with our hospital emergency rooms feel that service is slow and waiting times are long and frustrating, and many of them end up leaving without seeing a doctor. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister advise the House and Albertans as to what plans are in place to shorten waiting lists in our hospital emergency rooms?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I should say that I recognize that waiting in an emergency room can be a frustrating experience. But I have raised this subject with regional health authorities, and I believe sincerely that they're working hard, that they're putting plans in place to improve services in emergency rooms and reduce waiting times.

As an example, one of the things that regional health authorities are doing is improving their emergency triage systems and the protocols to ensure that those individuals who are most in need of attention on an urgent basis get that attention first. They're also implementing mental health triage and assessment tools so that those individuals who have mental health problems receive the care that they need.

Here in this city, Mr. Speaker, the 24-hour phone advice line known as Capital Health Link has provided an excellent service, in my opinion, that allows individuals who have difficulty to be able to contact a registered nurse 24 hours a day and avoid unnecessary emergency room visits.

Also, Mr. Speaker, on the capital side a number of emergency rooms throughout the province are being upgraded and expanded to meet not only the current but also future needs.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the initiatives that are under way to address waiting times in emergency rooms across the province. We will of course continue to work with regional health authorities in this regard to improve the service further.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Since many people visiting emergency rooms do not really require hospital care, would the minister support the opening of more 24-hour clinics in order to alleviate pressure on our hospital emergency rooms?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this may in fact be a very good suggestion to be applied in some cases. Certainly trying to deal with the issue of the use of emergency rooms for non-urgent needs is a challenge that we're always trying to address throughout the system.

Regional health authorities are taking different and various approaches to address the needs of people who need assistance when their regular health care provider is not available. Of course, individual physicians themselves set the hours of service that their clinics will provide. They've been encouraged by regional health authorities, however, Mr. Speaker, through recruitment and retention efforts to establish new office practices.

Also, under the primary health care project we're looking at different ways to deliver frontline care across the province. This project is in my opinion very, very important because it is aimed at making sure that patients receive frontline care from the most appropriate health care professional at the most appropriate facility, and often, Mr. Speaker, that may not be a doctor and it may not be at a hospital but at some other facility provided by some other health care professional.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: could the minister advise the House and Albertans whether or not the RHAs have the flexibility in their budgets to start these 24-hour clinics?

MR. MAR: Well, categorically, Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question would be yes. Regional health authorities do have the ability to use their global budgets however they deem appropriate to best meet the needs of the residents in the regions that they serve.

However, having the budget available to open such clinics as suggested by the hon. member may be only one of the required inputs. One of the other inputs, of course, would be the ability to staff such clinics. That could still be a barrier in the short term to operating the types of 24-hour clinics suggested by the hon. member, but we will continue through the primary health care project and through other venues and means to work with regional health authorities to find other ways of delivering an effective service for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Electricity Prices

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago I asked the Minister of Economic Development about a report by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters showing that higher electricity costs under deregulation would cost Alberta's manufacturing sector 31,000 jobs. The minister wasn't aware of the report, so I did provide a copy to his office. My question again to the Minister of Economic Development: what is his department's response to the report?

MR. NORRIS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question, and I'd like to point out again, as I did then, that electricity is but one of the many factors that go into production costs. In Alberta we are working on supply, and it's going extremely well. With the net migration that he's referring to, in the last two years there have been over a hundred thousand new jobs created in Alberta, so our department is working and continuing to work on that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the power price today is now running at \$185 a megawatt-hour, I'd like to repeat a question that the minister took under advisement two weeks ago. Can the minister name any jurisdiction in Canada where the delivered cost of electricity to small manufacturers is higher than Alberta?

MR. NORRIS: Well, as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I can. I don't generally like to put down other jurisdictions. In Alberta we tend to respect other people, and we don't like to criticize them for our own benefit, but there are numerous maritime jurisdictions that are charging far higher prices than us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know the hon. member will want to tell us which other jurisdictions have a lower business tax.

I do want to say that CIBC, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, has said that an important reason for the confidence that emerged among generation investors in Alberta is the province's practice of protecting residential and small commercial customers without distorting prices and inhibiting development of an efficient market. The member did accurately quote the price at noon today,

but he probably was taking notes of the answer to another MLA's question today that talked about the average moving down some 30 percent from January 1, 2001.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, given that the power rates in Alberta are averaging two and a half times the most expensive prices in Saskatchewan, for example, and given that the demand for electricity in Alberta in the 1970s grew at double the rate it did in the 1990s without significant price increases, can the minister explain why electricity deregulation has gone wrong?

MR. NORRIS: You know, Mr. Speaker, numbers are so deceiving. I recall the former leader of the Liberal Party just prior to the election referring to the number 43. I think she said that that was the number of seats they were going to end up with. I'd like the members to pass on to her that it's actually 4 plus 3.

The actual answer to the hon. member's question is once again that there are so many factors why people come to Alberta, not the least of which is that it's the best place to live. Saskatchewan people are migrating at a net migration far higher than they're leaving. So I'll leave it to the hon. member to figure out why.

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

Meridian Dam

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Environment is also responsible for approving new dam projects in Alberta. He has recently resurrected the discredited and environmentally unsound Meridian dam project, which is of direct benefit to his own constituency. In 1996 the minister, then an MLA, told the *Edmonton Journal*, "If you have to flood a portion of an ecological reserve to get the water, flood it, I say." My question is to the minister. Why should taxpayers have to shell out \$100,000 for a feasibility study into a project the minister already supports?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have to differentiate between a minister and an MLA. Perhaps in 1995 or 1996, which was my first term as a legislator in this province, I maybe said some things that I wish I hadn't said. I look along this front row and there are probably some other ministers . . . [interjections] Speak for myself, they say.

Mr. Speaker, this project has been on the books for more than 20 years. That's a fact. Nobody has ever done a feasibility study. When I say a feasibility study, I'm not just talking about a cost-benefit analysis and the benefits not only to Alberta, not only to my constituency but to other constituencies in this province. Saskatchewan would benefit as well. We've never done a feasibility study that looks at the effects on the environment, quite frankly, and that's what we need to know. That's what this study is about: if this dam were constructed at some future date – I want to make it very clear that nobody's saying that we're going to construct the dam – what would the effects be on the environment? That's the question we're asking.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much. My first supplemental question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Premier. Is the Minister of Environment flying on his own, or does he have full cabinet support for his decision to spend 100,000 tax dollars on a so-called prefeasibility study on the Meridian dam?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, ministers of the Crown are given a certain degree of latitude to conduct various studies that are associated with their portfolio. I assume that that's what the minister is doing.

Now, when it comes time to develop policy, then the minister will bring his report first of all to agenda and priorities. That report will probably then go to the standing policy committee that would deal with that particular area of policy. It would come back to cabinet, it would go to caucus, and eventually government would make a decision as to whether we would support a project.

Mr. Speaker, before any work is done on any project, you have to make a determination as to whether we should proceed. What are the pros? What are the cons? That is the normal process. Certainly every minister of the Crown has the latitude to initiate something, but the final decision of course rests with the government.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that this is just a pork-barrel project for the minister's constituency and cancel the \$100,000 for the so-called feasibility study and save the taxpayers' money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is an insult, an absolute insult to even suggest that this is a pork-barrel study. This is a very serious study that speaks to the fundamental and crucial issue in this province of water management. If this member doesn't think that water management is a crucial issue, then I would suggest that he has no social values whatsoever. You have to examine these issues. You have to examine these issues because water is our most precious resource in this province, and we have to make sure that we use it wisely and for the benefit of all Albertans.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We must look at water, as the Premier has said, in terms of the overall context of water management for the whole province. We need to have short-term goals, mid-term goals, and long-term goals. This is only one example. We will be doing more feasibility studies across this province on water management issues.

I would remind the member opposite that his socialist colleagues in the province next door have contributed one-quarter of the funding for this study.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Education Property Taxes

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I understand that because the province reduced the education property tax levy, most Alberta homeowners will see a reduction in their municipal taxes. However, the reduction varies from municipality to municipality. My question: if the reduction is in the provincial tax levy, why is the tax reduction not the same in all Alberta municipalities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two indicators on this that the hon. member mentioned are growth – and you know, there is lots of growth happening at a variety of levels across Alberta that we call the Alberta advantage. What I am pleased, though, to say to the hon. member across the way is that growth and also the issue of

the type of fair market assessment are the principles that we use. I'm pleased to report to the hon. member and to his constituents in the city of Edmonton that this year the majority, over 95 percent of them, will be receiving a 14 percent reduction in their property education tax.

MR. McCLELLAND: My first supplementary, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Should municipalities in the future expect the tax rebate to be the same across the province?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, because of those two indicators, such as the growth and the kind of fair market value that's taking place that we call the Alberta advantage, it's difficult, but what we want to be able to do is ensure a principle of fairness and equity for all municipalities across Alberta. We're attempting to do that. We're working on that, and we're going to continue to commit to the principles of fairness so that all municipalities, in dealing with this issue, are dealt with fairly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary is to the same minister. Will the education property tax requirement remain frozen at \$1.2 billion per year in future years, even though student enrollment will probably increase as our province continues to grow, and if so, how will education funding keep pace with need?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, a very good question. I'm proud to say that education funding continues to grow even though the education property taxes are dropping. I also want to say that the challenges are to balance the interests of municipalities, the associations, taxpayers while continuing to sustain a first-rate educational system.

What I will do is ask the Minister of Learning to supplement because he can speak of the additional funding with this growth that the hon. member has mentioned.

DR. OBERG: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Minister. First of all, what I would like to say is that despite the fact that the educational property tax is being frozen, there continues to be an increase in the amount of dollars that go to education. This year alone, for example, there was \$343 million more. The rest of the money has come from the general revenue fund, and this government has made it a promise that even though the taxation goes down with regards to the education property tax, this will have no influence on the amount of dollars that are spent in the Learning department.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Teachers' Salaries (continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On budget day the government provided information which purported to show that Alberta teachers will be the highest paid in Canada. The information has been used as the basis of an aggressive media campaign and appears to be without foundation. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Will the minister share his source of those figures?

DR. OBERG: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I have a table here, that I would be more than happy to table with the Legislative Assembly,

that basically explains the varying averages around the province. Where I believe the hon. member is headed is the notion that there are four school boards in Ontario that have higher wages. Yes, these are school boards in metro Toronto. But we felt it was a much fairer comparison if we took a weighted average of all teachers' salaries across our province and a weighted average across the other provinces. I don't feel that it would be fair, for example, to use the salary in, say, Fort McMurray versus the salary in Podunk Corners, Ontario. I believe that that just isn't a valid comparison. What we have done is provided apples and apples and oranges and oranges across Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta ranks fifth for the salary category in which the largest share of teachers are employed, hasn't the minister done exactly what he accuses the teachers of doing, cherry-picked categories?

DR. OBERG: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. Category 4, which is the majority of the teachers around this province: already, before the 6 percent, we are number one in the minimum salary, or level 1 on the salary grid. At level 11 of category 4, we are also the highest. Giving the 6 percent will allow us to be roughly \$6,000 more than number two in the same category. So there is no doubt that we are number one in the most predominant category, which is category 4.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister again table that information? Because my information is that we are third in category 4.

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, what I will do is I will read off the information that I was going to table. The rank of the minimum with category 4 at four years of education in Alberta with the 6 percent increase will be \$37,389. The next highest is \$35,182, which is British Columbia. In level 11 of the salary grid under category 4 the maximum will be \$62,879, with number two being \$56,543, a difference of a little over \$6,000. Here is the evidence. I'd be more than happy to share it with the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister, I understand, has tabled that document. Copies have been made for all members.

The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Highway 43 Twinning

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Transportation. With the government's commitment to twin highway 43 within the next few years, concerns are coming to me about the progress in Whitecourt-St. Anne. Presently in my area the only activity on highway 43 is resurfacing the already twinned portion near Onoway and the construction of a bridge over the McLeod River in Whitecourt. Will there be further progress on the twinning between Gunn and Cottonwood in Whitecourt-St. Anne this year?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that there will be continued progress on the north/south trade corridor.

There'll be a 14-kilometre stretch of highway going to tender soon with a completion date of June or July of next year but possibility even the end of this construction season, that will take us west of Glenevis to west of Gunn, and a further 11-kilometre stretch at Blue Ridge corner scheduled for work this year.

MR. VANDERBURG: My first supplementary again to the same minister. At Rochfort Bridge CN's overpass, which is presently one of the longest wooden structures in North America, will present a challenge. How will your department deal with another lane through this magnificent and historic structure?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, discussions are progressing very well with CN, and CN has offered in those discussions to replace a section of the bridge to accommodate the twinning of the highway. The new construction is scheduled to begin this fall unless weather conditions change it otherwise, but we will see progress on that bridge this fall.

MR. VANDERBURG: My second supplementary question is to the Premier. Mr. Premier, we talked a bit during your visit to Whitecourt a couple of months ago about the highway, but most of your time was spent in the classroom and in the school of St. Mary's. My question to the Premier is: I've had so many students, principals . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. member. We don't have preambles. The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Relocation of Burial Sites

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The discovery of human remains at the EPCOR Rosedale site a few days ago raises some additional concerns regarding the treatment of discoveries of this nature. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. When human remains are found in the province, what process is followed by the Department of Community Development to ensure that they are treated with respect and dignity?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure we would all agree that this is indeed a very sensitive matter, and we're all concerned that dignity be preserved in circumstances like this. I know in the case of the Rosedale EPCOR situation that EPCOR also has a policy which kind of parallels ours and that is for an excavation to stop immediately when human remains are discovered; secondly, to immediately notify the police; and thirdly, to call in a medical examiner so that all of those legal aspects are addressed.

From the Community Development point of view what we also do is engage in a process to connect with individuals and/or groups that might be known to be associated with the particular area or the particular group – maybe it's a religious or a spiritual group – so that proper, sensitive treatment can ensue thereafter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what precedents exist for how Alberta Community Development handles these types of situations and have done prior to this?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I think, Mr. Speaker, one of the more recent case precedents, if you like, surrounds the St. Joseph's industrial

school site in the Calgary area, indeed the burial site of several children in particular from that school who were there at the turn of the century and then passed away due to disease reasons or poor health care reasons or whatever. What happened in that case was that the local nations were contacted by Community Development and others. An agreement was arrived at to prevent any further erosion of the burial site, and they were properly and very nicely relocated to another centre under the strict supervision of the people in charge. That ceremony in fact just occurred, I believe on May 5.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member?

head: **Members' Statements**

Unified Family Court Task Force

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, it has been my privilege to chair the Unified Family Court Task Force, whose report was tabled in the Legislature today. We have recommended the expeditious establishment of a unified family court in Alberta which would exercise jurisdiction over all family law matters and would provide essential support services to people involved in family law disputes.

Mr. Speaker, I sponsored a resolution in 1999, which received the unanimous support of this Assembly, that government examine the establishment of a unified family court. Based on the extensive consultations conducted by this task force, I am now more convinced than ever that there is a need for a unified family court in Alberta.

Although the courts and court staff have done their best within the constraints of the existing system to meet the needs of family law litigants, there are very clearly sufficient deficiencies and gaps in the present system. People have told us that the existing system is too adversarial; one spouse is pitted against the other to the detriment of families. Mediation and other services are available to a limited extent, but much more needs to be done to help families resolve their legal issues with the minimum of damage, particularly to the children.

People have also told us that the existence of two levels of court for family law results in gaps and injustice. If one spouse starts proceedings in the Provincial Court, the other spouse can create delays by beginning a separate action in Court of Queen's Bench. The Provincial Court with its less formal procedures can deal with family breakdown where the parties are not married, but if the parties are married, the divorce must be handled by the Court of Queen's Bench. Further, Mr. Speaker, where the parties are unmarried, an order for child support cannot be obtained in the Provincial Court if the paternity of the child is in dispute. This is because only Queen's Bench can issue a declaration as to paternity.

None of this serves the public, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta deserve better. Our task force has proposed a single family court, and that would alleviate many of the problems. The unified family court is an idea whose time has come.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Independence of Judiciary

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the fundamental separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government in our parliamentary system. It is well established that in our system neither the legislative nor the executive branches may interfere with the work of the judicial branch.

Prior to the Act of Settlement of 1701 the King often beheaded judges if they ruled against him. A lengthy and acrimonious

struggle occurred between the King and the Parliament over the issue of the judiciary, resulting in the passage of the Act of Settlement. With this act the principles that judges are independent, that judges can only be removed on a vote from Parliament, and that judges' salaries are determined by Parliament were established. These principles are ones that we still hold sacred today.

I would urge all members of this Assembly as well as certain members of the federal House of Commons to respect the independence of the judiciary. It would be unfair for us as parliamentarians or as members of the ministry to criticize the judiciary as being unaccountable, because this is simply not the case. First, judges must excuse themselves from actions where they are involved with one or both of the parties. Second, litigants may appeal unfavourable decisions to higher courts, and lastly, almost all court cases, except under narrowly defined circumstances, are heard in full public view. In fact, the Canadian judiciary is held in such high international regard that many developing countries are modeling their justice systems after ours.

Just as Parliament struggled with the Crown to achieve its independence, so too do the judiciary. Thus it is only fair that we respect the separation of the different branches of government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Hinton Government Centre

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to speak on partnership. It's a pleasure to rise and speak of the opening of the Hinton government centre on May 15. It was an honour to be there at this opening as a representative of this government and this Assembly. In many ways the centre represents one of the most important goals of the government of Alberta. By providing a progressive, environmentally friendly, and energy-efficient approach, this building mirrors the ambitions of our government for the province of Alberta.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, the Hinton government centre was built in response to the burning down of the old town hall a few years ago. It was decided to construct a facility that would be functional and environmentally friendly. Made of energy-efficient material, this building would use less than half of a like-sized building that uses conventional material. This visionary facility also presented the partnership between the town and the people of Hinton and the government to provide the staff for the Department of Children's Services, AADAC, Sustainable Resource Development, Health and Wellness an ideal place to conduct their business on behalf of the people of this region. The government centre in Hinton is a fine example of what can be achieved when government works together.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this facility will be an important addition to the community of Hinton for years to come. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Bird Habitat

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Birds in Alberta are at risk as a result of environmental degradation in the province's foothills and boreal forest natural regions. Birds are valuable for many reasons. They are key components of numerous ecosystems and play a vital and economically important role in the control of insects.

Because birds bioaccumulate toxic chemicals present in our environment, they act as bioindicators for the detection of pollutants. In addition, expansions or reductions in the numbers and ranges of certain species over time faithfully reflect the impacts of human-induced landscape scale ecological changes.

All birds are the canaries in our environmental coal mine. They are early warning lights of impending ecological problems, yet we continually threaten Alberta bird life with habitat fragmentation and habitat destruction.

Alberta bird species whose conservation needs are cause for particular concern include habitat specialists such as old-growth dependent species, forest interior and area-specific species that need large, intact areas of forest in which to breed, and breeding species that are especially vulnerable to human-caused disturbances.

Of the 386 species of birds reliably recorded in Alberta, 183 are Neotropical migrants. These birds link us ecologically to the tropics, and we bear an international responsibility for their conservation.

What can the provincial government do? They can support a genuine endangered species act and endangered habitat wilderness act. No net loss of old-growth forests and minimizing habitat fragmentation and deforestation of the Neotropical migrants' wintering grounds would be an excellent start. We need genuine protected areas to be set aside in each of Alberta's six natural regions. I urge the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to address this very important issue.

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the Government House Leader share next week's projected business with us.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to share next week's business, because we will be finished with Committee of Supply. On Monday, May 28, in the afternoon under government business for second reading we anticipate dealing with bills 17, 18, 16, 19, and 20 or such of those that we haven't dealt with today and Committee of the Whole or third readings as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. for second reading as per the afternoon and then in Committee of the Whole on bills 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 11; for second reading on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act.

On Tuesday, May 29, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 1, 2, and 7 and as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading private bills per Tuesday's report, Committee of the Whole for private bills as per Tuesday's report, bills 20, 14, 17, 15, 16, 18, and 19, and third readings as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, May 30, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading private bills, Committee of the Whole as per progress made on Tuesday, third reading of Bill 20 and as per progress made on Tuesday as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, May 31, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we would invite Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor to attend on the House for Royal Assent on such bills as may have been passed through third reading at that time, including bills 3, 4, 5, 6, 20, private bills, and as per the Order Paper, and such other business as may be left on the Order Paper at that time.

THE SPEAKER: On the first of two points of order that I've been advised are forthcoming, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Point of Order Sub Judice Rule

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My points of reference for the point of order are Standing Order 23(g) and *Beauchesne* 509 and 510. In reference to the Minister of Environment in response to a question from the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on Hub Oil, the minister stated that the Hub Oil issue was before the courts and he was therefore not willing to respond to the question. I would refer you to 23(g) in Standing Orders where it talks about:

where there is a probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, [in sub judice matters] the rule should be in favour of the debate.

Beauchesne 509 references: "In doubtful cases the Speaker should rule in favour of debate and against the convention." And 510:

The Speaker has pointed out "that the House has never allowed the sub judice convention to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest or to the effective operation of the House."

We have numerous instances of pieces of correspondence from the Minister of Environment on this issue talking about a variety of violations. We have ongoing safety and environmental infractions. We have ongoing groundwater and soil contamination issues with regard to this matter, and we have two people who were killed in this particular matter. In addition to this, we have seen in this Assembly over the past two weeks the minister answering Hub Oil questions, other ministers having answered Hub Oil questions, and even the Premier, responding to the extent that his knowledge on the issue was present, answered questions on Hub Oil.

So our position is that in accordance with Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* that refer to not allowing sub judice "to stand in the way of its consideration of a matter vital to the public interest" or where there is any doubt, the rule should be "in favour of debate," we believe that the minister should answer the questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Orders do not say what questions must be answered; they say what questions cannot be brought up. It's clear under the Standing Orders and under *Beauchesne* that you cannot raise a question or enter into debate in a matter which is sub judice. The rules do not require a minister or any other person in the House to comment on something when they feel it's inappropriate to do so, and it may or may not fall within the purview of the Standing Order rule with respect to sub judice. It may be quite appropriate still not to answer a question because you don't feel it's appropriate to do so.

In the House today the question that was raised was a question directly related to the charges which were laid against Hub Oil, and the minister, in my view, quite rightly indicated that he was not comfortable speaking specifically to the question of the charges or the progress of the charges. That was quite in order. It may well have been a question that was in order, but it's also, certainly, the minister's privilege, right, and I would suggest, his obligation not to comment in those circumstances where he feels that providing an answer in that case or proceeding with discussion in that particular area would be inappropriate.

So notwithstanding that the sub judice rule may allow questions to be raised in certain circumstances, it does not compel an answer. As you have commented many times, no minister is compelled to answer a question, and in this case the minister quite rightly indicated that he was unwilling to provide answers under the circumstances, because there were charges before the courts, and he didn't wish to get into discussion on that.

To go further, Mr. Speaker, this was not a debate; it was question period. While, again, the discussion at an appropriate time and an appropriate place may have come up under the conduct of debate in the House, the Speaker may well not have ruled it out of order for it to come up in discussion, but it still would have been up to the minister as to whether he wanted to engage in that discussion and whether he thought it appropriate to do so.

THE SPEAKER: The Blues are very clear. A question was forthcoming from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I'd just quote from a section of the question: "Have additional charges been laid or will additional charges be laid under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Criminal Code?" The response from the hon. minister: "Well, I can comment, Mr. Speaker, on part of that question, and I can read exactly the charge that was laid on August 1, 1999," and he goes on to quote some sections from the charge that was laid.

2:50

Now, one can go on ad nauseam with respect to the sub judice rule, but very clearly, in a nutshell, from the date the charge is laid until a determination of the charge, we follow the practice that basically says that the matters would become sub judice and questions should not be proceeded with in that regard. That's the traditional approach we've taken on the basis of all the consultations that we have. *Beauchesne* is part of the consultation mechanism, and the whole thing has to be read in the context of the whole section and all sections with respect to *Beauchesne* and other parliamentary authorities. One should avoid just extrapolating certain paragraphs and staying in the context.

The flexibility that the chair would use in these regards: number one, it's quite legitimate to ask the question, "Has the charge been laid?" Once the answer has been given – "Yes, the charge has been laid" – then I think we should avoid with a great deal of prudence further questioning with respect to this matter until a conclusion to it has been reached, as we just recently had a situation here before the Assembly where certain charges were laid, then decisions were made, and questions were forthcoming thereafter.

There is no incumbent need for any member of the government to answer any question. That's a time-honoured tradition of the parliamentary system, and how that individual, he or she, might choose to answer a question is also subjective for that individual in the manner in which they would want to raise that. So the matter has been raised, I gather, more for information than anything else.

The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Actually, Mr. Speaker, on a point of privilege.

THE SPEAKER: A point of privilege?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Citations please.

Privilege Imputing Motives

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, during question period today the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands raised questions with respect to the Meridian dam project and, in raising the first question, referenced a benefit to the hon. Minister of Environment's constituency. I chose to overlook raising a point of order at that stage, although I think it would have been quite an appropriate issue to raise a point of order on.

However, in the supplemental question he referred to "a pork-barrel project." In the context of both of those comments it was very clear to members of the House and to anybody who might have been watching that he was doing what we've heard earlier this week being done, and that is impugning the integrity and the character of the minister and Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

I would refer you, Mr. Speaker, to *Beauchesne* 485 and 491. Sorry; I had it marked. No, that references unparliamentary language.

But I would refer you to page 86 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, where it clearly indicates examples of obstruction, interference, and intimidation under the Privileges and Immunities section.

The unjust damaging of a Member's good name might also been seen as constituting an obstruction . . . The normal course of a Member who felt himself or herself to be defamed would be the same as that available to any other citizen, recourse to the courts under the laws of defamation with the possibility of damages to substitute for the harm . . . However, should the alleged defamation take place on the floor of the House, this recourse is not available.

I've argued with respect to questions of privilege before, Mr. Speaker, and I think them to be very, very serious matters. The question of reflection on a member's integrity is one of the worst accusations that can be made. It goes to the very ability of a member to represent his constituents. If you do not have integrity, if you do not have honesty, if you do not have your character and reputation intact, you cannot be a member of this House and represent your constituents appropriately.

Therefore, the allegation, which is clearly there in the member's questions. The first question, talking about benefit to the constituency, one could take in many contexts, but when you combine that with the accusation of this being a pork-barreling project, Mr. Speaker, it is very, very clear that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands was accusing the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the Minister of Environment, of taking on a project for his own benefit. It clearly calls into question the member's character and integrity, and the hon. member should be referred, in my humble submission, to the appropriate committee of this House to investigate and to call him to account for those remarks and for attempting to take away, in the way these questions were phrased and the way the accusation was brought to the floor of this House, the reputation of the member in question.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members – and I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands – the hon. Government House Leader has risen on a point of privilege, which should not to be taken lightly and will not be taken lightly by this Speaker or the chair. This is not the same as a matter of a point of order. The points of order we try to deal with quickly and have them out of the way the same afternoon.

Now, having heard the statement made by the hon. Government House Leader with respect to this matter, the chair does not have the Blues and access to them because of the timing with respect to this question. There is no easy resolution to a point of privilege. Pending a full review of this matter, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you may either choose to make a statement now or await till Monday to make a statement pending a review of the Blues. An opportunity would then be afforded at the conclusion of question period on Monday for the hon. Government House Leader to further participate, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to participate, and any other member who would choose to participate on this review of the point of privilege, and no decision would be rendered today with respect to that.

However, in fairness to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands

and recognizing his parliamentary experience and the length of it, the chair will provide an opportunity for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to venture forth at this point if he chooses to. If he chooses not to at this point, then he will be recognized on Monday. That's entirely the hon. member's option. The hon. member should be advised, however, that there is a charge against the hon. member. The hon. member may choose to seek advice.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was expecting a point of order from the hon. Government House Leader, I am not prepared to deal with the point of privilege right now and appreciate your offer of deferring it until Monday.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Totally appropriate.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on a point of order.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

MR. MASON: Earlier in the response to the same question the hon. Premier suggested that under certain circumstances I had no social values. I believe that this is a contravention of Standing Order 23(j), when a member "uses abusive or insulting language" and would request that you rule on that point of order. Mr. Speaker, I can understand how such a suggestion might be made in the heat of debate or in the heat of question period, but anyone who has looked at my work in politics over the years would have to admit that that is not a correct statement.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, I'm tempted to even just ignore the point of order, Mr. Speaker, given the juxtaposition of this point of order with the previous question of privilege, which was a far more serious nature.

Obviously the Premier and I haven't had the benefit of the Blues on this one, but when he was commenting, he was suggesting that water issues in this province are of utmost importance. The management of water is a clear issue and an issue relating to social values just as important as any of the social values that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands might raise from time to time. I think the response that was given by the Premier this afternoon was very clear in the context that he was raising with the hon. member, that questions of water should be dealt with on just as high a plane as some of the other social issues that are raised because they're important to Albertans and different parts of the province have different issues that raise their level of importance for them. Water in the south is clearly an important issue. It was in that context that the Premier made the remarks that he made.

I don't think anyone in the House could have taken that as impugning the hon. member's character at all, and everybody of course knows where the hon. member comes from. His public positions from time to time on various issues have been very clear. The answer that was given this afternoon by the Premier very clearly was intended to indicate to the member that he should consider water issues as important as some of the other issues that he raises and wasn't, obviously, an impugning of the member's character.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, the chair was listening very attentively to what was happening. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands did not at the time advise the chair that there would be a point of order. The chair received that later by way of a memo. Normally, again, if there's a point of order, one rises and advises at the time. The chair, again, had great difficulty ascertain-

ing where there was an allegation made against another member at that particular point in time. The chair is however prepared to review the Blues and will provide additional comment on Monday with respect to this matter.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Committee of Supply**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

head: **Main Estimates 2001-02**

Environment

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd just like to remind all members that this is not a designated committee. Therefore, the standard rules that were agreed to by the House leaders apply. The minister will have 10 minutes to open debate, followed by one hour allocated to opposition members. If any of the government members wish to speak, they'll have an opportunity thereafter, and then the minister will have five minutes to conclude debate.

With that, I'll invite the hon. minister to open debate.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to be here this afternoon and go over my estimates and be able to listen to the fine members of the opposition that are here and hear what they have to say.

Just as we go forward, I'd like to introduce some people that we have upstairs. We have my fantastic deputy minister, Dr. Roger Palmer, who was with me in Innovation and Science and has kindly consented to come with me into Environment. I very much appreciate his advice. We have my terrific communications director, who wishes I didn't say some of those things I said in the past, Val Mellesmoen, who also came with me from Innovation and Science. Upstairs as well we have Alex Hildebrandt, who also came from Innovation and Science, and Bruce Perry. Bruce is part of our financial team that keeps us on the straight and narrow when it comes to our finances, and we certainly need that. Thank you for coming, folks. Why don't you folks all rise and we'll give you an appropriate welcome.

Anyway, it is a pleasure to be here as the new Minister of Environment. I can say, Mr. Chairman, that when I was first informed I was going to Environment, I was perhaps – how shall I say it? – a little surprised. I think there were a number of other people out there that are probably still surprised, some of my colleagues. But I'm very much enjoying it. I was used to a very strong economic ministry in Innovation and Science, in which we were driving a research agenda, driving a business agenda. Although I had general concerns, as one does, about the environment, I never really had to pay an excessive amount of attention to it in terms of what I was doing and some of my actions.

Mr. Chairman, now I think constantly of how we make decisions. I think constantly of how I personally make decisions: about my recycling and how I can recycle better at home. Actually, my wife is in the business of helping to train me, and my kids are in the business of helping to train me as well. So it's opened up a whole new world of experience to me.

One of the ways I'm using to help me make decisions is the fact that I have grandchildren. I will have grandchildren living in this Edmonton area after July 15, so when it comes to a decision-making process, when we're talking about Inland Cement or any of these decisions that we make, one of the questions, just one, that I ask

myself is: would I want my grandchildren living there? That's a very serious question to me because, as you know, Mr. Chairman – I think you've had the opportunity to meet one of my grandchildren once several years ago in the summer – these two little guys are going to live here in Edmonton, a six-year-old boy and a three-year-old girl. They are the smartest and best-looking grandchildren in the world. So the question I ask myself is: would I want my grandchildren living in the vicinity of Inland Cement? Would I want my grandchildren drinking this water? [interjection] I see that the Minister of Learning is greatly enjoying my conversation here with the group this afternoon.

That's an important question. If I answer that question and say, "No, I don't want my grandchildren drinking the water," or "No, I don't want my grandchildren living in that particular location," then the question for me, Mr. Chairman, is: why should your children or why should anybody else's children be expected to drink the water or to live in a location like that? That's a very serious question. That's one of the things that's helping me become focused, helping me to understand some of the significant issues that we are in fact dealing with.

I want to be able to hear from Albertans, quite frankly, and I'm making myself very available to do that. In fact, some of my colleagues were at a meeting I was at – it would be two weeks ago this coming Monday night – in a community hall here in Edmonton. I've forgotten the name of the community hall offhand.

MR. RATHGEBER: Woodcroft.

DR. TAYLOR: Woodcroft community hall. There were 250 or 300 people there, Mr. Chairman, and you may have seen some of the results on television. They very clearly told me what they were thinking at the time, and I very clearly heard what they were thinking.

We're going to do it in the same kind of format in the Exshaw-Canmore area a week from tomorrow night. We're going down to Exshaw and Canmore, once again, to hear people's concerns. I want to be very up front with people, I want to be very open with people, and I want to listen to their ideas. I want to hear: are there better ways of doing things? Can we as the Department of Environment do things in a better way?

Not only do we want to hear about actions, but we need to hear their feelings as well. We need to know how they're feeling about certain issues. It's been my experience, just from the one meeting that we've had, that people are not shy in telling us about their feelings. So that's why I'm going to do everything in my power, as we move forward, to make this ministry friendly to the people of Alberta. When I say friendly, you know, it's our frontline staff that has the largest contact with the people of Alberta, and we're going to work very hard with our frontline staff to make them listen to the people of Alberta and to be respectful to the people of Alberta and to be helpful to the people of Alberta. It's not enough for our frontline staff just to sit and listen, even in a respectful fashion. We have to learn to be helpful to the people of Alberta as well.

Now, this ministry has received many kudos in the past number of years and will continue to receive kudos for its professionalism, but we do get some criticism – and, I believe, legitimately so – because of the length of time of our processes. Some of our processes, Mr. Chairman, do take a long period of time. In fact, it takes too long, and rather than getting the results to people, in some cases we serve up red tape. I want to tell this House and I want to tell the people of Alberta that this process will change.

3:10

Now, because we're changing the process and speeding up the process, that does not mean we are lowering our standards. I want

to be very, very clear on that. We will maintain our standards or even make our standards more rigorous. What we are doing is reducing the amount of time that it takes for the companies, for the individuals to get through the process. Whether it's an Environmental Appeal Board hearing or whether it's an environmental review process, we're going to reduce the amount of time it takes to get through that process. It has absolutely nothing to do with lower standards.

We're going to seek outside public advice, Mr. Chairman. One of the first steps we will take is to appoint a new environmental advisory committee. This committee will be chaired by Moe Amery, and we will activate that committee. We will put some experts on the committee, but as a former Treasurer of this House said: we've got to listen to the Henrys and Marthas. We will be putting Henry and Martha on this committee or, as the Premier refers to them, severely normal Albertans. This committee will be my first line. When I've got some new ideas, when I've got some new programs, I will be taking the new ideas, the new programs or issues that the environmental advisory committee wants to talk about and listening to them. This will be a very activist committee, and I have some experience with committees like this. I was very involved with the Alberta science and research authority for four years, and I can assure you that it is an activist committee that advises the government.

I see you're just signaling one minute, Mr. Chairman, but I'm only on page 2 of nine pages. So what I will be asking for is unanimous consent to continue.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

DR. TAYLOR: I can't believe I heard that from a colleague.

We will be going forward with the environmental advisory committee and bringing the average Albertan in to provide advice not only to me but to the department.

Not only will we do this, but in this whole process we will become more transparent. It is necessary that companies and Albertans understand clearly the process. People have to know where their processes are, where their application is in the process. People need to be able to understand and see where their appeals and processes are. What we're going to move very quickly towards is a one-window access for such things as applying for a licence that may require a regulatory approval under the Water Act. For instance, Mr. Chairman, if you needed a water licence today in southeastern Alberta in the St. Mary River basin . . . [Dr. Taylor's speaking time expired]

Could I request unanimous consent to continue, Mr. Chairman?

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I regret that your request has been denied.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's nice to see that the minister has got some friends.

Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to participate in the Environment estimates this afternoon. First of all, I would like to say hello to the staff from the department, all really good people, people that, for the most part, I've had the opportunity to work with over the years. Certainly I respect their abilities, their judgment, and their commitment to the environment. Sometimes what I don't respect are the rules that they have to operate under based on the kinds of government policies that this government has brought forward in Environ-

ment, but that is an entirely different issue. I know that they do absolutely the very best job they can given the mandate that they work within.

The first few comments I have are with regard to the divisions in this ministry. Sustainable Resource Development is gone. Environment stays with limited kinds of areas of activity including environmental assessment and compliance, environmental sciences, environmental operations, climate change, and water management. What it looks like to us, Mr. Chairman, and only looks like because we don't have the details on this yet from the minister or his department in terms of the exact scope of his responsibilities, is that this minister is in charge of air and water and the decision-making that provides a base for discussing protection issues in this province, and those issues that relate to the province's ability to participate in moneymaking have gone to the Sustainable Resource Development side. I would like some clarification on that and some detail in terms of what the department sees now as their mandate and the scope of their responsibilities. If we could have that, that would be helpful.

The minister talked in his opening comments about the environmental advisory committee. The concept is, I think, a good concept and interesting. What will be primarily interesting here is how this unfolds. The other most recent committee that this department has been responsible for is climate change, and I think that that overall is working not badly. I do have some questions on that. I would hope that this advisory committee would follow suit and, also, at the very minimum work not badly.

I have some questions with regard to that, and that is: how does the minister expect to achieve a balance in terms of representation on the advisory committee? He talked about stacking it with average Albertans, so what we need here, Mr. Chairman, is a definition of exactly what average is. You can be average industrial supporters or you can be average environmentalists. There's quite a wide range of beliefs and standards that will be set and recommendations that will be brought forward depending on which side of the teeter-totter you happen to sit. So if we could get some definition in terms of that.

What I would expect to be happening on that committee is that we would see a fair and reasonable balance. The selection of the people to the committee is perhaps going to be absolutely the most important process that can happen with the committee. It is fundamental to the committee actually being helpful, complementary, and taking the best interests of the province to heart in terms of its membership.

We would expect to see some industry representation on that committee. We would expect to see some agricultural representation on that committee. We should expect to see some representation from either municipal districts or municipalities on that committee. We would expect to see some representation from environmental groups on that committee. We would expect to see people who truly have no direct ties to any kinds of interest groups, be they from any of those particular sectors, and we would expect that screening process to be quite severe in terms of establishing what ties people have to what places.

We saw during the special places committee assignments how easy it can be. Skewing of the representation on the committees can occur. It's very easy to say that you put someone on the committee who has a strong environmental interest who also has one or several other interests that would be deemed by environmentalists to be competing. I'm thinking of a person representing themselves in this instance as an environmentalist whose real, key interest is off-road vehicle trails or industrial development of some form or rezoning of some form. So I would ask that the minister be scrupulous in terms of the criteria he develops for the advisory committee and the manner in which he proceeds in bringing people on to that committee.

3:20

If it not only is fair representation but is perceived to be fair representation by people in the province, then there will be a lot of trust put into the committee, and it will have a lot of credibility. I believe the minister will find that a committee such as that could be immensely helpful to him and his department in the kinds of decisions that they're going to need to make in the future. So I would hope that in spite of the flippancy of some of the remarks we've heard from him this afternoon, he will take this issue seriously. I believe that he does in most instances take the issues seriously and that would be the case here.

We would also like, Mr. Chairman, some more information in terms of what the budget is for the committee, the breakdown of the expenses: who gets paid; what kinds of expenses will be reimbursed? Some sort of outline in terms of when they'll meet; how issues will hit their agenda; how resolutions will be made; if, in fact, there are resolutions or recommendations, how they are presented to the minister; any kinds of time lines on reports back or even bringing the resolutions forward; also any kind of benchmarking the committee is going to do in terms of measuring their successes or failures over time.

I think this is a serious and significant step in the right direction, and I will watch with bated breath as it unfolds and hope that it will actually achieve the objectives that will truly benefit the entire community, being the province of Alberta.

So, with that, I want to talk about one of the other comments that the minister talked about when he said in his opening comments that he wants to hear about better ways of doing things. Mr. Chairman, I think we have a few good ideas in that regard in response to the environment.

I have been the environmental critic for some years now in this province. It is interesting to watch the way things unfold and the kinds of filters that the government has used to make decisions and the lobbying that has gone on, both at the industrial level and at the environmental level, how money gets spent on lobbying, how people use different kinds of schemes and avenues to try and get what they want in environmental decision-making. What that has proven to me beyond a shadow of a doubt over these years of watching this is that the lobbying process that we have on environmental issues is completely flawed. I would hope that this minister, who I think likes to make a big splash and who has an opportunity in Environment to do so, would consider an idea that we are bringing forward in terms of supporting the sustainability of the province.

The idea is this. The objective here is to take the lobbying, the personalities, the dollars out of the decision-making process for the environment and instead provide a framework under which environmental decisions and, in fact, industrial and agricultural decisions can be made on a science-based basis as opposed to the kind of lobbying techniques that happen now.

How would this unfold? What needs to happen? We need to do an inventory of activity that's happening on the landscape in the province at this particular time. That inventory would include determining what uses the landscape is under and what pressures the landscape is under right now from an agricultural perspective, from an industrial perspective, from a people perspective, from a wildlife perspective, and from a plant life perspective. What is the current land use load in all regions of the province right now?

Once that has been established, then you can ask the question: is the landscape currently supporting the uses it has? I think that in some cases we can just say yes. In some cases we can say that the landscape is underutilized, and in some cases we will see that there is a burden on the landscape right now that is unsustainable. Perhaps in some of the northern parts of the region we'll see that the

landscape is underutilized from whatever perspective you take. There is lots of argument that in the greater Edmonton area the air is overutilized at this time, and the kinds of industrial uses and pollutants we're putting into the air now is not sustainable in the long run. I think you will find that some places in central Alberta are just fine the way they are and that they're very sustainable in the manner in which they are being taken care of.

As we do that, at the same time what we have to do is take a look at the province and decide what kinds of uses we want and where. Some of them are already mandated by us: the national forests, some of our provincial parks, and some other land uses. We already know what those are designated as, and we're quite happy with those. In other areas we have competing interests and aggressive lobbying going on by all sides for different kinds of use and sometimes integrated use at this particular point in time.

So, first of all, we decide what the land use is right now, and then we need to decide what is it that we want it to be used for. Then we have to decide: is that sustainable? Perhaps we need to move some of our industrial regions into different parts of the province. If they're not sustainable on an air, water, and landscape basis, then where do we go with development?

If we can decide that kind of criteria, it certainly helps us with decision-making in the future. Then it doesn't matter who's lobbying the government; there is a science-based response to the decision-making that goes on. If we find out that wildlife corridors cannot be multi-use facilities, then that helps us in our decision-making process.

I was at a briefing this morning with the staff from Sustainable Resource Development, and I thank them very much for the briefing. An interesting thing happened there. We're taking a look at a map of some proposed development at Three Sisters and its two golf courses. The staff are explaining to me how the wildlife corridors are going to be sustained through that basis. I'm looking at the map, and what I see are golf courses. What doesn't occur to me is that now golf courses in this province are multitasking. They're also wildlife corridors. This only happens in Alberta, Mr. Chairman.

MS BLAKEMAN: What do the golfers think about that? A moose just wandering through.

MS CARLSON: Well, often the moose do wander through and the elk and the ducks. We've got lots of Canada geese on golf courses in the mountains that have been beamed by golf balls. Well, what we need to do is put little helmets on them to protect their safety; right? It's hard for me to grasp the concept of golf courses as multi-use facilities, multitasking also as wildlife corridors, but clearly this is what is proposed.

This falls within the rules of the decisions that were made on this piece of land, and clearly to the best of their ability, the ministry will carry out and exceed, whenever they can, the expectations according to the rules. The issue is the rules, Mr. Chairman. I think that often they are wrong when it comes to actually being able to sustain different kinds of uses of our landscape.

So the filter can't always be industrial development in this province. The filter needs to be land base utilization and what is sustainable in the future. We change the way we make the decisions just a little bit to decide what is sustainable on the land base given the kinds of things we want in our life.

So what do we want? We all want good jobs. We all want clean water. We all want clean air. We all want some green space that we and our children and our grandchildren can access and enjoy.

If we use those as the criteria for deciding how we're going to carve up the province and then we back it up with some science-

based facts in terms of what the landscape can actually sustain, we end up with a decision-making process that is very clear, that is not open to lobbying by whomever has the ear of the government and is not open to protest by those who don't have the ear of the government. The decisions are science based and are sustainable in the long run. So when we talk about sustainability, I'm not talking about these three-year business plans that we see from the department; I'm talking about 15, 20, 30, 40, 50 years down the road. [interjection]

If you're going to sit here and stare at me while I'm talking, then you'd better be prepared to participate in debate.

3:30

MS BLAKEMAN: This is a cute trick.

MS CARLSON: Yes. They try to do this to me quite often. They think that it's going to cut down my speaking time or somehow otherwise interfere, and normally the chairman would interfere at this point and ask the member to take his seat and not be bugging me or otherwise providing interference in my speaking time.

Mr. Chairman, I'm looking for a ruling to remove this person who is not in his place while I'm speaking.

MR. LUKASZUK: You're not enjoying my company?

MS CARLSON: No, I'm not enjoying your company at all. If you want to sit here and bug me for the rest of the time, then . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would the hon. member please take his own seat? Thank you.

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. [interjection]

Yes, they do have to grow up. The peanut gallery over there likes to interfere in our speaking time if they can. But certainly that's not what we're prepared to tolerate, Mr. Chairman, and as the chair I'm surprised that you would be either.

To continue on with my comments in this regard, we have some interesting times before us in this province as the minister decides how he's going to move forward with this department. I think they're doing some very good things. We're going to see a long-term planning process, I believe, being put in place in terms of where they're going on this issue, so I hope that he and his department will take my comments under serious consideration.

This is an idea that I have talked about with many other people. Certainly in talking to the University of Alberta and their environmental department, they are quite prepared to participate in establishing science-based criteria for determining land load and for determining what is sustainable in terms of increased or potential land load in the future. So we then also take some of this decision-making away from the politicians, where people can say that the decision-making process is also skewed. We put it into the hands of reputable people who can do adequate research and provide a good foundation for decision-making. I think that's very good.

I've talked to people from industry on this, and in fact I have a commitment from some people in industry in terms of monetary support should this kind of a project go forward. So industry, too, is wanting decision-making to be made on environmental issues on a science basis rather than by lobbying. While they're winning the war on lobbying in this province at this particular time, they know that in fact that's not always sustainable, that the decisions being made are not always the ones they would choose as a first option. But they have to make some choices in terms of who gets the rights, and they're going for the brass ring, as they should.

I have talked about this idea with people from the environmental community. They, too, would like to see science-based decision-making on land load and land load use for this province. Also, many groups would be willing to participate in any manner that they can in terms of suggestions or more direct participation in this area.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would respectfully ask the minister and his department to consider this as a viable option. It's something that now, with the change in his department, he could move forward on and truly have some excellent results. He could go down in the history of this province as the best environment minister that we've ever had. He could establish a basis for decision-making that then could be taken not only by other provinces but by other countries as we move forward into a global economy where environmental decision-making will actually gain a larger portion of attention.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the next speaker, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thanks very much. It's a great pleasure for me to stand in this House and introduce to you and through you two gentlemen in the members' gallery. These two fellows I met about a year ago when we took on the challenge. They believed in me then and they still do, which is kind of a miracle, Mr. Chairman.

DR. TAYLOR: You shouldn't admit that publicly.

MR. NORRIS: I won't admit that publicly. The fellows in question are the president and vice-president of the Edmonton-McClung riding. They're as happy as I am that we have it back.

DR. TAYLOR: And surprised.

MR. NORRIS: And surprised, yeah.

I'd like to have them rise and receive the warm welcome of the gallery. It's Mr. Marty Raine and Mr. Ralph Henderson.

head: **Main Estimates 2001-02**

Environment (*continued*)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to join in the debate and questions for the estimates of the Department of Environment. I have to admit that I'm struggling a bit to track the way the government has divided everything up. Mind you, this government seems to like to change their structure and how many ministries they've got every 18 months or so just for fun. My understanding of this department now is that it includes air and water essentially.

As I look at the notes there, the "two core businesses are Environmental Management and Environmental Hazard Management", and these are to support their vision and mission. When I looked at the core values, this is the first time I've seen this: this ministry lists it

last – but nonetheless it's there – core value as "honesty, integrity and ethical behaviour." I thought: well, that's the first time I've seen that. Very nice to see, and I hope it's followed through with.

The areas that are of interest to me this time are the ones with increases, and what we've got is increases in environmental assessment and compliance, environmental sciences, environmental operations, climate change, and water management. Now, this is interesting to me, Mr. Chairman, because in Edmonton-Centre the environment consistently comes in as the third most often raised issue of importance to constituents. That's following health, education, particularly postsecondary education, and then the environment. Of course in the last six months the issue around energy, electricity prices and natural gas prices, have superseded all of those.

Consistently the constituents of Edmonton-Centre have been very thoughtful, concerned citizens of Alberta who in particular are concerned that we find a balance in the struggle between people and places and corporations and development. If anything, I think my constituents would prefer that we erred on the side of people and places. Although we live in the centre of a metropolitan urban city, we seem to share a deep concern for our environment and for the natural resources that we should all be sharing in as Albertans.

Now, as I start to go through the actual numbers in this department, a couple of questions. I'm interested in the ministry support services. I'd like to know how many FTEs are employed under ministry support services for this budget year. We've been given one number for the entire department, which isn't really helpful to understand how the breakdown in the programs happens. I've seen this as a consistent factor all the way across the estimates that I've looked at this year, and therefore I end up asking the same question over and over again to try and get some idea of detail about what's actually going on in these departments. We're tending to get a one-vote breakdown and sometimes a second-layer breakdown about what's actually going on under these program headings, but it's difficult to plow through. So a breakdown in the ministry support services, and I'd also like a breakdown of the FTEs by each of the subprograms that are appearing in the budget.

I look and I see a \$320,000 budget for the minister's office for this year. If I could please get the information on salaries: how many are full-time permanent, part-time permanent, contract positions, and, as well, the hosting expenses, travel, advertising, and telephone and communications, please.

Now, that's a comparison that I didn't do here, what I've seen in a number of the other departments that have been sort of broken off from what they were before. Environment in fact has lost some areas that they covered to Sustainable Resource Development. If that were the case, then some of the money from the minister's office should have gone over to that department, and I bet you it's the same amount.

3:40

The same question about the deputy minister's office budget. That's listed at \$312,000. I would like the breakdown of salaries there as well, the number and amount as to permanent positions, nonpermanent positions, contract positions, and the hosting, travel, telephone and communications, and advertising budgets.

One thing of interest to me is that there's a little less than a \$200,000 increase in the budget for human resource servicing, and I'm wondering if this is a signal that the department is looking to hire new staff for some particular project. The overall number of FTEs didn't change, but is the staff expected to decrease with a number of ministerial duties going over to Sustainable Resource Development? What's that \$200,000 buying us when we look at that increase in human resource services?

I'm also interested in finding out how many requests the depart-

ment received under FOIP in the last year. I note that this year there is a modest increase, so is the department expecting more applications in the 2001-2002 budget year? Perhaps I could get some clarification from the minister on that.

Moving to program 2, policy, program and standards. Again my question about the FTEs. Under the program for policy, program and standards, where are the FTEs allocated, please? What is the breakdown of FTEs by subprogram?

I'd also like to know why in vote 2.0.2 the capital investment is increasing from \$124,000 to \$794,000. Why is that? What is anticipated there? And some detail on the capital investment, please. Could I also get a comparison between what capital goods were purchased in 2000-2001 and what investments are considered or contemplated or anticipated for 2001-2002?

Looking at the budget for environmental assessment and compliance, that's increasing from \$3.2 million to \$6.2 million. That's a lot of money, \$3 million. Is this including additional staff? If that's the case, since we see the same total number of FTEs, what other area is losing staff?

The budget for environmental sciences, which is vote 2.0.4, is increasing from \$8.3 million to \$15.6 million, almost double. Again, what is this covering? Could I get some detail and breakdown about why we're seeing this? Is there a new research initiative, with this being here, that hasn't been announced somewhere, where we're waiting for a big announcement sometime later in the year when we need a diversion? What is this amount of money? Is it a volume increase for some reason? A higher anticipation of demand? What's the money for?

We've also had an increase in the budget for climate change, which is 2.0.6, and it's going from \$1.69 million to \$3.36 million. So some details and breakdown, please, on programs and initiatives that are funded under this increase and, with that, the accompanying staff assignment.

Moving on to program 3, regional operations. Now, this is interesting. All of the budgets for regulatory approvals are increasing except for the one for the northeast slopes region. Why is this budget decreasing? What is the difference between this budget and all of the other regions that are noted? Is something happening there that's not happening in this particular region? Could I get some details on that, please?

When I look at the next line items here for environmental enforcement and monitoring, again, all of them are increasing except for the northwest boreal region. Why is the budget for enforcement in this region decreasing? What's anticipated here that's not going to happen anymore, or correspondingly, what is anticipated to happen in every other region but this one that would account for their increase in the budget?

The third part of these votes is water management. We've got the northwest boreal region and parkland. Again, those two budgets are decreasing for water management, but the rest of the budgets in all the other areas are increasing for water management, so I'd like detail, please, on what's happening in each of these regions. Do they have more activity? Or what is the activity that's being decreased in the parkland and northwest boreal that they have need of less money?

Now a couple of specific questions here. Are the dedicated revenues in the various areas from the fees paid for water diversions? How is this money used within each region? Does any of the money go into research on water levels in the individual regions? I'd also be interested in knowing how many applications for water diversions had fees waived, and under what circumstances were the fees waived?

Can I also get information on what studies the department is doing

regarding water tables in the province? What is the status of our water tables? There's a lot of interest since Walkerton and then the more recent episode just across our own border in North Battleford and Saskatoon – I think it got that far – around water, plus there's an overriding concern from people that there might be some attempt to be selling water, which under NAFTA would commit all provinces to then be selling water. So both the potability of our water and our management of it as a resource have moved up on everybody's radar screen. Obviously our water tables are a big part of that equation. So I'm looking for more information about that.

Has the department done any recent studies on interbasin water transfers? Are water transfers being considered as a way to deal with drought conditions? That would be interesting.

Those were a few of the questions that I had. I know that I have other colleagues who are looking to bring forward additional points and concerns and questions on this budget, and I will make way for them.

Thank you for the opportunity.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to raise some questions about the budget estimates that are before us this afternoon from the Department of Environment. I wanted to start with some specific questions about the measures that are going to be developed. Page 136 of the business plan begins with a goal to develop a "credible set of environmental indicators," and it goes on further to say that this is "important for sound" policymaking. Then what follows is a number of goals and some targets that are being set for them. I guess what I worry about, Mr. Chairman, is the reliability of the measures that are going to be developed and the targets that are going to be set.

3:50

One of our experiences on this side of the House with the business plans is that they keep changing. They keep changing in terms of what is being monitored and what is being reported. Instead of what we might have expected, which was a continuous improvement of business plans from 1993 onward when they were first introduced as a tool by government, what we have is just the opposite. There's no track record. Every time a department moves, there are changes in the performance objectives, and we're left with the kind of budget that we have here, with very few measures that give us any real confidence that things are being monitored and that next year we won't be faced with business plans where things have been moved around again and we're asked to look at a set of proposals for targets. So it's a growing concern, I think, and it's one that the Auditor General has addressed in general to all departments. No matter how many times the Auditor General mentions it, life seems to go on as usual, and we have what we have before us.

I'm concerned about the reliability, the credibility, and the durability of the measures that are going to be put in place, and I wondered with many of these: who's going to be involved in establishing the indicators? I hope that it's going to be more than just an inside department task, that there will be a wide range of interest groups and authorities consulted in the development of the indicators, and that when they do come before us, they are ones that we have some confidence in in terms of what they purport to measure.

Every year we seem to go through an annual sort of exercise where one group across the country will rate the province on environmental matters as a D and then the department promptly

responds, "Oh no, it's not a D; it's really a B" and we go through this sort of foolishness. That's because the kind of indicators that are being used aren't accepted by all as being reliable and being valid. My question is: who's going to be involved in setting these indicators? Has consideration been given to setting up an independent group to develop and to monitor? I think that as long as it's being done by the department itself, it's always going to be open to suspicion that the data is being manipulated for government purposes. Again, my question is: has there been consideration given to putting in place an independent agency that could take the measures, once they're developed, and monitor them for environmental purposes?

Under the air quality index they have a report that over the last 10 years the Index has been rated air quality 'good' 97.6% (356 days) of the time. The other 2.4% are for days rated 'fair'. There have been no days [rated] as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Again, it's a very global index. I'm not sure how useful it is in terms of, say, people living downwind from refinery row. I know there is monitoring done in Edmonton and Fort Saskatchewan, but it's site-specific monitoring. How much of that is being done, and is it enough to make us confident that these global measures like the one that's being reported here are really an indicator of the kind of air quality that Albertans are experiencing?

The drinking water index I think will be welcome by all. We've all had our faith in the public water supplies shaken rather badly in the last year or so. I think the notion of having in place an index and having in place a method of constantly monitoring that water and being able to assure everyone that the water supply that we draw upon is safe and that we won't find ourselves down the road wishing that we had done something as a result of the experiences in North Battleford and Walkerton – so the index is good. Again, I'd be interested to see who's involved in putting the index together and who's consulted and how it can be used as a tool in local communities to report the quality of the index. Again, I don't think a provincial index is useful as much as an index in local communities could be.

The goal of bringing downstream water up to a better standard I think is one that, again, will be welcome. I was pleased to see a group of behavioural indicators being listed, specifically that they're going to get an indicator of "Alberta's progress in reducing the generation of municipal solid waste." The target there I would question. It says: "Continuous reduction of municipal solid waste going to landfills." That's a worthy objective. How fast is it to proceed, and are there going to be targets set so that no matter what the index is set at, we have some target levels in terms of reducing that amount of municipal solid waste?

The next one: "pulp production versus amount of biochemical oxygen demand discharged." There's a target that it "does not exceed 1.0 kilograms/Air Dried Tonne of Pulp." My question is: where does that standard come from? I would be pleased to know the source of that standard, that target.

Similarly with greenhouse gas emissions, it says, "New targets are being negotiated." Can we have some of the details of that negotiation? It says that it's "for achieving its 14% target." Just exactly what is being done in those negotiations? The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions: a number of voluntary organizations, they indicate, are part of that effort. Can we have an indication of who those voluntary groups are in this project?

The climate change concerns raised on page 138, particularly goal 1.1, is again, I think, a welcome addition. One of the activities that they're going to undertake is under the fourth bullet, which is: "Set clear and enforceable standards and guidelines for landscapes (air, land, soil, water quality and biodiversity)." Again, very important measures. My question is: who is going to be involved in determin-

ing those standards, and will we be assured that they are standards that are acceptable and recognized as being acceptable and won't be open to constant challenge by one group or another once they are implemented?

4:00

I had something on management. The goal is to make decisions "about allocating resources through approvals, dispositions and licences and ensure compliance with those decisions." I think that has been raised in past budgets. I know it was raised last year when we looked at this department's estimates. I know they completed a survey of users some time ago, and I wonder if the results of that survey have been reported elsewhere. I don't recall seeing it. It doesn't mean that it's not there. I know there was a survey undertaken by the department where it asked users of the department's services to rate the department in a number of areas, and I would appreciate being able to see the results of that survey.

There were some indicators before that survey was taken that approval time lines were inordinately long in some areas and that particularly when it came to individual Albertans, their requests were put on the back burner and could linger for months and in some cases even years before they were addressed. So if that information is available, I would appreciate having a copy.

Over on page 140 the department takes on the responsibility of "environmental hazard management" and talks about flood prevention and damage to property due to drought being mitigated. Then it has, "The safety of individuals utilizing public land is supported by an effective and efficient system of responding to events and incidents that may threaten life or health." I wondered just as a matter of curiosity if they have considered warning systems for Albertans at public use sites? I think particularly of Pine Lake and the tornado that struck there. The ensuing losses could have been prevented had there been a warning system in place. My question is: is that part of this budget? It may well not be, but seeing that there is this environmental hazard management portion of the budget, I would be interested in that.

I'd like to go back to some questions that were raised last budget time, Mr. Chairman. These are some specific questions about the emissions from gas flaring and from gas plants. There was some work being done. I know the government was making some progress, and I wonder if we could have an update in terms of what's being done in that area to reduce emissions from flaring and from gas plants.

In terms of the accidental risks – and this is where sour gas wells come into play – what protection is in place for Albertans in terms of accidental emissions from sour gas wells and particularly those that are close to populated areas in the province?

There was a lot of work done on the northern river basins study, and it was the subject of a number of questions in the Legislature and a number of questions in last year's budget. Could we have an update on the recommendations that were made in that study? Is there ongoing monitoring? What is the state of the ongoing monitoring? I know that there was some work being done in conjunction with the federal government as a result of the study. Could we have an update on the progress of that work?

One of the concerns that was raised was the fisheries. Has there been any more work done in that area? There were fish advisories on some of the rivers due to high levels of mercury and dioxins. Can we have an update in terms of what has been done?

The other area I'd like to ask about before my time is complete, Mr. Chairman, is the Cold Lake area. Again, it is an issue that was raised in question period and at budget time. What is the state of the water supply in that area? What activities have been undertaken?

What kinds of preventive measures have been put in place to ensure that the quality of that water remains one that people are comfortable with and should expect?

The Pine Lake landfill was poorly sited, and because of its siting, there are hazards in terms of the water table. I wonder who's responsible for the monitoring of those conditions. Are inspections being made? Just what is the state of not only the Pine Lake landfill but also the Ryley landfill? What monitoring has been undertaken by the department? How often are on-site inspections undertaken? Those are two specific landfills.

The other area is intensive livestock operations. I'm not sure that all of these are in the department now, Mr. Chairman, but if they're not, maybe I can receive some direction from the minister in terms of where the questions should be directed. I remember at the time of our last budget the size of the livestock operations was a problem in that it seemed that the size selected for monitoring was very large. The question is: what is done in terms of smaller livestock operations? Are they monitored? How can people be assured that there isn't a cumulative effect from a number of smaller operations that the department wasn't going to monitor in the past?

I think maybe that's the end of what I have for this round, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the few minutes remaining to me, I'll touch on a number of issues of particular importance and priority for me. This is obviously a department with a very high public profile, high public concern. The number of questions that have gone to the minister in question period I think reflect that. I'm sure the minister will be kept extremely busy during his time as Minister of Environment.

4:10

One of the puzzles in this department that I haven't quite solved is how some of the responsibility for the land has been shifted out of the Department of Environment and into the department of sustainable development. I'm concerned that that reflects a view of the environment that fails to recognize the integration of all of the different components of an ecosystem. So I would be curious to know more detail about how the line is drawn between the responsibilities of this department and the responsibilities of the department of sustainable development.

The number of high-profile issues that come up under this are many. I'm thinking back just to the last few weeks, the issues of high public concern that I've heard about and that have come up in this Assembly: the intense debate over the Inland Cement proposal to burn coal and the issue of the Meridian dam that has come up repeatedly both in the Assembly and in the press, the widespread concern over water quality, the media coverage and debate in this Assembly on the Ponoka dump, on the deterioration of Lake Wabamun. Those are all issues of high public concern, both in the Assembly and outside. I'm sure the minister has the necessary light touch to handle them, but it will be keeping him busy, and it's a good thing he has over \$100 million to address them as the year goes on.

Relating to all of these are some broader issues such as climate change. Certainly climate change is an issue of national and international concern. As we look at the drought that's intensifying here, there are questions, of course, to be raised. Would this have occurred regardless of human impact on the environment? Whether the link is there directly or not between the weather we have at any

given time, the issue of climate change is not going to go away and is likely to accelerate as we see more and more evidence supporting the fact that climate change is under way and is likely linked to human activity.

As critic for the health department I'm also concerned about the public health aspects of the work of the Minister of Environment, and certainly those relate back to public concern over pollution, emissions, water quality, and so on. I would encourage the department, when they speak of integrated practices and integrated delivery and so on, to ensure that their perspective includes health and that their resources in the budget are committed to keeping health in mind and to working closely with the regional health authorities and the department of health.

There is a long list of business practices. I'll only mention one right now: science-based decision-making. I commend the department and the minister for that. I think we would all support that. I am concerned, of course, as undoubtedly the department is, over the quality of science and the source of science. For example, we need only look at the issue of coal burning to realize that the science is very contradictory, and the source of the science seems to relate to the nature of the argument that is put forward. So the support for the science is important, and I would encourage the government to seek as independent sources of information as is possible. Relying on the coal industry for science on the safety of burning coal is fine up to a point, but it needs to be recognized for what it is.

Key strategies. I commend the key strategy under goal 1.2, working with aboriginal communities.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt, but your time has elapsed.

Before I recognize the hon. minister to conclude debate, are there any other members who wish to speak on this estimate?

The hon. minister to conclude debate.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm actually very pleased to hear the comments from the members. They are in *Hansard*, and we will take the comments seriously. We did have some staff up there listening, but as I said, they are in *Hansard*, and we will respond and give you appropriate responses to the comments you made through a thorough review of the *Hansard*. I thank you all for your comments and time that you've taken in somewhat of an unruly forum on occasion. As I say, the value of *Hansard* is obviously evident because some of my members perhaps didn't hear your comments, but they'll be able to read them, and we will respond to them.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the business plan and proposed estimates for the Department of Environment, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:
Operating Expense and Capital Investment \$117,225,000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that the committee rise and report the vote and, parenthetically, not seek leave to sit again any time soon.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

Resolved that a sum not exceeding the following be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, for the following department.

Environment: operating expense and capital investment, \$117,225,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that the supply estimates have all been reported and in keeping with the past practices of the Assembly, I seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly to revert to the Introduction of Bills to allow for the introduction of Bill 20, Appropriation Act, 2001.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2001

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 20, the Appropriation Act. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a first time]

4:20

head: **Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 19 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

MR. STEVENS: It's my pleasure to move on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice second reading of Bill 19.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have reviewed miscellaneous statutes in conjunction with the government and certainly support what is within that bill and will be supporting it at second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a second time]

Bill 17 Insurance Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to move second reading of Bill 17, Insurance Amendment Act, 2001.

The scope of Bill 17 is to provide for the regulation of employees of insurers who adjust insurance claims, commonly referred to as staff adjusters. It also provides for the attendance of witnesses to give evidence at regulatory hearings.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair]

On the first part of the bill, relative to staff adjuster licensing, it can be said that Bill 17 achieves the same objective in the new Insurance Act, which comes into force September 1, 2001, under which the regulation and licensing of employees of insurers who adjust insurance claims is provided for. Under Bill 17 the objective is achieved differently, and I'll speak to that now.

The new Insurance Act which, as I mentioned, will come into force September 1, 2001, would require employees of insurers, staff adjusters who adjust insurance claims, to be licensed as insurance adjusters similar to independent adjusters who are now required to be licensed. This was done, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that insurers' employees are qualified to handle policyholders' claims and also to ensure that such employees comply with the market conduct rules in the new Insurance Act.

In the face of this, however, insurance companies argued to government that they are in fact responsible for the conduct of their employees and that it was therefore not necessary for government to license insurers' employees to ensure compliance with the Insurance Act. Consequently, after much discussion with industry, it was decided to remove the licensing requirement for insurers' employees but still make the employees subject to the market conduct rules in the new Insurance Act.

This is achieved in the following ways: by codifying that regulatory action will be taken against the insurer who is the employer of the adjuster if the employee adjuster in the course of adjusting an insurance claim breaches the Insurance Act; secondly, it will give the minister the power to order an insurer to stop using a particular employee as an adjuster if that employee is found to be incompetent or consistently breaching the Insurance Act; thirdly, it will provide regulation-making power for claims settlement practices by adjusters.

A consequence of Bill 17 will be that it will remove the need to license over 2,500 employees acting as staff adjusters and therefore avoid the associated regulatory cost while at the same time providing an effective mechanism to ensure that employees of insurers who adjust claims are qualified to do so and that they comply with the prescribed claim settlement practices. That deals with the first part of Bill 17.

The second part, which is the provision to require witnesses to provide information at hearings, gives the minister and appeal boards appointed under the Insurance Act the power of a commissioner under the Public Inquiries Act to require a witness to attend and give evidence at regulatory hearings. This power is necessary to enable the regulator and appeal boards to gather all relevant evidence before making regulatory decisions. Similar powers are in the current Insurance Act, and Bill 17, therefore, refers to the appropriate provisions in the Public Inquiries Act to ensure that the rules for procedural fairness in that act are also applicable to the power in the Insurance Act.

That, then, Mr. Speaker, is the substance of the contents of Bill 17.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to be participating on Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001. This is an interesting bill. What we have seen develop from the time that this bill was printed, had first reading, and was distributed to members here in the Legislature is interesting feedback from stakeholder groups. We've sent the bill out. We've talked to a number of organizations and other people who could or would be directly affected by this particular bill, and the longer it stays out there in the public domain, the more concerns we have coming forward from particular interested parties.

Given the nature of these concerns that are starting to come in – and some of them look like they need some additional research – we are hoping that this is one of the bills that will be held over until the fall, Mr. Speaker. We are hoping and expecting to be able to spend some time over the summer consulting more extensively with people. It looks like I'm going to need some amendments to the bill. That's what we're starting to hear out there. There really hasn't been enough time to get the details on this at this time, so it's our expectation that we wouldn't want to pass this bill in committee. [interjection] I understand what the minister is saying. [interjection] Yeah, if you want to heckle me, then I can go 20 on this, or I can go 10 if you don't heckle me, so it's your choice.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member for Edmonton-Ellerslie does have the floor.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are, as I was about to get to before I was interrupted by the minister . . .

DR. MASSEY: Which minister?

MS CARLSON: Yes, which minister is a good question. Both of them.

MRS. NELSON: Oh, name names.

MS CARLSON: I'm polite. I'm not going to go there yet, but keep it up. We could go there.

I think there are some good things in this bill, Mr. Speaker, and I do acknowledge the long consultation process that has been involved with the industry on these issues. I do think that the key substance of the bill and the overall intent of the bill, which is what we're speaking to today in second reading, is commendable.

What I did state – and perhaps the minister wasn't paying attention at that particular time – was that I thought that there were going to be some amendments that needed to be brought forward. What we find is that the most proactive way of dealing with issues like that is if we get some detail and some substance from people in the community with regard to the kinds of amendments that they would like to see, then we could work in conjunction with the sponsor of the bill and have the sponsor bring forward friendly amendments that would enhance and strengthen the legislation and would be acceptable to all parties directly affected and certainly to all members of the Legislature. So that would be the kind of progress we're looking forward to in this instance.

4:30

It's nice to see strong legislation passed in the Legislature, and sometimes an amendment or two can achieve that purpose. That would be where we would expect this particular bill to go, and it certainly would be our hope of where it would go. Our critic for

this, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, is certainly willing to take a look at working with the sponsor of the bill in terms of strengthening this.

The requirement that adjusters who are employees of insurance companies need to be licensed is removed. I'm not sure that I particularly agree with that. I think that's a highlight of this bill, and I have some concerns about that in general. There was some explanation by the sponsor with regard to that, and I'm looking for more feedback from people that I have talked to about this. So that's an interesting point.

Also, it makes clear that insurers are held responsible for the actions of adjusters who are their employees. There's no doubt that all of us who have had some involvement in advocacy work at the constituency level have had issues with adjusters who are employees. So to have a flow-through of responsibility is excellent, and certainly that's a part of this bill that we can support.

That this bill also gives the minister or an appeal body the power to call witnesses to give evidence at hearings and appeals under this act seems overall to be a positive move. Certainly it seems like we have support for that at this particular point in time.

This bill is really entitled an amendment act. Amendments are supposed to be minor changes, and for the most part I think these can be identified as minor changes, and that's positive.

The licensing one I think is the key issue here and is one that people have in general supported. We've seen that this is the response to concerns heard from the industry during the debate we had back in 1999 on the Insurance Act as it was brought forward. So it's good that the government is responding to the concerns of industry stakeholders in this regard. We're wondering where the rest of those amendments would be in terms of the other concerns that were raised by stakeholders during the consultation process on this act. If we could get some explanation from the sponsor of the bill in terms of why these were not addressed, that would be helpful to us.

Some of those were eligibility on sole or primary occupations. What we heard there was that licensing regulations will no longer restrict insurance agents from engaging in other occupations except where other occupations place the agent in the position of conflict of interest. You know, scrupulous people follow these rules to the letter, and in some instances it compromises their ability to make a living or to provide services that are complementary but not in conflict. I can think of several instances in that circumstance. So that's an issue that I think needs to be addressed.

Can an insurance agent sell real estate? I don't see why not. Can they do something in direct conflict? Well, I think that's a different issue. Certainly in my constituency I have heard issues over the years where agents – perhaps not themselves, because that would definitely be against the law – have someone directly related to them, be it a close associate, a business partner, or a family member, who does engage in positions of conflict, what could be perceived or real positions of conflict. So that's a problem.

Those things have been ongoing. What we need to do is make sure that the rules are in place for those people who do like to follow the rules, Mr. Speaker. I think that's an amendment that could have been brought in here that would have been quite easy to address and include in this particular act. Government believes that a prohibition against insurance agents from engaging in other occupations is anticompetitive and a barrier to new agents entering into the insurance business, so it's another argument in favour of having included that particular amendment in this legislation. We're wondering why that didn't happen. I think they're probably right, and I think we could have supported that had we seen it come in here.

From stakeholders we hear that they're concerned that the full-

time sole-occupation provisions have been removed and is of particular concern as it pertains to the level 1 licensing of insurance agents. You know, I've had quite a bit of correspondence from people on this particular issue. I've received a number of e-mails and letters, certainly not the highest volume that I've ever seen in my time in this Legislature but enough to make me pause and go back and reread the material and hear the two conflicting sides to this story. I think that's interesting and would appreciate hearing from the sponsor of the bill in terms of how they address that particular issue and why they felt it was important to leave it out.

There's a thought among stakeholders that there's a need for beginning agents to master the foundation of knowledge and skills involved with the process, that they need to have some depth to their ability to do the job, and that consumers have the right to advice and services from an insurance provider who is fully committed to satisfying the needs of the clients. So in terms of the argument on why they shouldn't be able to multitask in their jobs, that's what we hear from stakeholders. I think that can be valid, Mr. Speaker, and we would like to see some provisions in there in terms of the length or kinds of training provided to these folks before they have the right to advise and provide service. I think there can be issues around that, and I'm sure my colleagues will talk about the education component of what could have been put in this bill at some depth. It's an issue that's also important to me. I've heard from numerous stakeholders in terms of it being an issue that needs to be addressed. So if we could get some feedback from the sponsor of the bill in that regard, that would be excellent.

We also heard that Alberta practitioners may not be able to obtain reciprocal nonresident licensing opportunities in other jurisdictions that continue to adhere to the full-time sole-occupancy rule. I'm not sure we buy that argument in this province as a reason for not having it in the legislation, Mr. Speaker, but it's something that has been brought forward. I think there are always ways around that provision if that's where you want to go, and I think there are some good reasons why other jurisdictions would take a look at them being sole practitioners based on evidence of past performance within the industry. I think that's an argument that isn't really one that I support.

We've also heard from stakeholders that Alberta licensing regulations uphold the sole-occupation requirement for level 1 insurance agents and provide that the regulator suspend, revoke, or refuse to renew a licence if during the term of the licence that level 1 agent has breached a condition of sole occupation, of course a rule that only applies if sole occupation becomes a key issue. There are, as I understand, thousands of insurance agents throughout the province, or people involved in that employment, and this could have a profound effect on their ability to make a living and perform their duties.

4:40

We've heard some instances where people who have the licensing facilities now would also like to be insurance providers. Should the sole-occupation provision be removed? I think there need to be some pretty strict rules in terms of what is a conflict and what isn't a conflict. I would say that operators of the licensing bureaus would be in direct conflict in this instance because they would have a significant advantage in terms of providing service. Then you take a look at other players in the industry, and you wonder if they don't have a direct advantage right now. People who do road testing or provide insurance and related services are a good example. I think we can use grocery stores and liquor licences. We've heard that argument in this Legislature before. It is another good example where it certainly looks like there is a direct advantage being given to a particular provider of service.

I think that should this go forward, then, there needs to be some

good thought put into what the framework for deciding what conflict of interest is, Mr. Speaker, and the question would be: who would be deciding that? Do we need to put together an advisory committee? Which ministry handles that? How long does the process take? What's the process for public debate? Does it come back to the Legislature? Is it done through regulations? I think those are all the kinds of questions and issues that come up around that kind of point.

We heard, too, from some stakeholders that they believe that a list should be established in the legislation of prohibited occupations that are deemed to expose a client to the risk of undue influence. What they say is that these precluded occupations could include professional advisers such as doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, mortgage brokers of credit-granting institutions, and full-time government employees. Well, you know, we would support that, Mr. Speaker, but I know this government is never going to go there. They don't do anything, or they do as little as possible, through establishing it in legislation. This is a government that likes to bring in blank-cheque bills and then decide what the rules are going to be by regulation, behind closed doors.

That was the basis for my previous comments in terms of what would be the process to establish what the rules of conflict would be. We're not going to see that here in the Legislature, and I'm not so naive, after all these years of participating in this process, to believe that the government for one second would undertake that kind of a process. Should it happen, it would be done by regulation. It would be done behind closed doors. I would hope that before the decisions were actually made, there would be some sort of a consultation process put in place.

It would be nice to see if the recommendations were made public and input and feedback provided on those prior to the regulations actually being passed by order in council. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that that would not be in keeping with the habits or the traditions of this particular government, but it would be nice to see that it would happen. It certainly would be a point of cleanup and something that we would support seeing. It would be, I think, something that would be a very positive action for this government to undertake. So I think those are some interesting comments there.

Some of the coverage that we've seen on this particular bill has been that there are tough new insurance laws coming forward. I don't know if these are particularly tough. I think they do strengthen the bill, and that's positive in nature, but it isn't the toughest legislation, I don't think, that I've ever seen.

It is talked about as being the largest piece of legislation ever. I'm not sure that that's true either. I think we've seen some other legislation come forward that is further reaching than this, and particularly what comes forward as those kinds of comprehensive bills are amendment bills. Generally when they come forward, it is nice to see that they have gone through a relatively rigorous process in terms of involving stakeholder groups.

Given the feedback that we've had from people in the community on this, Mr. Speaker, I would like to pose the question of who the government included in their decision-making bodies as stakeholder groups, because it seems like there's a whole sector that has been missed in this process. So if we could just get that question answered before we get to committee, it would be helpful for us, because when we take a look at it, it seems like there are a few pieces of the puzzle that are missing.

I'd like to applaud the government, though, for having undertaken this review, for having stuck with it, and for taking a really old piece of legislation that in many ways was outdated, over 80 years ago that it was brought in – that is progressive and certainly good to see. If they could take that same kind of proactive approach to reducing regulations in this province, that would be an excellent step forward

and something that we could applaud. So I just applaud and support and throw that out there in terms of the government taking a look at other things that need to be reviewed.

We've got some old regulations on the books that are time consuming and cumbersome and a complete waste of people's time. Regulations and paperwork are the number one complaint we hear from small business owners, many of whom are insurance agents and who are party to those kinds of concerns. So we would like the government to consider undertaking that task now that they have completed the task of the Insurance Act. Hopefully we'll see that the sponsor addresses a couple of the amendments that we think will be coming forward from this.

One of the things that's really good about this act . . . [Ms Carlson's speaking time expired] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. A couple of issues that I wanted to raise around this bill. Now, I understand that Bill 17 is in fact tweaking, making a few adjustments to the major change that happened to the Insurance Act in 1999, which was about an inch thick and covered a whole change in the Insurance Act, which I think hadn't been changed since 1913 or something. This Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001, is a few small considerations that are being made to adjust that.

I have some concerns that flow out of what's being suggested here and flow back to what was not included in the Insurance Act, which was known as Bill 25 in 1999, I think it was, feedback from agents that I have spoken with or small brokers that I've spoken with. My overriding concern here is the small broker. What I'm seeing being proposed through the change to the Insurance Act and this amending act is a move supposedly to open this up to wider competition, but what we're moving from is people that specialized in providing insurance services to anybody else that deals with money in any way being able to do this as well.

Now, I'm painting that with a broad brush stroke, and I admit that, but we're now looking at banks offering these same insurance services. We're looking at travel agents offering the same insurance. We're looking at credit unions potentially offering these same kinds of services, or maybe they do now. I think that's making it harder for our small brokers, the small businessperson to stay alive in this market.

I think you may well have set this up to increase competition globally or with very large providers, but in doing so, I think we are making it much more difficult for the small businessperson in Alberta. I really believe that the small businessperson is the backbone of this country and the backbone of Alberta. You know, every farmer is a small businessperson, and certainly in our other economic drivers I still believe that it's the smaller entrepreneur or businessperson who really brings us forward.

4:50

A couple of huge corporations, yeah, they can throw their weight around and they look really impressive, but what kind of stake do they really have in our community? They move on so quickly, and really their alliance is probably to some head office that isn't even in the country. That is what has shaped my concerns when I look at what's being proposed in Bill 17 and, through that, to what didn't happen in the amending Insurance Act. Given that context, I want to go back and look at this.

Now, Bill 17 specifically is removing the requirement that adjusters who are employees of an insurance company need to be licensed. The quid pro quo for that was that insurers are held

responsible for the actions of their employees who are adjusters. My concern around this is that we also lost a provision around mandatory continuing education. There was no provision in the act for mandatory continuing education, which we now have in place until September 2001, when this Insurance Act comes into being. There was nothing done in the new act to allow for that, and I think stakeholders believe that the needs of consumers demand a knowledgeable, dedicated, and competent financial adviser providing a certain level of service.

Given the increasing diversity and complexity of financial services – it's absolutely bewildering now – I would prefer to see that practitioners stay current in their knowledge and skills and continually upgrade them. When you look at other areas where the government has interceded to insist on some kind of mandatory lifelong learning – that's happened in the medical professions; that's happened in a couple of other areas – why was it allowed to lapse here?

I mean, the counterargument to that is: well, employers will train their own employees who are adjusters. You know, that isn't being exposed to a diversity of opinions and new programs and challenges. That's often a sort of company indoctrination, if you like, where it's: this is what we need you to know, and that's all we need you to know. There's not an additional challenge and exposure to new ideas and concepts and practices. It's just exactly what is acceptable to the employer, who again could be a multinational who has no real commitment or stake in the local economy or in the local community.

You know, all of the Canadian jurisdictions with insurance councils either mandate continuing education requirements or are planning to, and Alberta is now going to be left behind on this one. B.C. requires continuing education, Saskatchewan does as of January of '99, Manitoba is expected to introduce it or already has, Ontario requires it, Quebec requires it, and Nova Scotia looks like it's going to go for it as well. If we look to the States, I think some 48 U.S. states have continuing education requirements. So that's a fair preponderance of examples in front of us of what others think is important, and I'm curious as to why we are not considering that as important.

I also note that the Alberta Insurance Council is opposed to mandatory continuing education. That's curious to me, because I know that the government set this group up as sort of an arm's-length DAO to regulate the industry. I'm really wondering how well it reflects the industry in fact, because certainly the stakeholders we consulted felt very strongly that they wanted the mandatory education requirements in there. Now, it's a cost to them to send their employees on conferences or seminars where they're picking this up, and they're acknowledging that that cost is important to them, and they're willing to pay it. So I'm curious as to why the Alberta Insurance Council would be opposed to it.

I mean, they're saying that disciplinary measures can be used if incompetence is demonstrated, but that's after the fact. There has already been a problem because somebody wasn't up to speed or wasn't up to code, and there has been some sort of disciplinary hearing, and now there has to be some punishment meted out, suspension or revocation of licence or even a requalification, I suppose. That's after the fact, and the consumer has already been dinged. The industry has already got a black eye. It's all after the fact, and I don't understand why there's resistance to this from the group that is essentially established to make sure that everybody keeps their nose clean in this industry. Very odd. Essentially the cost of continuing education is borne by consumers and agents, so it's not even costing these larger brokers significant amounts of money.

Now, I know that the government is on record as saying that forcing agents to keep up to date with new products and practices is not acceptable, that they think insurance agents should be required to meet tougher prelicensing requirements. Well, I'll agree with tougher prelicensing, no problem, but I strongly believe in lifelong learning and continual updating especially in a field that is moving and changing as rapidly as this one is. So there's an inconsistency in the government position there that I don't approve of.

The other area that was causing me concern – and again this is coming at it from the point of view of the small broker – is the concept of the antirebating provisions. If we're moving into this era where we have small independent brokers, you know, a one-, two-person office maybe, trying to compete with the Toronto-Dominion/Canada Trust/PriceWaterhouse conglomerate, whatever it all is now, down on the corner and a credit union a block away that has 900 outlets in Alberta, and a travel agent that's in the local mall – I don't know that that's going to be a very good competition for everyone involved. I think what happens is that people get drawn to that one-stop shopping, and in particular you end up with the little giveaways, the little incentives for people. I mean, I've never been drawn in. I've never gone to one place over another because they were going to give me something. I'm always a little suspicious about that actually because I think that somewhere along the line I'm paying for that gift, and I'd rather just have the discount.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MS CARLSON: Go back to sleep, you guys.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, I think so. Sorry I woke you all up. I'll try and talk softer so you can snooze again.

The industry had been quite clear that they did not like what's called rebating, which is part of either discounting what's going on or giving away of little . . .

MS CARLSON: They want to know if you've ever bought a coupon book.

MS BLAKEMAN: A coupon book? No. I've never bought a coupon book.

5:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre does have the floor.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Back to rebating, which is where I was. This makes it very hard if we have a situation where we've got very large banks and credit unions and who knows what other kinds of corporations that are selling insurance having these giveaways. It makes it really hard for a small broker to compete with that. I mean, their margin of profit could be quite small on any given policy. They might be looking at a profit of \$50 or \$70 on a given policy. So they just can't be competing with a bank that's looking at giving away, you know, gold Cross pens or something.

The industry had always opposed removing the anti-rebating rule between the original act and the amending act. It was a well-established market conduct practice that was based on the principle that a company should not practise unfair discrimination between individuals presenting the same risk. That makes perfect sense to me, and it came from the grass roots. It came, in fact, from the community that was practising this and whose sector we are talking about. It's not conceived as a form of price-fixing or an

anticompetitive measure. Premiums are based on actuarial considerations, and they should not be open to competition which would undermine a pricing consistent with the insurers holding appropriate reserves.

Once again, I'm questioning why the government seems so keen to make it difficult for small brokers to keep going, in the same way that some of the practices that have been put forward by this government have made it very difficult for small farmers and family farms to keep going and seem to make it easier for corporate farms to go well.

In this particular instance, those are the concerns that I want to bring forward about the mandatory education and about the rebating.

Now, there's another section, the deposit-taking institutions: banks, loan and trust corporations, the Alberta Treasury Branch, and the credit unions. In this new Insurance Act that we're hooked to here with Bill 17, which is the act that's amending it – and then somehow they all come in together hand in hand in September of 2001 – it permitted the minister to issue a restricted insurance agent certificate of authority to a business that is a deposit-taking institution, a transportation company, a travel agency, an automobile dealership, or other prescribed enterprise. Gee, that's sure a big restriction. It named just about every kind of sector there is in Alberta. The restricted insurance agent certificate of authority authorizes the holder to act as an insurance agent in respect of classes or types of insurance specified by the minister.

Currently, loan and trust corporations, banks, the Alberta Treasury Branch, and credit unions are permitted to distribute certain limited types of credit-related products in their branches. These products are sold to credit union customers without an individual assessment of risk, and under the act loan and trust corporations, banks, the Alberta Treasury Branch, and credit unions will be required to obtain a licence to sell this limited range of credit-related insurance products. But it still puts them in direct competition with your neighbourhood independent, small businessperson insurance broker.

There is no provision in the Insurance Act that allows deposit-taking institutions to underwrite and sell insurance through their branches. Industry stakeholders are concerned that because the terms and conditions of their restricted agent certificates are left to regulation, it may open the door in the future for provincially regulated institutions like the ATB or like the credit unions to market insurance products directly from their branches. I can see it coming.

You know, those large institutions are capable of doing such massive and expensive campaigns to talk you into things. Once you get hooked into that, unless an individual takes the steps to say, "Don't send me any accompanying or related information from your agency, please," in your mailbox within a few weeks you'll start getting all kinds of related services that they're trying to sell, and it's very convincing. They're glossy brochures, and it looks really good. They can offer you all kinds of incentives on all sorts of things, and that's what we're setting up our small businesspeople to have to try and compete against. It's just not possible for them.

Now, the government has suggested that there's no provision in the Insurance Act to allow deposit-taking institutions to underwrite and sell insurance through their branches and that the restricted certificate of authority will allow them to sell a limited range of credit-related products. But there are no indications in the new Insurance Act about what types of limited insurance products these institutions such as the ATB or credit unions will be able to distribute since this is the subject of regulations. Now we're at the nub.

So once again it's been left to come in through the back door. It's been left to be developed behind closed doors by the government, and we end up with all the same ferris wheel of problems that we have for the community being able to understand what's happened and to get the information when the stuff is coming through

regulations. Everything can be changed. Then you've got to know to be watching the *Alberta Gazette* to see the order in council and then go back and track the information to find out what actually happened there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to make some observations and ask some questions about Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001. As we're at second reading, I think it's useful as we consider these amendments to go back and look at the principles that were the basis for the original Bill 25. I think some of those principles are still supported by the amendments that we have before us, but having said that, I do have some questions.

One of the principles – and I thought it was an important principle – in Bill 25 was that the responsibility and liability for how an insurance company conducted itself, the responsibility for that behaviour, really rested on the shoulders of the directors of the company. That's, I think, a principle that deserves support as long as it is viewed in the perspective of the public interest, that they can be held responsible and that they will be acting in terms of not only their company's interest but that there's a public interest that is also part of what they accept.

Another principle that seemed to be a part of Bill 25 was the principle that there had to be in place some fairly clear procedures and ways of dealing with those who would engage in coercive or deceptive practices, and Bill 17 I think does nothing to change what was agreed upon for Bill 25.

The principle that there should be full disclosure from insurance companies and their agents again is one that we supported when Bill 25 was before the Assembly.

I think another principle was that there had to be a firm set of rules, a clear set of rules that surrounded claim practices. We've all heard of difficulties with people filing claims and those claims either being rejected or being delayed, so it was an important principle, when Bill 25 was discussed, that we felt had to be part of that piece of legislation and is. I think it's in everyone's interests that those rules are abundantly clear and particularly to consumers, because I think that's where the difficulties arise, when insurers pay for policies and then come to claim on them and find that the policy doesn't actually cover what they expected it would.

5:10

The principle that the minister has to have the power to impose administrative penalties for specific violations again is one that I think at the time we questioned and remains untouched by Bill 17, that there had to be a system of fines and penalties that were appropriate for inappropriate acts, and that those fines and penalties had to be in keeping with today's economics.

So those are some of the principles that we supported in Bill 25 and we also had questions about and had in some cases asked for amendments to make stronger.

At the time of the passing of Bill 25 we raised a number of questions for change, and they weren't ours alone. For my own information I would appreciate hearing from the member who sponsored the bill what is being done in terms of the concerns and suggestions that were made for amendments. I remember that at the passage of Bill 25 the compensation plan was a matter of concern, and there were requests at that time to make sure that the compensation plan was inclusive. Yet I don't see that having been changed in Bill 17. The plan was to be established under regulation. I should know, Mr. Speaker, but I don't. I assume that that plan has been

established through regulation, and I would ask what the stakeholder reaction was to the compensation plan.

I remember at the time their concern was that there might be some companies holding restricted agent certificates of authority who didn't have or who wouldn't obtain errors-and-omissions insurance. I think the reference used at the time was to travel agents who sell insurance as a coincidental product to their core business and wouldn't know the policy or the wordings as thoroughly. There was concern about that group of businesses like travel agents who have some exemption. It was felt that the consumers would be the ones who paid for this group of businesses not being part of the compensation plan.

To the mover of the bill: I wonder what's developed with the compensation plan. Is the industry happy with it, and are there actions taken to make sure that businesses like travel agents are part of it and thus the consumers that would deal with them would be protected?

The sharing of compensation was another concern, and there's nothing in Bill 17 that addresses the issues that were raised at the time. Some of the stakeholders thought that it opened the door to allowing unaccountable individuals who didn't have the kind of background and skill and knowledge that they should have of the industry to take control of an insurance transaction for personal gain, contrary to the interests of the consumer. That was raised, if I recall, a number of times during Bill 25 debates, yet I don't see anything in this amendment that would address those concerns.

Now, I do recall the government at the time making statements to the effect that the market should dictate how compensation is shared and then also stating that financial intermediaries such as insurance agents and security brokers should be permitted to enter into partnerships where referral fees and profit sharing is possible, but that is the other side of the fear that was raised at the time. Again, the stakeholders – and I haven't heard that their position has changed – believed that sharing of compensation should only take place when an agent shares a commission with an insurance agent who holds a licence to sell the class of insurance for which compensation is being paid. Again, a number of issues around compensation sharing that are not addressed in the bill as we have it before us now. I raise the issues, Mr. Speaker, because it was an opportunity to address those concerns, seeing that amendments were going to be brought forward in any case.

There were some other concerns in the former bill that again this bill doesn't remedy. The concerns were about unfair, coercive, or deceptive practices and that there was no detailing or defining of what those practices are. I realize the difficulty in that, trying to anticipate the creative work that can be done in terms of deceiving consumers, but there was the concern put forward at the time Bill 25 was passed that there had to be some definition. The definition doesn't appear in the act, whether or not it's through regulation, but it gave some concern, and I think the preference was that there be some defining within the act itself.

At the root of that concern about those practices was that stakeholders I think believed that just talking about unfair, coercive, or deceptive practices was too broad, and they wanted to ensure that it was made more specific. I guess the question is: were there discussions with stakeholders as the regulations were being formulated? Just exactly what was the meaning of that phrase? I'd appreciate again hearing from the mover of the bill as to what the situation is in terms of that concern. I assume that it has been dealt with in regulations and that the stakeholders were involved in those regulations and that regulation formulation. So that was another area of concern. I remember it being raised at the time and again wondering why those concerns aren't addressed in the amendment that we have before us at this time.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, Bill 17 makes really a compromise in terms of adjusters. It's a compromise that I think we support, although I do recall at the time supporting the requirement that adjusters had to be licensed. An underlying principle of this amendment is that the insurers are the ones that are responsible for the adjusters who work for them, and that is where the responsibility rests. A lot of the sections in the bill are a result of that provision being taken out, so a lot of it is housekeeping in terms of some of the subsections of Bill 17.

The removal of any reference to the need of an adjuster who works for an insurer to have an adjuster's certificate: I remember talking about and supporting that provision at the time. Obviously the industry didn't think it necessary, and this bill reflects the input from the industry. So it will be interesting to see how this turns out.

I think that with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude and look forward to hearing the kinds of responses the mover of this bill has to some of the issues that my colleagues and myself have raised. I think we initially saw the bill as something that could be passed quite quickly through the Legislature, and it's only in the last few days that we've had some reservations raised about provisions of the amendment. I think those reservations being raised need to be dealt with before we continue and pass the bill.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 17, the one before us today, makes amendments, obviously, to the Insurance Act. I think our concern is that there are other improvements that could be made to this act and that those are not being considered here. The act that it amends comes into force in just a few months, in September, and this is our last chance to make amendments to the act before it comes into force. So it would be worth serious consideration to review Bill 17 and have a look at perhaps extending the principles and the details that it addresses.

The way Bill 17 stands now, its main purpose, as we're looking at it and as I see it, is to remove the requirement that adjusters who are employees of insurance companies need to be licensed. In place of this, the bill proposes that adjusters working for insurers no longer need to be certified, but the insurer instead is held responsible for the actions of adjusters who are their employees. I can see, as the sponsor of this bill said, that this can increase accountability of the insurance companies themselves. But is that far enough? That's our question. Are we going far enough with Bill 17? Are there not other amendments that ought to be made? We believe that there are.

The bill also gives the minister the power to call witnesses to give evidence at hearings and appeals under the bill, but our proposal and our concern here is that Bill 17 needs to address some other issues.

The issue that Bill 17 does address did come to our attention during stakeholder consultations on Bill 25 in 1999. Bill 25 led to the Insurance Amendment Act. We were hearing even then – well, we of course heard many concerns. This particular one we heard was that insurance companies wanted the staff adjuster licensing provision removed even at that time from Bill 25. They felt it was redundant given that insurance companies who act as adjusters are already required to have a valid adjuster's certificate of authority, so the additional licensing requirement that was built into Bill 25 represented an increased cost to insurers that would simply drive up consumer costs. Certainly the people we were hearing from on this viewed this requirement as needless and costly, and in some cases they were even concerned that it was a possible money grab by the government by way of licensing fees and so on.

This Bill 17, to the extent that it addresses this one issue, I suppose is a reasonable compromise between the industry and the government. It does clearly outline that an insurer is the one who is ultimately responsible for adjusters who work for them. There's been a case recently sorted out in which an insurance adjuster was caught for unethical behaviour in the auto industry and I think was recently fined by the court system. I'm not sure if in that case the insurance company ultimately covered it or if it was paid out of the adjuster's personal pocket. But certainly there's room for abuse here, and I'm glad to see that this act holds the insurer accountable for the actions of their adjusters. In exchange for that, of course, the government is no longer requiring adjusters who work for insurers to be licensed.

However, the question is: is this enough of a change? Or perhaps before the Insurance Act is actually enforced this coming September, do we want to improve it a little bit further and give it some more changes? The kinds of things we would like to see considered and used to extend Bill 17 would be some kind of provision in the Insurance Act that might allow deposit-taking institutions to underwrite and sell insurance through their branches. When they do this, industry stakeholders are concerned that because the terms and conditions of the insurance agent certificates are left to regulation, this may leave the door open in the future for provincially regulated institutions such as, say, the Alberta Treasury Branches and credit unions to market insurance products directly from their branches.

[At 5:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 28, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, welcome back.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for the beauty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people. In this difficult time we ask You to hear our prayers for Your intervention so that much-needed moisture may assist in the sustainability of all of Your wondrous works in this Your Alberta. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem, and would you please join in in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have great honour in introducing to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mrs. Shenaz Jeraj, president of the Ismaili Council for Edmonton since July 1999. Canada is home to some 75,000 Ismailis, of which about 10,000 reside in Alberta.

Mrs. Jeraj and the council have partnered with your office, Mr. Speaker, in co-ordinating the celebration of Eid al-Adha for the past three years. During those events the community has made charitable donations to several organizations such as the Winnifred Stewart Association for the Mentally Handicapped as well as the Alberta School for the Deaf to buy equipment. The council will be hosting yet another charitable event, with the proceeds going to Compassion House for breast cancer victims, on June 23 of this year.

Mr. Speaker, this past weekend the Ismaili community also organized a partnership walk here at the Legislature grounds as well as in many cities across Canada. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General as well as the Minister of Community Development attended the event in Edmonton, and the Minister of Health and Wellness attended the event in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Jeraj in her private life works for Dow Chemical at the Fort Saskatchewan plant and looks after the computer infrastructure for that organization. I request Mrs. Jeraj to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition which states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative

Assembly . . . to end the Policy permitting hazardous wastes to be transported into Alberta from outside Canada and delivered to Swan Hills Waste Treatment Plant.

This petition has 2,000 names on it that come from the communities of Smith, Hondo, Slave Lake, Wabasca, Widewater, Wagner, Canyon Creek, Kinuso, and High Prairie.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 21 **Electronic Transactions Act**

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act.

This legislation has a very simple purpose: to give electronic transactions and electronic signatures the same legal status as their paper counterparts as long as both parties involved consent to handling the business transaction electronically. The omnibus approach of this legislation removes the necessity of individually amending each piece of Alberta legislation that makes reference to requiring signatures or information to be in writing. It will give Albertans the option to communicate electronically while still allowing for current methods of interaction with government organizations or the business sector. In the spirit of harmonization, Mr. Speaker, the intent and scope of this legislation are aligned consistent with similar legislation across the country and will result in consistency in dealing with electronic transactions across provincial borders.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, with the introduction of this bill today, we will be releasing a discussion paper to seek feedback on our approach. Albertans will have an opportunity to provide input on the legislation through comments on the discussion paper, which will be available on the Innovation and Science web site, www.innovation.gov.ab.ca. The deadline for this input is August 1, 2001. In addition to that, government departments have also submitted lists of stakeholders they wish to have an opportunity to comment on the legislation. The discussion paper will be mailed to these individuals and/or organizations and the departments I've identified.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 21 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise with two tablings. One is a letter of congratulations to the Aga Khan Foundation members for a very successful partnership walk this weekend, which was co-ordinated by Mr. Salim Bhimji, the volunteer convener, along with assistance from our guest Mrs. Jeraj and numerous others. In this International Year of Volunteers it's a particular pleasure to make that tabling.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a tabling of a

letter sent to Mr. Orest Korbitt, chairman of the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, regarding the outstanding work that he and his board members did to recognize inductees this weekend into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame: Pat Bawtinheimer, Michelle Conn, Catriona LeMay Doan, James Greenough, Jean Jarrell, Mark Roy, and the Edmonton Oilers hockey teams from the '80s, also Bill Powers on the Bell memorial award, Alex Decoteau on the pioneer award, and century award recipients Wayne Gretzky, Kerrin Lee-Gartner, Glen Sather, Elsie Barlow, the 1978-82 Edmonton Eskimos, and the 1915-1940 Edmonton Grads. It was a pleasure to be there with the Deputy Premier and numerous other colleagues from Red Deer and elsewhere.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table five copies of two letters that are expressing strong support for bicycle helmet legislation, and they are signed by 15 emergency pediatricians and specialist physicians at the Stollery children's health centre here in Edmonton. These physicians care for the most severely injured children in northern Alberta and have seen firsthand "the devastation preventable injuries have on individuals, families, and society."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two tablings. The first is a letter from Mr. Frank Andruchow of Edmonton. Mr. Andruchow is concerned with the deforestation of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the second one is a letter from Anne Williams of Lethbridge. Ms Williams does not agree with the rezoning of land on the edge of Waterton park.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

1:40

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is five copies of letters from Mr. Wilde, who is very concerned about Inland Cement's plans to convert from natural gas to coal.

The second tabling is a letter from Alberta Environment to the municipal district of Cardston. In the letter the department outlines its concerns with the proposed subdivision of land on the edge of Waterton park.

My final tabling today is copies of a letter from Bonita Field of Calgary. Ms Field is concerned about overdevelopment in the Castle-Crown area.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table five copies of a document announcing good news for my constituency, Medicine Hat, as well as southern Alberta. I will be tabling a copy of a news release issued today by PanCanadian Petroleum Limited announcing that they have entered into a memorandum of understanding with Canadian Fertilizers Limited for the development of an 85-megawatt natural gas fired cogeneration plant to be located in Medicine Hat. This project was selected by the province of Alberta's transmission administrator under the location-based credits standing offer process, designed to address transmission constraints with the development of new power generation in southern Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the program from the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame & Museum induction banquet, which was held Friday in Red Deer and attended by a number of members from this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the information and interest of all members of this Assembly I would like to table the lyrics to *Four Strong Winds* by Mr. Ian Tyson and also the lyrics to *Alberta Bound* by Mr. Gordon Lightfoot.

My third tabling this afternoon is a news release dated July 19, 1999, from Alberta Resource Development. It is titled: "Results of natural gas liquids policy task force announced." Unfortunately, the task force identifies several possible policy options but makes no specific recommendations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. The first one is a set of two letters, each written by two members of Manyberries School Council, Michele Mayer and Sharon Bodin. One of these letters is addressed to me and one to the Minister of Learning. In these letters these parents are expressing their concern about the quality of education as the Prairie Rose regional division 8 does some budget cuts that would force their school to be triple graded in September of this year.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is appropriate copies of an application for an electricity export permit before the National Energy Board. This application is dated May 1, 2001, and is made by Morgan Stanley Capital Group Inc. of New York.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling an appropriate number of copies of a letter addressed to the Premier from the Bragg Creek Environmental Coalition opposing the proposed Kananaskis FMA and urging the Premier to stop the de facto privatization of these public forests.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two constituents of mine who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I'd ask them to stand, please. Dr. Donald Jolly and Mrs. Christina Jolly are the parents of page Tim Jolly. Tim has been a page with the Assembly since 1997 and is going into his second year of university in September. He is majoring in political science, even though I've tried to talk him out of that. I understand that his work with the Assembly is coming to an end, and I want to take the opportunity to thank him for his service to this Assembly. We're all very, very proud of Tim. I would ask Dr. and Mrs. Jolly, who are in the Speaker's gallery, to please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you 38 enthusiastic students from William E. Hay composite high school in Stettler, Alberta. With the students today are teachers Mr. Neil Humphreys and Mr. Garry Fix and parent helper Ms Cathy Chartier. I am very pleased that they're here today and thank them for coming. Please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 34 very bright and ambitious grade 10 students from Trochu Valley school. They are accompanied by some very hardworking teachers and friends of mine, Mr. Brian Vokins and Mr. Bill Cunningham. I would ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Bovar annual report for 2000 blames falling revenues at the Swan Hills waste treatment facility on "increased efforts by generators to pursue alternative, lower-cost disposal for their hazardous waste." My questions are to the Premier. Mr. Premier, why is it that the government is promoting old, outdated technology that even the generators of the waste doesn't want to use, especially given that there are alternative technologies that can treat these toxic wastes at source and at lower cost?

MR. KLEIN: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging, absolutely encouraging – and on this point I agree with the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition that industry should use all efforts at source to reduce the amount of toxic materials that would otherwise have to be destroyed. They should deal with that at source. I'm pleased also that new technologies are evolving to deal with hazardous waste. But I would remind the hon. member that the Swan Hills plant guarantees a 100 percent kill of toxic wastes. No matter how far the technology progresses in the next 10 or 15 or 20 years, there will always be a requirement for a facility like Swan Hills to absolutely kill those wastes that otherwise can't be disposed of.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. When you talked about, Mr. Premier, that it guarantees a 100 percent kill, the industry standards are saying that these other alternatives are at least as efficient. So does that not imply that they achieve the same kill of these toxic materials?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if they can achieve the same kill, better. Better. You have to understand and go back and look at the history of this plant. It was probably years ahead of its time. We can say with a tremendous amount of pride in this province that probably we're the only jurisdiction that is absolutely free of PCBs. We're probably absolutely free of toxics that otherwise would've cost us

hundreds of millions of dollars to ship elsewhere and created a problem for another jurisdiction. This plant has served a useful purpose as far as I'm concerned and from the evidence I've seen thus far will serve a useful purpose into the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we're going to be doing that, then why not let industry move on and deal with the new technologies, the new alternatives, and the cost-effective means to do this? Why stand behind an old technology?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are not stopping industry. As a matter of fact, I'm sure the Minister of Environment would concur that we would encourage industry to develop new and more efficient and more effective ways of dealing with toxic waste, but until all of that technology develops, until there are processes in place to guarantee a kill of all toxic wastes, I would suggest there will continue to be a use for the Swan Hills waste treatment plant.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on this, Mr. Premier, you talk about the idea that we have to allow them to move on. When we have deregulation as a major premise of Alberta, why is it that you continue to create a cost subsidy for this Swan Hills plant and we don't allow the other industries to develop? If they have to have a competitive industry, they shouldn't be fighting against a subsidized industry supported by this government.

MR. KLEIN: Again, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition makes somewhat of a point, not a total point. The simple fact, Mr. Speaker, is that there is a cost to garbage. There is a cost to garbage whether that garbage is toxic garbage or whether that garbage is municipal waste. In the city of Lethbridge, where the hon. member resides, he pays taxes to subsidize the collection and the disposal of garbage. There is a cost to garbage. As a matter of fact, there is an argument amongst some municipalities as to whether garbage is in fact a service that is a utility or whether it is something that should be the responsibility of the private sector or whether garbage should solely, absolutely, completely be the responsibility of the individual or individuals who create the garbage.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just remind the Premier that I live in the county of Lethbridge, and I pay \$14 every time I take a load of garbage to the landfill.

Will the Premier explain to this Assembly where the plant is expected to get enough waste revenue to make money, given that its previous owners shut it down four times in 2000 due to a lack of volume of waste?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to where we are with negotiations to have a private-sector operator take over the plant, I will have the hon. Minister of Infrastructure respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're currently dealing with a number of international companies on the sale of the Swan Hills

plant. We're calling now for the specifications for qualification, and we will be moving forward with those companies. Certainly, they are looking at the market. They will make those decisions whether, in fact, they believe there's enough waste, and we'll be moving forward with it as quickly as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. Then to the Premier: will there be continued subsidies as part of these negotiations with these international companies when they're coming to look at the option of taking over that Swan Hills plant?

MR. KLEIN: That is an interesting question. Mr. Speaker, certainly we would like to make the plant as profitable as we possibly can for the operators without going to the extent of dreaming up new ways to manufacture waste for them to dispose of.

Will there be subsidies? Mr. Speaker, as I explained earlier, there will always be a cost to garbage. In this province I don't know how many orphan sites there are for which the provincial government has assumed responsibility, contaminated properties for which we cannot assign responsibility to those who originally contaminated the property because of the amount of time that has lapsed. So if there are contaminants that will be recovered from those properties, contaminants that must be by law destroyed at the Swan Hills plant, then, yes, the taxpayers of Alberta will have to subsidize those particular disposals.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Cataract Surgery Contracts

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last September the Capital health authority awarded a two-year cataract surgery contract to Surgical Centres Inc. The request for proposals was issued in mid-summer with a short response time, and the winner was a company that had neither a surgeon nor the equipment to do the work in Edmonton. It's the same company that is owned to a significant extent by immediate family members of the chief medical officer of the Calgary regional health authority. My question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that the government committed during the Bill 11 debate that contracts with private health care providers would be open and public, will the minister make public the tendering and evaluation documents from this contract?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can say categorically that this is a completely transparent process. We have gone through a tendering process. We've had our evaluation of those contracts, under the Health Care Protection Act, evaluated by the Auditor General. We've had them evaluated by an outside of province consultant from the province of British Columbia. We've had each contract reviewed by an outside of province consultant from the province of British Columbia. I can say without fear of hesitation that these contracts have all gone through a very scrupulous process. The regional health authorities do have the same conflict of interest bylaws that apply to MLAs that sit in this Assembly, including the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. The Health Care Protection Act requires full disclosure of ownership of private facilities that seek to have contracts with regional health authorities. If individuals wish to see the contracts, those contracts are available on the Internet, and individuals can look at them. We have no fear in having individuals review those contracts for themselves.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Was there a detailed cost-benefit analysis done for this process, and if so, will the minister provide those details to us?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the issue of cost-effectiveness while important is not the only issue that is looked at in the review of these contracts. For example, there may be an advantage in providing such services in a private surgical facility as opposed to being in a hospital, because it frees up space in a hospital surgical suite for more serious types of surgeries to be done. So cost-effectiveness is one element, but it is not the only one. There are a number of other factors, but overall there must be, on balance, more benefit. That benefit may come in terms of cost-effectiveness, or it may be, for example, that better use of resources is being made by contracting out certain services to private surgical facilities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I need to repeat the question. Was there a detailed cost-benefit analysis done for this process, and if so, will the minister release details of it to the Assembly?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can again say that each of these contracts has gone through a very, very stringent review process, and I stand by my previous answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Electricity Exports

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday it was reported that an American investment firm is applying to the National Energy Board to ship 3 percent of Alberta's total power generation to the United States. The application for this export, which I tabled earlier today, clearly states that the export would come from the existing power supply. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the application clearly states that the export would come from the existing supply, how much more will Albertans be forced to pay when a major sell-off of electricity takes place as a result of this application?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would assume that this would be a matter for the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board to adjudicate. Our policy is quite clear relative to the export of electricity, and I will have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement. That policy, as I understand it, is that the demands of Albertans relative to supply must be met, that a certain amount of surplus has to be left in the country, and that the surplus on the surplus can be exported contingent on very strict approval requirements being put in place. I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The National Energy Board does have a role to play in international interconnect, and the group Morgan Stanley Dean Witter did the appropriate thing, and it filed for export. They're, in fact, one of 10 companies that hold export permits already. There are also exports going on today as we speak to Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

2:00

There is a compelling commercial reason why power is used in

Alberta first. One is that when you export it, it then is subject to line losses. Line losses make it less economic to use that power in a mileage-based jurisdiction or someplace far away from grand Alberta than it does locally. So there will always be an Alberta-first issue.

I think the hon. Member for Medicine Hat today showed the positive effects of a deregulated market by tabling yet another 85 megawatts in cogeneration. That adds up, Mr. Speaker, for PanCanadian to some 300 megawatts. That, coupled last week with TransCanada Pipelines that are in various stages of approval, is some 500 megawatts. That's very close to 1,000 megawatts that is going onstream and will be used in Alberta for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The export to Saskatchewan and B.C. is different from exporting to the U.S.

Perhaps the Premier can explain to the House how his government can protect Alberta's domestic supply of electricity, when NAFTA will almost certainly prohibit any efforts to limit exports to the United States once exports have started.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I will defer to the hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: I know the term "compelling commercial reason" is one that is difficult, Mr. Speaker, to get through to a New Democratic Party jurisdiction. But I will repeat that in fact there is a cost advantage to use Alberta-produced power in Alberta.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my last question to the Premier: given that power exports result in a larger market for coal-fired electricity, will the government explain how all environmental concerns will be addressed?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I'll have the hon. Minister of Environment supplement, but there are stringent rules and regulations already in place relative to emission and stack standards for coal-generated power plants and other forms of coal generation. Relative to the specifics of those rules and regulations, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Alberta does have very strict standards on emissions, but we need to recognize that emissions can be fuel neutral. It's what comes out of the stack that counts; it's not necessarily what goes into the furnaces. So whether it's natural gas or coal or some other fuel source, we will monitor the stack emissions. We do have tough standards on the stack emissions, and our standards will only get tougher.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workers' Compensation Board Reviews

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Given that the two WCB review reports completed at the end of last year have raised expectations from injured workers as well as WCB caseworkers, could the minister give an outline of the process for consideration and implementation of the recommendations from the reports?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, this allows me the opportunity to again thank the chair and the committees of those two groups that have provided the input.

As we stand here today, Mr. Speaker, we're currently involved in

what I would class as a ministry response. We have an internal system within our government that we must move through now in order to arrive at the government response. The timing of that of course is subject, as all of us are, to the various demands that are made on our time. Of course, in recognition of the member's comments about expectations, we are trying to arrive at some sort of public announcement that we'd have available by mid-June.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only one supplementary question, and it's to the same minister. Given that a number of injured workers have expressed to my office their frustration that existing and new cases seem to be put in limbo and decisions delayed because WCB caseworkers are waiting for the implementation from the report, could the minister shed some light on this?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned by some of the components of that question in the sense that with the mandate that the two committees were given, there really shouldn't be anything that would have impacted on a decision when a worker is injured as far as the case manager is concerned. So all I could indicate to you and, of course, to all members of the House is that if there are specific situations now of where decision-making is being held up due to some sort of reference to what our ministry and our government will be doing, I think it would be very, very important that those specific situations be brought forward to my office as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Natural Gas Liquids

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another major policy shortcoming of this government is its failure to ensure and protect an economical, reliable supply of ethane for Alberta's petrochemical industry. My first question this afternoon is to the Premier. Why did the government's task force in July of 1999 on natural gas liquids make no specific recommendations regarding ethane supply for this province?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is, as they say, a work in progress.

MR. SMITH: A moving target.

MR. KLEIN: And it is a moving target, absolutely.

But certainly relative to gas produced in this province, there is a policy, Mr. Speaker. What we want – and I hope I receive the support, the undying support, of the hon. member from the Liberal opposition in our endeavour to establish a policy and a program that will allow us to strip the ethane and the propane and the butane and other liquids from that gas, those trillions of cubic feet, that hopefully will flow through Alberta from both the Mackenzie Delta and Prudhoe Bay as it gathers at Boundary Lake to support our growing and our thriving petrochemical industry. I look for his undying support in this endeavour.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the moving target in this case is gas and jobs out of the province, why

is the Premier allowing the government's policy on ethane supply for straddle plants to be phased out starting in the year 2004? The phaseout is to be complete by June of 2008.

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true at all. As a matter of fact, that would be counter to our policy of achieving as much liquid as we possibly can from natural gas. But to shed more light on the situation, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. SMITH: The member tabled today the results of the natural gas liquids policy task force, and because it is a tabled document, Mr. Speaker, I know I can quote from the task force chairman, the MLA for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, who is named in the press release as being Rob Loughheed. Mr. Loughheed has been returned to office from that pre-election time, July 1999. In it he says:

The issues raised by our partners in industry and government will shape policy on ethane and other natural gas liquids to ensure that Albertans continue to receive fair value for these publicly owned resources. I trust our stakeholders will continue to work with us to achieve this goal.

That is, in fact, the policy. That is, in fact, what is occurring today, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, my question again to the Premier: why didn't the Premier actively intervene at the National Energy Board hearings that were held in conjunction with the Alliance pipeline to protect the ethane supply of Alberta so it wasn't shipped off to Chicago and the jobs along with it?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Why didn't I personally intervene? I didn't intervene because we have experts in the department, Mr. Speaker, who did intervene in those hearings. Again, relative to the extent of that intervention, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

2:10

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, today in this economy anybody can buy ethane, and there is a balance that allows us to continue to have a healthy, thriving, petrochemical industry. The difficulty that exists today is the price of natural gas, helped in part by the building of the Alliance pipeline that created a continental energy market that allowed producers in Alberta to share in world market prices.

Now, as that happened, we had an opportunity for ethane to be used here, but ethane . . . [interjections] It's hard for me to get through with the chirping from the Liberal opposition, so I'll just continue to talk and maybe slow it down a little, Mr. Speaker, so that we get the point through.

Mr. Speaker, we have now a balance in ethane. We have an issue where ethane is being challenged for its competitive price because of the rise in the natural gas price relative to the price of crude oil. When that natural gas price rises to that extent, those petrochemical plants that are based on crude oil and naphtha start to become more competitive. That starts to challenge our industry. So just as the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan said, it's a moving target; it's an evolving market. That's exactly what we're faced with today.

The great thing about the Alliance pipeline, Mr. Speaker, is it created jobs in this province. It allowed the petrochemical industry to be sustained, and although there are less Liberal jobs in this caucus today than there were a year ago, there are more petrochemical jobs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Electricity Deregulation

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Typically, rent controls, price ceilings, price caps, deferral accounts, or any artificial pricing mechanism imposed by government has the unintended consequence of providing consumers a reduced supply of an inferior product. Consumers are not motivated to conserve, and producers are not motivated to innovate or invest. My question: what flaws in the design of Alberta's move to a deregulated electricity market have been identified, and what has been done to correct them?

MR. SMITH: Well, we're starting to move on a topic, Mr. Speaker, and I welcome the question from the member. As a matter of fact, on Friday I met with individuals from the Power Pool Council, those involved in electricity in Alberta. It was a productive meeting, and we asked some fundamental questions: what's gone right, what are the warts, and how can we change it if we have to make it stronger? In fact, as the member mentions, we'll be working hard at that part.

One of the parts of that meeting, Mr. Speaker, was an overview from a top world-based consultant that talked about Alberta's restructured electric model. Now, in fact there are 27 states that are in some form of renegotiation of their offering of electricity in a competitive market. He said that what Alberta did in a year, it took the United Kingdom over a decade to get to. So there's progress to report. Part of that progress refers to the earlier questions in that Alberta is not an island. We have to find larger and more creative ways to tie into a prairie power grid, to tap into the hydropower of Gillam and Kettle Rapids on the northern borders of Manitoba.

We do know there's need for a continual review of governance. We also need to know, Mr. Speaker, that we have strong market surveillance administration. As the member appropriately and correctly pointed out, price caps are the way to the California experience; free market is the way to lower prices in Alberta.

MR. McCLELLAND: My first supplementary is to the same minister. Is the date for the removal of price caps or the regulated rate option fixed, or is it tied to competition? Can they be removed earlier if competition is present in the marketplace?

MR. SMITH: A good question, Mr. Speaker. The regulated rate option is in place for five years for residential and farm customers, three years for small commercial customers. Again, we'll be reviewing what is appropriate based on market experiences to date, but those time frames are locked in.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary. Given that conservation is cheaper and better for the planet, what is the government of Alberta doing to promote energy conservation in our present regulated-rate environment?

MR. SMITH: Well, again another good question. We've had questions from the Member for Calgary-Currie that talked about what's occurred in the city of Calgary and in fact the production of what is termed nega-watts. Anytime you turn a regulated product such as electricity into a commodity, you get two outcomes from that. One is innovation, and the second is conservation.

Now, we've seen from early reports that the conservation in Alberta has been as much as 6 percent. I do know that the government is taking an active role, I think probably with your co-operation and help, Mr. Speaker. As you go through the Legislative Assembly

and the building itself, you'll see compact fluorescent lights in place. I know that there is a deputy ministers' committee. I know the good work of the Minister of Infrastructure, who may wish to supplement about what conservation measures are taken part in across government. There is a great bounty of opportunities to save on power and particularly in that time between 4 and 7 in the evening, which is peak load time, because conservation can save Albertans hundreds of millions of dollars. If you look at today's Power Pool, you'll see power prices at \$80.17 a megawatt-hour.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Underground Tank Remediation

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this legislative session Albertans have learned that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is very concerned about underground tank remediation, that tank remediation is a priority issue, and that 80 million taxpayer dollars are funding the cleanup of industrial waste. What Albertans don't know is where the leaking tanks are, who will receive money from this fund, and what the specific cleanup plans are. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How can Albertans find out if they are living on or near a former tank site?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, the program that this government announced last year is the only program of its kind in this entire country. The \$80 million that is being used for this remediation work is on a priority basis. In fact, presently we are looking at establishing an even broader criteria on the almost 5,000 sites that have been identified within this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how much of the \$80 million is earmarked for assisting Albertans who are living on or near a contaminated site?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, every single site that is being identified – that is the purpose of the \$80 million. My response to the hon. member across the way is quite simply this. If it has been identified as a site that needs help, this province and this government are going to help.

MR. BONNER: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday the minister said that the stakeholders were very pleased with the remediation process. Specifically, who are the stakeholders, and what is the process?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, the process has been that we've been working with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and we've been working with the AAMD and C, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. We continue to work with them. The municipal identified sites have been moving forward very productively, and I am proud to say that over 300 and some sites have already been remediated. That good work is going to continue over this next year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Two weeks ago I asked the hon. member responsible for AADAC some questions relating to fetal alcohol syndrome and related programs here in Edmonton, and I will continue to do the same in the following years. Will the minister tell us about funding that her ministry has in place to address this serious issue?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

2:20

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the next three years we'll spend at least \$7 million dealing with fetal alcohol initiatives, but I should point out that we are also in partnership not only with Health but with Justice. Numerous issues that emerge there are being funded through numerous programs, even in our local FCSS groups. Some groups do devote dollars to mentoring programs. Overall, that dollar will be placed in the 18 authorities through partnerships that are locally driven, so dollars there may also include some support from various corporate and business partners. Born Free, which we mentioned a couple of weeks ago, is an example of a particular pizza company getting involved and making sure that nonalcoholic drinks are given to pregnant moms. So a number of initiatives beyond that \$7 million.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentioned the amounts, but could she please let us know some of the initiatives under way that she is planning for combating fetal alcohol syndrome?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the first thing to do would be to take a look at what happens when a child with FAS or FAE is diagnosed, and that is not a simple issue. We have to in fact do that very important assessment. The assessments of FAS are really important. From the time last fall when I mentioned that about 1 percent of live births carry that potential for fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effect – I cited at that time that if we have 36,000 births in Alberta and 1 percent were identified as being FAS/FAE, we'd spend a million and a half dollars for each of those children. That would start with dollars at the time of assessment, Head Start and healthy start programs in communities at the community level, and working with health authorities to make sure that we had mentoring in place for families.

Mr. Speaker, recently I asked that question to an Ontario pediatrician, Dr. Mary Gordon, who said that the most important thing we can do for an FAS child is to love their mother. If we love their mother enough, we'll look after the mother. We'll train her so that her understanding of FAS/FAE will make her so interested in not having any further alcohol during pregnancy that we will be involved in that very important prevention that is critical in reducing the number of FAS/FAE candidates that present themselves in our province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was at a function last week with the federal Minister of Justice, and she mentioned that Alberta will lead the prairie/northern FAS partnership. My questions

to the minister: are there other ministries involved in this partnership, and are there other stakeholders that are going to be involved?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the prairie/northern FAS partnership actually is our way of networking or making a definitive contact with partners in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and recently the territories and Yukon have been added. We do liaise with the minister of health. AADAC is involved. Our staff work in teams together. The prairie/northern FAS partnership ensures that we're not all reinventing the wheel on issues like guidelines for pediatricians in understanding the assessments, in promotional programs. We build on each other's strengths. We have many people that have a common interest in all of these areas, because there's a mobility among the population that frequently sees children transferred from one area to the other.

Electricity Prices

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, under questioning about electricity prices last week, the Minister of Economic Development said, "There are numerous maritime jurisdictions that are charging far higher prices than [Alberta]." In spite of his comments, we have yet to see any evidence from this minister to back up his claim. To the Minister of Economic Development: will he either provide details backing up his claim or withdraw his comments?

MR. NORRIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, my parents raised me that once you say something, you stand by it. I won't withdraw it. I have information that I'll supply to the hon. member.

I would like to use this opportunity again to tell them why people choose Alberta. The pricing of electricity is one of many, many things that go into people making decisions about coming to Alberta. I have some information that may interest the hon. members opposite about people very close to us. I won't use names, but there is a gentleman . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Tell us.

MR. NORRIS: I can't tell you, but I can tell you it's from Saskatchewan. His comment was that he's moving his business, Mr. Speaker, because he is absolutely fed up with Saskatchewan's high taxes, and he has put his Regina-based business up for sale to come to Alberta.

I would encourage the members to stop myopically looking at this issue as electricity only and understand that the Alberta advantage is made up of many, many, many things, not the least of which are the lowest taxes in Alberta, the lowest corporate tax rate, and the highest net migration of employment. There is so much more than electricity. They seem to be hung up on all the wrong things.

In answer to the hon. member's question, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are the jurisdictions. I did mention that I don't like doing that. I wasn't raised to criticize other people. But it is here in black and white.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is the department's response to the report by the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters showing that higher electricity costs under deregulation would cost Alberta's manufacturing sector 31,000 jobs?

MR. NORRIS: Again, I would encourage the hon. members to look at the long term. Certainly under the current situation of electrical deregulation there may be some sectors that are doing better or worse. There may be shortages that I'm not aware of. I don't understand why they can't focus on the fact that our net business

migration was over 7,000 businesses last year, Mr. Speaker. The number of new jobs created was 110,000. It's endless, and to be myopically focused on this one issue just shows me that there's a lack of direction from the members opposite.

MS CARLSON: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given the findings of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters report and the fact that Alberta's small manufacturers are subject to the highest electricity costs in the country, aren't the benefits of Alberta's lower business tax being squandered by electricity deregulation?

MR. NORRIS: Well, Mr. Speaker, again we're getting into that very fuzzy Liberal ground of speculation versus fact. Quite simply put, I don't know how to get the message across that one of the many, many factors of coming to Alberta . . .

DR. TAYLOR: Speak slowly.

MR. NORRIS: I'll try and speak slowly.

One of the many, many factors that people choose about Alberta is electricity. That's certainly true, but there are so many others, Mr. Speaker, and at the end of the day all business facts point to the very obvious truth that Alberta is the place that people want to come to. I'd encourage the members to start spreading the word instead of being so negative.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Municipal Transportation Grants

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend's meeting of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has once again highlighted the need for longer term funding partnerships between the province and Alberta's municipalities. Both Edmonton and Calgary have identified LRT as a key transportation strategy and a major way to reduce traffic congestion in the two cities. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Will the province take a firm funding commitment to extend LRT in Edmonton and Calgary beyond their current limits today?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, as I pointed out to the member one other time, the building of LRTs and that kind of work is not in the Department of Infrastructure.

MR. MASON: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, the same question to the Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, this government has done something quite unique in the jurisdiction of the dominion of Canada, and that is to extend to Edmonton and Calgary 5 cents of every litre of gas sold in those jurisdictions to go directly to transportation needs in those respective municipalities. Nobody has ever done that before, and that gives the city of Edmonton almost an 80 percent increase in the kinds of revenues they receive from the province and well over 62 percent to the city of Calgary.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, why does the government use specific funding formulas for its pet projects like the twinned export highway to the United States, yet when it comes to important municipal projects like the LRT, the province does not have specific funding programs?

2:30

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the north/south trade corridor is a \$1.3 billion project that will connect the Grande Prairie area, all the way through the cities of Edmonton and Calgary and all the way down to Coutts, Alberta, to Montana. That project is undertaken by the province of Alberta. It's solely sourced by this province, and it has no partnership with any municipalities.

In doing that, Mr. Speaker, we've also taken over full jurisdiction of the Deerfoot in the city of Calgary, which would see, oh, a funding commitment of about \$220 million to \$250 million, and we've also taken over the Anthony Henday construction in the city of Edmonton, full construction, which would be about \$250 million, with three bridge structures: one over the Blackmud, one over the Whitemud, and the other one over the North Saskatchewan. That shows a tremendous commitment to those two municipalities, plus we've taken over all of the maintenance. So that gives them at least another 10 percent saving on what they used to spend on those roads.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Court-ordered Prison Visits

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Children's Services. A mother in Red Deer, Lisa Dillman, is being forced to take her young children to see their father in prison despite the fact that he is a convicted sexual offender. Due to the trauma that the children will suffer, has the Children's Services ministry taken any action to prevent these visits from occurring?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right from the moment that I first realized that the children may be affected, I asked officials both in our department and in Justice what actually is the role of the Children's Services ministry in this situation. Under the current Child Welfare Act there is absolutely no authority to either contradict or challenge the judgment from Saskatchewan. I did advise the mother to get a lawyer, seek legal opinion, and we have also taken a good look at the fact that the Child Welfare Act is under review. With my colleague the Minister of Justice I fully intend to discuss whether or not there could ever be in the Child Welfare Act a section included that would allow that intervention.

I should point out that one of the things about the mother in question here is that she was an excellent advocate. I wrote to her and expressed my sincere concern as she had also demonstrated that our role of children's advocacy tends to be interventionist when there is no other advocate available. Mrs. Dillman is an excellent advocate. She followed through with the lawyer, and as you can see, there was further work done by the courts in appointing a social worker to attend with Mrs. Dillman on the occasion of the visit that the judge indicated must take place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Justice. Is there anything he or his ministry can do to prevent any future visits to the penitentiary by these young children?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Children's

Services indicated, children are the top priority of this government, and in our view a determination should always be made on what's in the best interest of the child. However, this unfortunate situation arises through a Divorce Act application which originated in Saskatchewan, and therefore the Alberta courts do not have jurisdiction in that issue. Neither this department nor any department of government can interfere with respect to an order of a court, particularly the order in this case, made in Saskatchewan.

So the answer given by the Minister of Children's Services is exactly correct. The mother in this case, although she has our complete support and sympathy with respect to what she is trying to do, must avail herself of the court in Saskatchewan to have that particular court order dealt with or reheard. It's not within our authority to interfere with the independence of the court in this particular circumstance.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in that case, can the Ministry of Justice and this government change legislation to prevent a similar situation from happening in the future?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a timely question, because there are issues with respect to jurisdiction. Last week we tabled the task force report from the Unified Family Court Task Force, bringing the jurisdiction of the Provincial Court and Queen's Bench in this province a suggestion that it be brought together so that there be one forum.

At the same time, we indicated and in our business plan for Justice is an indication that we are reviewing family law in Alberta with the hopes of bringing a simplified form of family law to this Legislature, perhaps this next spring, and in that review we will be looking at issues with respect to family law, custody/access provisions, as they pertain to provincial jurisdiction. Again, in the course of that review the first and foremost as a principle will be that it should always be what's in the best interests of the child.

I should also mention to the House that the federal government is at this very moment conducting a review with respect to their aspects of family law under the Divorce Act, with respect to custody and maintenance issues relative to the federal jurisdiction, and that there are consultations going on. The province will be participating in those consultations, and we're trying to co-ordinate as much as possible the federal and provincial consultations. I do hope that through the course of those revisions, both in the federal and the provincial laws relating to family law, we will be able to deal with issues like this, which seem to fall through the cracks, and provide better assurance for Albertans that the best interests of the child will always be paramount and that we have no interest in advancing the interests of pedophiles or other sex offenders but that we must protect the child at all costs.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Gary Macyk

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize coach Gary Macyk of the Waskatenau Chiefs baseball team. On October 29, 2000, at the annual Baseball Alberta awards banquet Gary received the coveted Aurora coach/manager award. This award is presented to a senior coach who directed his team with

sportsmanship and is perhaps the highest recognition a coach can receive.

In the third week of August the Waskatenau Chiefs welcomed four teams from British Columbia to Manitoba for the western Canada championship. Gary was not only on the organizing committee, but his team also won the first-place gold medal. In a game against Team Alberta, the Fort Saskatchewan Giants, producing a victory over the Giants by a score of 8 to 6, the Waskatenau Chiefs became the first Alberta team in nine years to win this event.

Over the past 20 years Gary has made an impact on many athletes. I ask the Assembly to congratulate Gary Macyk.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Sports Hall of Fame Induction Banquet

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday evening I had the opportunity along with a number of other MLAs to attend the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame 2001 induction banquet. This was a very special year as not only inductees were welcomed into the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame, but also there were onetime century awards, which acknowledged outstanding contributions to Alberta's sporting heritage for the last century.

Worthy recipients of the century individual awards include: athletes, skier Kerrin Lee-Gartner and hockey player Wayne Gretzky; builders, Elsie Barlow for softball and Glen Sather for hockey. The century team awards went to the Edmonton Commercial Graduates basketball teams and the 1978 to '82 Edmonton Eskimo football teams.

All the award recipients have given us great moments and events to remember. Their outstanding contributions have been witnessed provincially and in many cases nationally and internationally. Today we congratulate these recipients on their achievements and thank you for your great involvement in sports in this province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Nelson Lumber Company Ltd.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize another Alberta success story. The Nelson Lumber Company, with its head offices in Lloydminster, has long been recognized as one of the best home builders in western Canada and has now become Canada's largest home manufacturer. Earlier this month the Nelson Lumber Company acquired SRI Homes of Kelowna, B.C., and now employs 800 people, with expected annual revenues of \$160 million. The type of growth and accomplishment demonstrated by the Nelson Lumber Company is a direct result of sound management, excellent customer service, and a positive vision for the future. This company contributes to the Alberta advantage and the resulting booming economy that we all enjoy.

I would like to congratulate Mr. Ray Nelson, his daughter Ms Glenda Elkow, the board of directors, as well as all the staff that make up the Nelson Lumber Company team. The achievements of this successful Alberta company are a direct result of Mr. Nelson and Ms Elkow's initiative and perseverance. I would also like to wish this new venture success and to Mr. Nelson, the oldest ever heart transplant recipient in Canada, continued good health.

THE SPEAKER: Now we'll hear from the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

2:40

Red Deer Rebels

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today for the first

time in their history the Red Deer Rebels are bringing home the Memorial Cup, representing the Canadian national junior hockey championship. All of Alberta shares in the pride and excitement of this musketeer team that believes in the one for all and all for one system. The Red Deer Rebels are a team of dedicated, hardworking, and talented hockey players, and we congratulate each and every one of them for this outstanding national performance.

Congratulations go to Martin Erat, Justin Mapletoft, tournament MVP Kyle Wanvig, captain Jim Vandermeer, Ross Lupaschuk, Andrew Bergen, Colby Armstrong, Jeff Woywitka, Doug Lynch, Joel Stepp, Boyd Gordon, Jeff Smith, Bryce Thoma, Diarmuid Kelly, Darcy Robinson, Devin Francon, Shane Bendera, Shay Stephenson, Derek Meech, Ladislav Kouba, Joel Rupprecht, Shane Grypiuk, and Cam Ondrik and their excellent coaching staff of Brent Sutter, Dallas Gaume, Justin Wallin, goaltending coach Andy Nowicki, trainers Dave Radar Horning and Les Scott, and head scout, Carter Sears. Congratulations to all of you. Mr. Speaker, if this ran into overtime, that's how Red Deer wins.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Emery Dosedall

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I recognize the career of an exceptional educator, Emery Dosedall, superintendent of Edmonton public schools, who last week announced his resignation.

Since 1995 Superintendent Dosedall has achieved remarkable success during a time when the monopoly position of public schools was challenged by the introduction of charter schools and attractive funding increases for private schools. Instead of allowing public schools to become a victim of the changes, Dr. Dosedall offered Edmontonians an expansive vision of public education.

Building on the site-based decision model that he helped create under former superintendent Dr. Michael Strembitsky, Dr. Dosedall moved to make the public schools as responsive to parents as possible. From schools focused on the fine arts and heritage languages to those with narrow academic concerns, Dr. Dosedall has redefined public education in our city.

Emery is an exceptional leader because he is an exceptional person. His wisdom, love of learning, enthusiasm for life, and ready sense of humour have served students and citizens of Edmonton well. He'll be sorely missed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Dr. Llewellyn Schwegmann

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in this House and recognize an Alberta physician and relate yet another good-news story about health care in Alberta. A young man was attended by a physician in Valleyview, Dr. Llewellyn Schwegmann, who works in the Mistahia RHA. He had a scrape on his leg. An early diagnosis of flesh-eating disease by Dr. Schwegmann and a rapid response in treatment at the University of Alberta hospital resulted in not only saving the leg of the young man but in all likelihood his life. So I think we owe the system and the doctor our vote of support.

Thank you.

Privilege Imputing Motives

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on Thursday last there was a point of privilege raised in the House. It was raised by the hon. Govern-

ment House Leader. At that time the chair invited the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to make a tentative statement if he so chose. The chair also indicated that this matter would come back today. So, hon. Government House Leader, do you have something further to add to this point of privilege?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker, unless there's an initial statement that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands would like to say first.

THE SPEAKER: Please proceed now then.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned on Thursday, I consider it and I think members of this House consider it to be of utmost importance that in the public's eye and in our own eye the question of character and integrity is first and foremost. I think it's well understood, as you review *Erskine May*, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, and *Beauchesne*, that the question of privilege can and in fact should be raised when there is an issue which tends to impede or goes to impeding a member's ability to carry out his parliamentary practice. There is nothing which impedes a member's ability more than a reflection on their character, integrity, and honesty. That's the root of this whole question of privilege today.

Mr. Speaker, I outlined on Thursday that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands had in the course of both his first question and then a supplemental question referred to issues relating to a "direct benefit to his own constituency" and "Will the Premier admit that this is just a pork-barrel project for the minister's constituency?" Those two comments made together go directly to the question of the member's integrity and in that way constitute a question of privilege.

Now, I'd refer you to *Beauchesne* 64 on page 19. "The House has occasionally taken notice of attacks on individual Members," most notably where a member was referred to as "a cheat and a swindler." Now, that's obviously a much more significant comment than the one here, but what's important about that section is that it says that "for the offence" – and this is an offence of impugning a member's integrity – the member "was judged guilty of a breach of privilege and was summoned to the Bar to apologize."

I'd also refer you, Mr. Speaker, to *Beauchesne* 69.

It is very important . . . to indicate that something can be inflammatory, can be disagreeable, can even be offensive, but it may not be a question of privilege unless the comment actually impinges upon the ability of Members of Parliament to do their job properly.

Again, I take that section with respect to its reference to the ability to do the job properly, and there is nothing which is more deleterious to a member in this House than to have their integrity or their character questioned.

Under *Erskine May*, page 117, under Constructive Contempts and Reflections on either House:

Indignities offered to the House by words spoken of writings published reflecting on its character or proceedings have been punished by both the Lords and the Commons upon the principle that such acts tend to obstruct the Houses in the performance of their functions by diminishing the respect due to them.

Reflections upon Members, the particular individuals not being named or otherwise indicated, are equivalent to reflections on the House.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's clear in *Erskine May* that reflections on an individual's integrity can be constituted and should be constituted as a reflection on the integrity of the House as well. Drawing a person's character or integrity into question is a serious offence.

I raise this, as I have in the past, Mr. Speaker, because I believe that we as members of this Legislature are duty and honour bound

to raise the profile of the Legislature and legislators in the public's mind. We need to have, in order to do our jobs properly, a clear understanding that we're here for the betterment of Alberta and not for the betterment of ourselves. If we in any way as members of this Legislature put out into the public mind that any given legislator is here for their own benefit, that calls into question the integrity of each one of the members of this House and makes it more difficult for us to do our job. It is a question that is of the utmost importance.

Now, given that, Mr. Speaker, and given that it is the duty of members of this House to hold members of the government accountable and it is difficult sometimes to do that in certain circumstances where there may be questions to be raised, this House has set aside a special process for that. We have established the office of the Ethics Commissioner, and that's an officer of this Legislature under appropriate legislation. In any circumstance where there is a question about a member's ability to carry out their office and whether they're doing so with integrity and honesty and ethically, then, clearly, the appropriate way to raise that type of a question is to refer it to the Ethics Commissioner for investigation. To bring questions before this House in a manner designed to impugn the integrity of any member impugns the integrity of all members and brings us all into disrepute and must be sanctioned.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment on this point of privilege.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, I would, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Justice has provided good legal documentation and the parliamentary documentation of the point of privilege, but if I might, I would just like to add a personal note. As you know, I come from a rural constituency, as you do, and the one thing we have in a rural constituency is our reputation. That's why I feel that I need to protect my reputation to the utmost.

We moved to that community in 1945, and we have been in business in that community since 1945, when my father started a business there. My father unfortunately passed away, but my brother and I have sterling reputations for honesty in that community, and our business is based on our honesty. So I strongly object to anything that impinges on my reputation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week the hon. Government House Leader rose on a point of privilege, which he has briefly outlined for the House again today. I certainly take a point of privilege very seriously and have spent a considerable amount of time over the last few days reflecting on the issue, looking at the various authorities and consulting with people, who have provided me with advice.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you rule that no prima facie case of privilege exists, and in doing so I draw your attention to *Beauchesne* 27, which states that

a question of privilege ought rarely to come up in Parliament . . . A genuine question of privilege is a most serious matter and should be taken seriously by the House.

The Government House Leader could have risen on a point of order rather than the much more serious question of privilege.

Now, in my reading, Mr. Speaker, it is the difficult task of Speakers to balance the requirements of the protection of individual members with the important principle of freedom of speech and the duty of the opposition to hold the government accountable. Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* on page 315 states:

It is clear that freedom of speech is a constitutionally inherent

privilege, being one of those powers or privileges that are intrinsically necessary for the legislators to perform their legislative work.

The matter should not have been raised as privilege for the following reasons. The alleged use of language impugning the integrity of other members does not constitute a question of privilege. The Speaker himself made this very clear in a ruling rendered in this Assembly on November 17, 1998. The Speaker was ruling on a question of privilege raised by the then Minister of Transportation against the former Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert. In that ruling the Speaker said:

Language spoken during a parliamentary proceeding that impugns the integrity of members would be unparliamentary and a breach of order contrary to the Standing Orders, but not a breach of privilege.

The Speaker went on to say, "Accordingly, the chair does not find that there has been a prima facie case for a breach of privilege."

The Government House Leader cited page 86 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* in support of raising a question of privilege. However, if one looks at the section cited within its proper context, you'll find that some very strict tests have to be met, including significantly impeding a member from fulfilling their duties and functions. On the citation of the Government House Leader the Speaker of the House of Commons ruled that there was no question of privilege despite the fact that a federal cabinet minister had been accused of being involved in a conflict of interest.

No similar accusation was made in my questions against the Minister of Environment. No evidence has been provided by the Government House Leader that my questions interfered with the ability of the Minister of Environment to do his job. Furthermore, no suggestions were made in my question that the minister would derive any personal benefit either from the commissioning of the feasibility study or from the possible building of a dam down the road. The minister himself did not object to the way I had framed my question at the time. Nothing is wrong with supporting projects benefiting one's own constituency. There's also nothing wrong with pointing it out when it takes place.

I'd like to cite page 224 of Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, which says:

Parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of Members, not in their capacity as ministers or as party leaders, whips, or parliamentary secretaries, but strictly in their capacity as Members in their parliamentary work.

My questions last Thursday were clearly directed at a decision made by the minister to order a feasibility study, a decision made in his capacity as a minister, not as a member. The minister himself made that distinction in answering the question.

I would like to refer you also to *Beauchesne* 31(1), which states: "A dispute arising between two Members, as to allegations of facts, does not fulfill the conditions of parliamentary privilege." Two members may differently interpret the same set of facts. It is a fact that within months of being appointed, the Minister of Environment commissioned a feasibility study for a major water management project located near or in his constituency. While we may disagree about the significance of these facts, it does not give rise to a question of privilege.

I'd like to address the question of the term "pork barrel." We had been very careful, Mr. Speaker, in looking up this term before the question was even asked. It does not appear in any of the expressions which are ruled unparliamentary by Speakers or chairs of the Alberta Legislative Assembly or in the list of unparliamentary expressions provided by the Speaker's office. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, which is located in the Legislature Library, defines "pork barrel" as "a government appropriation, bill, or policy that supplies funds for local improvements designed to ingratiate legislators with their constituents." It does not imply personal benefit by any member.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we did a quick search of *Hansard* and found dozens of instances where the words "pork barrel" have been used in this Assembly over the past 10 years by both opposition and government members and no member stood up to make a point of order or certainly not a question of privilege.

Again, using the words "pork barrel" last Thursday, I was very careful to apply it to the proposed Meridian dam project. I did not apply it personally to describe the minister or his conduct. In response to my question, the Premier acknowledged that I was referring to the project not to the minister when I used the words "pork barrel." The Premier said that it's "an absolute insult to even suggest that this is a pork-barrel study." The Minister of Environment, in supplementing the Premier's response, certainly expressed no objection at that time to the use of the term "pork barrel."

Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning of my comments, I believe that this issue could have been raised by the hon. Government House Leader as a question of order. If you want to raise it as a question of order, I would certainly be most willing to make the appropriate amends as you direct.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on this point of privilege. Citation, please.

DR. TAFT: I feel that these rulings are exceedingly important for setting the tone of the House and for maximizing the opportunity of our debates to proceed here. I don't see the comment as directly impinging on the personal reputation of the hon. minister, so I'd like you to consider those factors as you make your ruling.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Since last Thursday the chair did receive a visit from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and all members should be aware of that.

I believe, hon. members, because this is the first time that we've had a point of privilege raised in this session, that I'll just spend a few seconds longer than perhaps ordinary on this particular point and point out that the basis for the Government House Leader's argument for breach of privilege was certain comments made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands the afternoon of Thursday last. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands raised a question related to the Meridian dam, and as *Alberta Hansard* records at page 775, the hon. member said that the project "is of direct benefit" to the Minister of the Environment's constituency. In his second supplementary question the hon. member said on page 776 that "this is just a pork-barrel project for the minister's constituency."

3:00

Under our Standing Order 15(2) written notice of a question of privilege is to be provided to the Speaker "at least two hours before the opening of the sitting," or under Standing Order 15(5) a member may raise a question of privilege "immediately after the words are uttered or the events occur that give rise to the question, in which case the written notice required under suborder (2) shall not be required." Privilege is such an important issue that any delay in raising the matter may serve to deny the request. In this case there is certainly no doubt that the issue was raised at the earliest possible opportunity. Under 15(3) the Speaker "may defer debate on the matter until such time as" it is determined that the matter may be dealt with fairly, and that is what the chair did last Thursday when he invited the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to respond.

The Speaker's role is to determine whether the matter raised constitutes a prima facie question of privilege. Joseph Maingot

states in *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, at page 221:

A prima facie case of privilege in the parliamentary sense is one where the evidence on its face as outlined by the Member is sufficiently strong for the House to be asked to debate the matter and send it to a committee to investigate whether the privileges of the House have been breached or a contempt has occurred and report to the House.

Only you, hon. members, can determine whether there is a question of privilege and what to do about it. If the chair finds that there is a prima facie question of privilege under suborder (6), “any member may give notice not later than at the conclusion of the next sitting day of a motion to deal with the matter further.” If the chair finds there is not a prima facie question of privilege, then under suborder (7) the matter is concluded.

The chair has listened attentively to the arguments made by those participating in this debate as early as last Thursday and today as well. It should be clear to all members that an Assembly is a place of strong words. It is the Speaker’s role to ensure that all members are allowed the greatest latitude to express themselves in line with centuries of tradition attesting to a member’s freedom of speech. The right carries a duty to act responsibly consistent with the Assembly’s rules and with traditions, and the chair will not be guided by an individual member’s point of opinion exercised on a particular day but will be guided by the rules and the traditions of the British form of parliamentary democracy created, developed, and extended for nearly 800 years.

Last Thursday the hon. Government House Leader quoted a passage from page 86 of the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. The passage quoted by the House leader was from a May 5, 1987, ruling by former Speaker Fraser of the Canadian House of Commons. The chair examined that ruling, which is found on pages 5765 and 5766 of Commons debates. In that case, allegations were made against the then minister of fitness and amateur sport, the hon. Otto Jelinek, concerning a reported conflict of interest. Speaker Fraser found that while the allegations were serious, they did not amount to a prima facie question of privilege as the member’s ability to perform his functions was not impaired.

In this case the Member for Edmonton-Highlands may have violated certain provisions of Standing Orders; namely 23(h), “makes allegations against another member,” or 23(i), “imputes false or unavowed motives to another member.” The comments could have given rise to a legitimate point of order. The chair does not believe this is a case that falls into that very small category of comments that would impede a member in performing his or her parliamentary duties.

In a November 8, 1998, ruling in a similar issue, the chair quoted Maingot at page 254:

Language spoken during a parliamentary proceeding that impugns the integrity of Members would be unparliamentary and a breach of order contrary to the Standing Orders, but not a breach of privilege.

Furthermore, although the term “pork barrel” has been used in this Assembly, it has not been ruled unparliamentary. However, as all the authorities point out, whether a word or expression is parliamentary or unparliamentary depends on the context in which it is used. To quote *Beauchesne’s* at paragraph 491, “A word which is parliamentary in one context may cause disorder in another context, and therefore be unparliamentary.” The chair did not intervene last Thursday when the words were spoken. While they might have been the subject of a point of order, they do not give rise to a point of privilege.

To return to Speaker Fraser’s 1987 ruling, the Speaker then made some very interesting points. One is that the absolute privilege that

was extended to members for what they say in the House came about in “the British House of Commons in a different age when things said within the House would probably not be heard throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom.” He then said:

Today, as a consequence of television and electronic broadcasting, anything said in this place is said in the street right across the country, and that has to be borne in mind.

He also reminded members to take the greatest care in framing questions relating to conflicts of interest.

While there is not a prima facie question of privilege, the chair is very concerned about the type of statements that give rise to these types of points of order and questions of privilege. This is a place of honour, and members on all sides must respect the institution. The tremendous rights and immunities that members possess must be tempered with responsibility. If members will not exercise some self-restraint, then the chair will intervene more frequently to ensure that the proper level of decorum and respect is maintained. In the chair’s view this was a regrettable exchange that did not reflect well on a particular member. We will move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

Second Reading

Bill 17

Insurance Amendment Act, 2001

[Debate adjourned May 24: Dr. Taft speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to stand up and make a few comments and a few observations on Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001. I would like to compliment the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who had a tremendous job in trying to overhaul the legislation. I gather that the former act has been in effect in this province since 1915. It is also my understanding that it has been amended over the years to fit the bill and fit the needs of Albertans, but this major update to our legislation which is provided in Bill 17 will certainly not only update the legislation, but it is designed to carry it into the future.

Now, then, when I look at the major object of this bill, it is to amend the new Insurance Act, which is to take effect on September 1, 2001, by removing the requirement that adjusters who are employees of the insurance companies need to be licensed. In its place adjusters working for insurers no longer need to be certified, but the insurer is held responsible for the actions of adjusters who are their employees.

I also see as one of the highlights of this bill that it gives the minister the power to call witnesses to give evidence at hearings in appeals under the act, again I think something that the industry has seen a need for for some time.

3:10

As I said in my opening remarks, this was quite an exhaustive review from stakeholders. We have been receiving information for seven years, but like so much of what we do, as the date of instituting and bringing into effect this new legislation gets closer, we continue to hear more and more input from the stakeholders. As they see how the bill is going to affect them, they certainly bring forward new ideas. So what we have been witnessing is some increased scrutiny, not only from the stakeholders but also from the public domain, and they are bringing more concerns forward.

Now, what we hear from the public domain is that they continue to request more research. They wish there to be additional research, and again I think, Mr. Speaker, that because of the impending implementation of Bill 17, people are finally taking a very close look at it and putting all these changes under the microscope and seeing exactly how it is going to affect them. I think that overall Bill 17 has attempted to address these concerns. What I would like to do is just continue my remarks with regards to some of the parts of this bill that people have made comments on.

When I look at section 2 of the act, 459.1, I see that

where an individual referred to in section 460(2)(c) contravenes this Act or the regulations in the course of employment as an adjuster, the contravention is deemed to have been committed by the insurer that employs the individual, and any remedy available under this Act in respect of the contravention may be pursued directly against the insurer.

I think this particular amendment is a very good amendment. It takes into account here how we want consumer protection, better protection for all Albertans when it comes to dealing with the insurance industry. The insurance industry like so many industries in this province has been impacted tremendously by technology, by increasing demands and changing demands, so I see that this particular amendment, 459.1, is definitely one of those amendments which addresses some of the concerns of the stakeholders.

Now, I see as well here that section 460 is also amended by substituting the following: "The individual is an employee of an insurer and the contract . . . by that insurer or by an insurer that is an affiliate of that insurer," again one of those changes that is certainly an update and simplifies the responsibilities of the employee of the insurer.

In looking at other issues in this new legislation, I see that the new Insurance Act will place the responsibility and liability for the conduct of an insurance company on its directors. Again, this is exactly where it should be. I see that in the present act they have definitely looked at what can happen when insurance companies do not live up to the responsibility and liability placed on them. Certainly they have instituted fines where the maximum fine to insurance companies now has increased dramatically, a thousand-fold, from \$200 originally to \$200,000. When you are looking at those sizes of fines, it certainly bodes well for the average consumer who does want protection when dealing with insurance companies. As well, I see here that these fines will also apply to any dealings with insurance companies which are coercive or deceptive in the way that the insurance company or any of its agents practise.

Another major issue in this particular bill, Mr. Speaker, that it now deals with, is that we will have disclosure from insurance companies and their agents. As well, we will have the implementation of rules governing claim practices.

All of these changes, Mr. Speaker, certainly do a great deal to update this legislation, to move it forward, and to carry it into the future. So with those few comments I will take my seat and listen to what other members of the Assembly have to say in regards to Bill 17.

Thank you for this opportunity.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a few words to say regarding Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001. I worked with our ace research staff on the coverage we did back on the Insurance Act, Bill 25. There was such an extensive consultation between the drafters of the legislation and the insurance industry that I'm surprised that this amendment act comes so quickly to the Assembly. It is scarcely two years since Bill 25.

Certainly at that time the industry's opposition to the situation

regarding staff adjusters was brought to our attention. Of course, that was during the stakeholder consultation process. The insurance companies wanted then the staff adjuster licensing provision removed, as I understand it, going back a little ways in history with Bill 25. The opinion that was expressed to us was that it was redundant, given that insurance companies that act as adjusters are already required to have a valid adjuster's certificate of authority. The additional licensing requirement represented an increased cost to insurers that would be passed on to consumers.

The insurance industry viewed this requirement with a great deal of suspicion. They thought it was needless and that possibly it could be a money grab by the government in the way of licensing fees. This could easily happen, because we know the number of fees that have been introduced into this jurisdiction in the last seven years. There's a fee for this; there's a fee for that. In my view, there is no difference between a tax and a fee. Such is my view, and fortunately in our case the courts had something to say about the excessive costs of user fees in this province.

3:20

The highlights, as I see them, of this bill include removing the requirement that adjusters who are employees of insurance companies need to be licensed. Secondly, it makes it clear that insurers are held responsible for the actions of adjusters who are their employees, and I think we should make it abundantly clear that this should go for all employees of insurance companies. This also, again, gives the minister or appeal body the power to call witnesses to give evidence at hearings and appeals under this act.

This insurance act – as I understand it, we are going to receive another rather large, extensive document in regards to the second half of the old Insurance Act from 1918. I'm wondering if the sponsor of this bill, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, in the discussions that have occurred – and I'm sure there have been discussions both ways between the government and industry regarding this specific insurance amendment. What else is coming down the road with the last stage of the overhaul of the Insurance Act?

When we look at, I suppose, the size of the legislation and the fact that it's two years later, perhaps the other side of the coin, Mr. Speaker, is that if there's only one amendment to the act, then the drafting of that legislation was sound and there was certainly a consultation process. But one cannot take that chance, I believe, with consumers in this province. Consumers are sort of at the bottom of the last-to-know list. If there's anything going on in this province, the consumers seem to be habitually left in the dark. We think of pine shakes; that's one example.

The issue of pine shakes, Mr. Speaker, is one of great importance to all Albertans, and the insurance companies certainly have a very keen role as observers in this as it goes through the court system. But when you think of consumers and you think of the priority that's placed on the consumers' right to know, perhaps we're a little bit too hasty with the amendment here. It looks sound, but one can never be sure, and I'm a little reluctant, I'm a little cautious to support this amendment at this time until I hear back specifically from the insurance industry myself.

Now, I'm looking at the notes I have. The stakeholders consulted, I believe, on Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, 2001, were the Consumers' Association of Alberta; the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Alberta division; and the Independent Insurance Brokers Association.

For Bill 25, the Insurance Act, there was a long list of people consulted. There was the Consumers' Association, the Canadian Bankers' Association, the Canadian Institute of Actuaries, the

Alberta Treasury Branches, the Canadian Independent Adjusters' Association, the Independent Insurance Brokers' Association, the Insurance Bureau of Canada in Alberta, the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association, the Canadian Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors, and several others. Now, realizing that the consultation was not as extensive for this amendment, I'm concerned about this. I've sent out several letters to various stakeholders. I'm waiting to hear back from them, and I'm sure I will.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when we consider that this legislation will change the insurance industry – now, there are people who will tell you that, no, it's not going to change the insurance industry, but I think in five or six years we will see increased competition. Certainly the banks are very anxious to get in on the industry, and there are certain legislative triggers that are going to be initiated in Bill 25, the Insurance Act. There's also the issue of eligibility, sole or primary occupation, and that's an idea that we've discussed here before. There's the issue of mandatory continuing education, and there was no provision in the act for mandatory continuing education.

Now, many people believe that the needs of consumers demand knowledge, dedication, and education on the part of financial advisers. I myself went in February – yes, Mr. Speaker, in the midst of the election – to make an RRSP contribution. An adviser was there, a young man, and I was astonished at the advice I was receiving from this man. I believe I'm certainly a much more cautious investor than he, but this concept of mandatory continuing education is one that I think would be noteworthy in that specific industry and in that specific institution, which, I can guarantee you, is going to want to sell insurance.

There's also the issue of financial guarantees, compensation plans, compensation sharing, antirebate provisions. Of course, getting back to what I said earlier about the deposit-taking institutions – the banks, the loan companies, the trust corporations, Alberta Treasury Branches, and the credit unions – there's the issue of unfair practices. When will we see an amendment before the House in regards to the specific concerns relating to an unfair or coercive or deceptive practice? You know, many people thought that that definition was too wide, too broad, and they wanted details. But as I view that, it certainly was not in that bill, and it's certainly not part of this amendment. When will that happen?

Now, Mr. Speaker, at this time I think I will conclude my remarks at second reading on Bill 17. Hopefully I'm going to hear back and receive direction on this bill from the stakeholders that I've consulted, and until I do, I'm very cautious. At this time I'm going to withhold judgment on this bill until I hear back from those stakeholders, possibly as soon as tomorrow or perhaps even Thursday evening, because I'll see some people involved in the industry, if I'm lucky, on the soccer pitches of southeast Edmonton.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a second time]

3:30

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'd like to introduce to you and through you a very valuable person and a good friend of mine, Mr. David Despina, who worked very hard on my campaign and is also the PC president for the Edmonton-Norwood constituency. He has risen. I'd like the House to give him the warm traditional welcome.

Thank you.

Bill 16 School Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 8: Dr. Massey]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to have an opportunity to talk to Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, 2001, at second reading, a time when we have an opportunity to speak in principle to the bill and the very beginning stages of when we are able to send bills out to a variety of stakeholder groups and get their feedback and their comments on what they think about the legislation and sometimes have them respond to us on their own, depending on how controversial or how interesting the bill seems to various organizations, groups, and people.

This is what I would call a classic government bill. We see about one-third of the people in the community very much in support of the legislation, we see about one-third of the people in the community very much opposed to the legislation, and about one-third of the people are sitting on the fence, like some parts and don't like other parts and aren't quite sure how they want us to vote. Certainly this is what is unfolding with this particular bill, and it's been quite interesting to watch. This is a bill that's very important for us in terms of the future of our education and, in certain areas that are played out, in terms of how our children will be taught and the manner in which they will go to school and who will have rights and who will have their rights changed. What we've seen with this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, is one of the greatest volumes of correspondence that I have witnessed on a piece of legislation while I've been an MLA – and that's for some time now – and certainly there's been lots of information.

There's an interesting part of this process with this particular piece of legislation, and I believe that it's one of the fundamental reasons why we have to be very cognizant of our responsibilities as legislators not to pass legislation too fast. What has happened in the course of the timing of this bill having been introduced and now, when I have an opportunity to speak to it in principle, is that we've had the first flurry of feedback from groups directly affected by the legislation. Over the course of last week some of those groups have amended their position slightly after they've had a longer time period to look at the bill, and the bill isn't a short piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. It comprises some 17 pages of changes, portions to the amendment that are being acted on, and those take some study and some review in order to fully understand not the first wave of implications but other implications involved with the legislation in and around what can happen, may happen, or how it will potentially affect other areas of education.

So what we've seen in the letters and correspondence that we've got from groups is initial reaction and then some of the reactions being somewhat amended as this particular amendment act has been sent out for circulation among additional stakeholders, and some of those stakeholders then have sent this bill to lawyers for legal opinions. It's interesting that those opinions have come back in some detail and, as often is the case with legal opinions, not always expressing exactly the same concerns or perspective.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So what does that tell us, Mr. Speaker? It tells me that there are some flaws in this bill, that there are some areas for concern, that it certainly needs sober second thought before it gets passed into legislation, and that perhaps this is the kind of bill that would require some amendment, not to say that there aren't potentially some very good things in this bill. Maybe I'll just spend a moment talking about some of the parts of the bill that are particularly appealing to me.

The first of those would be the aspect that deals with charter schools. What we see happening here is that this places charter schools in context, which I think is something that we've needed. We've seen over the past few years that charter schools have been increasingly popular for a variety of reasons, not the least of which, I hear in my constituency, is that they give parents more direct control over what their kids are learning and the process by which they are learning. It allows them sometimes to specifically stream into an area of interest or provide what they believe is a subsequent beefing up of aspects of education that they for whatever reason feel are not available within the current public or separate system. Many people like the charter school system for who it excludes, Mr. Speaker, so I think that in itself is an interesting topic for debate.

What happens here in this legislation, as I understand it, is that the groups now must apply first to a school board to be included as an alternative program. That's really a positive step forward. I think that for the most part most of the charter schools that we have in existence could easily fall within the umbrella of the public or separate school system.

My kids are in the separate system, and as I chose a school for them, I did certainly take a look at the kinds of activities that were available in the school, the scholastic record of the school, and some background on the teachers that they would be most directly affected by and made my choices for my kids based on that. They started in the immersion program, Mr. Speaker, because I felt that it was very important for kids at an early age to learn at least a second language. In my constituency many people speak four or five languages from a very young age. I felt at the very least my kids could have a good grounding in both official languages of this country, that that would be beneficial to them and beneficial to the country.

So that's where they started out, in French immersion at a very excellent school where there were some good programs. A downside to that, though, is you don't get everything you want, and perhaps that school didn't have the same programs for sports or cultural activities that some other choices would have had. Primarily as a result of those options, my children chose to start junior high in different schools.

We took a look at what options were available in the community there, took a look at all the options, including the public system and charter schools, and they chose to remain in the separate system and again by choice went to a school that wasn't within walking distance of the home, that they had to take the bus to or I had to drive them to. Now they're in high school, and they made their choices in terms of where they wanted to go, and they made choices based on programs available there. So once again they looked at charter schools.

The schools they looked at that were charter schools I felt would have fit very well under this umbrella as is listed now for charter schools, that they first must apply to the school board to be included as an alternate program. If they're turned down by the board, the minister may issue a charter. What that does also is raise more than one opportunity for the public to get involved in those decisions. I think that isn't a bad thing, Mr. Speaker, so I'm glad to see that at

least the charter school part of the act will be included. I think that's a progressive step.

3:40

Something else that I was quite happy to see in this particular bill were the discussions around teachers, where they're requiring the school boards to report any employment action against teachers to the registrar. It surprised me actually, Mr. Speaker, that that wasn't already existing in the current legislation, because it seems to be good common sense. It seems to be that when we're talking about the safety of our children and their ability to be educated in a manner and an atmosphere that is positive for them, we would certainly want employment action to be reported to somebody who is in a position of being able to keep track of that information and act on it as necessary. So what will happen now with this piece being in here is that records will be available to employers across the country. I think that teachers are held in the same high regard as nurses and doctors and other professionals, and certainly I have found in my experience that that is a regard that is well placed.

However, there are exceptions to every rule, Mr. Speaker, and certainly teachers fall within that framework. We've seen situations arise throughout this country where there are issues where it would have been very important for the school boards or any employers of teachers to have information about teachers that would have perhaps changed the decisions about where teachers were placed or even if they were placed. So I think that this strengthening of the act is long overdue and a good move.

What it means is that teachers in trouble will not be able to move to other schools without their records following them. It doesn't address what kind of assistance may or may not be available to teachers who are in trouble in terms of turning their records around or addressing outstanding issues, but certainly it weighs heavily on the side of protecting students and the people who hired those teachers, so I'm quite happy to see that particular provision being put in place with the changes in this amendment act. It's a good part of it.

Another good thing that's happening here, Mr. Speaker, I think, is the changes within the bill to the School Buildings Board. While I have a couple of reservations about this, I think in general this is a positive move. What we see happening here is that the School Buildings Board is being dissolved, and what's going to happen now is the school building decisions are transferred to the Minister of Learning. So it's a bit of a dilemma. We don't like to have too much power in the hands of the minister for decisions about where a school is to be built because . . .

DR. MASSEY: School boards become lobbyists.

MS CARLSON: Yes. School boards absolutely become lobbyists under that kind of a situation, Mr. Speaker, and it gives the Minister of Learning a tremendous amount of power and control. Of course, the concern always is regarding the independence of the decision-making about where the schools go. We saw some of that here recently just prior to the election. There seemed to be a priority list where schools should go. The next thing you know there's a sod turning, and people are participating in the building of schools in areas where it's a surprise to the rest of the province that they're going up.

DR. MASSEY: Block funding would be better.

MS CARLSON: Yeah, block funding would certainly be better in this regard in terms of where the schools would go and how the decision-making will be.

So we would like some information, Mr. Speaker – and perhaps the Minister of Learning can give this to us when we get to the committee stage – in terms of how he's going to make the decision on the school buildings. What we would like to see happen is that criteria be developed, a framework for the decision-making that is open, accessible, and where the minister is accountable for the decisions that he makes. What I would envision seeing is a weighting given to the various criteria for schools wanting or needing to be built, so that the weighting develops and what can be the kinds of criteria. We've all seen them. I have many of those instances in my own constituency. We have plots of land designated particularly for junior highs in my constituency that haven't been built and it looks like, under the existing system, will never be built.

What are the demands in the area for those schools? There are a great number of children who need access to that education who are now being bused or driven by parents to other locations that are quite far out of the way. Why do you want kids to go to your school locally? So that they can participate in extracurricular activities, so that they can develop friendships within the community, so that it's easy for them to get to the school and get home afterwards. I think that those are some excellent reasons.

We've heard all kinds of horror stories of kids taking very long trips on bus rides. Certainly my own kids have been in that situation where they've had 45 minutes or an hour to ride on the public system. The biggest problem with that in Alberta is that when they're on the public system, particularly if they have to transfer, what do they do in cold weather? Small kids get pushed to the back of the lineups; they get pushed out of the bus shelters. Those are all things that you have to be concerned about when you're in a situation where you cannot drive your child to and from school every day but they need to get there. So having schools in local areas is important.

We have a particular problem in Mill Woods with the high schools at this time in terms of them being overcrowded and periodically going to time periods when they have closed boundaries and kids who live right across from the school can't go to the local school. They have to bus someplace very far away. So those are all items that we would like to see developed in the criteria for assessing who gets a school and who doesn't: the population, current and future in terms of pressure on existing school systems; how many kids are currently being bused out of the area; what kind of programing would be developed there; perhaps infrastructure needs of other schools in the area. All these kinds of things can be put on a list. They can be assigned a weighting, and then depending on the weighting, it can be determined how fast they move up to the top of the list and schools be built there.

There's a tremendous amount of development in southeast Edmonton, and in fact there are another 10,000 homes slated in my own constituency over the next five to 10 years. There's no way, Mr. Speaker, that that kind of a population increase – that's homes, not people. That means 30,000, 40,000 people moving into the constituency over the next few years. Mill Woods is an area where young families tend to move in, so kids of school age will definitely be moving into the area, and the current schools can't sustain that kind of pressure on them by any stretch of the imagination. We have gone through many years of school boards moving in portables and setting them up, and that's not going to be adequate to meet the needs. So we would like to see, specifically, the kind of criteria that the minister is going to be developing to deal with these pressure points in the province.

Conversely, what decision-making is he going to be making in terms of shutting down schools? We know that there are many schools in rural Alberta who share the concern with declining

populations that they're going to have to shut down a school. Schools are always a fundamental anchor in a community and particularly in rural areas. If they only had to ride on a bus for 45 minutes, the parents would be happy. We've heard some horror stories of kids and the amount of time that they have to get on buses and the age that we're putting kids on buses.

3:50

You know, when I lived in Coronation, Mr. Speaker, the big debate then was to change kindergarten from a half-day program to a day program there in town. Why? The only reason was the school bus ride. There were a number of young kids – so those are four and a half and five year olds – who were on the bus for longer than 45 minutes five days a week. It was crazy. We think about it: they're very young children being put on a bus like that. So what they decided to do was to have two full days of school instead and provide a nap time for the kids after lunch so that they could rebuild their energies. That turned out to be much more beneficial, I think, to the kids in the long run than the half-day programs, where they had to spend so much time on the bus. So those are issues that I'm hoping the minister will take under consideration and will report back to us on.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to take this opportunity to make some comments on Bill 16, which contains amendments to the School Act. The amendments are diverse. They deal with a variety of issues and aspects of the existing legislation. Some amendments would seem to be quite timely and helpful. Others I have some questions about. Now, I'm not sure which way I would lean in the end. Yet there are others that are so contentious that I'm hearing a fair bit of opposition directly from school boards that will be affected by those changes. So this is sort of an omnibus bill, but let me outline the various sections that I'd like to speak on and then continue with my remarks.

I think the preamble to the School Act, as I read it, is a good one. It seems to underscore the fact that minority language education guarantees will be respected in the province. I think that's really a question of the Francophone community and its language rights being protected and respected, I guess, if this bill passes. That's good.

The next section, section 3, talks about abolishing co-ordinating councils, and I guess that becomes redundant given the changes that are proposed here. So that's fine. I don't see anything particularly controversial about that.

Section 5, then, goes on to talk about the process of establishing charter schools. I guess what's intended here is that if these amendments go through, anyone wanting to establish a charter school would apply to the minister now and not to the board. Really several sections of the bill deal with charter schools. Given the experience we have had with charter schools in this province, which is one of, I think, failure of the experiment, I don't know why the minister has gone on in detail to outline a somewhat modified procedure to establish schools rather than to say that the experiment has failed, that we recognize it, that it was an experiment, let's get rid of it, and encourage school boards to continue doing what they're doing; that is, to establish alternative schools in order to meet the needs of the diverse communities which they serve.

The minister clearly recognizes that the public school systems, both separate and public, under the overall umbrella have been sensitive to growing community needs which grow out of growing

diversity. They provide choice and alternative programs that have been subscribed to quite heavily by the families and students who enroll in them. So I just have questions about why the minister still wants to retain and put in his own hands the power to establish private schools, when he duly recognizes that the current system of public school boards works well in providing diverse and special programs where there is a demonstrated need. There's an ability on the part of the board to deliver those needs by way of special programs.

Then there are some minor changes, I guess some wording changes. The word "company" is fine, I guess, in the way it's being used now. The word "person" is eliminated. I have no problem with that.

Section 15 still continues to talk about private schools. It is certainly a welcome change with the amendments in this act that are being sought by obliging the school boards and schools – whether they're private schools or charter schools or public schools – to report in a systematic way on unsuitable teachers. I think that's a change that was overdue. I understand that it has the support of all segments of the stakeholders in the education system. So that's certainly been a very welcome change.

There's the abolition – let me look at my notes here, Mr. Speaker – of the School Buildings Board and the space utilization committees, you know, that arrive out of that, so I guess that's good. The two ministers, the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Education, can deal directly with those questions now. So it certainly helps reduce some bureaucratic bottlenecks and give to the ministers the ability to directly respond to community demands and pressures.

In that regard I guess I would like to mention in passing the question of school closures, particularly in the inner-city areas of Edmonton and Calgary and even in Red Deer. I visited a school council there about three years ago, where parents in an older area of Red Deer were facing a school closure, a school that served not only their children exceedingly well, but most of the parents who had sent their children there were in fact recent immigrant families. They thought the school served the special needs of their children exceedingly well. In addition to that, they thought that the school also served as a community centre with all kinds of facilities. They, as new members of Alberta society, needed those facilities located nearby them in their own schools so that they could access them.

So those are the kinds of concerns that continue to persist, not only persist but are growing in Edmonton. I know they're also quite serious concerns in Calgary. In another school area that I visited there about a year or so ago, I met with the school council, and there were very similar concerns.

So I hope that with this change the minister will be able to show much greater responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs of local neighbourhoods, particularly in the inner-city areas, which are certainly in crying need of renewal. The city centres are losing businesses because the population is thinning out. We in fact need to attract more people into the inner-city area. If schools are being closed, the ability to attract more people to move into those areas is thereby reduced.

4:00

So I hope the minister will use this new power that he's seeking by way of changes through this bill to respond more sensitively and more openly to these pressures from inner-city neighbourhoods and communities. The space utilization formula is in part to blame for school boards having to close inner-city schools, and I would urge the minister, again, to revise, change this formula, make this formula sensitive to the needs of these local neighbourhoods and inner-city communities.

There's always, of course, a fear that this kind of centralization of

authority in the hands of the minister himself could be used in the opposite direction. I certainly would hope that doesn't happen. It is centralization. It does concentrate power in the department's own bureaucracy, which, on the one hand, can make it easy for the minister to simply say, "I'm going to do this and do it very quickly" to respond to local community concerns. On the other hand, the communities might find that the power is placed now so far away from them that it's not accessible to them.

Mr. Speaker, to turn to some of the other issues, the most contentious area, as I said, has to do with the establishment of separate school regions, starting with section 29 onwards in the bill. I want to just draw to the attention of the House and the minister some of the concerns that have been communicated to me through letters and have been communicated to other members of this House. I'm going to just use a sample of them to put them on the record.

On Thursday, I guess, at the reception of the Alberta School Boards Association meeting in the Royal Glenora club, next door to us here, there were several from all sides of the House present. I certainly was very seriously lobbied and buttonholed by concerned members of the school boards. One message that I received from them was that on this issue of the establishment of separate school boards there isn't support from the majority of the members of the Alberta School Boards Association. I hope I'm not wrong. My impression is that the minister, in fact, did say that there's wide, broad-based support for this. Certainly that's not the message that was given to me firsthand, face-to-face by several members of these boards who were present at this reception.

Let me take a letter from the Black Gold regional schools jurisdiction. In this letter I think the interesting part for me is:

My Board has some serious reservations about some of the provisions of Bill 16. We are particularly concerned about several of our smaller communities where any erosion of student enrolment will jeopardize the programs currently in existence. We are extremely proud of the educational opportunities we provide in New Sarepta, Calmar, Thorsby and Warburg and to allow decisions from outside those communities to determine the availability of educational opportunities within those communities is completely unfair.

That's from Black Gold regional schools.

Red Deer public school district No. 104. Again, let me read, Mr. Speaker. It says:

The Board of Trustees of the Red Deer Public School District No. 104 wishes to share with you its grave concern regarding some of the provisions of Bill No. 16, The School Amendment Act, 2001. Specifically, our Board is opposed to the provisions which establish a new process for facilitating the expansion of separate school education. We urge you and your colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to withdraw these provisions.

So that is another letter.

Then a letter, a copy of which I received, to the minister from the Francophone secular school division, and that's quite categorical about the way they think this bill fails to address their rights and their concerns. So there are several problems with this bill. Let me just quote a couple of sentences as well from the Greater Southern public Francophone education region No. 4. The observations made here are something that deserve the consideration of this House in my view. It says that

although a solution may have been found which may meet the legal requirements, the proposed amendments do not respect the rights and needs of the secular Francophone community.

Again, since the letter is addressed to the minister, it says:

As a result, Dr. Oberg, this is to advise you that as advocates for public Francophone education, the Board of Trustees of the Greater Southern Public Francophone Education Region No. 4 cannot accept on principle that this second condition regarding prejudicial hiring practices be incorporated into the governance structure of the . . . Boards concept.

So they're also expressing a very serious concern about it, Mr. Speaker.

The last letter from which I want to quote is from the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. They have expressed several concerns which overlap with the concerns expressed by school boards and school board associations which I referred to in my remarks a few minutes ago.

So there are problems, Mr. Speaker. There are problems to be resolved. All of us realize that these matters of public/separate school boards are contentious ones. They're complex ones. They're sensitive ones. We shouldn't rush to impose solutions which are unacceptable to a substantial number of school boards involved and citizens involved.

In light of what I've heard as representations from a variety of school board members from different jurisdictions, different backgrounds, different stakes in the changes being proposed, I get the feeling that what we need to do as an Assembly is advise the minister to withhold further action on this bill in this Assembly and give himself and give his department time to consult, to find solutions that would be appropriately acceptable to these large numbers of significant educational players, policymakers and decision-makers. If we show some degree of patience in this regard, if the minister and his department are willing to consult further, it may be possible to ultimately find solutions that will enjoy greater permanence, that will enjoy more widespread support and approval across Alberta, across various communities.

So I'm going to certainly call on the minister to consider holding this bill until the fall session and to engage in consultations with those who have expressed serious concerns. I know that the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, with 41 members, at the end of last week told me that they had 18 boards who had formally expressed opposition to certain sections of this bill having to do with the establishment of those public schools.

4:10

Public education, Mr. Speaker, is such an important institution in our kind of society not only because it provides young people with skills which are related to their intellectual performance later on and their ability to earn a good living and become productive and responsible citizens but also because public education is a very important means of seeking a degree of harmony through integrating diverse segments of our society into a harmonious totality or entity. So I would certainly hope that the minister will pay attention to the concerns that are being expressed broadly across this province with respect to those provisions that I've drawn attention to. These concerns should be taken seriously, and an attempt should be made to address them before we proceed any further with this bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that I close my comments on Bill 16. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a few concerns. I have a few observations and some analysis in regard to Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, 2001. As other speakers have said before me, this certainly is a contentious and conflicting piece of legislation yet legislation that all parties in this province, I think, seem to have some need of. Yet they are very cautious and very concerned about the contents of Bill 16.

These amendments to the School Act certainly are amendments that will have far-reaching concerns and perhaps cause us more problems than solve problems. So when I heard the hon. Member

for Edmonton-Strathcona talk about taking time to pass this bill and taking more time to consult with the various stakeholders, I would certainly have to echo those wise comments, particularly when it comes to something that is so important to Albertans, and that is public education.

Certainly all members in this Assembly realize the importance of public education. For many of us it was stressed by our parents, by our grandparents, particularly parents and grandparents that had experienced situations in other countries before they immigrated to Canada. They certainly saw public education as one of the key instruments for their children to get ahead, for their children to become educated, for their children to have a better life in this country than they had, certainly worthy, worthy principles that all of us hold dear.

So in looking at this, I saw that the object of Bill 16 was to address the equalization of the assessment tax base, new methods for expansion of the separate school jurisdiction, and other amendments for the Francophone regional authorities, charter schools, reporting of employment actions against teachers, and the dissolution of the School Buildings Board.

Now, last week, Mr. Speaker, a number of members from this Assembly had the opportunity to attend the meeting of the Alberta School Boards Association, zones 2 and 3. I can certainly say that in my four-plus years in this Assembly I have never, never encountered so much concern over a piece of legislation by a group of stakeholders. Some of the things that came forward from my meetings with those stakeholders that particular day were not by people in our school boards from our major cities and major urban centres but from those that were from outside.

The county of Sturgeon school board was well represented at this particular meeting, and they had many, many concerns. Their concerns were certainly what this would do not only to education, not only to the funding of education, but also what it would do to communities as they struggle to deal with some of the provisions of Bill 16. It certainly is full of conflicting and contentious issues, and it will have a huge impact on our rural communities.

I was quite interested to see, when I was going through the material on this particular bill, what impact this would have on, say, smaller communities like Jasper. Certainly that is one of those communities that I'm familiar with. I obtained my education from grades 1 to 12 in Jasper, and we certainly had a number of Catholics but a far greater percentage of Protestants that attended school in Jasper. I can't begin to think what would have happened at that point if, for example, we'd had to have two separate systems. I would think that perhaps our math 30 class, which had five members, would have been cut to a system where we would have had three students in the Protestant system and two in the Catholic system. So, again, we have to look at legislation and certainly hope that reasonable minds deal with these changes and that when they deal with these changes, they make changes which are for the good of all when it comes to education.

Now, I notice here that the bill addresses six issues. One of those that we do wish to make comments on is the expansion of Catholic separate school education. When we look at this particular part of the bill, the amendment assumes that the only minority faith entitled to separate school education is Catholic where Catholics are the minority. There are communities in Alberta where Protestants are in the minority compared to Catholics, and the amendments make no provision for this reality. They go on to say that the amendments discriminate against a Protestant minority.

I had an opportunity to teach in this particular type of a situation when I taught with St. Albert public, which was the Catholic board, because at the time that the school board was formed in St. Albert,

the Catholics were the majority, so they were considered the public board, and the Protestants, who were the minority, were considered the separate board. Now, over time the number of Protestants in St. Albert that are attending school have far outstripped and outnumbered the Catholics, yet we still have the situation where in St. Albert the public board represents the Catholics.

As well, under the amendment it assumes that the local members of the minority faith invariably want separate school education, so there is no provision for these people to say no to separate school education. The amendments discriminate against local minority faith communities that wish to remain part of the public system.

4:20

The amendments also transfer control of this issue from the local electors to politicians, who perhaps do not even live in the affected community. What this would do, as well, is take away that citizen control; they would lose local control of the particular situation. This again, Mr. Speaker, is something that as members of a community we certainly hold dear: the fact that we do have locally elected school boards and we wish those people to speak on our behalf.

Now, as well, one of the other issues that I have concern with is that certainly in education all educators and all boards do have a very restricted budget with which to work. Certainly one of the key issues that is going to be addressed this fall, again a very contentious issue, is where in our budget we had a line item that indicated that teachers over the next two years would get a 6 percent raise. This is certainly a challenge as to how this is going to be dealt with. Here we have legislation that is going to increase quite dramatically the cost of educating students, and one of the outcomes of this legislation is that because of the sparsity, we can look forward to increased busing. We also are going to have huge bills when we look at providing education to all, as is the possibility under this bill.

When I look at this busing issue – the former assistant superintendent of schools in the county of Parkland, who is a good friend of mine, had to make the decision whether they were going to close a couple of rural schools. The enrollment had dropped in those schools, as it has in many of our municipalities across this province. They were really looking, at times when they were short of money, as to the feasibility of keeping these schools open or the reality of perhaps having to close them. At that time it was indicated that perhaps they should close these schools because enrollment had dropped significantly, but it also meant that they'd have children in elementary school that would be riding school buses for 90 minutes one way in order to get to school.

Now, they were holding this meeting on a Friday afternoon, and he said: "Well, why don't we hold off on this decision until Monday morning? We'll meet over in the yard where we have all the school buses and we have our maintenance department." So when all the school board members arrived on Monday morning, he instructed them to get on the school bus, and he had the school bus driver take them for a 90-minute tour on the back roads, the gravel roads, the rough roads, of Parkland county. Now, when they got back to the yard 90 minutes later, he then had the school board members vote on whether they should keep those schools open or close those schools. It was a unanimous vote, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely nobody that rode that school bus for 90 minutes wanted to close those schools.

So what we have to look at in this legislation, as well, is how we are impacting the youth of this province. If we are going to require them to ride buses for an inordinate amount of time, what are we doing to those students? It is not only from the point of view of the time taken out of their day riding a school bus but the opportunities they lose at school because they have to get on buses and head home directly after. You know, the additional burden we would put on

parents: they would have to drive in order for their children to take part in school activities. So that is another issue in this particular legislation that does cause me a lot of concern.

I think what we have to do here is look at other implications of Bill 16, and this is the effect that it will have on our communities in this province. We have already had examples of where people have built partitions in schools so that they can have two separate types of education, and we have seen how this has torn communities apart. As well, when we have this being allowed to happen, Mr. Speaker, we also have the situation that we cannot offer the same quality education to each particular student. When we are taking a pie, a small pie, I might add, and splitting it into even smaller amounts because we are not working together, because we have to deal with two small groups rather than one group that could be dealt with much better by being combined, then I really have to question the value of this.

These were many of the concerns that I heard last week from the Alberta School Boards Association, zones 2 and 3, when I met with those people. There weren't too many people that I spoke to at that particular time that were in favour of Bill 16 in its present format.

So, again, when it comes to legislation, legislation that is difficult and legislation that people realize there is a great need for in this province, when we have this much opposition, this much concern, then I think that as legislators it is very, very important that we don't push this through, that we do search out other alternatives to what is suggested in this bill, that we do look at amendments which will strengthen this bill, which will strengthen our Alberta communities, which will strengthen the education program that we can provide to our students.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat. I certainly would urge all members of this particular Assembly not to rush forward and pass this bill but to certainly look at it with the tools that are available to us to make it a much better piece of legislation.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 16. I think that it's a very significant piece of legislation, and I think it's worthy of some comment. As my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and leader of the third party has said earlier, there are different elements to this bill that make it very difficult to sort out whether or not we can support it. There are certainly some positive elements in the bill, and I do want to acknowledge that fact.

Certainly the right of electors belonging to one group or another, that previously may have been compelled to support a separate or a public system, to actually under the new legislation look at opting out and supporting the system that they choose is a very positive development. I think it's important that parents be permitted to choose the system in which they want to enroll their children. These decisions are, in my experience, made less and less along the basis of faith but more and more along the basis of the individual school: the quality of the teaching staff, the quality of the administration staff, the programs that might be offered in that school, and the overall quality of the education that might be had.

4:30

We've seen examples of this, Mr. Speaker, in some of the discussions around closure of inner-city schools in my constituency. Certainly decisions of parents to go to the separate or the public

systems are made more along the lines of the convenience and quality of the education that's offered. For example, in one case one school lost enrollment because the other one in the different system instituted a program of all-day kindergarten. That was the deciding factor, not which particular faith they belonged to but rather that specific program. So I think it's a positive step and one that I'm pleased to support.

The second element that I think is positive about this legislation, Mr. Speaker, is that it – and I forget the other positive thing. I will come back to that. Perhaps reciting a few of the negative elements of the bill will jog my memory, and I will come back to it. I guess I'm just unaccustomed to saying positive things about government legislation, but I do try to do it every once in a while. I do try to do it.

I guess the most difficult piece of this legislation is the capability of a minority group within a specific area to force the creation of a new school jurisdiction and people not being in a position to stop it once it has happened. I think you come back to the question of what the quality of the education is. So if you have a small school jurisdiction where there's just one system, whether it's public or separate, and then a group wants to divide it into two because they think there might be some advantage to do that, whether it be for religious education reasons or other reasons, then you may in fact have a situation where the quality of education received by the children in that district is reduced because the schools are too small to support an adequate level of education. I think that that's a difficulty of the bill.

I know that the Public School Boards' Association has raised a number of concerns with respect to this bill, and I think that's got to be one of the more difficult elements of it. I think that we ought to have sufficient flexibility built in so that between the parents, whether they're supporters of the public or the separate system, the local school board, the department of education, and the minister the right decision can be achieved. The right balance has to be there to ensure that the rights of the minority to their own separate school board are qualified by the parents themselves from that particular faith community having the right to say, "No, we don't want to have a separate system; we think that the students are best served by having one." I think if that were incorporated, it would make it much easier to support this bill.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have remembered the other positive element of the bill, and it has to do with the changes around creation of charter schools. I think it's certainly an improvement in the bill to specifically further restrict the ability of charter schools to be established, so we find that the minister has more jurisdiction over that.

I think the whole question of charter schools is something that the government should relook at. I know that it was an article of faith of the neoconservative developments of education coming out of the 1980s. It was certainly something that people believed needed to be done because public school systems had not been responsive to the changing demands of parents. But as I think we've seen and we've heard in the debate and, in fact, in one of the tributes that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods made this afternoon, the public school system has responded to those demands of parents. They have in fact provided a large measure of variation in programs to meet the needs of parents, whether it be for special education or the arts. We've seen a number of schools – I know in Edmonton there are at least a couple of schools, one at the junior high and high school level and another at the elementary level – that have developed outstanding arts programs that attract students from around the city. They are very highly recognized schools.

We find a number of other schools that have offered language instruction, primarily in the area of the French language, first of all,

with the French immersion schools and so on. That has become a really important development. Parents now have an opportunity not just in the big cities but even throughout the province to enroll their children in French immersion schools and have them educated in the French language. I think that that has been predominantly provided through the public and separate school systems. I sometimes use the term "public school systems" to mean both, but what I mean is that those systems that are elected and supported by taxpayers have been very responsive, particularly in the area of language. Also we've seen, for example, Ukrainian language programs. I know that in my old ward 3 that I represented on city council for many years, I often was invited to programs at schools that offered Ukrainian language education. And there are more. There are some that offer Chinese language education.

The fact of the matter is that the main argument put forward in the 1980s in favour of charter schools has been refuted by the facts and by the development historically of responsive public school and separate school education systems that have really dealt with the demands of parents for options and choice for their children. So I think the government might want to reconsider its commitment to charter schools. I think that it would be better if people as a whole participated in a democratically elected school system and insisted that the needs of their children for education were properly represented within that system rather than opting out and setting up a number of smaller scale schools or school divisions. I think that that's an important piece, Mr. Speaker.

I think there's a danger when you have smaller groups in the community insisting that they need to have direct control over the programming that exists. I think there needs to be a balance between the interests of society as a whole to provide education and to making sure that there are some common elements of education, that we're all educated with some common values and certain principles, some things that everyone has in their education, yet allow a variation in programming to provide for the individual needs of students and the special qualities or special interests that the children themselves may have to enable every person to individually become a great contributor to our entire society.

4:40

In general, Mr. Speaker, I think that the bill has some very positive elements. I would like to see a greater emphasis, a greater shift to publicly delivered education, whether it's separate or public systems. I would like to make sure that individuals in small areas have some option if it's suggested that you want to split the school system in that particular area. I think that that's an important piece.

Generally, I think the bill deals with things that maybe ought not to be considered together. It would certainly make it easier for us on this side if we could somehow divide the positive elements of this bill from the negative ones. It presents us with some quandaries, but perhaps when the bill comes to committee stage, we will be able to address those through the suggestion of a number of amendments, which I will be only too pleased to present and speak to the members opposite about and give them a full and detailed understanding of our positions and the things that we think could be done to improve the legislation.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd be pleased to take my seat and allow others to continue this very important debate. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a second time]

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to stand today and have the pleasure of moving second reading of Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2001. With regards to this bill, we've already had some discussion in the Assembly with regards to the estimates, and this bill brings forward the authorization of the spending amounts as identified in those estimates for the period of 2001-2002, ending March 31, 2002.

With particular regard it does authorize operating expense and capital investment of \$19.364 billion, including operating expenses of \$18.795 billion; program expenses and voted debt servicing of \$80 million; capital investment of \$569 million; voted nonbudgetary disbursements of \$179 million; and lottery fund payments of \$1.016 billion.

Ministries are also authorized to make additional statutory payments as permitted under the statutes other than the Appropriation Act. Statutory payments are identified in the estimates document for Budget 2001, but they do not form part of the Appropriation Act.

Just as a side comment to this, we in the Legislature have an opportunity of debating all of the estimates of the departments. Especially with the assignment of the Department of Revenue, at this stage I've always been puzzled in some respects that we spend all of this time debating the expenditures and the appropriation of that – and I appreciate that we have legislation that authorizes the collection of all of our taxes and fees and revenues that are associated with funding those expenditures – yet we don't take the time, really, in this Legislature to actually review and debate all the various revenue related items. I know it's been a procedure that we've gone through in the past, but I certainly would like to see that we have the opportunity likewise to give full considered debate to all of the items that we collect and disburse through this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to see that the Minister of Revenue and I agree on something, and that's that we should have more debate time for the budget. Certainly we would support having an equal amount of debate time for each type of revenue that comes into the government's hands. That would be very appropriate, we feel, and perhaps he can lobby his colleagues to add that to next year's agenda. We'd certainly be looking forward to seeing that happen.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 20, this year's appropriation bill, at second reading. You know, we have a problem with this bill in principle. It's tough to support the appropriation bill without getting some kind of explanation about how the new spending will contribute to meeting defined outcomes and performance criteria such as reducing health care waiting lists and reducing the pupil/teacher ratio and improving the lives of vulnerable children and protecting our seniors. The list goes on and on.

It's hard for us to also talk about passing this bill and approving it in principle, Mr. Speaker, when there are any number of questions that, in fact, we didn't get answered during the debate time. In some cases we certainly did talk about sending additional questions in writing to the minister and having those responded to in writing at some future date never quite determined at the point that we were talking about it, but it isn't quite the same as having an opportunity to debate. In fact, we don't really have an opportunity to debate budget issues in the process that's set up. What happens is that the minister makes a short introduction, we lay out our questions over

the course of an hour, and then the minister responds for an even shorter time period at the end of that.

It would be really productive, I think, for both sides of the Legislature if we could honestly have a question-and-answer kind of process in here where not only was the minister available for questions, but we had key staff available from the departments. Often the minister knows the basic concepts of what it is, the policy-kinds of directives in terms of what's happening in the department, but they don't often know the details, Mr. Speaker, not through any fault of their own. There's just too much work to do. Sometimes it's those very details that we'd like to get at when we're talking in budget debates, and I certainly would support a process that made that possible.

When we have tried to do the question-and-answer thing here in committee debates over the past years with regard to budget, what we did find was that we didn't get very good answers. Some ministers were excellent, but for the most part what the ministers would do would be to stand up and answer a question and rattle on for however long on that particular answer to the question and related items and use up the speaking time that was available for the estimates. What would be the most proactive is for us to get, for instance, our one hour of debate time, and then the minister could respond to the questions in as much additional time as was required to adequately meet those questions. I think what that would give us is a quality of question-and-answer time. That's the kind of process that we would like to see develop in appropriations over the future, where good questions can be asked and good answers are provided and where we still get at least a minimum of one hour talk time per ministry.

That isn't very much time, Mr. Speaker, when we're talking about huge dollar expenditures, a total of \$19.544 billion in expenses this year. In fact, one hour was all we got to talk about the \$19.544 billion in revenue that was collected by this department for the government in general. So we would think it would be more appropriate to have more time than that.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to put some of the questions that did not get discussed during budget debate on the record at this point in time. Perhaps we'll get some response prior to us having to actually vote on the appropriations. This Wednesday looks like the date when the final vote will come up. I think these issues are important. They're outstanding issues that need to be talked about and discussed.

The first one that I would like to talk about is under the special places program. A change was made this year, Mr. Speaker, where special places programming was put into the Community Development department business plan rather than in Environment, where it was before. I have some reservations about that having been done. I think the jury is still out in the department in terms of whether they support those changes having been made. We never got a full justification for why those changes were made, and that's one of the questions that we would like to have answered. How does the Minister of Environment feel that special places and parks in general will be enhanced by moving them to Community Development? My first impression of that happening is that now we're supporting a theme park kind of filter when making decisions on parks. I hope that's not the case, and I guess as time unfolds we will find that out.

In terms of special places specifically I have some questions. What's the status of the Special Places 2000 program at this stage? We know the long and not very happy history of that program, and it was to have been concluded by 2000. It isn't yet, Mr. Speaker. There are still several outstanding issues involved in the program,

and we'd like to get an update on where it stands and what the Minister of Community Development plans to do in terms of finishing up the program and what replacement program there is for finishing the concept. I don't think we actually got to the stage where we can adequately say that the mandate of that committee to designate 12 percent or better of this province was actually met. So if we could get that information, it would be helpful. I would also like the Minister of Environment's feedback on what he thinks in terms of the success or failure of that particular program.

We'd also like to know if the department plans to continue to protect areas under this program in terms of any additions and those areas that were still under discussion. If the department is continuing with the program, will economic development rather than environmental protection continue to be the cornerstone of protected areas? That's, of course, our very grave concern.

You know, I hearken back to when this government set out a committee to talk about public lands in this province. The government committee went out and talked about them, solicited feedback from the community, and they got it. One of the government members who was on the committee at one point said to a participant in the program: ranchers are bringing money to the table in deciding about these areas, grazing leases; what are you bring to the table? That was quite startling to the person to whom that question was asked, because they felt, as I feel, that the mandate of the government is the greater good of the landscape and not necessarily the monetary value that is brought by using that landscape in a particular manner.

Greater good isn't always economic good, Mr. Speaker. It can include many different facets. In fact, often the greatest thing we can do for the landscape is to protect it. So our question is: how does Community Development, whose very name, Community Development, would be in contradiction of environmental protection, expect to continue to be the cornerstone of providing protected areas? We'd like some specifics on that if we could, exactly where the minister expects to go with that, the framework within which he will be making decisions. Do they have any long-term plans in this regard? When can we expect feedback, and how are they benchmarking success? So those are the questions with regard to that.

Also, if you could tell us what the department is going to do if they're not going to continue with the program. Is there a program replacement idea out there? If not, why not? What will happen to all the areas that were nominated for protection? I ask this on behalf of many people throughout this province who are gravely concerned about this issue, and we have been waiting, in fact, for some sort of public announcement that has not been forthcoming from the minister. So if we could get that information, it would be very helpful to us.

Another question in that regard is: how will the department monitor applications for industrial developments in or near parks and protected areas? The buffer zones have always been an area of great contention, and now, Mr. Speaker, we have a ministry that really doesn't understand the mandate of protection and the impact that can occur with industrial development very near or right beside protected areas. Has any of the staff from Environment been transferred over? Who is it that's got the technical expertise in that area? Those are the kinds of questions that we like to see answered. If the minister can develop that, that would be very helpful to us. Have they been receiving applications at this stage? That would be a good question to have answered.

Also, what are the department's plans for promoting low-impact ecotourism? Always an area of keen interest to us, and certainly those are some areas where we can see replacement income coming

into regions that have been otherwise economically disadvantaged. I think particularly of some of the coal mines that have been shut down recently. It certainly has an impact on areas.

However, there is no doubt that for every single place where we had a coal mine, we also have incredible opportunities for ecotourism. I'm wondering what the Minister of Community Development has in mind for those areas. To be seen as the minister who really drives ecotourism in this province would be a feather in his cap, I think, and something that he wouldn't really want to ignore. Those questions relate to page 88 in the business plan, and if the minister could respond to them, I would appreciate it.

If we go to page 96 there too, now we talk about the total area of parks and protected areas in Alberta being 81,000 kilometres squared. We need to know what new areas are anticipated in this increased area. Not getting much information about that, and some feedback would certainly be beneficial. Do we see that there are major areas planned, or, Mr. Speaker, will Albertans continue to see a patchwork of fragmented areas evolve from that?

I'm not sure if the Minister of Community Development is up to speed on the Y2Y concept, Yukon to Yellowstone, the kinds of wildlife corridors that are needed and necessary in this province. I'd appreciate his feedback on that if he knows about the concept and if he supports it. If he supports it, what action is his department taking?

I know that formerly in Environment there were some people dedicated to that particular concept, pulling in some research and, I'm hoping, trying to develop the science on why it would be necessary to have those linkages. Certainly I think that we've put on the record many times why the linkages are important, but we haven't particularly seen great support on that issue from the government. Hopefully we can hear something back on that, hopefully a big announcement. But in the absence of that, perhaps before the summer comes, we can see the Minister of Community Development respond to those particular issues.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about climate change, if I could. There are issues here that also weren't fully developed in the budget. If we talk in principle about spending billions and billions of dollars in government expenses, then part of what we need to talk about is how we reduce those dollars in the long run and what decisions the government has currently made, whether or not they're feasible and whether they're going to create additional costs in the future.

5:00

One thing I'd like to talk about is some of the statements that we've heard from the Premier about the clean coal technology. We need to get a definition of exactly what this government means by that. There's some desk thumping at the idea of clean coal technology. I agree with the member that clean coal technology is where we want to go, but let's talk about the scientific facts in that regard, Mr. Speaker, which would state that clean coal, truly clean coal technology is not feasible, is not possible even scientifically at this particular stage.

I see that the member is shaking his head that I am wrong. Well, I would like to see some facts tabled on this, Mr. Speaker, because certainly all the research we've done would indicate that we are at least 15 years away from true clean coal technology. There are lots of cleaner coal technology systems available, but that is quite different from clean coal technology. I know that all of the businesses involved in coal technology support cleaner coal technology. Good for them. It's the right thing to do for people, it's the right thing to do for the environment, and it's the right thing for them to do in the long run in terms of dollars spent and saved. So we would

like to see them pursue that beyond a shadow of a doubt, and what the government can do to support that technology we're also in support of, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, clean coal technology is absolutely not available at this time. It isn't even at the pilot project stage. All scientific evidence and feedback that we're getting would indicate that we are at least five years away from being able to build a pilot project on clean coal technology. Then in order to get a proper length of time to evaluate the pilot project, it's going to take about another five years to be able to identify whether in fact it is running on a clean basis and any tweaking that needs to happen in the process. Traditionally what has happened then is that it takes another five years before that technology can get to market. So what we're seeing now are some public dollars being spent on this research and development. That's somewhat of a concern because what we're seeing are the bucks being spent on something that might or might not work and has a payoff that is coming quite far in the future, incredibly far in the future, Mr. Speaker.

What we would like to see at least with parallel dollars allocated to it, if not more dollars – at the very minimum we would like to see parallel dollars dedicated to looking at alternative sources of technology such as wind or solar or whatever else is out there or other kinds of options that will reduce emissions and reduce the usage of coal as a fuel at this particular time. We don't see that kind of commitment by this government, Mr. Speaker, and that's really too bad.

The kinds of things that we need to take a look at are retrofits for individuals and for businesses and not the least of which is government, Mr. Speaker. This is a place where the Minister of Environment, who is not all that thrilled with listening to this particular debate, could have some huge impact. Why doesn't the government take a look at retrofits for its buildings and its vehicles? They could show some true leadership in this regard, and they could move a serious way towards reducing emissions in general. The government is a huge consumer both in public buildings and in public vehicles, and it would be very proactive of this minister if he could move forward to see the government undergo major retrofits. That would be an economic development stimulant. So perhaps the Minister of Economic Development can get on this particular bandwagon too, because certainly what it does is stimulate the retrofit industry, stimulate the incentives for businesses to look at alternate sources, and it also serves a huge environmental benefit, Mr. Speaker. Those are the kinds of things that we think the minister should be taking a look at. This could be a big hit for him, and we'd like to see him pursue it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 20, the Appropriation Act. This bill is kind of the culmination of the Committee of Supply debate that we've had where we've dealt with each of the departmental budgets and we bring them together now into the aspect of dealing with the overall approval of the appropriations.

One of things that we have to look at in the context of the Appropriation Act itself – we end up with a few dollars, the dollars actually reported in here in each of our departmental areas and this Legislative Assembly, but what is missing in this from the perspective of judging it as a functional document for the public and for us in the Legislature are some of the issues that would relate back to outcome measurements. When we talk about the commitment of

dollars in the context of this act, we're seeing more and more where there are provisions being made for a kind of flexibility within what's going on without any resulting accountability for the change in dollars.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we've seen all the way back to when we started the debt retirement act and allowed for, within a department, changes in budgeted processes. We spent a lot of time in Committee of Supply talking about the line item values. What we end up with is debating the allocation of a lot of dollars, yet when it comes to an operational budget, the minister responsible is never held accountable for anything other than the total value of dollars that are put to that department in the sense that here now is the bill that allocates money to each of those departments without ever putting into legislation the commitment that we make to the specific programs that are represented by the line items in those budgets that we debated at length for the last 20 days.

This is the kind of thing that leaves Albertans with a question in mind as to what kind of legitimacy there is to the budgeting process. Even though we spent time debating the line item allocations, when it comes time to deal with accountability and verifiability, the government can spend them as they see fit. What we then end up with as the only mechanism for accountability is the Public Accounts debate a year down the road, and, Mr. Speaker, even there we're finding now that as we get involved in dealing with the public accounts – as an example, this year there's no way we're going to be able to address each of the departments in the one time per week only during session scheduling that comes up with the debate on public accounts. So there's no follow-up ability in terms of the government's performance and the government's measure except in those few areas where we do get to bring them to Public Accounts.

I think what we've got to do is look at this from the perspective of how we provide for that accountability when we go ahead and present our budget to Albertans. I guess that's where I would suggest that it would be useful to have the line item, full-scale budget brought into the actual enactment. Mr. Speaker, I say that because what we're finding now is that more and more the needs of Albertans require action from more than one ministry. In essence, as an example, what we end up with is that in our service-providing ministries they decide the focus of a program and they decide the delivery of that program, but the capital structure for that program gets moved over to Infrastructure. That's even true in Transportation now, where this becomes a part of the Infrastructure debate. What we then have is no relationship between the related needs and the actual delivery capacity that we have within the budget.

5:10

The other area where this comes up is if we take issues that relate to some of the seniors' or some of the children's programs that we have. Even though more and more children's services or children's needs are being addressed by the minister responsible, we now have a news seniors' approach. What we want to do is watch, because a lot of the needs of those individuals are actually delivered by other departments, through Health or through Learning. What we see then is that you can end up with dollars being shifted around, and they're not accountable in terms of the recipient of that service when all we see are totals for the budget as they come out reported in the Appropriation Act.

I think it would be useful for us to further review whether or not it's legitimate to not deal with incorporating into the legislative approval process, i.e. the Appropriation Act votes, the actual line items. We can see some very significant changes in the direction of a ministry just by moving dollars from one part of their budget to another, which does not require, then, any subsequent legislative

debate or legislative approval. That's the issue that becomes really critical in the case of what I'm talking about. If there's no legislative debate, this in essence becomes an internal decision of the minister with possible standing policy committee and possible cabinet discussions behind closed doors in the government structure, where there's no open public debate available to Albertans, when we see significant shifts in the way the dollars are being moved from one program to the other.

The issue that I also wanted to look at that kind of follows on this a little bit is as we get into the Appropriation Act, section 3(2), when we're talking about effectively allowing any surplus. I assume it also then would be any negative or any deficit that would occur in the lottery fund to automatically roll over to general revenue under the title of debt repayment and contingency reserve so that it moves over and becomes part of that 75-25 pool that the government has. I think that what we want to do is make sure that we look at that as being a true statement in the sense that if lottery fund commitments that we vote through the Legislature at the end of the year are greater than the revenues – now, we have a history, Mr. Speaker, of increasing revenues from lottery. Still, if there was to come a year when revenues were not as expected and we ended up with the revenues coming into lottery not being sufficient, does this section here also then imply that there would be additional general revenue dollars made up to effectively meet the needs of those programs that were being funded by those lottery dollars?

I think that should be clarified for Albertans, because what we see is essentially that if there's a surplus in the lottery fund after commitments, it rolls over. But what happens to those dollars that are specifically identified in programs as being funded by a transfer from the lottery fund? If there's not enough revenue in the lottery fund, how do we deal with that?

So we've got kind of an inconsistency here. If we've got extra, we put it in general revenue as a surplus. But if we have a deficit, what happens? How do we fund those programs? Are they just automatically cut, as would happen if the general revenue fund revenues did not reach the level that was necessary to meet the expenditures that we pass in the budget? You know, that's part of the act as well, which basically says that on a quarterly update if we don't have the revenue stream to support our expenditures, the expenditures are reduced proportionately. Well, would that necessarily transfer over on a program-specific level to the lottery fund program allocations and how they are treated? So I guess that section, when we looked at Bill 20, triggered that kind of concern and that kind of inconsistency when I was looking at that.

The other thing that I wanted to basically touch on initially as we go through this is to look again at the fact that when we deal with our budgets, we keep talking about the idea that we want to be accountable to Albertans, that we want to be accountable to ourselves in terms of our process. The Auditor General has also suggested that we build some measure of performance into our budget approval process, but we don't see it here. We don't see at all in the Appropriation Act any reference back to the performance measures or even to the business plans. If we see the information we're dealing with in the context of the performance measures, in the context of the business plans having any relevance as we go through this approval process for the budget and the appropriations, what we should do is have an additional section in the act which basically stipulates that any ministerial transfer of dollars within their budget has to be consistent with the business plans or has to be consistent with achieving the performance indicators.

You know, this would just be a statement that would stand out for Albertans that says: we've gone through the process of developing business plans, we've gone through the process of selecting a series

of performance indicators, and we now want our budget to be reflective as we put it into operation. That way what we would have is just a slight reminder to the ministers that when they start transferring dollars within the legal authority of the minister but outside any voted amount, they would still do it in the context of and under the achievement of those performance indicators.

Mr. Speaker, as we look through the budget, we also see that in the last two years we've now rolled together operating and capital. This creates a real kind of opportunity for a minister at the end of the year when there are additional dollars available to say, "Oh, well, let's buy some capital; let's buy some supplies," those kinds of things. In essence, "Let's make sure we've used our money."

By separating out the capital allocation from the operating expense, what we end up with is a clear, separate process for decision-making that would allow us to say that these capital projects are needed during this year's commitment to delivery of a service. Yet by not earmarking those dollars separately in our Appropriation Act, what we basically allow is for a minister, as they move through the year, to deal with specific capital projects as part of their overall budget, so there's no operational separation.

If we're going to allow for additional operating dollars, say to be transferred to capital, what we would see then is that that may in effect commit in subsequent years a need for further operating dollars. In essence, we are committing future years to an expenditure pattern that hasn't been approved, prior to implementing it, by the Legislative Assembly, by the people of the province. So I guess I just raise that as kind of a companion to this issue that I was talking about of moving the operating dollars between programs, yet we don't have the flexibility that we need.

5:20

Those are the kinds of things we need to look at in terms of a more direct relationship between our votes here, the debate that we had in Committee of Supply, the actions of the minister delivering those services and programs during the year, and the subsequent follow-up that we have to have when we go back to the accountability phase that comes up under Public Accounts. I guess what we have to do is look at how that whole process maintains and effectively conveys to Albertans a degree of true commitment to the openness and accountability that we talk about in the Legislature on a frequent basis.

The final area that I would like touch on is: how do we measure the idea of budget management, budget stability, and budget sustainability? When we see the ability of the government to increase expenditures in the middle of the year, to switch expenditures in the middle of the year, we don't have that same kind of commitment to a sustainable budget or a sustainable operation of our commitment in the delivery of these programs. I think we've talked about this a lot in Committee of Supply, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about how we measure the change from one year to the next in our budget.

You know, this budget now is about 22 percent above the approved budget for last year, but it's only 12 percent above the actualized or expected expenditures when we get to the end of the year. In essence, there's almost a 10 percent increase in expenditures that occurred during that year, which becomes a baseline for this budget. If we start listening to the Provincial Treasurer talk about having only a 12.5 percent increase this year in the budget, that implies that the budgets from last year are based on what was actually spent, not the value that was approved by the Legislature. We have to look at that in the context of the appropriateness, in the context of the planning process.

I guess in that previous comment, Mr. Speaker, I was not quite

correct in the sense that I said “approved by the Legislature.” Even the supplementary estimates are approved by the Legislature, but I meant the amounts that are approved at the time of the budget debate.

Even though we add those in, what we’ve got then is basically a two-step process for budgeting in Alberta. One is the budget debate. One is what we need in the middle, and then that relates to the next year in terms of what is the base for the next year. My contention is that we should always use the budget that is approved in the Legislature at the time of the budget debate. In other words, when we pass the original appropriation bill, that should be the base for the subsequent year, not the realized expenditures that we deal with through additional appropriations in the interim period. That way we end up with a degree of consistency in our debate and our legitimization, I guess, of those expenditures, because they’ve come before this House, they’ve come before the people of Alberta and had a true open discussion as part of the expenditure pattern.

So that’s basically where we’re going. Mr. Speaker, it gets to be a real issue about: how do we deal with appropriations when we want to look at voting for the bill, when we have a whole kind of series of questions that we raised about the individual line items? The province has to go on. We have to have the dollars. When we get it presented in this kind of a manner, it’s hard to argue at this level that we should be changing money between ministries without having the line item information to justify or to verify where we would be moving the dollars from. So I guess in the end what we have to say is that we vote yes for Bill 20, but remember all the comments we made when we were voting on and debating each of the individual ministries as we went through the discussions, and we ended up then basically questioning a lot of the things that came up

for debate in the actual decisions on the individual programs and the individual services that we would be providing.

Mr. Speaker, what we want to do then is basically say that in order to keep the province running, we’ll be looking at voting for this, but we’ve still got a lot of questions on the exact way that the dollars were allocated and, more specifically, in terms of the way the performance indicators relate back to the expenditures of those dollars and to the way that we deal with the issue of keeping our budget in line with the discussion and the debate and the approval process that we go through in this Legislature.

So with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I’ll take my seat and let someone else continue. [interjection] Before I sit, I would like to adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Prior to adjourning for the afternoon, there’s one item of business that needs to be dealt with prior to Committee of the Whole consideration of certain bills later on this evening. Members may have noticed a minor typographical error that appeared in the title on the cover sheet of Bill 13, Farm Implement Dealerships Act, when it was first printed and distributed to members on May 7. I would request the Assembly’s unanimous consent to replace the original copy of Bill 13 with the correct version for the official records of the Assembly.

[Unanimous consent granted]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 28, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/28

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 28: Dr. Nicol]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be speaking in second reading on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2001. During the Committee of Supply debates on the budget, particularly in the area of Community Development, there were some issues I wanted to raise and didn't have the time.

When I look at Bill 20, this is going over the final budget amounts in every department, and I do notice that under Community Development we have an operating and capital investment of \$591,160,000. Inside that is \$16.1 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. I've had contact in response to my request for information on how the stagnant budgeting in the Alberta Foundation for the Arts is affecting our professional arts organizations in Alberta. I've had responses from a number of organizations, and I raised points that they were concerned about during Committee of Supply, but a couple of them I want to go over now in conjunction with Bill 20.

First of all, the situation of funding for artists in residency programs. I've had some very intelligent, thoughtful correspondence from David Chantler at Trickster Theatre, and he's been doing a lot of work in the area of artists in residency programs in the schools. His point is that the program is desperately underfunded. Often parent organizations and the schools' students themselves will raise moneys to contribute to the cost of this artist in residency program, but in fact "this program is hopelessly under funded," to quote his words. The AFA does in fact jury them, but it looks like about half to three-quarters of the applications to the fund are turned down simply because there's a lack of funds. So they're good programs, they're excellent companies, they really contribute and are a life-enriching experience for the students, their parents, and the teachers, but they simply can't be done. Then at that point the money that has been raised by the school, by the students, by the parent advisory councils has to be given back because in fact they couldn't get the necessary amount of funding through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.

Now, some time ago – and I'm talking pre-1990 – in fact there was money in the education budget for arts education. That doesn't exist any longer. It was all transferred under the auspices of the AFA. They're now responsible for all of this, and with their stagnant funding allocation they've had to cut a number of these. I had spoken earlier about the position that the PASOs, the provincial arts service organizations, are finding themselves in, where they took over programs the government had run but are getting into a position now where they simply cannot afford to run them anymore because the grants they are given are not enough to actually pay for the program. We're running into the same area with this section of education arts funding with these artists in residency programs.

The current situation is the worst funding environment ever. This artists in residency program is immensely popular. I've been into my schools in Edmonton-Centre. There was one artists in residency

program that was done at Queen Mary Park. It was just an amazing program incorporating all the multicultural aspects of that school. So, you know, I really urge the minister to lobby his colleagues in the coming year to ensure that we get some more funding into this area and, indeed, into the funding for the AFA, period.

One of the related issues that has come up around that is the funding for visual arts organizations that are doing work that is less standard. They're working in multimedia. They're working in electronic media. They're pushing the envelope. It falls under what I would call development. There has been a steady erosion of support for development of art in Alberta, and in particular these experimental galleries have really been hard hit. We've got Latitude 53 here in Edmonton and the new gallery in Calgary. So this is really affecting us across Alberta because those are the two centres that are large enough to support a public that's interested in what the gallery is doing, and they are really under stress at this point and have corresponded repeatedly with the AFA board, with the chairperson of that board, with the executive director. I don't know what's going to be done to support them here.

They're falling under the one-grant rule that's now been put in, which has really affected all the organizations in that the additional grants were brought in to indeed supplement what the groups are doing, with an acknowledgment that the base operating fund wasn't enough. Now they're being told that all of that is taken away from them. So they've really suffered a double hit: one from a lack of funding increases to keep up with the cost-of-living increases and the second in losing these ancillary granting opportunities. It's really affecting these organizations.

There has been a change in the way funding was allocated. They are going to make galleries fall under the community-derived revenue formula, which is almost impossible. I mean, galleries don't charge tickets to get in. There's usually a donation setup. People here in Alberta and in Canada are not accustomed to going into a gallery and paying a particular entrance fee. It's usually done by donation, and they just don't generate a significant income by which there could be a community-derived funding formula applied to that to let them get any kind of assistance.

I've spoken pretty much across the board: arts education, public galleries, experimental galleries, performing groups, dance companies, musical companies. All of them are really showing the wear and tear of trying to continually do more with nothing and, more than that, having the Alberta Foundation for the Arts constantly shifting the deck chairs around on the Titanic trying to come up with new funding formulas, which requires re-training which nobody is going to be paying for. The administrators in the organizations are just expected to somehow put in a couple of additional hours on top of their 15-hour day to figure out how all these new applications are to be done and followed through with.

We do have most companies working with smaller administrative staff, doing the same amount of work. We have them hiring less artists, producing less shows. So there has really been an erosion here. Shortly I think we are going to be seeing programs being dropped because they just can't afford to do them, and we may well see the collapse of some companies, which I wouldn't want to see, but given the state of affairs here and the lack of support, I think it's inevitable and most unfortunate.

The new gallery, for example, is talking about a substantial decrease in funding due to the new restructuring, and their cost of living is increasing at a rapid pace, their rent likely doubling, and the cost of utilities for these groups has increased rather dramatically. After much lobbying the government did in fact come through with some sort of rebate program for the nonprofit organizations, but it's based on the commercial rate, and it's less than what some of the other sectors are getting as far as rebates.

8:10

Additionally what's happening with the galleries is that they're being mandated to pay the CARFAC fees, which I think every gallery has a commitment to, but may not be able to pay the full CARFAC fee. They just won't be able to continue to produce at anywhere near the level that they have been. The new gallery, for example, is looking at eliminating another staff position. There are only three staff members left, and they're looking at decreasing essentially 30 percent of their staff. Also advertising. So it makes it more and more difficult to get people to come in and see the shows and give them some revenue at the door, which they can then base their formula for application for funding on, when they can't get the word out about what they're doing and what's going on. There's only so much assistance available from the media outlets in the community for free advertising. They have to make a living too. Most of them are for-profit businesses, and they're just not interested in doing that kind of community service for free.

Of course, everybody is trying not to cut programming, but at a certain point it's inevitable. You just cannot uphold the structure of producing a five-play season, for example, when you've got a staff of three people. It just can't be done. When you don't have enough money to pay for a six-actor show, you're paying for a two-actor show. In the galleries you're mounting fewer exhibitions every year, doing less by way of art education. I've already talked about what's happening with the artists in residency program, a very long-standing and very successful program, which is just suffering a drought of enormous proportions here.

So those were the comments I wanted to make, specifically picking up on what I had been going over during the Community Development debates, and I'm aware that there are others who are anxious to be speaking to Bill 20 in second reading here.

I think that overall, when I look at what's happened with this bill, I'm very reluctant to support it, not that I don't support the various ministries carrying on their programming, but I have real issues and have had for some time with the government's management of the finances of the province. It's a boom-and-bust economy, and I don't see plans being made to accommodate that. I see a gutting of programs that took place in the early '90s and then money going back in but not accomplishing the goals that were supposedly set. In fact, in most cases there's been no attempt to accomplish those goals. It's just been more money going in to satisfy demand and pressure from the public but not actually restructuring the health care system, for example, not dealing with the housing issues that we have.

What I see are the easy targets being hit for so-called holding the line: the seniors, who have yet to have their 5 percent restored to them or any of the programs that were taken away; people living on social assistance and living on AISH, who are having to cope with significant increases in their cost of living with rent and utilities and food and user fees, yet the government is staunchly holding the line on any increase for them. I think that long term we have a number of studies that now show us that if you continue to impoverish people, you never get them out of that cycle.

I don't see the government looking at useful bridging programs that actually assist people to move off things like SFI and into the workforce. They're just kind of pitched off and expected to sink or swim. In fact, a number of them have sunk, and we see the result in a 60 percent increase in the child welfare load, and that is going to cost us dearly in years to come. So there's a very short-term vision here. There's a very short-term reaction. It's at a crisis point. What was that favourite expression we heard from the government? Pressure point reaction to budgeting and management of finances.

When I first came here, I was debating a \$16 billion budget total.

We're now looking at something that's in the range of \$19 billion, so that has come up by \$3 billion in four years. That's a significant increase, yet we still have waiting lists in health care. We still have housing problems. We still have issues in education with classroom sizes, equipping of classrooms. We still have issues with maintenance of our infrastructure, our highways, building of new schools. So, in fact, I don't believe it is good management, and I don't think it's good stewardship of our resources.

We look at the process we've just gone through with an hour of negotiated debate on most of these different departments, and then we're expected to vote on the budget without ever having the responses back in writing from the minister before we're expected to vote on Bill 20, the appropriation bill. So all those questions that I was putting forward to the ministers on which I was going to be basing my decision to support the budget for a given department – I've heard back from very few of the ministers to whom I put questions. I'm just expected to let this go *carte blanche*. It gives me some real issues as a legislator and a responsible person to be allowing this kind of thing to go on and to be supporting it through my vote for a bill like this. So I struggle with the situation that the government places me in constantly.

I'm aware that others wish to get some time in. [interjection] I think that the Minister of Environment is also angling for an opportunity seeing as he's mouthing off and heckling me from across the way, so maybe we'll look to him to rise and speak to this as well. In the meantime, I think one of my colleagues wishes to address this.

Thank you for the opportunity to bring forward a few more remarks at second reading, and I look forward to Committee of the Whole and third reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to address Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2001, this evening and to make some specific comments about the Department of Learning and the Department of Children's Services that I didn't have an opportunity to include in previous debate and to start off, though, if I might, with some general comments related to performance objectives.

A former Provincial Treasurer in this House is quoted as to having said . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: What happened to him?

DR. MASSEY: It's still happening.

He is quoted as having said, "Business plans are one of the cornerstones of Alberta's prudent fiscal management." That was in A Plan for a Debt-Free Alberta. If these business plans are the cornerstone, then I think the building is in some jeopardy. Since the government started using business plans, what should constitute the elements of a business plan have been under debate and have appeared in various ministries with varying formats.

The Auditor General has been fairly persistent in his criticisms of the business plans, and he took the opportunity in the last report to summarize some of the business plans' shortcomings. It was against this list of shortcomings that I judged this year's business plan and the estimates.

One of the criticisms he made was that over 60 percent of the ministries do not relate the goals to the ministries' core businesses. I think the Auditor General this time will probably indicate that they're doing a better job, but there are still some departments that either refuse to do that or choose not to or don't know how to. I'm

not sure what the case may be, but that relationship to the core business and the goals still eludes some ministries.

8:20

I think the second criticism he had and the most telling one for me was that many of the business plans seem to be no more than, I think his words were, a paper exercise or a device to negotiate more money rather than an effective system of accountability. That is rather a devastating criticism of business plans given that we are in 2001, and we've been looking at business plans since 1993. To have them labeled by someone like the Auditor General as little more than a paper exercise is something that I think should be alarming to members of this Legislature and to Albertans.

So much of the budget and the budget process is predicated on the development of these plans and the tracking of resources, and the effective use of those resources is again based on effective business plans. To have them regarded as nothing more than a paper exercise probably helps us understand why they have been so inconsistent year to year and why the measures keep being developed and dropped and redeveloped and dropped again and are in some departments almost totally missing and in other departments a major number of them are still under development. It's not taken as seriously as those of us who were sold the plan on its inception would like to have it taken.

There were a number of comments that related to budget management, but in terms, again, of the business plans he indicated that core businesses are still defined variously in terms of goals, strategies, activities, or performance criteria, and strategies are sometimes defined as desired results rather than broad actions to achieve them. If you go through this set of business plans, I think that same criticism applies. What's a strategy in one department is a goal in another, is an outcome in another. Community Development has come up with its own little set of labels called a stretch target. I'm sure the Auditor General will have some comment in terms of the addition of a new category called a stretch target and how that differs from targets, because the business plan sheds no light on that. It will be interesting to learn.

The hit-and-miss situation in terms of targets and outcomes and performance objectives is again something that has been commented on, and how extensive that criticism is throughout the business plans is, as I said, disturbing. The number of ministries that are still developing performance measures even after this long period of time for some things that you would have thought would have been very simple to measure at an early stage is still quite amazing. I think a criticism that would make the business plans much more readable if the criticism were met is to include the external factors that can influence performance in an area. We don't see much of that in these business plans.

The last criticism that I'll mention from the Auditor General was that output and outcome measures are not always well defined and measurable and clearly related to core business goals. It's a theme that comes through again and again and again. Some of the performance measures that are there certainly cause one to wonder. With a lot of the measures you wonder if the government is in the best position to be doing the measuring, whether it shouldn't be done by an outside or an independent agency. It's rather like in some cases asking schoolchildren to mark their own work, and I think that's the level of the performance measures that are in place. So a number of criticisms of the performance measures as they exist in the business plans.

I would like to now, if I may, Mr. Speaker, move to some specifics in terms of the Learning department and some criticisms, again, of the estimates. Approximately 60 percent of the extra

money that found its way into Budget 2001 for Learning had previously been announced. It was spending that we already knew about. You wonder what that does to the budgeting process when large amounts of a budget are already announced to the public. You wonder what it does to the role of legislators when material comes to us in that form, having already been the subject of public debate.

The same for some of the increases. While the per pupil grants received a 3.5 percent increase, only .5 percent of that was new money. We already knew about the other 3 percent. Again, is that the way budgeting on the magnitude that we are involved in here should proceed?

In terms of Learning again, the basic instructional grants: the 2000-2001 estimate is 3 percent below the 2001 budget, and 2001-2002 is 3.4 percent more than the 2000-2001 actual. So it's a curious set of figures and I think one that deserves some explanation.

Spending on special needs. Special-needs funding continues to be a huge problem for those parents who look to that funding for their children to be provided the programs they need and deserve. I'm sure that my experience isn't a solitary one, Mr. Speaker, in the number of calls I get from parents who are upset about the lack of resources for their special-needs youngster. We've been through this budget after budget, and here we are again this year and I'm receiving the same calls, two of them at the end of last week from parents who are alarmed that they've been in touch with their child's school and not only has the special-needs funding for next September not increased, but the funding has decreased. In one case the special-needs youngster who had a classroom aide will be losing that aide and in another case the same withdrawal of resources that had been in place.

So the money in special-needs programs is still clearly not adequate to children's needs. It leads in terms of the parents who are involved to a tremendous amount of frustration, knowing that the kinds of programs their youngsters need are available and yet not having the resources, not being able to appeal to the school, not being able to appeal to their local school board, but having to rely on the provincial government for the funding and that funding not forthcoming.

Another concern – and I did mention this briefly – in the budget has been the rapid growth of the money placed in the Alberta initiative for school improvement. Again, this is a way of earmarking and controlling dollars that would in my mind be more appropriately placed in increasing the basic grants, the per pupil grant allocations.

This earmarking is done at a price. It takes school systems, school districts hours and hours to put forward their proposals. Many of the proposals are duplicates, but systems and districts are forced into this just to get their hands on those dollars. A good example is the \$500,000 that was spent on the reading initiative in Edmonton public out of the AISI initiative, I think proving to everyone's satisfaction that small class sizes make a difference, supporting all the research we had from elsewhere saying that small class sizes make a difference, yet we find a number of projects under the AISI label being funded across the province to see if class size makes a difference.

8:30

That seems quite incredible, Mr. Speaker, that that should be happening. Again, it's a way for the department to control funds that are going into school districts, to earmark them and to avoid that basic responsibility of dealing with an underfunded system where the per pupil grants are the ones that really need to be bolstered at this point.

It can't go unnoticed, given the other increases in the Learning budget, that private school budgets are increased by 11 percent for

the year 2001-2002. Again, that's a healthy increase for those schools, and would that the public school systems could enjoy such generous increases in their budgets.

The dollars allocated, the percentages allocated for teacher increases, that new line in the budget that has so alarmed teachers in the province and school boards is one that is still going to be played out. We haven't heard the last of this initiative by the government in terms of what it will do and what it has done to provincial bargaining, and we haven't heard the last of it in terms of the amounts that have been included for teachers who really, really are angry and resent what they feel are games that have been played in terms of their income, with expectations raised by the Premier and members of the government that there would be increases in the 10 percent plus range and to only have those expectations dashed with the 4 percent and the 2 percent included in the budget. So I think this is something that's still going to haunt the government. It's going to have implications for provincial and local bargaining far down the road from what I think the government expected when they included that line item in this budget.

The government's reduction to the education property tax, a lot of money, \$135 million, really is just tinkering around the margins. Between 1992 and 1999 the government reduced the grants to municipalities by \$335 million. They've now created this tax room at the local level, but at the same time they've told municipalities not to move into that tax room. So I think the kind of long-term planning in terms of education financing and the financing of municipalities comes together in this reduction and leaves neither school boards nor municipalities happy with the outcome.

Those are the major comments I had about the Learning department, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to mention a couple of items out of Children's Services, and that is the seeming preoccupation with short-term outcomes instead of long-term goals, goals that we'd look at: children being free from abuse, a family's ability to access family violence services. There's a great thrust in the Children's Services ministry on being sensitive to the culture of aboriginal children, and that's laudable and a praiseworthy objective. This is a province of many, many diverse cultures, and one would hope one might find at least some mention of those cultures in becoming sensitive to other cultures in the business plans and in these budget estimates and that, in fact, there would be attention paid to all cultures, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

The problem with day care staff is growing more acute day by day. The ministry has as a goal or a strategy or an objective – I'm not sure which – of having skilled caregivers with level 2 or 3 training. Level 3 training, of course, Mr. Speaker, is a two-year diploma from a college like Grant MacEwan, and level 2 is one year of that same program. This is, again, a laudable objective but hardly one that's going to be achieved when the money going into day care – they lost their operating grants. They're being paid in subsidized day cares \$12 a hour, but in some private day cares they're making minimum wage. As long as those salaries prevail, attracting good people to the child care field is going to be very difficult. In fact, I was in conversation with a child care worker who indicated that many of the students now in child care programs in the colleges are seriously looking at education or at social work as an alternative to staying in the child care field because of the unattractiveness of the salary scales. Again, that's going to be a huge loss.

I think that with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I've almost used my time. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 20.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 19

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. [some applause]

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, thank you very much for that enthusiastic response. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 19, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

Traditionally there is very little debate on miscellaneous statutes, because in fact the opposition has been given an opportunity to scrutinize what's being proposed and we have some time to contact stakeholders and ensure that there is no issue and time also to review the implications of any proposed changes.

Ideally, miscellaneous statutes is to make small administrative changes, a correction in spelling, typographical errors. [interjection] Sorry. The Minister of Justice is trying to signal me on something. I'm not wearing my glasses, so I can't read his lips.

8:40

MR. HANCOCK: I'm just saying that we know what the miscellaneous statutes are about.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, yes. I know. Yeah, that's right. He understands what miscellaneous statutes is, and that's a good thing because he's the Justice minister.

We have had time to review what's being proposed in Bill 19. In Committee of the Whole one would generally be going through clause by clause, which I do not need to do in this case. Any proposed sections to be amended that we had an objection to have already been removed.

So this is looking at amending the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act, the Animal Protection Act, the Engineering, Geological and Geophysical Professions Act, the Legislative Assembly Act, the Professional and Occupational Associations Registration Act, and the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. In every case it's a housekeeping or a minor or an administrative change that we have been able to scrutinize and find acceptable, and therefore I'm pleased to speak in Committee of the Whole in support of Bill 19.

Thanks very much.

[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 9

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is such an important bill and a very progressive bill. There were some questions that were raised in a number of the proposed amendments during second reading of Bill 9 on May 7 that have to be addressed.

The first question was about the release of information. This section of the amendment is desired to provide clarity to the program's authority in the gathering and use of information. There is no intent to unnecessarily or unreasonably use or release personal information of any individual involved with the program, and the individual's right of personal privacy will continue to be respected.

Clear authority within the act is desired to permit the program to obtain the police and medical information necessary to determine eligibility and assess the victim's injuries. The sources contacted to determine the extent of injury may include treatment professionals other than medical doctors. Examples of these professions are physiotherapists, chiropractors, and licensed counselors. It does not extend to nonprofessional treatment providers or general care providers such as home care nurses. It is necessary to identify the victim and date of the incident when requesting information from these sources to ensure the appropriate record of reference.

A general reference to the applicant being a victim of crime may be included when requesting medical information. Only the police receive additional information provided by the applicant regarding the details of the alleged crime. The program also recognizes that there are circumstances where it is in the best interest of the victim or his survivors to allow the release of such basic information to relatives or others closely involved with the victim. For example, when multiple family members of a deceased or incapacitated victim are making inquiries, clear authority is desired to confirm the existence of an applicant and the name of the applicant. Some decisions on death benefit applications result in the award being paid or shared with someone other than the applicant. Clear authority to contact these potential recipients and advise them of the application is needed. Clear authority is desired to respond to queries from estranged parents with shared custody of a child victim. If one parent has applied for financial benefits, the program should be able to confirm this if the other parent makes inquiries. These individuals often rely on local victims' services providers for assistance. This provision will allow the victims' services program to make inquiries on the victim's behalf.

Under no circumstances would general third-party queries be entertained. The personal information of individuals continues to be subject to the protection provisions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Health Information Act. The information provision in this bill was received and approved by the office of the Privacy Commissioner and appropriate officials from Alberta Health and Wellness. Changes to the program application forms are also planned to ensure applicants are clearly aware of the program's disclosure requirements and to obtain the applicant's approval.

The frivolous request for a review. This provision only relates to applications for a review of the director's decisions on an application. The cost savings to the board's administration is only a side benefit. More importantly, we do not wish to raise false expecta-

tions with an applicant if a request for a review clearly has no grounds. It is far less frustrating to the applicant to be advised quickly than to unnecessarily put them through the hearing process only to be told that there is no basis for a change in the director's decision. The intent of the provision is to address these requests that are clearly without merit. The review board should not dismiss an application if there is any indication of a possible change to the director's decision. This can be further defined within regulations when they are drafted.

Common examples of meritless requests include instances when the alleged crime occurs outside Alberta, instances when the offender applies – after all, this is a victim's program – instances when the applicant was already granted the maximum award under the program. Duplicate applications: this is most common with relatives of a deceased victim applying for the same death benefit.

The requirements for a physician was another question. The requirement for one member of the board to be a physician is the minimum requirement. In reality, the intent is to have two or three physicians or medical professionals appointed to give some flexibility to the chair in selecting panels for hearings. A minimum of one physician member will ensure that there is always at least one appointed member available to hear appeals involving medical evidence. This requirement does not extend to the panel selection, as there are some hearings that deal solely with eligibility issues and do not require medical expenses or expertise.

The panel quorum. The quorum of two members for conducting hearings is not a change from the existing act. Agreed, it is preferable that every hearing panel consist of three members. That is why the amendments require the chair to designate three members to sit as a panel. However, board members are people and may occasionally be unable to sit at the last minute due to illness or other personal emergencies. We do not wish to cause inconvenience to the applicant by postponing the hearing at the last minute. Assigning a last minute replacement member is not a realistic option as it does not provide that member with sufficient time to prepare and would be a disservice to the victim.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that answers all the questions that were brought forward in second reading, and I thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise on this opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001. Now, Committee of the Whole is giving us an opportunity to go over the bill in detail, clause by clause. I'm already on record as speaking in support of this bill in second reading. Actually, I think most or all of my caucus colleagues are in support of this bill because it is strengthening and cleaning up a program that we feel is very valuable. I remember being at the official launching of the very first victims' assistance fund, in '89 or '90 perhaps, when the fund was first established. Now, it has gone through some changes in legislation since then.

Let me just go through very quickly. I don't want to spend a lot of time on this but will go through the different clauses that are put forward and put some comments on the record as I go through them.

8:50

I think one of the highlights of the '97 Victims of Crime Act which this bill is amending is that financial assistance is provided to the innocent victims injured by a violent crime, and it also funds agencies that are helping victims of crime or working with violence issues in the community. This is another area where the community

has taken on a good deal of service provision and the brunt of the work making sure that these programs are out there and are accessible to people who wish to access them, and it's important that we do support them through government funding. That can often be a sort of patchwork of applications that organizations are making to put together an operating budget because no one department is willing to fund them adequately. I know that for some organizations access to the funds in this victims of crime fund is very valuable and does allow them to expand programs or to do special short-term programming to augment programs that are much in demand for any given reason, so I'm certainly in favour of that.

When I look at section 7(2), this is allowing for government appointments, patronage appointments essentially, to the criminal injuries review board, and I'm hoping and I'm encouraging the Solicitor General to ensure that any government appointments are following the PAO directive regarding appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions. Essentially that's to make sure that people receiving these patronage appointments have some qualifications to be appointed to a given board, because if they're just going to be handing out favours to people, we're not getting good quality and in fact good public input. So I'm encouraging the minister to follow that PAO directive and to certainly make use of the most valuable services and expertise from the personnel in that department, who are able to look at potential appointees and make sure they have some experience, expertise, and background in this particular area before they are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which is essentially cabinet, to these positions.

One of the areas that I had spoken about extensively during second reading of Bill 9 was extending the time limit for the application for individuals to access the fund from one year to two years. My comment at the time was that that was in fact bringing it into line with a number of other programs and qualifying criteria for victims. A number of the Criminal Code and I think other statutes in Alberta as well are subscribing to that two-year rule, and I think it's appropriate to bring this into line with them.

The one area that's always controversial – and I don't need to go into it at this time – is those people that are recovering memory of some trauma that happened some time ago. Then it's expected and the community standard for this is that in fact the clock starts ticking when the memory is recovered and the two years would run from there, but I think that's still an issue that's under debate by this particular government.

The sort of trade-off, if you will, in the bill for increasing the time is allowing the dismissal of frivolous claims. I understand that sometimes people just don't understand the process, and for whatever reason they hear what's being told but they interpret that in their own words to be giving them more leeway than, in fact, is there. It can be very frustrating when there are people that really do need assistance who are caught in a backlog because there are a number of applications that, in fact, are not eligible for any given program. So there has to be a way of regulating who's applying to the fund and to be able to allow the review board to dismiss frivolous claims, people that are coming back repeatedly just because they didn't like the answer no the first time.

It doesn't happen often, and certainly most people are quite genuine in the way they approach programs like this, but it does happen. Sometimes individuals can be quite tenacious and really take up a lot of time, and that's not fair to the others that are in fact waiting to have their application heard.

What I would be interested in – and perhaps the minister could just supply this to me in writing shortly – are some examples. I don't need personal information but some anecdotal material of what kind of situations the panel has found itself in where a claim was

considered frivolous. We weren't really given examples of that when the minister spoke at second reading. This is not an area I'm familiar with, so I'm not quite understanding what kinds of issues are coming up that would require this section to be put into place. Perhaps the minister could give me a quick phone call or have staff just jot down some anecdotal experiences of what sorts of frivolous claims they've had. Again, I certainly don't need personal information.

Section 13.1 is around collecting personal information. I had raised a number of concerns around this during second reading, and the minister has spent some time responding now in Committee of the Whole to the concerns I was raising during second reading around this determining of eligibility and the ability of the director to seek out information, both collecting information from law enforcement agencies or people providing medical care or public bodies and also being able to disclose personal information to others to determine eligibility; for example, to parent or spouse or child or other family members or victims' services.

I always have a real concern around protection of personal information and have accused this government in the past of being a little free with putting that kind of information out and not being as respectful, in fact as vigilant of personal information as I believe they should be. Given that we now have huge databases that can in fact be accessed by unscrupulous people, we need to be constantly on guard for that.

I listened carefully, and the minister has put a number of responses to my questions on the record, which is important, because it's not immediately that this is an issue. It's three, four, five, 10, 20 years from now when people are looking at the act and some other situation has arisen and they're saying: "Well, it's not in the act. It's not spelled out there. It's not spelled out in the regulations. What really were they intending?" To be able to go back and look at the remarks on the record from the minister proposing the legislation gives us some recourse. It gives individuals and even members of the review panel such as it will be in the future some recourse to be able to understand what was intended. I'm sure there have been a number of times when we wish we could have questioned the Fathers of Confederation on exactly what they meant by putting any given clause into our Constitution, and we don't have their remarks on the record, so we're unable to determine what it was that they were attempting to get at.

9:00

So I'm cautiously satisfied by hearing the reassurances from the minister that really the idea in collecting the information is strictly within the bounds of what's proposed here in the legislation. I hope every attempt will be made to handle that information with scrupulous care and not allow it to get to any person or agency who in fact should not have access to it. I understand now – it's been clarified for me – what is being intended by the ability to disclose the personal information to any person, which I went on about at some length, because the way it was written and I was interpreting it and I think others were interpreting it, it could, you know, be publicized to anybody that was asking.

Now that I've got the minister on record as clearly indicating that it's really to be used for clarifying duplicate applications from family members or to let one parent know that another parent has already applied for it, where you have a case where there is an estranged family or multiple family members all applying for the same benefit, yes, then that's appropriate, because otherwise people just keep saying: "But it says I can get this. Why can't I get it?" Well, until you know that someone else in the family has already applied for it and received it, you just think you're being discrimi-

nated against for some reason or that you're not understanding the process. So it may well be important that you're able to receive the specific information about who has already received funds from this agency.

Now, that covers most of the individual sections I had wanted to go through in Committee of the Whole. Again, my biggest concern when I first looked at this was the use of personal information, both gathering it from various sources and disseminating it to various people. If the minister is clear and upholds the act, we are to be working within the confines of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and, I think, in some cases, even further than that, because I think we've already had some examples where personal information has been released under that act but in retrospect we question as being really appropriate.

Overall this is a good act. This is a good amending act. The original act is a good one. The concept that the funding comes from a surcharge on provincial offence fines and surcharges imposed by the courts under the Criminal Code has a lovely ring of poetic justice to this member's ears. I think it's quite appropriate. It's really hard these days, I think, to find a victimless crime, and certainly the intention of the government to be able to compensate people or to reimburse them for extraordinary expenses that have arisen as a result of a crime is an important part of a caring government and of one that is attempting to administer justice fairly. I think that's an important concept that I am more than willing to uphold.

So with those comments I am willing to take my seat and support Bill 9 in Committee of the Whole. I appreciate the minister coming in tonight to clarify and give answers to the questions I had put forward during second reading. I'm awfully glad to have her on the record on that.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is with pleasure that I rise to speak at committee on Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act. I believe that the proposed changes to the Victims of Crime Act will streamline award processes and focus resources on innocent victims of violent crime in Alberta. The description of violent crime in Alberta is limited. Later in my remarks I will express my concerns about that.

In 1997 the Victims of Crime Act replaced the long-standing Criminal Injuries Compensation Act and the Victims' Programs Assistance Act. I wonder how many people would have been affected and why these provisions weren't included in the act over four years ago. Now, it's about time the application process was streamlined. I think this will be a good thing out of what is probably just a horrible situation for the victims, for the people involved. It is bad enough that people who suffer injuries as a result of violent crimes are forced to wait long periods of time to receive compensation. It's unfortunate that the government did not also review the amounts of damages for each type of injury to ensure they reflect current realities.

We need to have a look at some of the key amendments, Mr. Chairman. Certainly we are allowing the appointment of three more patronage-style appointed board members. Currently there are three. I'm very interested to know from the hon. minister who brought this bill forward if in the view of the minister it's an issue of workload and an issue of overwork.

The financial benefits program was established in November of 1997 with the proclamation of the Victims of Crime Act. The total awards granted in the fiscal year 2000 was \$6.7 million, according to my information. Now, my question at committee on this specific

fact would be: how much of this money comes from the 15 percent surcharge collected on provincial offences fines and surcharges imposed by the courts under the Criminal Code? In respect to my earlier comments that perhaps the whole compensation package should be reviewed, it's summed up in the fact that the average award amount is \$6,900. I, too, wonder how far that goes and if it's sufficient. You look at some of the reasons for entitlement that are listed in the back and you wonder how far that amount of money will go.

The number of concluded cases last year was over 1,200, Mr. Chairman. Interestingly enough, the number of cases resulting in an award was 967, roughly 75 percent. Now, that may be the reason for the feeling that there has to be more members on the review board. It simply may be a case of workload now. If I could receive in committee an explanation of this, I would be very grateful. Obviously it looks like it's a full-time job.

I see further down in section 7:

Where a hearing is required under this Act, the chair must designate any 3 members of the Review Board to sit as a panel, which may include the chair, to conduct the hearing.

Am I correct in concluding that the workload has increased dramatically and the review panel can be divided into two teams to carry on investigations and the other duties relating to the review board?

9:10

When you look at the review board in that light, perhaps if it's going to be divided into two, at least there should be the necessary requirements of having two physicians out of the six panel members so that perhaps at all times, if need be, there is a physician available for each panel. I'm assuming here that both panels, if they're busy, could be working at the same time. This would be an excellent place for social workers; I think they would be a valuable addition to the review board. Perhaps retired police officers would be a welcome addition to the review board. I certainly hope, Mr. Chairman, that the review board is not strictly set up on political affiliation, because these are people that would be very good members. Their professional background would perhaps stand the entire review board in good stead.

The Public Inquiries Act. I'm familiar with the Public Inquiries Act because of the carnage that's happening in the workplaces of this province. I believe there should be a review of each fatality in this province under the Public Inquiries Act, because the OH and S staff are so overworked that they don't have time to do an adequate review of the accident. Perhaps I can discuss that further at another time.

Mr. Chairman, there's roughly about 25 or a little less than 25 percent of files that are denied award requests; there's no need for compensation. The first reason given here is that many of the applications are beyond the scope of the program; no violent crime occurred. Well, if a law is broken and that leads to a death, then I think we need to have another examination of this. With that I'm again referring to occupational health and safety violations where there's been a crime committed. When you consider that it may not have been a violent crime – but that's not true. It would all depend on your definition of a violent crime; for instance, if a backhoe in the winter is being operated in an illegal manner and the operator of that machine is not adequately trained and he or she turns the machine abruptly and hits with the bucket an employee who was standing nearby and that person is killed. That, in my view, is a violent crime, yet there is no recourse for family members who are left with the loss of a loved one and in some cases the primary breadwinner for the family. These are crimes that unfortunately are not covered in this Victims of Crime Amendment Act or in the original legisla-

tion, but hopefully at some time in the future hon. members of this Assembly will take a look at that.

Now, another common reason for denying award requests is that there are often duplicate applications, various family members applying for benefits relating to the one deceased victim. Well, I would like to know from the hon. minister how often this is occurring with these duplicate applications. Another common reason is that too much time has elapsed before the application. The proposed amendments increase this amount of time from one year to two years. For that reason and that reason alone I think it is notable and it would be worth supporting this legislation.

Now, the eligible offences, again I would note, are under the Criminal Code, and that would exclude certainly the accident I described previous. I believe it would also exclude, for instance, the case that occurred last year, the horrible, tragic death I believe of two individuals who lost their lives while working on a corporate farm outside Calgary. This accident is under investigation, but of course because it occurred on a corporate farm, as I understand – now, I don't have the luxury of having these accidents . . .

Chairman's Ruling Computers in the Chamber

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the chair wishes to make a comment. It is not allowed to wear speaker phones in the Assembly that are attached to the laptop. The only hearing aide you are allowed to wear is the one attached to your desk so that you can hear the debate that's proceeding in the House.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you may now proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Now, getting back to this accident that occurred last year. Because, as I understand it, WCB does not cover farms, whether it is a family farm or a corporate farm, these individuals would not be eligible for compensation under the victims' benefits regulation. If my interpretation of the events that led to this accident and my interpretation of the laws of this province as have been explained to me are true, then we have to do something about that. We either have to change the law so that everyone who is working for a wage in this province, regardless of where, is eligible for WCB or that people can turn to this or similar legislation, because what occurred there is wrong. Just plain and simple it is wrong.

Now, when you look at the offences that can be eligible here, there's everything from riots to hijacking of aircraft. There is careless use of a firearm, sexual exploitation, failure to provide necessities, abandoning children, causing death by criminal negligence.

9:20

Now, that is interesting. I wonder how many people who lose their lives in an industrial accident fit under that criteria, causing death by criminal negligence. One specific case comes to mind, Mr. Chairman, and that of course is the tragic explosion that occurred in early August 1999 at Hub Oil in Calgary. There were two individuals unfortunately killed there, and what is chilling about that is that one of the individuals who unfortunately lost their life in that explosion was on a committee who wrote the best practices manual for the entire facility. When I opened that manual and saw that individual's name in there, it was certainly a sobering, chilling experience, because safety was a priority for that individual or he would not have served on that committee.

As I understand it, there were other charges to be laid there as well

as the occupational health and safety charges which were laid last summer by Alberta Human Resources and Employment, but there was also contemplation of charges under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Criminal Code.

Now, if those charges were laid under the Criminal Code, would the families of those individuals be eligible for compensation under line item 220 here, "causing death by criminal negligence," if those charges were laid and that employer was found guilty? This is all pending, and it'll have to work itself through the courts.

These are a number of offences that can happen: everything from arson, extortion, robbery, kidnapping, abduction, illegal confinement, intimidation by violence or, in other words, stalking.

Now, the financial benefits here. I believe \$6,900, yes, was the average award amount, but the benefits here seem low: for a head injury a thousand dollars, shock that lasts from six to 16 weeks, lower limbs, scarring, dislocated fingers or thumbs, temporary or partial deafness lasting at least 13 weeks. This category, burns, is up to \$1,250, and it doesn't seem like very much money for the pain and suffering one would have to endure. There's disfigurement again, fractured ribs. If in the act of some sort of violent confrontation there's a perforated eardrum, that's \$1,500. Eyes are blurred or double vision, lower limb disfigurement, whiplash injuries with effects lasting at least 13 weeks: the list goes on and on. For an eye injury it's \$2,000. A simple fracture of the skull is \$2,500.

If any other hon. members of the Assembly have had the time to compare this list with the list that is provided by the WCB, I think it would be interesting, Mr. Chairman, to compare the two. A ringing noise in the ear is \$3,000. A loss of four or more teeth is in this category. A fractured ankle, a fractured femur, and it goes on. I don't know where we will get to next, if there are any higher categories. Partial deafness in one ear, a compensation package of \$3,500. Moderate burns on the head is \$4,000. A pre-existing condition towards epilepsy is \$4,500. Loss of smell, detached retina, and a whiplash injury that is termed moderate and the recovery period is a half a year – these injuries are significant.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the time allocated to you has now elapsed.

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to address the amendments to Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001. I'd like to indicate that I'm generally positively disposed towards these amendments. There is an area that I would like to raise some questions about, and I haven't yet had a chance to get hold of the regulations under this act, so I may be not entirely informed as to the impact of some of these sections.

If we look at section 13, it says that "on receipt of an application for financial benefits, the Director," who is an official appointed by the minister, of course, "in accordance with this Act and the regulations" determines eligibility. As I go through this and look at the various powers delegated to the director, I find they are in fact very significant. One of the things it says is that the director, subject to the regulations in this case, can "require the applicant to provide information respecting how the injuries were acquired and describing the injuries suffered by the victim," and so on – and that makes a great deal of sense – and then can require evidence to be provided, documents and so on. That makes sense.

It's under section (3) that I have the most questions, I guess. I'll just call them questions for now. It says:

- (3) The Director may dismiss an application made under subsection (1)

- (a) if the Director determines that the applicant or victim is not eligible under section 12,

and that makes sense. But here's where the concern is, Mr. Chairman:

- (b) if, in the opinion of the Director, the applicant or victim
- (i) did not fully cooperate with any investigation into the events that resulted in the injury or death of the victim, or
 - (ii) did not provide information required under subsection (2)(a),
- or
- (c) for any other reason provided for in the regulations.

Now, the question I have is whether or not an individual civil servant ought to be in the position to simply dismiss an application on the basis of an opinion without a greater context for the director to make those kinds of decisions. There's a strong element here, I think, Mr. Chairman, of subjectivity that could result in arbitrariness in the treatment of victims. I certainly appreciate that appeals are there, but I think it would be much better for all concerned if we had a situation in which there was a real context for the director to make these kinds of judgments. I would hate to see someone who had suffered grievous loss as a result of a criminal act to be denied their benefits under this act for anything less than the most objective reasons that are possible. So I think that's one of the difficulties I have.

9:30

Now, the other question.

The Director is authorized for the purposes of subsection (1) to collect and use information, including personal information, from

- (a) a law enforcement agency relating to the event . . . or to determine previous conduct of the victim.

I have a concern, I guess, Mr. Chairman, that does set off some alarm bells for me in the sense that we're looking very much at the conduct of the victim, who's not been tried, who's not under any charge, I assume, in almost all cases. There's an implication here that someone who is the victim must conduct themselves in the most exemplary fashion and make no errors or not be involved in any errors of judgment, which we're all inclined to do from time to time, and if they are, the implication is clear that they can be denied benefits.

This allows the director, if someone makes a claim – and keep in mind, Mr. Chairman, that people who make claims are victims. They have suffered some sort of serious loss, injury, may be permanently disabled as a result of criminal activity. The director is then in a position to go through and inquire about their conduct to the police or other law enforcement agencies, inquire to their doctor. It says: anyone “who provided diagnostic, treatment or care or other similar medical services to the victim.” So the director could interview the nurses, could interview people who'd operated an ambulance and so on, or

a public body as defined in the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act to determine or verify whether a person is eligible for financial benefits under this Act or to determine the amounts of those financial benefits.

So it seems then, Mr. Chairman, that by the simple act of applying under this act for compensation as a victim of crime, that person's privacy is seriously compromised by the provisions of these acts. The director can then go and inquire from police or nurses or doctors or virtually anyone else what exactly the situation was. Now, is that fair? This is a question I have. Is it fair that someone who is a victim of a crime should have their entire history explored without any of the normal protections for their privacy in order that they

might obtain compensation? When you combine that with the earlier issue I referred to, that “the Director may dismiss an application made under subsection(1)” if the person did not co-operate or did not provide information, then it creates a situation where there's a potential for injustice at least and abuse at worst to occur to someone who makes application.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that these amendments to the Victims of Crime Act could be strengthened considerably if we provided provisions to protect an applicant from an unjustified intrusion into their personal affairs and business by the director and, secondly, if we would provide a greater contextual basis for the director to make decisions once they've acquired the information they need. It really does seem to me there's a bit of victimization of the victim here – victimization is maybe not the right word – stigmatization of the victim, which is implied by some of the provisions of the act. So I think we ought to take a look at that.

Now, having said that, Mr. Chairman, I see that under section 14 it talks about the review board. “A person may apply to the Review Board for a review of a decision [made] under section 13 or 15.” But I think that damage may already have been done at that point. I think it would be better if we strengthened the earlier section and not leave everything to the review board. It goes on to say that the review board may “require a victim to undergo a medical examination,” and I suppose that is something you can't avoid. I mean, obviously somebody has to have some sort of injury and so on, and the board has a right to know the exact extent of that and draw conclusions about how it may have been inflicted and under what circumstances before they provide public funds to the person in compensation.

I'm pleased as well, Mr. Chairman, that the review board can “rescind, confirm or vary a decision of the Director as to eligibility for financial benefits.” I think that's important. Otherwise, why would you have a review board at all?

Then you have a situation where “significant new evidence is provided to the Review Board,” and it can “refer the matter back to the Director to review the original decision, taking into account the new evidence.” I wonder if that's not just an unnecessary complication that could prolong the situation faced by somebody who's waiting for benefits. Why does it get referred back to the director instead of simply being varied or changed by the review board? Instead of sending someone back to the beginning, why can't the review board simply make the decision at that point?

I guess, Mr. Chairman, it reminds me a little bit of the game of snakes and ladders. Just when you think you're going to get to the top and you're finally getting through the system, all of a sudden you land on a snake, and you're all the way back to the bottom. I'm sure many of the members of the Assembly have played snakes and ladders as a board game as a child. Sometimes it's very analogous to politics as well. I think that's a concern. We don't want people to get caught in loops. We don't want people to be constantly thinking that they're getting through the system and then being drawn right down to the beginning when they don't expect it.

Now, the final point I want to make with respect to the provisions of the act has to do with appeal to the courts. We're seeing more and more in law people's rights to access the courts being restricted by legislation. A most notable example is the Workers' Compensation Act, where people agree – I guess there's a sort of social contract between employers and employees – that in exchange for the coverage under the WCB people's right to access the courts is eliminated or severely restricted. We've seen that there have been a lot of problems in that, Mr. Chairman. I certainly get many, many calls from people on workers' compensation who feel that they haven't been well treated and haven't got their just compensation,

have exhausted the appeal procedures and so on, and would like to challenge some of the things that have gone on in the courts. Of course, they can't. Their rights to access the courts have been taken away by the legislation that established the Workers' Compensation Board.

Here we have, again, a section that says: "The applicant may appeal a decision of the Review Board to the Court of Appeal only on a question of jurisdiction or on a question of law." Now, I'm not a lawyer, Mr. Chairman. That's for sure. Maybe there are some lawyers here who can advise me.

DR. TAYLOR: Too many.

9:40

MR. MASON: Well, I won't go there with the hon. minister, but if you put all the lawyers end to end, Mr. Chairman, I don't know if you reach a conclusion or not.

I would hope that someone would rise on the government side who is a lawyer or who at least has asked this question of a lawyer and respond to the question of what is allowed on an appeal on a question of law, which is what it says. This is the part that I would like some clarification on. It's section 14.1(1). It says: "The applicant may appeal a decision of the Review Board to the Court of Appeal only on a question of jurisdiction or on a question of law." Maybe the hon. Government House Leader could respond to that. I would find that to be an important clarification that needs to be made.

Then we have the director's decision, which is dealt with under section 15.1. It says:

After making a decision under section 13 or 15, the Director must provide the applicant with a copy of the decision and must advise the applicant

- (a) that the applicant may apply to have the Director's decision reviewed by the Review Board, and
- (b) that the applicant may request that the review be conducted in person or by written submission.

That's an important point there, Mr. Chairman. I'm really glad to see that the act really will require written confirmation of the decision and notification of the route and avenue of appeal. I think that's essential. I guess it's probably fairly common these days, but you'd be surprised at how many avenues of appeal are available to people, and there's no requirement that they even be informed of it. So I think that's a strong section and something I can certainly support.

You know, in general, Mr. Chairman, I think that the amendments here are good ones that could be better. Certainly the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001, is a good step forward. The Victims of Crime Act was of course a very positive and progressive development, and I think it's to the government's credit that it was passed into legislation, because for too long, of course, victims of crime were completely ignored in the entire process. Investigations go on and people aren't informed.

I dealt with one person – and this wasn't a victim of crime per se, but there is a criminal investigation, as I understand – with one gentleman who lost his son in the Hub Oil explosion and fire. I met with him when I was in Calgary some time ago, and he described to me in detail his struggle to find out where the investigation was around the death of his son and whether charges would be brought, what the status of the investigation was, and a whole list of questions that he of course had. He finally tried to get some further assistance, and he contacted the Calgary labour council, which deals with workers' rights, and it was the natural place for him to go when he couldn't get answers from the law enforcement agencies and from the agencies of the government.

Now, I should say clearly, Mr. Chairman, that he did contact someone who was involved in the investigation, who was a very sympathetic individual, and she was able to connect him with all the people he needed to get the information he required. The difficulty is that it shouldn't take a stroke of luck that you find a person who has compassion and is willing to work a little bit of overtime in order to make sure you get the information you need. It needs to be provided to you as a matter of course, regardless of who the individual is in the organization or in the bureaucracy or in the law enforcement agency. So the provisions of the Victims of Crime Act are very welcome, and I think it's a very positive step, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you. I'll let another member speak now.

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 2 Cooperatives Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. I have a few brief comments this evening on Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act. Certainly again I would like to recognize the efforts of the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill in the exhaustive research and consultation the member did in the preparation of this bill. This legislation modernizes and replaces co-operative legislation for the first time since after the Second World War, and it's notable that it's aimed at attracting more co-operatives to Alberta. We need to ensure that the more than 400 co-operatives in Alberta – and the majority of them are involved in agriculture, the farming industry – continue to be a focal, important institution in the lives of many.

When you look at the co-operative movement across Alberta and then across the country, the 400 co-operatives in Alberta, there are more than 15 million memberships in co-operatives in Canada, Mr. Chairman. The memberships of some other co-operatives are also significant. You know, the consumer movement has 3.7 million co-operatives. Housing co-operatives: some quarter of a million in more than 2,100 co-operatives. Now, the insurance company of course is The Co-operators. This is an important company in the insurance industry.

9:50

Mr. Chairman, we think of the types of co-operatives – there are producer-owned ones, like I mentioned before, for the farmers, for the producers, for small businesses, marketing and purchasing supplies, the UFA, the Bison co-ops, Bee Maid Honey. An example of consumer-owned co-operatives certainly would be the Calgary Co-op Association, and that is considered, as I understand it, the largest consumer co-op in North America. It has nearly 40 percent of the local retail market. Mountain Equipment Co-op, for example, reported revenues of over \$130 million in 1998 and has over 1 million members. As part of the consultation process in reviewing

Bill 2, I met with some of the individuals who are very active and are taking leadership roles in the co-operative movement in Calgary, and they were very supportive of this legislation.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

When we think of health care, we sometimes don't think of the co-operative movement, but our sister province to the east, Saskatchewan, has been using it since 1962. Some other provinces have been using it in the last 10 years; for example, for day surgery, pharmacy, ophthalmology, rehab, health promotions, workers' co-ops for the ambulance sector, home care, nursing.

We can think of natural gas and rural electric co-ops. In fact, Mr. Chairman, it is interesting that there was one of the natural gas co-ops – I don't know where this would fit into the bill, but certainly what we need to have a look at in committee are the gas co-ops. Triple W Natural Gas Co-op – and many hon. members of the Assembly are wondering: where's Triple W Natural Gas Co-op? Well, it's east and, I understand, a little south of Lethbridge. Now, there was a possible contamination of natural gas in the distribution system of Triple W Natural Gas Co-op. When it learned that there was a potential for contaminants in the natural gas received from the co-op's supplier, naturally it became quite concerned.

I don't know where in Bill 2 such a deficiency would be addressed. There's examination, there's notice of error, there's a right to information. There are a number of categories where the citizens or the clients or the customers or the owners or the members of Triple W Natural Gas Co-op would look to seek some sort of redress or to at least answer questions about this possible contamination of their gas supply. These contaminants, as I understand it, have the potential for causing personal injury to occupiers of households or businesses to which natural gas is being supplied. The effects of such contamination can create flu-like symptoms. These symptoms include a headachy feeling and watering or smarting of the eyes, dizziness or vomiting, tightness across the forehead and at the temples, and weariness and weakness.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, according to Triple W Natural Gas Co-op, there was an advisory put out. The advisory listed three items: that there was a potential for gas contamination in the natural gas supply, that in the event there was a natural gas contamination, there was a possibility that occupants of a building or buildings supplied with natural gas would experience symptoms that could be described as flu like, and in such an event persons should immediately consult a physician regarding such symptoms. Now, for a rural gas co-op and its board of directors, where would they go in this legislation to seek an answer? I don't know where the directors would go.

The minister in this case would be the Minister of Energy, and perhaps the minister has issued a waiver of compliance under the Gas Distribution Act regarding quality assurance of natural gas for rural gas utilities. Where would the board of directors for the natural gas co-operative go under the Cooperatives Act to find out if the minister did this? Where would they go to find out if the minister of health has issued public health warnings or bulletins to alert the citizens or the co-operative participants south and east of Lethbridge of the flu-like symptoms caused by the effects of such contamination? Where would the board of directors go to ensure that the minister, the Minister of Energy in this case, would order an investigation of the gas plant supplying gas to Triple W Natural Gas Co-op?

These are all very important issues, Mr. Chairman, and perhaps

with the guidance of the Member for Calgary-North Hill we could get an answer for those people, because certainly they deserve answers. The Cooperatives Act, as good as it is, has to protect all the members.

When we think of the modern co-operative principles, Mr. Chairman, this province's legislation for co-operatives dates back almost to the time that we became a province. The co-operative principles are those established by the International Co-operative Alliance, an independent nongovernmental organization founded in 1895 to link co-operative movements in several countries and foster an environment conducive to co-operation on a worldwide scale. These principles were updated in 1966 and again in 1995.

I'm pleased to support this legislation in this Assembly this evening, but we need to look at one of the principles incorporated in section 2 of Bill 2. Now, I'll go through these briefly. Bill 2 incorporates co-operative principles in section 2(1) with the following:

- (a) membership is available to persons who can use the services of the cooperative and who are willing and able to accept the responsibilities of and abide by the terms of membership,
- (b) each member or delegate has only one vote,
- (c) no member or delegate may vote by proxy,
- (d) interest on any member loan is limited to a maximum rate fixed in the articles,
- (e) dividends on any membership share are limited to the maximum rate fixed in the articles,
- (f) to the extent feasible, members provide the capital required by the cooperative,

restricts use of surplus funds, and provides education on the co-operative principles.

These are noteworthy, and in the remainder of my time I think I'm going to have a discussion on the new-generation co-operatives because they're very important. Hopefully in the future there are going to be no problems, Mr. Chairman, with the new-generation co-operatives. When we're discussing them, we need to think of the free rider problem. We need to consider that since economic benefits arise through the use of the co-op, little incentive exists for members to invest in the co-op, and the co-ops rely more heavily on debt and are chronically short of capital. So we have to be careful of that. We have to also be careful of the horizon problem. Of course, some co-ops may be prone to inefficiencies because of limited patronage horizon to members. Patronage refunds, when used in the co-op, tend to support activities that maximize short-term rather than long-term returns.

There's also the control problem. Because co-op shares are not traded on open markets, share values cannot be used as a performing gauge, so operational inefficiencies can go unobserved.

10:00

The portfolio problem, the lack of tradeability in co-op shares, Mr. Chairman. This lack of tradeability in co-op shares also means that members cannot adjust their investment portfolio to reflect their own risk preferences. Consequently, members will attempt to direct the activities of the co-op in a direction that better matches their own risk return trade-off.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, the influence cost problem. When we look at this, we have to understand that the dual role of member as owner and user can lead to attempts by groups or members to steer the co-operative to positions that will benefit them personally, and managers must spend much time building consensus for decisions. That is perhaps a tactic that would be well suited for this Assembly. Perhaps we all could take a lesson from the manager of a co-op and spend more time building consensus for decisions. Since there are very few amendments to the legislation that comes forward in this

House, perhaps it's time that in this Assembly we could better spend at other activities.

Now, those are problems that can be identified, and they certainly can be identified with the new generation co-ops. Many people may think: what's a new generation co-op? Well, the new generation co-operative, or the NGC, is the name given to roughly 200 value-added processing, closed membership co-operatives that have emerged first in North Dakota and Minnesota and most recently in neighbouring states and provinces. Many of them in this province are centred around, of course, the agricultural industry and the farming communities. They have their own problems, Mr. Chairman. There are external pressures. There are internal pressures. There are always conflicting proposals or counterproposals being presented.

When you look at property rights issues and problems, co-operatives must find a way to respond and to keep their organizations viable, and the maturity process is going to be working on the new generation co-operatives. I'm sure and I have confidence that they will adapt to this legislation, and I'm confident they will prosper. I certainly hope they prosper.

The external environment in which co-ops operate has changed because rural Alberta is changing. Rural Alberta is changing from the family farm unit, and it is a discussion that I think is long overdue in this Assembly as to what exactly is going to constitute a family farm, what constitutes a corporate farm. There has been significant industrialization of agriculture. Now, I'm not in this debate going to go as far as calling it 20th century sharecropping, but I have before, because this is what's happening, in my view, to our agricultural industry not only in this province but across the country. The farmers are simply becoming 20th century sharecroppers. We have to discuss this at length on another occasion. I realize that, Mr. Chairman.

Internally a reduction in traditional member commitment and the increasing importance of well-defined property rights to structure members' behaviour have resulted in a need for new structural features in co-operatives, and this is the new generation co-operative, in my view. When we think that the new generation co-operatives are clearly seen as organizations that are not on the fringe, I think this is positive. The model of the new generation co-ops is now viewed, as I understand it, as a serious organizational structure both among farmers wishing to form new co-ops and more traditional co-ops looking for ways to adapt. That's why I have confidence in the future of these organizations, and I certainly hope I'm proven right.

Mr. Chairman, the new generation co-ops are also viewed as necessary and legitimate by people outside the co-op sector, and who outside the co-op sector would be more important than the commercial banks? Commercial banks, for instance, are increasingly interested – and again this is positive – in funding new generation co-operative operations. I don't know about the opinion of this government, but it would be interesting to hear the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill discuss this. Do they consider it a tool for industrial development, particularly in niche areas?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act, and I appreciate that this is a weighty bill in more than one sense. I would also like to congratulate the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill for his comprehensive job on this bill.

This bill has a wide range of provisions and is very, very systematic in its approach and is clearly the result of a great deal of co-

operation, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure that the member has co-operated with all sorts of co-operatives and co-operative organizations in the province, partly because he tells me so, but I have every reason to believe him. This member has approached me on not just one occasion but on three separate occasions to ask if I have any concerns or problems with the bill and has offered to meet with me and discuss the bill at any time.

This is the only time since I've been in this Assembly that the sponsor of a bill on the government's side has made those kinds of overtures, and I very much appreciate it. I think the Member for Calgary-North Hill is to be commended for that, for taking on the obligation of consulting even with the third party in this House, with only two members. I think that's commendable, and I would recommend that approach to all members opposite who sponsor legislation and particularly to those members of Executive Council, because I think we would all benefit from a much healthier legislative climate if there was rather more consultation in this Assembly. Even though we have only two seats, we represent a significant trend of thought in this province and always have, and the same can be said for our colleagues in the Alberta Liberal Party. So I think the entire province benefits if there's a degree of consultation.

Now, Mr. Chairman, certainly co-operatives have had a major role in the development of this province, and if we look back to the early days of the province, we'll see that co-operatives have always been important and have been significant. If you look at the gas co-ops in this province or even a variation of co-operatives, the electrification districts, which did more to bring electricity to the rural areas of this province than any investor-owned utility ever did, you can see co-operatives operating in many ways.

The farm sector, of course, has been one of the main areas where co-operatives had an early development in this province: the wheat pools, the various forms of organization of farmers. When it was clear that private industry was not prepared to meet the needs of small farmers on a thinly populated land area, as Alberta once was, they did what they needed to do and got together. In fact, you could say that co-operatives came from the earliest days of farming when you needed to co-operate in order to get buildings built, barns and so on. So the co-operative spirit is part of the tradition of this province. I know that lots of people like to talk about the free enterprise heritage of this province and that lots of people in this Chamber certainly talk about little else, but the co-operative spirit of Albertans has long been evident and long been an important part of our political, economic, and cultural makeup.

10:10

Now, I think I could talk a little bit about what I see as some of the areas where co-operatives can be of value. I, of course, have long since been a member of a number of co-operatives. Credit unions are another example of co-operatively based financial institutions. I participated for a number of years in a housing co-operative which is now part of my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. I know that the past minister of education in this place under the government of Premier Lougheed – and that is Mr. King – was instrumental in assisting the formation of a number of housing co-operatives back in the late 1970s. I found that the co-operative I participated in was very valuable for a number of reasons. [interjection] It was the Sundance Housing Coop, hon. member, but there are a number of housing co-operatives throughout the city, and they have done a number of things.

The first thing they've done is provide housing to people. At a time when housing was expensive and in short supply, people were able to get together and get favourable rates of interest and participate in the planning, the financing, and the organization of their own

housing. The people benefited greatly from that experience, Mr. Chairman. They worked hard. They learned about things that they didn't know. They learned about financing. They learned about incorporation. They learned many, many things. They were able to develop housing that suited their needs. They didn't have to go to the market and say: "Well, I'll take this one. It's got what I want, but it doesn't have something else that I want." They were able to design from the ground up their own housing according to their own needs.

Secondly, they were able to get housing, Mr. Chairman, that was very low cost relative to what was available on the market at that time, and they did that by eliminating unnecessary costs in housing. Specifically, I'm referring to landlords. By eliminating the landlord, who was taking a profit from their housing, they were able to have housing that was substantially less in cost than comparable housing elsewhere on the market. So the second advantage of co-operatives is that it eliminates middlemen. It eliminates people who don't add value to the equation, and it does that by eliminating profit. By eliminating profit, they enjoy lower costs.

I think the third thing I found is that people learned to work together. They learned co-operative principles, which I think are very important. They were able to assist one another. When one person had a set of skills that was of value to someone else, they offered it without charge, without anything being required, just simply because they were neighbours and wanted to work together. Mr. Chairman, they were able under these circumstances to share their capacities, and their sense of value that they had as individuals was enhanced and strengthened. So someone who knew how to do maintenance on furnaces, for example, was able to help someone who knew how to do landscaping, and someone who was a lawyer was able to provide their skills, of course, free of charge to their neighbours and the co-operative members. Altogether everyone benefited.

The other thing I found from the experience of that time, Mr. Chairman, was that people really learned a lot about basic things that they didn't know anything about. People who otherwise didn't have skills and were at a fairly low educational level learned from the people around them. They learned how to conduct themselves in meetings, how to get things done, and how to make decisions collectively. They learned things like basic maintenance, and they learned all kinds of skills. They learned from their neighbours, and they all learned from co-operating together.

Mr. Chairman, all in all, it had a tremendously beneficial effect for many people I have seen who came into the co-op when I was there, who were not people who had a high level of skill in certain areas, and they left as self-confident individuals who were able to go out into the community and had a much higher level of self-esteem. They undertook to improve their education. They got involved in the community league. They got involved in other organizations and, generally, became much better citizens. So co-operatives have a beneficial effect for everybody that participates in them.

Now, Mr. Chairman, they sometimes have disadvantages. One of them is long meetings. Sometimes people who've been involved in co-operatives speak for a long time, and it generally takes a lot of time to administer your own affairs when you're doing it with a group of 20 or 30 other individuals.

So I think those are many of the advantages of co-operatives.

Now, co-operatives of course are important in other areas. I know that in the case of taxi drivers in the city of Edmonton a number of years ago who felt they were not getting a fair shake from their employers, which were a number of big, privately owned taxi companies, they were able to set up their own taxi company, not really a company but a co-operative. Again, they were able to

eliminate the middlemen who didn't add value to the work they did and were able to get the kinds of work, the working conditions they wanted. They were able to retain more of the value of the industry for themselves and, generally, have become now the largest taxi company, the most successful that I'm aware of, in the entire city. So they took on the big companies at their own game, Mr. Chairman, and they were very, very successful indeed.

I want to ask about some specific things, Mr. Chairman, and maybe there could be some answers. A co-operative under this act, in section 7, must operate in Alberta and have its registered office in Alberta. My question is whether or not co-operatives that operate in other provinces but have a very small portion of their operation in Alberta can be incorporated here if they do have their headquarters in Alberta.

10:20

Now, I know there's a section here under investment shares, and I wonder if other co-operatives already use investment shares. I believe that credit unions, for example, do use investment shares. I'd like to ask if there has been any problem that's been documented with the insider trading of shares. [interjections] Mr. Chairman, I'm a little distracted by the conversation that's going on here, and I wonder if I could . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has the floor, so kindly accord him the appropriate courtesy to complete his remarks.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

Just to go back to that and repeat it, the question is, first of all, about investment shares. I understand that credit unions use investment shares. The question I have is whether or not some co-ops also already use them. I would like to know if there are documented problems with the insider trading of shares. If there are, then I'd like to hear, perhaps in the response from the sponsor to this bill, if that has been the case and what the circumstances are. If not, then the question really arises as to why it's in the bill. So those are just some of the things I wanted to talk about.

I know there's another form of co-op that I'm familiar with, and that's the equity co-op. Some of the fairly luxurious high-rise development that has occurred over the years in Edmonton has been on the basis of equity co-ops and has been constructed without the benefit of the government programs that were established for housing by the federal government and also by previous Alberta governments. Those programs no longer exist. People in co-ops were able to actually participate in the establishment of fairly nice high-rise developments on an equity basis. The question I would have, then, for the sponsor of this bill is to outline the differences between an equity co-op on the one hand and a condominium arrangement on the other. I think there must be some differences and they must be significant, but I'm not directly familiar with what those things are.

Now, I think if we ask some questions about membership in co-operatives, under part 2 it talks about becoming a member. It's got some basic things here: that the person needs to apply, that it has to be approved by the directors, and so on. It does provide for the directors to delegate "the powers vested by subsection 1(b) to one or more members or officers of the co-operative." What is the protection, Mr. Chairman, for people who wish to become members of a co-operative that they are dealt with equitably along the line so that everyone is treated more or less the same? There are instances in co-operatives, particularly in small co-operatives where people

live together in co-operative housing, where personal factors might get in the way. I think the legislation should protect and ensure that everyone is eligible and is treated the same, especially when the application for membership is delegated.

I think the legislation also talks about classes of shares. It doesn't really spell out what the classes of shares ought to be based on. I think that's something that is fairly important. You have a number of types of shares that are envisaged by this section, which I can't put my finger on just at the moment. I think it should be spelled out and particularly spelled out if there is any equity involved.

Now, Mr. Chairman, to conclude my speech on this matter, I just want to emphasize again that I believe co-operatives have had a very important role in Alberta's history, that Alberta's history is not as purely capitalistic and free enterprise as some people would like to pretend, that the province from the beginning of its settlement right up until the present day has had a strong co-operative element, and this has been most evident in rural areas. I think Albertans have always been willing to lend a hand to their neighbour in order to build the community. Albertans are very, very community-oriented people, and they're not afraid to work together in order to achieve common goals.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, good evening. We're all ready for 15 or 20 minutes from this side of the House, but not really.

Members, as you will recall, when this bill was introduced at second reading, I gave notice that there would be amendments brought forward at the committee stage. I'm going to be moving the amendments shortly, but before I do, I want to acknowledge the fact that the opposition parties were made aware of these amendments just a very short while ago, and for that I apologize. The opposition parties should have had these amendments some time ago and didn't, and for that I apologize.

The amendments that I will shortly introduce will have the effect of removing reference to the Alberta royalty tax credit. The ministers of Finance, Revenue, and Energy felt that the Alberta royalty tax credits would be best considered in their entirety separately, apart from this legislation, and therefore have removed them. The effect of the removal would be to treat all individuals the same regardless of whether they were large or small investors.

Therefore, I move that Bill 8 be amended as follows: sections 19, 30, 48, 59, and 60 are struck out.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

10:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this bill. It's an important bill. It's always, of course, very popular to cut taxes, and this bill will do that. It's not going to do it without a few comments from me, however.

Going through the first area where the bill reduces tax, I think it's the reduction of the general tax rate. A comment I would make here is that we need to take a long-term view of the sustainability of our tax load. The risk we face here is that under the current situation when royalty revenues are so high, we can afford very sizable tax cuts, but we all know that every boom in Alberta is followed by a bust. The risk is that when things slow down, we will not be able to afford the tax cuts that we will have made here, and that's a long-standing concern. It may well be something that comes back to affect this government, and it's a general comment I make. I think we need to look at the tax level in terms of its long-term sustainability.

We also risk becoming overfocused on the tax burden as an influence on business location. In many studies done on the factors that influence where businesses locate, the tax load is but one of a large number of those, and it's nowhere near the most important. Among the most important are issues of quality of life, issues of cheap electricity, issues of infrastructure, of educational facilities, of social stability. By focusing too much on taxes, we end up running the risk of cutting taxes and in the long run not being able to afford the kinds of amenities that really are important in bringing organizations and businesses to a location and keeping them there.

I mean, if it were as simple as low taxes being the cause of business location, then I suppose that countries like Haiti and various Third World countries with low taxes would be industrial powerhouses and New York City or Toronto, which have relatively high tax rates, would be impoverished, and in fact the opposite is the truth. So I think we need to keep that sort of discussion in mind when we look at the portion of the act that reduces the general tax rate.

As for the section of the act that reduces the manufacturing and processing tax rate from 14 and a half to 13 and a half percent, although it's not in the act, I think the ultimate objective is to keep decreasing the rate until it's at about 8 percent, which was the original recommendation of the Business Tax Review Committee. Again, we need to remember that taxes alone are not going to be what drives the development of our manufacturing sector and the diversification of our economy or attracts new businesses here.

I would actually bring in, in particular, the concerns over the electricity rates that are evident in Alberta as something of much greater importance in this area than manufacturing tax rates. Again, it's fine to cut taxes, but what's the point if people are facing greater than that tax cut in higher electricity costs? Certainly I've had calls from constituents, small businesses and manufacturers in my constituency, who are very concerned about what's happening with their electricity bills.

The section of the act that deals with small business tax rates and the increase in the small business threshold. Some of my greatest sympathies economically are for the small business sector, which is very often the most genuinely entrepreneurial, the most genuinely competitive. What we're talking about here are bakeries, for example, or restaurants or small manufacturers, locally owned businesses that employ people here not just at the clerical level but right up the chain, from their frontline employees right through to

their directors and presidents. They create more spinoffs because they employ the local law firms, the local advertising agencies, the local media, and so on. So I think that if we are to focus on anywhere in particular in reducing tax loads, I am pleased to see that much of this is in the small business area. If we are wanting to develop Alberta in a truly thorough and comprehensive way, then we should be focusing more and more on small local businesses rather than the large multinationals.

As I was reading through the bill, I found myself thinking of the old slogan that nothing is more nervous than a million dollars. While we can reassure people of our tax rates, we are less able to reassure them about stability in areas like electricity, and the price of electricity is fluctuating hundreds of percent up and down a day. If we are expecting, say, a high-tech company to develop a computer chip manufacturing plant in Alberta, there's no way they're going to do that if they can't nail down a long-term cheap supply of electricity. So I'm concerned that we should be focusing more energy on stabilizing our electricity than is happening, and we should perhaps shift some of the focus away from this bill and onto some actions to stabilize electricity.

I'm also concerned about the general trend in Alberta and across Canada that more and more of the tax burden is resting on personal incomes, on individual people rather than on businesses. If you go back several decades, you will see that the shift in the tax load from the corporate sector to the individual has been quite dramatic. I think all of us and all of our constituents would feel that shift in the taxes that are deducted from our incomes every week or every month here, taxes that at one time were shared much more broadly with the corporate sector.

So while this bill decreases taxes on the corporate side, in the process it shifts more of the tax burden onto individuals. In particular, when we combine this with the flat tax, it shifts the tax burden onto middle-income Albertans, so that is a particular point of concern for me as I approach the government's various tax policies.

This bill was developed in response to the Business Tax Review Committee, and you know we as the opposition have been advocating especially cuts to small business taxes for over seven years. We're wondering why this government took that long to undertake this kind of initiative.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I think I will take my seat. I think generally we will probably support this bill, but the most fundamental concern is that we are creating a situation in which our tax system is not sustainable given the long-term volatility of Alberta's economy.

10:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments about the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001. At this stage we're to be looking at the specifics of the bill. Before I do, I'd like to make some comments about the efface that seems to have been created around tax cutting in the province, not just in the province but across the country. It seems to me that one of the things in all of the tax discussions that we've heard recently is the notion that taxes can be a good thing.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair just wishes to remind you that we are currently in committee stage, where we discuss clause by clause. Okay? You may now proceed.

DR. MASSEY: I'm prefacing my remarks, Mr. Chairman.

We use taxes as a community to finance the common goods. Our schools, our highways, policing, emergency services: those are things that I think we all agree are necessary and that we all agree we should support through the tax system. In the rush to cut taxes and conversations about no taxes at all as being a good thing, I think that responsibility is sometimes lost.

I'd like to then look at the specifics of the bill, starting with the reduction of the general tax rate. The provisions of the act reduce the general tax rate from 15.5 to 13.5 percent. Although it's not in this amendment act when the bill was announced, there are plans that will further decrease that rate to 11.5 percent in 2002, to 10 percent in 2003, and finally to 8 percent in 2004. We're reminded that 8 percent was the rate originally recommended by the Business Tax Review Committee. I guess the question I have is: why those particular rates? What was the economic reasoning behind choosing those particular numbers for reductions, particularly when you get to as fine a point as half a percentage point? So there are some answers that I would be interested in hearing surrounding the rationale for particular rates in that general tax rate cut.

The provisions of the bill that relate to the reduction in the manufacturing and processing tax rate raise similar questions. The act reduces the manufacturing and processing tax rate from 14.5 percent to 13.5 percent. For this, too, the government has a timetable projected into the future so that in 2004, 8 percent will be the rate. The question is: what's the rationale? Why those particular numbers over that particular period of time? What prompted or caused the government to select those figures?

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

The same can be applied to the reductions in the small business tax rate. It's interesting, because in travels across the province I've talked to a number of small business owners and asked them about this. We had a proposal several years ago that would have reduced the rate from 6 percent to 4 percent, and most small business owners said that the reduction meant very little, that it really wouldn't encourage expansion in terms of their particular business. I remember talking to the owner of a bookstore in the southern part of the province, and in terms of their particular business it wouldn't make much difference. So here we see the rate going down 1 percent and then to a goal of 3 percent in 2004. What's the basis for those projections? If my information, which I admit is very limited, is correct, why are these particular reductions here?

The increase in the small business threshold from \$200,000 to \$300,000 is timetabled to move to \$400,000, again without any reason being given for those rates. The same with the capital taxes. Those will be changed because of the amendment tonight.

So those are some of the concerns. What was the rationale for choosing or picking those particular numbers? I noticed that one of the conclusions on one of the government releases was that by 2006 these tax cuts are projected to result in 40,000 new jobs, and that is just about 9,000 jobs more than what has been predicted are going to be lost by a number of businesses because of the high power rates in the province. So it's a rather interesting juxtaposition of tax cuts versus increased costs to industry.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'll conclude. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 8 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? It's carried.

10:50

Bill 10
Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments this evening on Bill 10, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001, as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The Traffic Safety Act itself was passed in 1999 but not yet proclaimed. The 2001 amendment will make changes to the existing act, as I understand it, so it will be ready for implementation next year. I appreciate the work that my colleague from Edmonton-Glenarry has done on this in preparing this rather extensive summary for not only myself but other members of caucus.

The highlight of the changes is the establishment of an administrative licence suspension process for new drivers under the graduated driver licensing program relating to zero alcohol tolerance. Another highlight is the fine-tuning of the Alberta administrative licence suspension program by adding an immediate 24-hour suspension for persons providing a breath sample of over .08 or for failure to provide a breath sample. Other technical administrative changes are also included to enhance the current legislation.

I think the object and the highlights of this bill are well suited and worthy of support, but this is really a cleanup of the act before it comes into force. Former colleagues of this Assembly on this side of the House expressed reservations about the police forces being able to hand out 24-hour suspensions for a person refusing to provide a breath sample. They felt at that time that suspensions should be dealt with in court and that there was room for abuse if the suspension was given for refusal to blow in the breathalyzer machine.

Now, there were general comments from many members of the Assembly at that time, but we need to think, as we review this bill in committee this evening, about section 1, the amendment to the Traffic Safety Act; section 2, the administrative cleanup because of wildlife officers and fish and game officers now being called conservation officers. Section 3 is on the administrative cleanup again. Section 4 is dealing with adding information that can be included for the inspection of an accident report. Section 5: the minister may make regulations concerning "commercial vehicles or classes of commercial vehicles to which section 11.1 applies."

Section 6: the process for appeals of a one-month suspension of a novice – and that is a learner's, or eventually it will be the graduated licensing that is going to be part of the province – the details of the hearing process, of course, and when the board must reinstate a licence and when the suspension must be upheld.

Now, section 7 deals with the administrative cleanup related to charges under section 6, and section 8 is very similar to section 7.

In reviewing section 9, the clarification for a person with a learner's licence for a motorcycle and driving on a highway, I'm not sure of the conditions of this. Perhaps that will be clarified further in debate here in committee.

Section 10: I don't know if this is requested by the federal government. I don't know what sort of consultation has gone on there, but there are changes in penalties under the National Defence Act in the Criminal Code of Canada.

Section 13: changes to section 88 dealing with licence suspensions.

Section 18, in a quick review now, referring to the regulation and description of the regulation, that the regulation is sufficient, and the provision that the statute does not have to be referred to. There are probably a few too many tickets that have been thrown out on a technicality, and this, as I understand it, will close that legislative gap with a loophole.

In section 21, as I understand it, we're going to be dealing with the administrative cleanup of the provisions for licence suspension and, when various provisions take effect, for a 24-hour suspension.

As I said before, many of these changes are administrative and sort of a cleanup in nature, and that's a sign, in my view, that things weren't done quite right the first time around. It doesn't appear that in this cleanup the government has considered its position on putting restrictions on riding in the back of pickup trucks – and this has been discussed many times – and the requirement for bicycle helmets into legislation rather than regulation. These are important issues, and I believe they'll be discussed later – hopefully later – in this session if we get time, Mr. Chairman, with a bill that's been proposed by an hon. member through the private bills process.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

While it's not in either of these amendments, it is important to bring up at this time the proposed changes to the number of hours that truckers can drive. We look at the simple title of the bill, Traffic Safety Amendment Act. Government officials in Canada are proposing to allow truckers in this country to drive up to 84 hours a week over extended weeks. Canada would allow up to 14 hours' driving in a shift compared to 10 in the U.S. and nine in Europe. A Canadian trucker will be able to drive up to 84 hours in a week compared to 60 in America and 56 in Europe. Now, I thought at the time that it would be good if the minister of intergovernmental affairs could talk about this entire issue.

I would at this time, Mr. Chairman, remind all hon. members of the Assembly that traffic safety, regardless of whether you know whether its exits are from the right or the left of the highway, is an important subject.

AN HON. MEMBER: Stick to the clauses of the bill, Hugh. Relevance.

MR. MacDONALD: This bill is dealing with traffic safety. It's an amendment to the Traffic Safety Act.

AN HON. MEMBER: Which is very relevant.

MR. MacDONALD: Which is very relevant.

Now, Mr. Chairman, it's not that long ago that we had senior administrators of this government not knowing which direction traffic exited off highways. And members of this Assembly are complaining about relevance? I think not.

11:00

On the issue of what should and should not be in this bill in committee, perhaps at this time it would be logical to consider an amendment. What would be a suitable amendment to the Traffic Safety Amendment Act at this time? I can't think of anything more suitable, particularly after what I read about traffic safety in Calgary. Recently inspectors pulled over truck traffic in Calgary, Mr. Chairman. It was reported in the weekend papers. I don't have the article before me, but it was astonishing the number of vehicles that were not roadworthy. Was it 80 percent of the vehicles that were not roadworthy?

Now, this notion that there would be transport vehicles in this province transporting goods to and from whatever enterprise in the province that would be using the trucks to transport goods. If you were to stop at a light in Calgary, you could assume that if there were five trucks lined up . . .

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All hon. members, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor. We are in the committee stage. If anybody wishes to speak to the bill, you will be provided that opportunity when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar finishes. So please give him the due respect to finish his comments.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, you may proceed now.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now, there is this notion that you stop at a light and see the trucks that are stopped there. After you read the inspection reports, you can conclude accurately that at least one in five is not mechanically sound. Is this the place to discuss that with an amendment to the traffic safety law, at least to bring it to the attention of all hon. members of the Assembly, particularly the hon. member who is, I believe, still the chair of the Calgary caucus? I'm sure many individual members of this Assembly who drive from Calgary to here on highway 2 now, as a result of this debate, are going to be looking very keenly at traffic on both sides of highway 2, particularly the truck traffic. When you think that we have diminished our standards in this province and are considering diminishing them further – and this is not an issue of concern for this Assembly? Again, I think not.

I would remind all members of this Assembly that it is important, when drafting legislation and the accompanying regulations, that the government ensures there are sufficient resources to enforce the provisions of the act. Reducing policing grants may contribute to provincial surpluses, but they also do not assist our police officers with working to ensure that roads are safe and our highways are safe.

Now, we look at other provisions. We look at the graduated licensing. We compare ourselves to other jurisdictions with zero alcohol tolerance and penalties. We think of what's going to happen here and in British Columbia. There's an immediate 12-hour roadside suspension, one month prohibition for the first offence, one year prohibition for repeat violators. In Ontario there's a \$110 fine. In New Brunswick the minimum fine is \$70, the maximum fine is \$500, and there are 10 demerits. In Prince Edward Island there is an administrative 90-day suspension, and that province is in the process of enacting their graduated driver licensing program, Mr. Chairman. In Quebec we see a minimum fine of \$300 and a maximum fine of \$600, and in Nova Scotia there are six demerits and fines of \$337.50. In Alberta the proposal is for an immediate 24-hour suspension followed by a seven-day temporary permit followed by a one-month suspension. That is I think sufficient, but we shall see.

The provisions for vehicle seizure. Currently the Traffic Safety Act stipulates that the 60-day vehicle seizure is triggered by a conviction for driving while suspended within the last three years where it is the same suspended driver and the same registered owner. Now, I can certainly be corrected if I've misinterpreted this, but the proposed change is that a 60-day seizure will be triggered, Mr. Chairman, when a suspended driver is charged a second time within three years of the first charge for the first offence. A vehicle seizure where the vehicle was released earlier will not be counted as a first seizure. This involves the repeal of the requirement of a conviction to trigger the longer seizure period. This amendment, as I under-

stand it, will make Alberta's program similar to both Manitoba's and Ontario's, where no conviction is required for the second vehicle seizure to be for a longer period of time.

Now, in closing, there are a couple of other questions that I have regarding the carrier profile. It's proposed to enable the registrar to forward records relating to convictions, reportable accidents, and on-road inspections relating to commercial vehicles to the jurisdiction where the driver was licensed and/or where the vehicle was registered for the purpose of that jurisdiction's carrier and driver profile systems. The type of offences would include all moving violations under the Traffic Safety Act and its regulations. That would include speeding, failing to stop at a red light, et cetera, equipment violations, inadequate headlamps, inadequate taillamps.

This is where it is so important, and it cannot be considered frivolous. I'm astonished that any hon. member of this Assembly would make such light of traffic safety, particularly with the heavy vehicles and as we allow more and more vehicles and allow more and more of the trucks to have trailers and pups. In some American states, Mr. Chairman, they're not allowed to haul like that because of public safety. There's a balance there between profitability of transport companies and public safety, but after this evening in this Assembly I'll need further clarification as to the amount of concern for public safety that can be expressed by some hon. members.

The Criminal Code. With Criminal Code violations we think of dangerous driving and impaired driving. I don't know how far we can go with that. Certainly the law has to be diligent.

Now, again in relation to transport trucks, the issue of weight, the loads carried in transit. [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm disappointed, but I will certainly cede the floor to another one of my hon. colleagues.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a few comments that I think have to be made as we look at Bill 10. We have indicated our support for Bill 10 and the provisions, but we'd be remiss if we didn't raise the objections that were raised before.

I'm looking specifically at section 90 of the bill: "If a peace officer . . . suspects that the driver of a motor vehicle who is a novice driver [has] consumed alcohol." The section goes on to indicate: "without a reasonable excuse fails or refuses to provide a breath sample when required to do so by a peace officer." I think there can be no question that we all prefer not to see people who've been drinking on our highways. That is not even part of the discussion. But the concern was that those suspensions should be dealt with in court.

If I recall, the previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo had some strong feelings about peace officers dispensing justice at the roadside. He felt that there should be other ways to handle it and that those purported violators should best be handled in a court. The provisions of the previous act that he found objectionable are now here again in section 90. It may be something that is of little consequence. Hopefully the incidents where it would be used by peace officers will be few and far between, but again it's a concern. Given the history of this legislation and the kinds of changes that we see before us, the number of administrative changes that had to be undertaken, it's a bit of a warning. We may be back here again some years down the road with further amendments that specifically address this concern with peace officers dispensing roadside justice.

Those are the only comments I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman, before supporting the bill. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a big job for me to follow behind my two eminent colleagues. I won't be able to live up to their reputations, but I will bring forward my own comments here.

As I understand the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001, Bill 10, am I correct in thinking that we are amending an act that hasn't even been proclaimed yet? I am concerned. We seem to be doing that a number of times in this sitting of the Legislature, and it speaks to me of the risk of rushing through legislation and then finding, after it's been passed, that it hasn't had adequate thought.

So as I look through the various sections here that are being amended, it's quite a long list. It's actually a fairly substantial bill to come forward to amend an act that hasn't even been proclaimed yet. We can go through it section by section if we want. I will, however, spare the Assembly my own comments section by section.

As I go through the sections collectively, there is always the problem, I find, of striking a balance between the need for control and social intervention on individuals and at the same time accepting as maximum an amount of individual freedom as we reasonably can. A great deal of the sections here seem to struggle with that balance as well, and fair enough. It's a balance we'll never have a final solution to.

The sections that particularly caught my eye as I think about the young drivers on the road today included, for example, section 6, which outlines a process for appeals of a one-month suspension of a novice operator's licence. I think it's probably reasonable for the bill to clarify issues around how those appeals for novice operators' licences will proceed and when the board must reinstate a licence and when the suspension must be upheld.

There is also section 9, clarifying issues around learners' licences for motorcycles. The great number of serious accidents involving motorcycles has got to be a concern for all of us. I know a number of emergency room doctors who don't call them motorcycles. They call them murder-cycles because they are so hazardous. So section 9's efforts to clarify some of the issues around learners' permits for motorcycles are probably commendable.

Section 15 addresses issues relating to alcohol consumption and novice drivers. We've got to be concerned with alcohol consumption with all drivers, but I guess we are being even stricter with novice drivers than we are with regular drivers on this. This outlines exactly how a novice driver, when alcohol is detected on his or her breath, will face a licence suspension. I would encourage this. I think it's a commendable step, as I understand it, to be exceedingly strict in terms of alcohol consumption and novice drivers.

I'm going over some of the other provisions in sections here. A number of them have to do with regulatory streamlining, and again I would repeat the point that we're already having to streamline and amend a bill this extensively – we're talking here about 15 pages of amendments to the Traffic Safety Act – when that bill hasn't even been proclaimed. It speaks to the risks of rushing legislation through.

I also wish there were a couple of other sections here, one addressing restrictions on riding in the back of trucks. More clearly, I don't believe that section is in here at the moment, and it would be worth considering.

I think, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I will take my seat, and you can look forward to me supporting this bill. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 10 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

11:20

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 19, 9, 2, and 10. The committee reports Bill 8 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act.

Mr. Speaker, over the course of the last six months Albertans have felt the pressures of unprecedented rises in gas prices, and those pressures have been met by this government bringing in certain programs to ensure that while Albertans get the benefit of a high world price for gas, they also get some of the rebate of the royalties that we earn on that gas to help shelter some of the prices of home heating and other issues in the province. Bill 1 is a method by which this government can continue natural gas price protection into the future for Albertans.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, at this time. It is an amazing piece of legislation. I've said in this Assembly before that it is reflective of a government that has lost its direction. [interjection] It certainly is. You look at this bill, and you look at the *Calgary Herald* article that's dated May 4, 1974. [interjection] It's research in the newspapers. It certainly is, yes.

The Natural Gas Rebates Act was introduced, and it was suitable legislation. There is no need for this legislation. There is absolutely no need for it. No one in this Assembly is against consumer protection. No one is against Albertans receiving the benefit of the resource that belongs to all the citizens.

Now, this is what the *Calgary Herald* said in 1974. During the election – and I spoke about this earlier – it is my view that someone was dispatched, probably from the Public Affairs Bureau, and the flagship legislation had to be secured for this session of the Assembly. They simply went to this editorial from the *Calgary Herald*. It states, Mr. Speaker, in the first paragraph: it probably should be called the gas price protection plan instead of the rebate plan, but whatever the semantics, Albertans received the details of a good deal yesterday. It goes on and on, but in the last paragraph it states: Alberta is already renowned for its low home heating prices; soon the claim that domestic natural gas prices will be the lowest on the continent will be true of Alberta; it is a fitting return on a resource that belongs to the people.

These features of having low home-heating prices and the idea, the notion that the resources belong to the people are already incorporated in legislation. It's not long since we heard from the government that they were so afraid of dome disease, and that concept was that while the Legislature is in session, there are laws being created that are going to have a detrimental effect on Albertans. It even went further, that all laws that are created are in some way detrimental to some Albertans. So if we have a perfectly good piece of legislation that just needed to have its regulations updated, why are we repealing this and putting in Bill 1? I thought Bill 1 could be improved, so if we're going to be spending billions of dollars in Bill 1, why not have an auditing process in place so that we could know where the money is going? That wasn't suitable.

Now, when you think that we couldn't have a definition of vendor – and it was discussed earlier in the Assembly, this afternoon in question period, regarding the location-based contracts to gas-fired electrical stations. How many hon. members of this Assembly know whether or not fuel gas for those power plants is somehow going to be subsidized under Bill 1? We never, ever did get a definition of vendor. Rebates to vendors, but there's no definition of it, Mr. Speaker. This bill as it exists is nothing more than unlimited spending on a credit card. The Premier himself mused in Calgary at a dinner that there was going to be a \$5 cap put on through Bill 1. Gas is trading internationally at about that level currently.

There's no doubt that the resources belong to Albertans, not the producers. This is a problem that many members of Executive Council have, that somehow it's for the producers, that it's not for the citizens, not for the consumers, not for the people of this province but that if it's good for the producers, it's good for the province. The producers in this case are many natural gas exploration companies that are operating in the western Canada sedimentary basin, specifically in the Peace River arch. When we look at what has gone on with this slogan bill and we have a look at what's going on in the province in the western Canada sedimentary basin, we have to be very cautious. This is why this bill, this blank cheque, is not necessary for the province, for the people.

11:30

We can look in the statutes covered. There are seven specific pieces of legislation to deal with gas exploration, distribution. There are even discussions in the statutes existing on price protection. Yet there's a huff and a puff, and we're going to have Bill 1. We're going to take an old editorial from the *Calgary Herald* and say we're protecting consumers, but the legislation, as I said, already exists.

Now, with the Canadian gas exports, Alberta gas exports, I think it is suitable at this time to take a look at the western Canada sedimentary basin. Mr. Speaker, the western Canada sedimentary basin includes most of Alberta, but significant portions of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, as well as a part of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories and certainly parts of the Yukon Territory.

Within this vast area there are significant differences. You can go from plains to foothills to the high Arctic.

Now, regional geology and certainly location can also have a great impact on drilling and costs. Geological formations in the western Canada sedimentary basin dip to the southwest, resulting in increasing drilling depths and increasing drilling complexity from east to west. Many people brag about how many gas wells are being drilled in Alberta, but they are being drilled in the southeast corner of the province where you can, as they say, punch a hole in a week. They're shallow gas wells. Sure, we're drilling hundreds of them. What are the production rates of those wells? They're marginal. If you go to the Alberta foothills and to the B.C. foothills and certainly to the B.C. plains or the northwest section of Alberta in the Peace River arch, the wells are drilled deeper. There are certainly higher production rates, but the locations are much more remote and, as a result of that and the depth, the cost of drilling is much, much higher.

We think of our marketable gas production, and we hear musings again from the government that there are going to be gas exports, new pipelines, that it's going to be over my dead body or that I'm going to get my piece of the flesh or Alberta's got to get its pound of flesh. Meanwhile, what are we doing? Before the EUB right now is the proposal to sell the Viking-Kinsella gas field. Meanwhile, we want a pound of flesh from the Alaska developments. We want this; we want that.

How ludicrous does this sound when at the same time we want to sell a gas field for \$490 million Canadian, I believe, to interests in the midwest? I believe it's Kansas City. Are they buying that gas for the benefit of the citizens of Edmonton or northern Alberta, or are they buying it for their own purposes in the American midwest? When you consider that part of the Viking-Kinsella gas field would be in the central region of the western Canada sedimentary basin and part of it would also be in the east region and when you look at both areas, they've had a significant production decline in the last 10 years, and that would tell me that perhaps it's an asset worth keeping.

Further on in my remarks I think I can prove without a doubt that the productivity decline of existing gas fields in this province is a lot less than the new wells. The productivity decline rates of the new wells are significant. They're much greater than what was previously thought, and that is of great concern to this member. But why, when you look at a gas field that for years has produced gas to heat the homes of Edmontonians and the surrounding communities, would we be contemplating selling it? It sits in an area of the province which, at least over the last decade, has had a 25 percent decline in production rates. It doesn't make sense, Mr. Speaker.

Despite the drilling of a record number of gas wells – and I'm going back to 1999 because I don't have the figures for the year 2000 – natural gas deliverability from the western Canada sedimentary basin increased only marginally. This is before the Alliance line was commissioned and is now sending 1.3 million cubic feet of gas daily to Chicago and with it the rich natural gas liquid streams. That's before that had happened. An examination of the production characteristics of wells connected over the last four years shows that the average initial productivity per well has been declining, in part due to the drilling of an increasing number of shallow gas wells. The declining rate of production from all existing wells is another significant factor affecting deliverability.

Now, to offset the annual decline in production from existing wells, production from new wells added in one year must amount to at least 85 million cubic feet a day in each year, or 20 percent of current production. Can hon. members of this Assembly assure me that that's going to happen or continue to happen, or are producers

going to move to another territory? Are they going to move to the B.C. side of the Peace River arch where there's a greater return on their money? If they're going to spend millions and millions of dollars drilling a well, they're going to go somewhere where they can get a return on their money, and the rich wells now are in that territory or even farther north in the Fort Liard region, whether it's on the western boundary of the Northwest Territories or in the Yukon Territory itself.

Now, the decrease in initial productivity per well within the western Canada sedimentary basin has been much more rapid than previously anticipated. I don't know how many hon. members of this Assembly I've heard assure not only myself but other members of the fact that there's an unlimited supply of natural gas. Well, there's not. There may be a lot of gas, but as to recovering it, what could we do? Perhaps it would be better than having this legislation. Perhaps we could look at a number of initiatives to further encourage production from marginal wells. A little earlier in the debate this evening there was a discussion, I believe, on the Alberta marginal tax credit. We need to have a further discussion on tax credits to see if those wells can perhaps be kept in production until all the gas that can be produced is produced.

11:40

We need to look at the solution gas from oil batteries. We need to look at the idea of solution gas as an alternative for electricity generation. But will that happen with the carte blanche here, this blank cheque? The idea that any government, but particularly this government after what we've experienced in the last 10 years with spending cuts and now more spending – this is a credit card with no ceiling. Anything could happen.

Now, gas protection for residential users, that's fine. What are we going to do with industrial users? What are we going to do with the resource companies themselves that use gas for enhanced oil recovery? Are we going to subsidize those efforts through Bill 1? You never know. This is such a brief bill that anything is possible.

I recently read in my research that there's going to be increased natural gas consumption for industrial purposes in the northern Alberta tar sands. It's becoming such a significant problem, the natural gas prices for the developers of the tar sands leases, that some of them are considering going to coal. We don't think of it very often, but there's considerable consumption of natural gas, whether it's in heaters or in furnaces in these industrial facilities for the production of steam. We look at the production of steam for heavy oil recovery with steam injection. Are we going to use Bill 1 for that? I hope not. I think not, but there's nothing in here to stop it.

Ethane that's not used in the petrochemical industry, but ethane that's used for reinjection purposes again is used to sweep a formation, Mr. Speaker. Is that going to be part of this protection package?

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 20 Appropriation Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but in accordance with Standing Order 61(3), the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 12 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a few comments to answer the few concerns brought up by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. The first was with regard to custom operators. We have a definition for custom operator which reads:

A person who purchases a new farm implement and uses or permits the use of that farm implement for hire or for service to others for valuable consideration to the extent of at least 50% of the annual use of that farm implement.

One primary difference for custom operators is found under section 5 of the Farm Implement Act, implied warranty. Section 5(3) states:

A custom operator does not have the benefit of any of the warranties provided for in subsection (1)(d) and (e) with respect to a farm implement mentioned in section 1(a) that is purchased by him.

The amendment to the definition of purchaser should not change the status of custom operators. Their equipment will continue to be warranted to be

- (a) made of good material,
- (b) properly constructed as to design and workmanship,
- (c) in good working order.

These warranties "apply for a reasonable period of time not to be less than 1 year." As this equipment is designed for a typical farming operation, it is understandable that custom operators – that is, feedlots – would put considerably more use on equipment 24 hours a day, seven days a week, resulting in greater wear over a short period of time.

With regard to the notice of failure to perform concern brought up by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, it covers situations where catastrophic failure or nonperformance occurs, and this issue is separate and apart from the statutory one-year warranty provided under section 5. The intent of section 6, notice of failure to perform, is to provide farmers who are operating under some tight time constraints with quick repair to new equipment that does not perform, replacement equipment should it not be repairable, or refund of their money to allow the farmer to purchase new equipment. Time is of the essence in farming, as it is tonight, and long legal battles in court do little to help either side. Section 6 clearly sets out the guidelines for dealers and distributors responding to significant failure of equipment during its initial use.

I think that covers some of the concerns that were brought out. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments that have just been made in terms of answering some of the questions that were raised. I think what we need to do now is make sure that we expedite the work on this bill and make sure that it is out there for farmers. As we just heard, this is important. Farmers have been asking for some of these clarifications in terms of warranty coverage and also the relationship between dealers when machinery is recalled or sent back or when a dealer goes out of business.

These are the kinds of things that we have to have in the industry, so I would hope that most people in the House see fit to support this. Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 12 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 13 Farm Implement Dealerships Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, I want to reiterate will provide options to our farming community, and it should help to go a long way to encourage and create competition. The opposition was indicating that there were concerns about that.

Certainly it will deal with specialized equipment and equipment that would at times not be sold locally. Dealerships and distributors will still be allowed to negotiate volume discounts. Distributors will be free to give whatever breaks they wish to dealerships to be in certain communities. Finally, this will help purchasers to have options, especially with specialized equipment in our communities. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

11:50

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just listening to the comments that were raised when I talked about the bill in second reading. The answers have been provided to the marks that I've got here on my page as we went through it.

I think if we look at that, we've got to recognize that this bill's purpose is to basically make sure that dealerships can, in essence, carry short lines if they want to, that the top-down decision-making by the manufacturers doesn't put a lot of pressure on that, and that farmers then do have some choices in terms of the material they purchase, who they purchase it from, and who the manufacturer is. So I hope everybody supports this bill as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 13 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 11 Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In bringing this bill into committee, just again a reminder to all members that we're moving regulation into legislation.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that certainly this is a bill that the minister is to be commended on. It's been a while coming, but it's here. It is a good bill for families. This is in committee stage of the Assembly, and hon. members are certainly welcome to participate in debate or discussion if they so desire.

At this time I think we need to have a look at this whole issue of parental leave in this province. The federal government doubled parental leave EI benefits to 50 weeks in the February 2000 budget. Eight other provinces had enough time to put in place matching legislation to protect jobs for 50 weeks by December 31. This evening I am pleased with the minister, certainly with the direction. But why was this province such a holdout?

Parental leave certainly gives both parents the opportunity to spend more time with their newborn and – I've said this before – newly adopted children in the all-important first year. We can talk a lot about supporting families. We can talk a lot about having family values, but at some point we have to put our actions where our speech is. This is a perfect opportunity for the government to act, and it did, but we have to ensure that we're going to continue to support new families. Again, why did this commitment take so long?

Of course, we had the usual consultation process. Many business representatives had reservations about this, many. I don't think their reservations were ever addressed, but I think they will learn to live with this legislation. I think they will profit from it, as a matter of fact, because when they are recruiting employees to take over from those who are on parental leave, particularly in this economy it will be easier to recruit people because they will be able to offer them suitable employment for some time.

Now, at this stage, at committee, certainly I don't feel it's appropriate to talk about what's not in this Employment Standards Amendment Act. Certainly at second reading I outlined significant deficiencies in the Employment Standards Code. The positive features of this, Mr. Chairman, are the facts that parents are better able to balance the demands of work and family experience, they have less stress, they have lower absenteeism from the workplace, and, I believe, are much more productive employees.

When the hon. minister introduced the Employment Standards Amendment Act, Bill 11, it was seen by people from across this province as a progressive step. I spoke at second reading of the mother in Calgary who had contacted my office. I think she would be very pleased. It took a while, but she would be pleased.

There are a number of questions that we need to discuss this evening.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but according to Standing Order 60, the committee has to rise and report before midnight, so the committee will now rise and report.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 12, Bill 13. The committee reports progress on Bill 11.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

12:00

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 11
Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001
(continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. How long does an employee have to work before becoming eligible for leave under this bill? Now, an employee must have 52 continuous weeks of employment with their employer to be eligible for maternity and/or parental leave. This requirement is too long. This requirement applies to both full-time and part-time employees.

The next question: when can leave begin? Maternity and parental leave can begin, Mr. Chairman, as follows. Maternity leave can begin at any time within 12 weeks of the estimated time of child delivery. Parental leave can begin at any time after the birth or adoption of the child, but it must be completed within 52 weeks of the date a baby is born or an adopted child is placed with the parent.

Now, it is interesting, Mr. Chairman, that the following conditions also apply. A birth mother who takes maternity leave and parental leave must take the leaves consecutively. When the pregnancy of an employee interferes with the performance of her duties during the 12 weeks before the estimated time of delivery, the employer may require the employee to begin maternity leave early. A birth mother must take at least six weeks of maternity leave after the birth of the child unless the employer agrees to early resumption of employment and the employee provides a medical certificate indicating that the resumption of work will not endanger her health.

Another question that I think is valuable at this time in committee is: what notice? Since there are so many violations of the Employment Standards Code in this province, it's about time we get this straight. What notice must an employee give to go on leave, Mr. Chairman? An employee must give the employer at least six weeks' written notice to start maternity or parental leave. Parents will still be eligible for the leave if medical reasons or circumstances relating to the adoption prevent the employee from giving this notice. A birth mother who takes maternity leave is not required to give her employer notice before going on parental leave unless she originally agreed only to take 15 weeks' maternity leave.

Now, what notice must an employee give to return to work? There are three issues here. The first one is that employees must give at least four weeks' written notice that they intend to return to work or to change their return date. This notice must be provided at least four weeks before the end of the leave. An employer does not have to reinstate an employee until four weeks after receiving this notice. Secondly, where an employee fails to provide this notice or fails to report to work the day after their leave ends, the employer is under no obligation to reinstate the employee unless the failure is the result of unforeseen or unpreventable circumstances. Thirdly, employees are required to provide four weeks' written notice if they do not intend to return to work after leave ends.

I'm sure that hon. members are concerned about this: can leave be extended if medical problems arise? I don't know how often this occurs, but for the information of the committee, at this time the Employment Standards Code provides for 15 weeks of maternity leave and 37 weeks of parental leave with no provisions for extensions. It would be up to an employer to decide whether to extend leave. Perhaps other hon. members of this Assembly are more familiar with employee/employer contracts than I, and they could enlighten us all.

Now, what protection is an employee entitled to during leave and on return to work? All hon. members of this Assembly know that employees in certain circumstances and particularly in certain industries have very little protection under the Employment Standards Code in this province. It's been proven time and time again. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre mentioned part-time workers, and as the number of part-time workers grows in the economy, she certainly is correct, Mr. Chairman.

There are two conditions here. An employer is not required to make any payments to the employee or pay for any benefits during maternity or parental leave. An employer cannot terminate an employee on maternity or parental leave unless the employer suspends or discontinues the business. At the end of the leave the employer must reinstate the employee to the same position or provide the employee with alternate work of a comparable nature at the same wages.

How do these leave provisions relate to maternity and parental benefits available through employment insurance? Now, I'm pleased to say that the new provisions bring the length of Alberta's job-protected maternity and parental leave provisions in line with EI maternity and parental benefits. It's been a long time coming, and for everyone it will mean that you will need only 600 insured hours of work instead of 700 to be eligible for maternity, parental, and sickness benefits. Not only does this apply to all Canadians but to all Albertans as well.

These increases, as I said before, are going to make a difference in families. We all know that in Alberta, contrary to opinions that were expressed during the Bill 11 debate that we have an aging population, the reality is that in this province we have a very young population, and with legislation like this I think hopefully that will continue. We have to ensure that we encourage young people to start and raise families, because there is certainly a decline not only across this country but in a lot of industrialized countries in the birth rate. This is one small way, as I said before, of encouraging families, particularly dual-income families, to perhaps feel more comfortable with the idea of taking time off from work to spend with their newborn and develop bonds that will be there for a lifetime.

That is why, in summation this evening, Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to support this legislation. I think, as I said before, that it's progressive, and I look forward to other amendments to the Employment Standards Code. Certainly there need to be amendments to prevent the exploitation of so many of Alberta's workers, whether they're part-time or whether they're full-time. Close to 80 percent of the workforce is reliant on this code for workplace protection.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to one of my colleagues. Thank you.

12:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001. I am supportive of this bill.

[interjections] I'm so excited that members of the government have woken up and are supportive. Great. I'm looking forward to what they have to say to the bill.

MR. AMERY: They're surprised that you're supporting Bill 11.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, yes, and I supported it in second reading as well. There you go.

A couple of things are concerns with me, not enough to make me not support the bill but concerns nonetheless. One is why it took the government so long. We're practically the last in line here, I think, to bring forward legislation that was coming into line with the federal parental leave program that came through in the February 2000 budget. The federal government, essentially, got the ball rolling on this one. They doubled the duration of the maternity and parental leaves under the EI program to 50 weeks, which became effective January 1 of 2001. But the federal government obviously can only compel employers that are governed by the Canada Labour Code, which leaves a lot of other folks not covered for this. So the feds' legislation essentially affected their own employees, federal construction sites, banking, transportation, telecommunications, things that were all directly controlled by the federal government.

It's essentially up to the provinces to protect the jobs of everyone else. So when the provinces get into the act, they're not talking about money. They're talking about protecting the jobs of people that take an unpaid leave essentially. Most of the provinces hopped right to it. This might have been because Alberta has come to a point recently where our fall sittings are very short, and therefore the government didn't have time to get it through, not that that's a good reason. Perhaps it's encouragement, in fact, for longer fall sittings. Alberta and Saskatchewan were the last holdouts on this, so I'm pleased to see that we are coming into line on this one.

Traditionally, we had only protected jobs for 18 weeks, which is a very short period of time, and then there was an extension for medical leave, which really only applied to the mothers, obviously, and we rather left adoptive parents out in the cold, period. So it's excellent that we are recognizing the importance of parental leave, and I'm also pleased to see that there is a recognition for adoptive parents. I am not pleased to see that there is discrimination between the two and that in fact adoptive parents are eligible for less time and also that the father is eligible for less time. I had hoped that we could come to a point where there was equity across the board on this one. If there really is support for families in Alberta, then I was hoping that the government would have dealt with this with an equitable hand, but I'm not surprised they didn't.

Now, we're essentially talking about the 37 weeks of unpaid leave time. How many people in Alberta will be able to take advantage of this? I don't have the statistical data at my fingertips to say. A significant portion of the workforce but not all by any means. A number of people will be left out of this. As my colleague was pointing out, very few people in a part-time wage position would be able to take advantage of this. They just haven't accrued the hours, and often part-time workers aren't afforded the same benefits from an employer that full-time workers are. Unfortunately, certainly in my constituency a lot of people are working several part-time jobs pegged together to give them a living wage. It makes it really difficult for them to start a family or to add to their family. So you do get into a larger philosophical argument here about whether this benefits only a certain portion of people that are in an income bracket and other factors which would enable them to take advantage of this.

Again, I spoke on this when there was a private member's bill bringing forward something similar. It's not enough for me for the

government to come forward with one bill like this and go, "Yippee, aren't we sterling examples, shining examples of support for parenting and support for families?" There are a number of other choices the government has made which I think work against families.

We still have a policy in place in supports for independence where mothers with children who reach the age of six months must start seeking work. Then I look at this bill, and we're saying 37 weeks of parental leave and the additional 15 for the mothers. That's 52 weeks of parental leave. So women on SFI get 26 weeks and they'd better be back in the workforce, but everybody else gets up to a year of unpaid leave. There's a discrimination and an inequitable way of treating people based on a strictly economic basis. That's one example of how this government is inconsistent in its treatment of families.

There are a number of other ones. I can refer people back to my debate on I think it was Bill 209 last fall, but there are other examples, like the changes that were made to the funding of day care centres. It made it very difficult for day care centres to stay viable when they lost their operating subsidy and instead the subsidies were provided directly to parents.

I have some day care centres in my riding that are really struggling. I mean, they have to be prepared to have 40 kids on any given day, but they might only get three. Well, when they're having to carry all the costs of that and they're only getting the subsidies for the kids that actually show up, it's really hard to keep it going. If it's a wildly fluctuating area, which some of my areas are, the day care centres just can't stay open. So they close, and then the parents in that area just don't have access to them. Now the parents couldn't even be out getting work and accumulating hours which could contribute to their eventually being able to take some kind of parental leave and add to their family.

So there are decisions being made by the government that I feel strongly impact families, and it's based on the economic status of the family. There's definitely a philosophical underpinning here in the way different people are treated.

Specific to what is being brought forward in Bill 11, I spoke at length in second reading on this. I think what's being proposed is fine. I have to underline again that this is unpaid leave. This is about keeping a position open. This is not about any kind of financial incentive. It just keeps the job open. I think a lot of people get confused about that and what's going on with the federal EI program, so I'm underlining that again.

As I said, I wish there hadn't been discrimination between birth mothers and everybody else, which is what's happened here. I think it is excellent that we have recognized adoptive parents and their role in nurturing children in our society. I think it should have been 52 weeks, but even the 37 will help some families that are looking to contribute to society by adopting children.

There are clauses in the bill that deal with written notice about when they go back to work and when they can leave work. Most people are familiar with how that happens through the federal program, which has been running for some years, and even the shorter program, the 18-week program, that Alberta had in place before. I mean, it's just a reasonable amount of notice to allow a small business to get on with things.

I'm glad to see that the government has come through with this. It's too bad we weren't leaders in this area, that we are in fact following the pack and I think at this point are probably dead last, but I'm glad to see it. I'm glad to support the bill in Committee of the Whole, and thank you very much for the opportunity to provide those few comments.

12:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I think that this bill is certainly welcome. You know, I would say that this bill is an interesting contrast to the government's normal practice, record, and history.

This government is a government of firsts. This government is the first government to balance its budget on the backs of the poor. It is the first to establish labour legislation which takes away the rights of workers. It is the first government to throw the health care system into crisis. It is the first government to completely ruin the electrical generation and distribution system that has served us so well. It is the first government to export massive amounts of natural gas, including all of the butanes and the ethanes and so on, yet it's the first government to say that when anybody else's gas is passing through this province, then we want them to park the butane and other things here.

So, yes, Mr. Chairman, this is indeed a government of firsts. I will give them that. They have many, many firsts to their credit. It's unfortunate that when it comes to progressive legislation, it's a government of lasts. It is the last government to do anything about poverty, the last government to do anything about . . .

Chairman's Ruling Committee of the Whole Debate

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, we are at committee stage, and if the hon. member would follow through clause by clause and stick to the bill, I think that would prevent a lot of the catcalls that we're hearing. I caution you that this is the committee stage, and I hope that you will follow the bill clause by clause.

Thank you.

MR. MASON: I just thought things had become altogether too quiet in this Chamber. I did want everyone to be awake while I praised the government, because if they don't see it tonight, they might not see it for some time, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate your comments, and I will now briefly address the clauses of the act.

Debate Continued

MR. MASON: So we have here in part 2 in section 45 that a pregnant employee is entitled to 52 weeks without pay. Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased that the government has finally come to bring forward the piece of legislation that it has which protects the rights of mothers to a full year. I think that it is a good piece of legislation. I am pleased to see the province of Alberta following the leadership of the federal government in this respect.

I see that "6 weeks' written notice" will be required unless

- (a) the medical condition of the birth mother . . . makes it impossible to comply . . .
- (b) the date of the child's placement with the adoptive parent was not foreseeable.

This deals with adoptive situations.

You know, it's a fairly comprehensive bill, Mr. Chairman. It deals with natural birth; it deals with adoption. It is the kind of legislation that I wish we would see more of from this government.

With that, I'm just going to indicate that in the third party we're very pleased to support this particular piece of legislation and commend the government for their somewhat belated enlightenment.

[The clauses of Bill 11 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 7

Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Bill 7 is a bill with one or two sections that we particularly like and with a few very serious flaws in it, so it causes us some real concern.

It's worth, I suppose, giving a brief background before we go through it section by section. The government has promised – I can't remember for how many years now – that there will be elections for the regional health authorities. I think there was even discussion of that two general elections ago, and there were delays and arguments and debates and concerns about how elections could be enacted, what legislation would be brought in, what mechanisms would be provided to govern elections of regional health authorities, whether it should be under the Local Authorities Election Act or whether it should be under its own act. We end up now with the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001, which will when it is passed, assuming that it is passed, lay out the legislation and provide a foundation for the regulations that govern the election of two-thirds of the board members of regional health authorities.

One of the dilemmas we face here is that it is only two-thirds of an elected board, and frankly that's not adequate as far as our perspective is concerned. School boards elect their full membership, municipal governments and county councils and so on are all fully elected, and our perspective would be very clearly that we should have fully elected regional health authorities. So it's a small step in the right direction, but it falls short of going the full distance.

12:30

When we look at it clause by clause, section 2 reads that section 19(1) is amended by striking out "and" at the end of clause (a), by adding "and" at the end of clause (b), and by adding the following – and this following clause is worth some note – after clause (b):

- (c) require the production for examination of any documents or records that are in the possession of a person who is or was a candidate in an election for membership on a regional health authority and that relate to that person's election finances, and make copies of them or temporarily remove them for the purpose of making copies.

Now, this is a section of Bill 7 that I, for one, will wholly endorse and support. It's crucial, absolutely crucial – and I can't overstate this – that the backers of the campaigns of people running for regional health authority membership face controls on the financing they provide to those campaigns and that the candidates themselves have to be accountable to the public for the way in which they finance their election campaigns. So this section, when combined with the proposed regulations, at least as I understand them, will have the effect of preventing the kinds of problems that we're seeing in some American health care elections in which you have absolutely enormous amounts of money being spent to influence the outcomes of particular elections.

I'm thinking here, for example, of a case that was brought to my

attention. I think it was covered in a major Boston newspaper, the *Boston Business Journal*. A number of companies including Aetna US Healthcare, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, and Tufts Associated Health Plans paid between \$100,000 U.S. and \$250,000 U.S. each to influence health care elections and particular state health initiatives that were going to be voted on. The insurers, these business groups, raised among them a million dollars for particular health care ballot.

MR. MacDONALD: That wouldn't happen here; would it?

DR. TAFT: Well, we would hope that it wouldn't happen here if this section is enacted, so that's why I'm speaking to this section in particular.

The other side of that particular election managed to only raise \$5,000, and it's a dreadfully lopsided reflection on the democratic process. This section of Bill 7 is, I think, unquestionably a step in the right direction.

Similarly, the next section, section 3, reads that section 21(1) of the Regional Health Authorities Act is amended by adding the following after clause (e):

- (e.1) governing all matters related to the election finances of candidates for election for membership on a regional health authority including, without limitation, regulations
 - (i) governing who may make and accept contributions to candidates, the maximum amounts of contributions and the time and manner in which they may be made;
 - (ii) governing the disposition of contributions that are made in contravention of the regulations;
 - (iii) requiring a person who makes a contribution in excess of the maximum amount permitted in the regulations to pay a penalty, and governing the amount of the penalty, the person to whom it is payable and the manner in which it may be recovered.

So we would see that the kinds of situations such as we saw in the American case I cited a few minutes ago would probably not be allowed whatsoever, and in fact people would be penalized for making that kind of enormous contribution.

The next clause:

- (iv) governing the manner in which contributions are to be held and accounted for, and the disposition of a surplus where the candidate decides not to contest the next election.

This will provide for regulations that will control exactly how election finances are accounted for.

The next clause under this section:

- (v) governing the keeping of election finances records.

Again, a good idea. Without good, solid record-keeping, how are we to be able to track election finances?

Finally, the last clause under this section, clause (vi), "providing that a member of a regional health authority who fails to submit audited financial statements" – now, not everything is audited in this government; is it? Some aspects of some bills just don't provide for audits. That's one of the things I do like about this piece of legislation. It provides for an audit. It says here:

- (vi) providing that a member of a regional health authority who fails to submit audited financial statements in respect of election finances as required by the regulations ceases to be a member, subject to any appeal provisions in the regulations.

So once again we have a section of Bill 7 here which I think is well worth supporting, and the minister in fact is to be commended for bringing in these kinds of provisions, particularly when they are brought in in conjunction with regulations.

As I understand it, the regulations for this bill are available now,

and I have a copy of them here. I must say that in some regards I find the regulations a bit confusing, but I'd first of all like to commend the minister for circulating regulations along with the bill so that we can see the two together before we vote on them. Again, there are other bills before us in this session in which the regulations aren't to be seen anywhere, and I think it's a good idea that these regulations are out there now, although frankly I have some concerns with some aspects of the regulations.

The next section, section 4, raises a bit of a question for me. It refers to, in fact, an amendment of the Local Authorities Election Act. This, as I read it, causes one of the fundamental questions I have around Bill 7, which is: why are we setting up a parallel and independent and separate structure for regional health authority elections when we could have just folded them under the Local Authorities Election Act? This section raises that issue and creates this whole parallel structure and in fact ends up with the effect of having the Minister of Health and Wellness in charge of administering the elections, including giving him the ability to appoint electoral officers, to create districts and wards, and to determine all the details of the election.

12:40

So we now have a situation in which we've pulled a major local election activity out from under the Local Authorities Election Act and have created through this section and other aspects of Bill 7 an entirely new electoral process which undoubtedly will have additional costs to it, which raises the question of duplication of efforts and raises the question of inefficiencies. It may even create situations in which I suppose at least theoretically there could be shortages of personnel, because the same election process and structure that's being run by the municipal elections and the school board elections will be competing for people against the parallel system set up for the regional health authority elections. I have yet to see anything close to an adequate justification for this particular section of the act, which creates the separate electoral body and puts the minister in charge of it.

Now, the concerns I have with that are that we very clearly have a case in which theoretically and potentially the minister of health in practice will be directly influencing the nature of these elections in a way, for example, that the provincial minister responsible for municipalities would not be able to influence the election of, say, mayors and city councillors and a situation in which the Minister of Learning would not be able to influence the election of school boards. But we have a situation here in which the Minister of Health and Wellness quite possibly is able to directly or indirectly influence the election of regional health authorities.

I could understand that occurring once at the very beginning of this process if the regional health authorities had not already been in existence for the last seven years, but these are, after all, long-established organizations now with fully functioning staff, fully functioning policies and sets of procedures. There is no reason that the regional health authorities themselves wouldn't be able, for example, to create their own wards and, if need be, appoint their own chief electoral officers. So I am concerned that this particular section of Bill 7 is an unnecessary duplication of law and bureaucracy and creates an opportunity for the Minister of Health and Wellness to unduly influence the outcome of the elections.

We even get into matters that are as specific as section 5 of Bill 7, which reads: section 42 is amended (a) by repealing subsection (1)(d) and (e); (b) by repealing subsection 2(d) and (e); (c) in subsection (3) by striking out "or district board." What this has the effect of doing is creating a lot of confusion. As I and our staff worked through this bill and spent time with Parliamentary Counsel

trying to understand it, we've had to refer back to the Regional Health Authorities Act. We've had to check and study carefully the Local Authorities Election Act. We've had to sort out how these sections correspond with each of the many pages of regulations here. It has created nothing but confusion.

We've found, in fact, that that confusion is showing up in our constituencies, because we have constituents phoning into our office. We've had two or three calls from people calling in interested in these possible elections and wanting more details. When we send them the draft regulation and the nomination forms and the legislation, we get calls back from people saying: "Gosh, I can't understand what's going on here. I can't sort it out. Can you explain to me X, Y, or Z?" Then we end up studying it carefully and find that, no, we can't explain X, Y, or Z. We've actually had to be in contact with the minister's office to help us understand and explain this bill to our constituents, and even then we found . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Confusion?

DR. TAFT: Well, to be honest, we found some confusion there and some lack of clarity.

When we find that this bill, as I read it – and I stand to be corrected – makes the Minister of Health and Wellness responsible for things like the nature of the ballots in the election, the number of members in each area, how things will be presented in the entire electoral process, I find myself wondering if we want to be creating a situation in which our Minister of Health and Wellness is becoming a major electoral officer. When we are looking at the scale of money spent here, it will be the people elected to these boards, at least the two-thirds who will be elected, who will have a say over something like a third of the provincial budget. I am concerned that the integrity and independence of this electoral process is under some stress here.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, for the moment I'll take my seat. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This will not be one of those exceptional occasions where I will come to praise the government. I wish I could remember more of Shakespeare, but it is getting a little late.

I want to speak to the bill, and I want to talk a little bit about matters relating to the election finances for election to the membership of the regional health authorities. The regulations that can be made deal with governing who may make and accept contributions to candidates, the maximum amounts of contributions, and the time and manner which they may be made. All of those are within the authority of the regulation. I think, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview indicated, that there is a real problem here in ensuring the objectivity of health authorities and the importance of making sure that they are not unduly influenced by campaign contributors.

There are at stake in these health authorities enormous amounts of money. Given the wide powers that health authorities have under the other Bill 11, not the one tonight but the Bill 11 which was seared into the minds of Albertans a year ago, it allows the health authorities to contract out virtually every aspect of their operations.

12:50

Health care is a very, very expensive business, Mr. Chairman. It's billions of dollars, and there are enormous profits to be made by

corporations as a result of Bill 11. Of course, the government promised when they passed the old Health Care Protection Act that they really weren't intending on privatizing it, but they've created a framework under which privatization can occur on a very broad basis. So the question of whether or not companies which stand to gain financially from the decisions of health authorities ought to be able to finance candidates for the health authorities is a really, really important issue as far as we're concerned.

Of course, as has already been pointed out, there is less control here than almost any other aspect of governance in this province. There's not even the opportunity for local electors or local authorities to determine their own rules with respect to "who may make and accept contributions to candidates, the maximum amounts of contributions and the time and manner in which they [can] be made." That's the language, and that's all up to the government. So what is to prevent a private hospital, for example, or a wanna-be private hospital – all they need is a contract from the health authority – from throwing thousands and thousands of dollars behind candidates who are going to give them that contract? That is a real concern.

The second part under 3(e.1) deals with "governing the disposition of contributions that are made in contravention of the regulations." That's a confusing clause to me, Mr. Chairman. What does it mean? If contributions are made in contravention of the regulations, what happens to the people who contravened it, and what happens to the money? What happens to the people that accepted the money if it was in contravention of the regulations?

The third subclause requires

a person who makes a contribution in excess of the maximum amount permitted . . . to pay a penalty, and governing the amount of the penalty, the person to whom it is payable and the manner in which it may be recovered.

What does that mean, Mr. Chairman? Confusing is putting it mildly. So if someone makes a contribution in excess of the maximum amount and pays a penalty, who do they pay it to? Do they pay it to the government? Do they pay it to the health authority? Well, it's not here. It's going to be determined by the regulation. "The person to whom it is payable and the manner in which it may be recovered." Why can't these things be spelled out in the legislation? Why don't you just say that if you violate the regulations, you pay a fine and you pay it to the government? If the government wants to give it to the health authority, they can do so.

The next sections:

- (iv) governing the manner in which contributions are to be held and accounted for, and the disposition of a surplus where the candidate decides not to contest the next election;
- (v) governing the keeping of election finances records;
- (vi) providing that a member of a regional health authority who fails to submit audited financial statements in respect of election finances as required by the regulations ceases to be a member, subject to any appeal provisions in the regulations.

Now, here, Mr. Chairman, is at least a little bit of a nugget of legislation, because if you sort through all of the verbiage surrounding the creation of regulations, it does say that someone "who fails to submit audited financial statements in respect of election finances as required . . . ceases to be a member." So there's something that's set out very clearly in the legislation, and I'm pleased it's there, but why do you have to search for it? I don't know. I don't know.

I want to talk about the clauses a little bit more, Mr. Chairman. The basic question I have has to do with eliminating health regions under the Regional Health Authorities Act from the Local Authorities Election Act.

Now, here you have a comprehensive system of governing elections for local authorities. A great deal of work has been done over the years to develop a fairly good, comprehensive Local

Authorities Election Act that deals with a thousand things that aren't in this act, and that piece of legislation is completely disregarded. In fact, any relevance that it might have had has been amended out of existence by this act.

I think what we've got is the opportunity, should the government choose to avail itself of the opportunity, to have an enormous degree of control over the local authorities that govern the health care throughout the province. So the government has reserved for itself the right to determine all of the regulations, all of the controls over elections that will determine the outcome of these health authorities.

That's unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, because I don't think that it serves the interests of the people who depend on health care. The government has an avowed aim of ensuring some local control over these health authorities, yet it seems to me that with the passage of this act there won't be real, meaningful control on the part of the citizens of the local jurisdiction. The real and meaningful control will reside with the government.

I want to indicate that before the establishment of these health authorities, we had a number of independent hospital boards and we had boards of public health. I'm familiar with some of those, because the local municipalities had the authority to make appointments. In my view, those appointments were a fairly good way to select boards for hospitals, given that you had an appointment principle in place, because you got a variety of groups making appointments, different groups. I think the College of Physicians and Surgeons made some appointments. Doctors made some appointments. The city made some appointments. The city even gave the government the right to appoint a couple of members to its board. So you got a diversity on the boards that didn't exist once the government consolidated all of these boards into local health authorities and began making the appointments directly themselves. Then you got a uniformity of appointee, and quite often you would find large numbers of active Progressive Conservatives on these various health authority boards. I'm sure that's purely a coincidence, Mr. Chairman, but it was very interesting that the diversity of experience seemed to be lost.

Now, we know that the government is reserving the right to appoint one-third of the members to each health board, and we know that the government is going to make those appointments after they've seen the results of the election. We also know that the government is going to make all of the regulations relative to election financing of the candidates. If the government chose, if the government, for example, hypothetically, wanted to support organizations such as HRG in Calgary or other private health care organizations, then they could create a set of election regulations governing finances, and so on, that would ensure that those companies had enormous influence on who is elected to the health care authority. We know that money talks when it comes to elections.

So I think this is a very dangerous precedent because we could have, theoretically of course, only theoretically, a situation where you had health care boards that were very favourable to vested interests in the health care industry, and that would be a most unfortunate situation, Mr. Chairman, and one I'm sure that the members opposite would like to help us avoid.

1:00

So on balance, then, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to take my full 20 minutes at this time, but I do want to say that I'm not prepared and we as the New Democrat opposition in this House are not prepared to support a bill which would give so much power to the government and allow the government to set rules for local elections in a way that could potentially ensure the election of candidates favourable to the government's policies. That is the fatal flaw of this

bill, and that's why we are determined to oppose it, and we will certainly be voting against this bill at every stage.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and yield to the next speaker. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the next speaker, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

MS DeLONG: Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you a couple of constituents from my riding, Leia Laing and James Vallentgoed.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I certainly have to commend the visitors for visiting us at this late hour or early hour in the morning.

Bill 7

Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

(continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to inform the Assembly that I have an amendment to Bill 7. It needs to be distributed. Should we take a minute for that? You can indicate to me when you'd like me to begin speaking.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I'll move that Bill 7 be amended by adding the following after section 3. Section 3.1, section 21 is amended by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) For the purposes of subsection (1)(e), all members of a regional health authority must be elected commencing October 15, 2001.

AN HON. MEMBER: All right. Good.

DR. TAFT: Glad to hear that.

Mr. Chairman, one of a number of profound concerns that we have with Bill 7 is the fact that it is a step backwards in the democratic evolution of Canadian society and indeed of the whole tradition of British democracy. We have under Bill 7 a proposal by the government to have only two-thirds of the members of a regional health authority elected. The remaining one-third, including – and I repeat: including – the chairman and vice-chairman, will be appointed by the minister after the results of the election are known. It's simply a distortion of democracy.

I think we need to go back through the history of the development of democracy to appreciate what a U-turn this is in our evolution as a society. If we go back to the origins of democracy, we can reasonably go back to the Magna Carta. Now, the Minister of Justice might be able to tell us when the Magna Carta – what's the date?

AN HON. MEMBER: Twelve-fifteen.

DR. TAFT: Very good; 1215. So we can go back almost 800 years. In fact, it's probably the same 800 years that our Speaker so frequently mentions as being the mandate that he uses for his rulings.

The Magna Carta, of course, was the first beginning of the devolution of powers from the monarchy to the people. Well, we know that through the Magna Carta the British barons were . . . [interjection] Maybe they were robber barons; I don't know. The robber barons came later.

The British barons were struggling with the monarchy because they felt they had a right to partake and to participate in the government of England at the time, and although there was a furious power struggle and even threats of civil war, the Magna Carta ultimately was agreed to, and we had the first steps, the very early beginnings of democracy in Britain and ultimately, if you go back through the years, in Canada.

In the course of affairs the spirit of the Magna Carta extended and grew so that it wasn't just the barons who obtained some version of democratic power. It became a larger group of the British ruling elite, and it leads us through, I suppose, to the English revolution and Oliver Cromwell and King Charles, when we saw in fact the monarchy being overthrown for a period and the establishment of a fully functioning parliamentary republic under Cromwell and his people. Again, a major step in parliamentary accountability. Of course, Cromwell proved to be a little bit of a harsh ruler, and the people brought back the monarchy, but the whole spirit of democracy reaching to more and more people was gaining momentum.

We can carry on 150 years further after the English revolution to the French Revolution, which was a major step forward in democracy. Although it was of course based in France, it had repercussions throughout all of Europe and indeed all the way around the world. The British and all the other European powers watched the French Revolution with great nervousness, because they were concerned that democracy was getting out of control. Too many people were getting a hand in things.

Actually, an interesting footnote in the French Revolution: the French Revolution is the origin of the idea of left and right in politics. The left sat to the left side of the Speaker, and they were the revolutionaries. They were the people calling for change. The right were the monarchists, who resisted change. That's the origin of left and right in politics, and it was a major step forward for democracy.

Well, we cross the ocean, and we come to Canada.

1:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, are you standing up on a point of order?

MRS. ADY: I'm not. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, you may proceed now.

DR. TAFT: You see local landowners and farmers beginning to get the right to vote in Canada. Some of you undoubtedly will have read the book called *How the Fathers Made a Deal* about the origins of Confederation. The author there argues that at that time Canada was the most democratic country in the world. The local farmers, the local landowners, the local merchants were all involved directly in the democratic processes.

We move again a few more generations ahead, and we come to – finally, long overdue – women getting the vote, in fact a process that was led by women largely from Alberta. Am I correct in thinking that one of the first elected female officials in the entire British empire sat in this Assembly?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, that's right.

DR. TAFT: So we have a great heritage, a vital heritage of expanding democratic powers in this Assembly.

The last major step I can think of before the retrograde step of Bill 7 occurred in 1969 when the voting age was lowered from age 21 to age 18 in Alberta. One of the things that was argued then was that if you're old enough to fight for your country and die for your country, you should be old enough to vote for your leaders. So we have an unrelenting move towards broader and broader democracy in Alberta.

Then we come to Bill 7. Gee, I covered 800 years in eight minutes.

MS BLAKEMAN: You did.

DR. TAFT: I'm going too fast.

Bill 7 takes us to a situation in which instead of a full democracy, an expansion of democracy, we're seeing a proposal that only two-thirds of authorities should be elected. Now, we have full elections for city councils, we have full elections for school boards, we have full elections for the province and for the country. Why shouldn't we have full elections for regional health authorities? How would we feel in this Assembly if a third of the members were appointed by the Prime Minister?

AN HON. MEMBER: Kind of like the Senate.

DR. TAFT: Yeah. Is it the policy of this government to support the Senate? No.

What if the chairman of this Assembly or the chairman and the leader of the government were appointed by the Prime Minister? It wouldn't be acceptable, yet here we are not only accepting but enacting in law a situation in which a third of the people on the regional health authority boards will be appointed.

So the amendment that I have proposed here, Mr. Chairman, represents not a two-thirds commitment to democracy but a full commitment to democracy and a full confidence in the wisdom of the voters to choose wisely and to choose properly who should be governing their regional health authorities.

Mr. Chairman, I could also point out and I will take a moment to point out some of the concerns that I have with a board that is two-thirds elected and one-third appointed. I think we do run the risk of creating factions on boards, and we can all see played out in our headlines every day what happens when politics and organizations get too factionalized. They divide among themselves and destroy themselves. I think there's going to be a serious risk in at least some of the regional health authorities of a split between the one-third who are appointed by the minister and who obviously will be approved by the minister and the two-thirds who will take their mandate from the general electorate. Frankly, if I was on one of those boards – and I'm sure the minister won't be appointing me to any, but maybe someday I'll run for election – as an elected official, I would feel that I had a more rightful place to exercise my role and my authority than those who were appointed at the whim of the minister.

In fact, undoubtedly, Mr. Chairman, we are going to end up in situations where candidates who receive thousands or even tens of thousands of votes in elections are not going to be able to sit on regional health authority boards because they will be one too many for the electoral process. Their rightful place at the RHA governing table will be taken from them, and they will be replaced by an appointee of the minister. That's a sorry comment on the effects of Bill 7 as it is structured right now, and it's an effect that could be

corrected very easily this evening by all of us by accepting this proposed amendment.

So, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I thank the members for listening to the historical view of things, and I hope you all fully appreciate the weight of the democratic evolution that rests on our shoulders.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to urge members to vote against this amendment and to recall history, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview mentioned, the Magna Carta. As I recall, the Magna Carta was all about the citizens taking into their hands some of their governance because they were tired of the King spending their money in foreign misadventures mostly. So the whole question of governance comes to taxation and representation.

The hospital boards, being a mixture of appointed and elected, should work fairly well, but we've got to keep in mind that those of us here in this room are elected to exercise judgment as regards the financial implications of the budget. We control the financial implications of what goes on on the hospital boards. All of those elected members and the appointed boards in the hospital boards are not going to be able to raise or spend 1 cent. They will only do what we give them the authorization to do. So the responsibility is rightfully right here in this Legislature. Therefore, I urge all members to vote against this amendment.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the amendment.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate seeing a member of the government side actually participate in debate. That was very refreshing, and I thank the member. [interjection] Yeah, I guess we had to go back 800 years before somebody was motivated there.

An interesting point that was raised there, and I will come back to it.

I am in favour of this amendment A1 to Bill 7 on the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act. To me, that has a lot to do with integrity. The regional health authorities were created as an animal of this government, and at the time I felt and I still feel that they were put in place as an entity created to do the bidding of the government and then be able to hide behind them.

1:20

For some time, if you follow question period in this House, to any questions that were directed towards the government around implementation of health policy the answer was: well, that's the regional health authorities; go ask them. Of course, we did go and ask the regional health authorities, who said back to us: well, that's the way we have to do things given the budget that has been approved for us by the government. So in fact we had an entity that was put in place that had the responsibility for doing something but did not in fact have the full authority to do it because they did not have the ability to raise the money and had to come back and petition the government for it.

Let me stop here and say that I'm in no way advocating that regional health authorities should have the power to tax. But for me, as a student of public administration and administrative law, it's a classic example of how not to set a system up. If you're going to

give responsibility, the organization has to have the authority to complete the task. Therefore, we have an agency that's been created by the government as a screen, I believe, and finally we were able to come back to the government and go: "Well, don't point us towards the regional health authorities. They can't answer the questions because they're not being adequately funded." The funding comes back to the government, and full responsibility and authority is laid at the feet of the minister.

For me the integrity part of this is that we had an oft repeated promise from the government that regional health authorities would be elected, and this is the disconnect, the schism, the reality/unreality check that we get from this government between what they say and what they do. In fact, what we got was two-thirds, a proposal that two-thirds of the regional health authority members would be elected and the remaining third would be appointed by the government. In further refinement of that, the chairperson – and I will argue with my hon. member here in that I think they should be chairpersons and vice-chairpersons rather than chairmen and that they should be open to all – that position, is also to be appointed by the minister.

This is an issue of control, and this government has managed to, I'm sure with the assistance of their some 7 million dollar Public Affairs Bureau budget, put it out there that this is a government about openness and transparency. In fact, what it is is a government about centralizing control, and this is another example about centralizing control. So even though we will look to a future where two-thirds of the regional health authority members are elected, in fact the control of the regional health authorities will reside and continue to reside with the minister, but they'll be able to stand up and say: oh, yes, we have two-thirds that are elected.

You know, the situation has been created here where it's almost moot. When you have control of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson, and a third of the members, you can be creating factions, you can make the board totally dysfunctional, and given the powers that the cabinet holds to itself, probably you may well be able to make the regional health authorities a puppet of the government.

It's important, I think, that we hold the government to the original promise that regional health authority members would all be elected. I thank my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for following through on that and bringing forward an amendment that puts that out front again, holding the mirror up to the government and saying: this is what you promised, and there's a reason for it. He very carefully has gone through a progression of enlarging, expanding democracy to include all members in it.

Now, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford had talked about the importance of no taxation without representation and pointed out that this regional health authority amendment and discussion was moot because the regional health authorities do not have the ability to tax. No, they don't, but when you look at the mechanisms of how this organization is to function, it is about responsibility and authority. We are not giving full responsibility under the two-thirds/one-third scheme, and we're certainly not giving authority for them to accomplish it.

So we continue along in a situation where one-third of our budget is spent on health care and where it's very difficult to get accountability, where it's very difficult to determine who made the decision and when and why. When I look at this legislation, once again the primary focus and concern of the government is around finances, money, and less around the implementation of a system that will work well and that will give us a well-managed health care system. Once again the option is to be concerning itself with money and not concerning itself with good management, with planning, and with a system that is set up so that it can, in fact, function.

I think that we careen down the path towards a health system that

doesn't function at all, thereby creating the market, so to speak, for the government to step back and say: "Well, you see, public health care doesn't work at all. You see that we've proved it now. Therefore, it should be a completely privatized system." I still accuse the government of strategizing to achieve that objective. I think the one-third appointed, two-thirds elected is a stepping-stone in that strategy, and I have yet to see this government do anything to convince me otherwise. I do hold this government accountable for that, and I will continue to hold the government accountable for that. We have an opportunity in the House tonight to right that wrong, to correct that, to not send us down that road, by supporting the amendment that's been put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I was pleased to be able to speak in support of his amendment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to this most excellent amendment. It's an amendment which would provide that all members of a regional health authority must be elected commencing October 15, 2001.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview neglected a key piece of his history. It's a history of the development of democracy that took place right in this country. It is the struggle for representative government that took place and which culminated in the revolts in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837 against the Family Compact, which dominated politics in Upper Canada. It was led by William Lyon Mackenzie. In Lower Canada, which is now Quebec, it was led by M. Papineau. This was a struggle which is fundamental to our basic democracy in this country, and it's something that happened in this country.

Mr. Chairman, members will, I'm sure, remember their history, but every time I think of it, I'm just shocked and appalled that we had unrepresentative government in this country. In fact, the Executive Council was not accountable to the Legislature, as it more or less is now. We had a situation where the governor, appointed from across the ocean, appointed the entire Executive Council of the Legislature. It did not come from the elected members. It was not accountable to them. The government did not fall when they did not have the confidence of the Assembly as a whole. That's a very important piece of the struggle for democracy in our country that the hon. member has neglected to point out but which has a direct bearing on the legislation that we're now considering and which I think is very important.

1:30

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has said: well, they don't have the power to tax. But the fact remains that they have significant powers to spend. They have a direct responsibility to the people in their community to provide good-quality and acceptable health care.

I think it's important to note that the government has indicated that these would be elected – and they've stalled a long time on implementing that promise – but that promise when it was made so many years ago was not qualified. It wasn't: we promise that we'll have two-thirds elected health authorities. It was: we promise that we'll have elected health authorities. Now it's been qualified. Why? Why has it been qualified, Mr. Chairman? I think that the answer is very clear. The government wants to retain control. It wants to create health authorities that look democratic but which are in fact not.

AN HON. MEMBER: With one-third?

MR. MASON: An hon. member across the way has raised a good point, and I thank him for that. He has said: how can you maintain control of an elected body if you can only appoint one-third? Of course, if we looked at this Assembly and if we assumed that we didn't have full independence of the voters of this province and the federal government in Ottawa could appoint one-third of the members, then how would they maintain control with only a third?

Well, I think a third is a very, very significant portion of the whole, Mr. Chairman, and it makes it very, very difficult to overcome. It gives you a tremendous foot in the door. It gives you a huge advantage right from the start, but then you've got to combine it with the other elements of this bill. It's the government that says essentially who can run, who can be financed, how much they can be financed, who can provide the financing. The government is in a position to determine the entire rules of the game. So it doesn't take very many more members of a health authority to get control.

So if you appoint a third – say there were 10 members, just speaking in very hypothetical and round numbers, on a regional health authority. Say that there were nine. That works better. [interjections] Yeah, it's divided by three. That's right. Mr. Chairman, you know, I just want to keep it simple so that everybody can follow along. I know that with the lateness of the hour higher mathematics is escaping many of us, so I'll say nine.

Now, you take one-third of that, and that is three. So the government appoints three. That means there are six that are elected. How many government supporters have to be elected in order to equal a majority?

DR. TAYLOR: Six more, Brian. We'd elect everybody. There'd be nine of us.

MR. MASON: Well, that's very good, but I think the math test is that it would take two more. All they would need is to elect two more. I mean, say that it was a by-election, and you don't do as well in those. [interjections] Two more and the government has control, and that's all that's really necessary.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I just caution you. If you could stick to the amendment that's before us, it would prevent the catcalls that we're getting. Thank you.

Please proceed now.

MR. MASON: I appreciate your advice. I was just trying to be responsive to members opposite who have a number of questions about my presentation. So I will come back to the legislation.

It is really fundamental, then, that this amendment be passed so that we don't get in a situation where one-third is appointed by the government and a small minority of the elected members is sufficient to give the government's unelected members a working majority on the body. The fear, of course, from our point of view has always been the government's intention to contract existing health care services that are now publicly delivered over to the private sector, and of course the ability of the private sector to influence elections through campaign donations and so on is a real fear and I think a legitimate fear.

As we all know, there are tremendous profits that can be made from privatized health care. In fact, it's one of the most profitable areas of business in the entire economy, Mr. Chairman. I think pharmaceutical companies have amongst the highest rate of profitability of any of the sectors of the corporate world. So there are tremendous profits to be made and a great deal at stake.

Of course, if we get into profits in health care, then we all know – and the literature is very clear on it – that health care outcomes decline, waiting lists increase, and generally the situation of the health care system deteriorates dramatically.

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Chairman?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: If anyone wishes to rise on a point of order, they need to be in their proper seat to rise and be recognized.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you may proceed.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do want to come to some of the other elements in the existing legislation, because I think they have a bearing. We see on this that if the minister wishes, he or she is permitted to dismiss the entire board and appoint an administrator. So the control that the government seeks is present with or without this amendment. There's no real reason for the government to not support a fully elected board because they have ultimate control over the board. They've got the hammer of removing the board altogether. I think that's important.

Now, I want to try and relate a fully elected board to the question of the functions of a health board. It says in section 5 of the Regional Health Authorities Act that a regional health authority

- (a) shall
 - (i) promote and protect the health of the population in the health region and work towards the prevention of disease and injury,
 - (ii) assess on an ongoing basis the health needs of the health region,
 - (iii) determine priorities in the provision of health services in the health region and allocate resources accordingly,
 - (iv) ensure that reasonable access to quality health services is provided in and through the health region, and
 - (v) promote the provision of health services in a manner that is responsive to the needs of individuals and communities and supports the integration of services in the health region,

and finally

- (b) has final authority in the health region in respect of the matters referred to in clause (a).

So it's clear that it's responsible for delivering health care services to the region, and it should therefore be responsible to the voters of the region. I think it's clear that with the government's proposed amendments we will not have a health authority which is responsible to the people in the region. That is, in my view, a very important principle, one worth fighting for and one which the patriots of 1837 would have been proud to fight for, Mr. Chairman, because they were standing up for the rights of the people and acting against tendencies to have arbitrariness and lack of democratic principles in our government in this country.

1:40

Here's another one that I think is important, and it's section 11. It says here:

A meeting of a regional health authority or community health council must be open to the public unless the regional health authority or community health council, based on considerations set out in the regulations, determines that holding the meeting or part of it in public could result in the release of [information]

and so on and so on. But clearly unless they're concerned about private information being released, they need to hold their meetings in public.

Well, what good is it for the public to come to a meeting and watch people making decisions on their behalf when they can't remove one-third of them? So what if it's in public? They can

ignore the wishes of the people of that region with impunity if they're not responsible to them and not elected by them. It's another example of why this amendment is so important and so fundamental to establishing real local control over regional health authorities, which is supposed to be what the government is prepared to talk about.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has said: well, they don't have the power to tax. I was looking as hard as I could, Mr. Chairman, for something in the existing act to refute that. At one point there was the power to levy supplemental requisitions. I regret to say – well, I don't regret to say it, but I don't find that in the legislation as it currently exists.

But it does say that the health authorities can receive grants which come in a manner that "the Minister considers appropriate." He or she can "provide grants or other payments to a regional health authority or provincial health board to assist it in carrying out its functions." That can amount to a very, very great deal of money, Mr. Chairman, so it makes a lot of sense to me to have some assurance that the money that's spent on behalf of the people of the region, whether it comes from taxes or from a government grant, is spent in accordance with the wishes of the people of the region. Once again, unless the people on the health board making those very important decisions are accountable in some way to the people of the region, it becomes very, very difficult to hold them accountable.

Section 18 of the act talks about:

Where an enactment provides that the Minister shall or may provide grants or payments of any kind to any person including, without limitation, an existing health authority, the Minister may instead provide those grants or payments to a regional health authority and, subject to any terms and conditions the Minister considers appropriate, delegate to the regional health authority the Minister's power in respect of the provision of the grants or payments.

So here you've got a situation where the minister can delegate his authority, including his authority in respect of the provision of grants or payments.

You know, you cannot just simply say that the responsibility to the public lies only in this Chamber when it's pretty clear that it also can be delegated to the regional health authority, and the regional health authority I think has once again got to be responsible to the people of the region.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think the amendment to this bill will accomplish a number of things. It will ensure that you have a health authority that is accountable to the people on whose behalf it provides health care, that it's going to be spending money on behalf of those people. It has very, very significant financial authority, so it ought to be elected.

I think also, Mr. Chairman, that it removes any concern that might exist that the government wishes to use health authorities to promote a particular agenda of privatization. I think it would go a long way towards calming the fears of some Albertans who may feel that the government's agenda is to increase the level of private health care and introduce the profit motive into our health care system through means other than direct means here at the Assembly.

The government has given authority to these health authorities to contract out any services, including overnight stays, and that gives it a very, very broad mandate to provide health care in a private fashion. So it becomes all the more important to reassure Albertans that the government really is interested in good-quality public health care, that we ensure that these health authorities are fully elected and accountable to the people they serve.

That ultimately is the most important aspect that I see this particular amendment providing, and I must commend the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for introducing this amendment. I think it is exactly what this bill needs, because without it what we have is

not a bill that really introduces public control in any way to our health authorities. So I think that he deserves a great deal of credit for having the courage to stand up in this Assembly and introduce such an amendment, and I really hope that some members opposite would also be prepared to support it, because I know that there are many opposite who are democratic in their inclinations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had much more to say, but I'll take my seat.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to support the amendment proposed by Edmonton-Riverview. The amendment addresses one of the difficulties that a number of us identified at second reading of the bill, and that is the concern with having a partially elected, partially appointed board. The amendment brings consistency with school boards in the province, who are totally elected, with municipal councillors, who are totally elected, and this amendment would have health boards in the same position.

Those other boards are fully elected for a number of reasons, Mr. Chairman. One of them is the whole business of chairmanship. What this amendment would do would be to make sure that the chair of the regional health authorities was one who had the support of the electorate and would not be put in the kind of vulnerable position that an appointed chair would be.

The chairing of these regional authorities is going to be important. The chairs are spokespeople for the board when there are difficult decisions made. Whether it's with respect to negotiations or contracts or closing or opening of facilities, it usually falls on the chair's shoulders to speak for the board and to direct the board. It's the chair who's instrumental in much of the activity of the board, and that's why school board chairs are paid extra stipends in terms of their service, as is the mayor of a city council, recognizing the extra leadership function that those individuals have to exercise on the part of the board.

1:50

Chairs are usually key in all committee appointments, so it seems only reasonable that the amendment would be supported and it makes sense in terms of looking seriously at the operation of the board. It's going to be very difficult, as previous speakers have indicated, for an appointed chair to argue it out with someone who's elected with – who knows? – 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 votes and to claim the same kind of authority that that elected member can claim.

It was interesting when the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford tried to make the point that these boards didn't raise taxes and therefore they didn't deserve to be fully elected. If I were a school board member in this province, I would start to shake, because that's exactly the position school boards are now in. They don't raise money by taxes, so is the logical next step that some of their members should be appointed by this government? If that's where we're going, then we're in double jeopardy this evening. But the member there is as inconsistent with his arguments, I would submit, as this legislation is in terms of the treatment of boards.

I guess the final point I'd like to make, Mr. Chairman, is that I would predict that we're going to be back here before our term is out making amendments to this bill should this amendment not pass this evening – and I can't believe that it wouldn't – making a similar motion, only this time it'll be proposed by the government benches.

With those comments, I urge members to support the amendment. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am very anxious to participate in the debate on the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and am delighted to see that hon. members from the government caucus are engaging in debate.

DR. MASSEY: One.

MR. MacDONALD: It's a start. It's a real start, and I would encourage more of that debate, because I think eventually, Mr. Chairman, it will lead to better legislation.

Specific to the amendment I have to congratulate the member. We're going to have only two-thirds of the board elected. Now, the Alberta Liberals have been calling for regional health authority elections ever since the creation of the regional health authorities going back to 1994, but equally we have been consistent in our call for full board elections in an open and accountable election process.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one of the first arguments that the government made was: oh, the elections are going to lead to political instability. I've never heard such an argument made before. Now if we have two-thirds elected, just precisely what is that going to mean with regards to political instability?

This is the same government that for its own political purposes talks about having an elected Senate. We on this side of the House have no problem with that, but can you imagine a Senate that is comprised of two-thirds elected members? Now, where are they going to come from? Are they going to come from western Canada, or are they going to come from Quebec or Ontario? The notion of only two-thirds of a body being elected and one-third being appointed is quite frankly ridiculous, and again I have to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this amendment.

Now, this is a democratic country and a democratic province, and if we can elect all members of school boards, if we can elect all members of municipal councils, why does not the same reasoning apply to regional health authorities? Regional health authorities don't have the power to tax, but they certainly have the power to spend, and that has been noted in the previous remarks of another hon. member.

This whole idea of financial accountability, as I understand from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford's remarks, is that the idea of financial accountability in the Legislative Assembly is paramount, which is true. But, at the same time, particularly during the Bill 11 debate, when this whole issue of regional health authorities and the direction in which they were going to take our public health care system was raging, the government conveniently said that they had no control over the regional health authorities, none, that they were at arm's length, that they were separate entities, so how could they dictate what was going to happen? The regional health authorities were removed from the government.

Now, when you look at the recent budget that we debated and you look at the regional and the provincial health authorities, you start with the Chinook regional health authority, Palliser, Headwaters, Calgary – the list goes on – and the total spending comes to \$3.6 billion. Then in the next reference line, provincewide spending – that is spending for the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital health authority – there's another \$350 million, and there's a bit more unallocated, \$1.5 million, Mr. Chairman. That is a significant sum of money. That is in excess of \$3.9 billion alone.

MR. MASON: How much?

MR. MacDONALD: It's \$3.9 billion. That is a considerable sum of money. In fact, the health care budget in this province is close to one-third of total government spending, and we have in my view not enough control, and the taxpayers of this province have no control. Certainly it will improve with two-thirds elected, but why not go all the way and elect all regional health authority members? That would include, as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about earlier, the chairperson also being elected. That's a very important duty. Again, accountability and accountability to the taxpayers is the first priority. There's money – and what do the government public relations people call it? – new spending on pressure points in the health care system.

2:00

Now, there has been a worry expressed to me, and I can't understand it. Apparently there was a task force struck by the government to visit many places, but one place in particular was the province of Saskatchewan, to see how the province of Saskatchewan was dealing with elected health authorities officials. As the tour was described to me, one health authority had only physicians elected to the board. This was a problem because apparently the physicians were deemed a special-interest group, and only they had influence on this health authority in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chairman, this notion: if you allow full elections, what happens if all the people that are elected, whether it's nine or 12 or 15, are from one special-interest group? I tried to assure the hon. member that I didn't believe that was possible. You look at boards of education, the backgrounds of the citizens who win their respective elections. They're from all walks of life. I don't think it would be possible for one specific special-interest group, regardless of who it would be, to be successful and, let's say, win all available positions in the Capital health authority elections. I don't think that's possible.

You just look at the makeup of the membership of the Assembly here. Earlier in the session the Speaker – and I was very grateful to receive this information – gave a list of the occupations and professions of all the members that were elected, and it was diverse. It was incredible. I think it's a good thing. I think the same would apply if we voted for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's amendment, and I would urge all members to strongly consider and please support this amendment, because we will certainly have a better province as a result of this.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to calm the fears of any member of this Assembly who was part of that committee that went to Saskatchewan and is concerned: "Oh, if we elect everyone in the regional health authorities, it's going to be taken over by special-interest groups." I just cannot see it happening. It hasn't happened, as I said earlier, with the school trustees, it hasn't happened with city councillors, and it won't happen with the health authorities.

Now, I can't finish my remarks without discussing that we need to ensure that if the health authorities are elected and directly accountable to the people every three years, each and every member, and meetings continue to happen in public, as they do, no one can then argue that the regional health authorities were established to serve as an administrative buffer between unpopular government health policies and frustrated Albertans, because Albertans would have the ultimate control, and that is at the ballot box. If they don't like the direction of all the health authorities, because of the hon. member's amendment they can simply replace them at the next election with others.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands was present. It was after the Bill 11 debate and in fact was on the south lawn. There was a reception held, and in the reception area there was quite a broad

discussion that occurred, Mr. Chairman. After Bill 11 was passed by this Assembly, there was encouragement given to all the people who were at that reception to actively seek a seat on the regional health authorities. The reason for them to actively seek election – and I certainly hope many of them do because I think they would be outstanding board members of the regional health authorities – is that they themselves can be the watchdogs to protect the public health care system.

That is one more reason why we need to ensure that every member, including the chairperson, is elected. They can be whistle-blowers, so to speak, and alert the public, the rest of the province, all the citizens. We can pick one. We can pick the Calgary regional health authority with almost a billion dollars in funds right here, \$957 million, one of the biggest budgets, and I'm sure the Capital health authority is about the same. Mr. Chairman, they can serve as whistle-blowers, watchdogs of the public health care system and talk about the contracting out if there is any going on. They can talk about the conflicts of interest. I'm not convinced that there is no conflict of interest. I'm not convinced of this. But those are the roles, those are almost the duties of a fully elected regional health authority.

AN HON. MEMBER: Couldn't they appoint whistle-blowers?

MR. MacDONALD: Well, I would like to see whistle-blower legislation established in this province.

On this amendment specifically, the fully elected regional health authorities can act in that capacity not only in regards to contracting out but if there are other inefficiencies. I don't think there would be a FOIP application by any party if all the regional health authorities were elected, each and every member. I would be curious to know how that would work, but certainly I believe there would be a lot more consultation with the citizens.

Now, there is a perception certainly – and we were talking about that earlier – that exists between the regional health authorities and the CEOs and other high-ranking administrators. The perception is that they're friends and that their positions are about politics, not about sound fiscal policy or quality health care. Mr. Chairman, that perception would be eliminated if all health authority members were elected as well. There are so many good things about this amendment that I'm surprised it's not incorporated in the original bill.

Two-thirds elected, 66 percent: I don't know where the 66 percent comes from. I don't know how much of a percentage of the vote the Hon. Joe Clark had at the Winnipeg convention. It was 66 percent, I think. [interjection] It was a little bit less than that.

2:10

Now, if we don't pass this amendment – and I urge all members to vote for this amendment – the minister will appoint the chair. That would be reason itself to support this amendment. The school board, where everyone is elected, after an election selects the chair. When we are elected to this Assembly, one of the first things we do is elect a Speaker. There's no notion that only two-thirds of us can vote in the election of the Speaker. I don't understand the rationale of just having two-thirds elected.

In closing, I would like to say to all members of this Assembly that in your decision to vote for this amendment – and I certainly hope you do – you consider the arguments I made, because I think the regional health authorities as they exist need to have a direct relationship with the voters. There are enormous sums of money being spent.

After the Bill 11 debate – and that will unfold. During the discussion on this amendment I don't believe is the appropriate time

to discuss a billboard that I saw, and I certainly will be discussing this at another time.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on the amendment.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm very pleased to speak again to this excellent amendment. I wanted to talk a little bit about the election of all members of the health authority and specifically with respect to electing people who would serve in the capacity of the chair or vice-chair of the committee.

You know, the chairs of committees have very, very important responsibilities. You know yourself, Mr. Chairman, that as a chairman you have a very heavy burden of responsibility to the group as a whole. The chairman needs to maintain order, and that is of course one of the first and foremost of his responsibilities. It's not always easy to keep order among members, all of whom are strong-willed individuals, people who have strong opinions, generally quite intelligent, and sometimes just a little rambunctious. So as things progress, the chairman's duties can sometimes become quite burdensome.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

A chairman also has the responsibility to make sure that the order of the agenda of the meeting is adhered to and that the group transacts the business it needs to do. A chairman has many other responsibilities: generally overseeing and ensuring that the minutes are prepared and taken and so on, that there's a secretary. All those things are important.

Often in the case of a health authority or a body like it the chairman becomes the interface between the body, that is the health authority, and the administration of the health authority. So they play quite an important role in making sure there is good communication between the policy that's set by the health authority or whatever the body happens to be – I keep wanting to say the elected group, but that's not entirely true in this case – and the administration. So they're the liaison, and that's a very important role.

Can you imagine, Mr. Chairman, if you were to attempt to provide these functions for a body in which the majority was elected but you yourself were not elected? That would put the chairman in a very, very difficult position altogether. It would mean that the chairman didn't have the same moral authority and stature as some of the members over which he or she was supposed to maintain order, preserve decorum, and generally co-ordinate the activities so that the business was transacted in a smooth and systematic fashion. So I think we need to take this into account when we consider the motion of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

The same thing would apply, of course, to the vice-chairman of the committee, who also has to fill in for the chairman when the chairman isn't present. Again, you have a situation where they don't have the authority they need in order to maintain the high office with the dignity that it requires for the effective transaction of their responsibilities.

You can take it also from the other side, Mr. Chairman, take it from the side of the elected people who are members of this body. Suppose we had a Speaker in the Assembly who was appointed from outside. In the cut and thrust of the debate, in the tangles that sometimes occur, would they feel that the Speaker had the necessary moral authority to rule on their actions, to say, "You're out of order and here's why," or to move on a question of privilege and rule on that, whether or not it creates a *prima facie* case of privilege, which is the Speaker's responsibility here?

Similarly, you might find in the regional health authorities that the elected people did not have sufficient respect for a nonelected chair. I think that would put the chair at a very, very serious disadvantage. I really do. A chairman is very important to the functioning of one of these committees. So I think that's another reason, a very strong reason in my view, for members to support the amendment that is before us.

2:20

The question I really want to ask and have been hesitating to ask but I will ask because it doesn't seem that the government members are participating as fully in this debate as the opposition members, the question I have for the government is: why do you want to appoint one-third of the members? What is the reason? Have we heard from the other side a reason for one-third of these members to be appointed? I don't recollect it. I may have been briefly distracted or otherwise occupied, but I don't recall the government putting forward a coherent series of arguments in a carefully structured way that explains why they want to appoint one-third of the members to these regional health authorities.

Now, we on our side have put forward lots of arguments for electing them, and the government seemingly believes that we're two-thirds right, but we don't know why we're one-third wrong, Mr. Chairman. I think that before we close debate on this particular amendment, it would be very useful for the House to hear from the minister or some other responsible member of the government why they have chosen to limit the number of elected members at regional health authorities to two-thirds. I think that's really a fundamental precondition for persuading those of us on this side of the House that we might in fact be wrong. I'm willing to accept that the opposition can theoretically be wrong and can actually be wrong in practice. [interjection] I appreciate that; that's true.

But we haven't heard from the government why we're wrong in this case. I wonder why. I wonder if some of our speculation as to the impact of not electing the entire body might just be off base, and if the government is prepared to share that information with us, I think we could seriously consider whether or not we're in error with respect to this particular amendment. I would again encourage the government to enlighten us on this point.

I just wanted to say that I saw an analogy with something I referred to earlier, which was the situation in Canada in the early 1800s where we talked a little bit about the struggle for responsible government in the years before Confederation. I guess I would go back to the comments about the chairman and the vice-chairman. In a sense they're almost an Executive Council and have some of the functions of an Executive Council. I mean, it's just broadly analogous, I realize. It's not a direct relationship, but I think it's fair to say there is a relationship there between the chairman of a regional health authority and the vice-chairman and the Executive Council in the Legislative Assemblies of Upper and Lower Canada. So I see a similar struggle to have a fully elected and accountable and responsible chair and vice-chair of these authorities.

I think that again history is serving us well, the historical precedent that the member for Edmonton-Riverview raised going back to the early days of the Magna Carta, going back 800 years, talking about the barons and the struggle of the barons for baronial democracy. Certainly it wasn't a struggle for the serf to have democracy.

Well, it used to be that we had similar restrictions on voting rights in the past. Even within my own memory, in terms of municipal government there was a case where unless you owned property, you couldn't vote or participate in municipal politics.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

MR. MASON: I apologize, Mr. Chair – Mr. Chairman. I guess Mr. Chair is not the correct form, and I apologize for that.

So I think the fight for the gradual extension of the franchise, the gradual extension of responsible government, as outlined very ably by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, is important and can be quite pertinent to this entire matter.

I know that there's another important element. When serving as a city councillor in the city of Edmonton in the early to middle '90s, I dealt with a number of constituents who called me. At that stage the city of Edmonton still had a role in appointing hospital boards, but the government reorganization of health care had already begun. They were clearly moving towards the development of these regional authorities, but it hadn't yet been consummated. The reform, so called, of health care had already begun, so we of course had lots and lots of people that were stuck in the halls, that couldn't get admitted to the hospital. It was a very dreadful situation. So people would sometimes phone me because the city of Edmonton at that point owned the Royal Alexandra hospital and appointed its board.

One person I know, a friend of mine who was also a bus driver – I knew him from work because that's where I used to work before I got elected for the first time to city council – had been left in the hallway outside the emergency room of the Royal Alexandra hospital for over 24 hours. Who did he want to talk to? He wanted to talk to his elected representative, and I was the closest thing to that. He felt that he should phone me because I was his elected person. I did intervene. I did phone the chief executive officer of the hospital and personally raised a question. I got a response immediately, and it was because I was an elected person with some responsibility for that hospital or at least for appointing some members of the board of that hospital that I was able to get a response.

So the question of accountability arises, Mr. Chairman. Accountability is an important factor. People want to be able to phone someone who they have some control over or with or some relationship to as a result of an elector/elected type of relationship. They want to phone somebody they voted for and get some response from the administration when they don't feel they've been getting the kind of service they deserve.

I hesitate to say it, but I doubt that that kind of relationship can exist in the case of an appointed member of a health authority board. You just don't phone and demand action from somebody that you don't elect. So it makes a lot of sense from the point of view of the citizen, the citizen who's also a consumer of health services, to call the person they have an electoral relationship with, if I can use that phrase.

2:30

Why would they feel that they would have responsiveness from somebody whose job or whose position on that health board does not stem from their action as a citizen, as a voter? There's no accountability whatsoever, which is really what I'm concerned about, Mr. Chairman. There is no accountability when people aren't elected. So anybody that's not satisfied with the performance of any health authority or any of its contracted agencies will not get the type of responsiveness that they might otherwise expect from somebody who's appointed by Executive Council or by the minister. You just don't see the same kind of situation at all.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

You know, I am pleased with what I've been able to accomplish as an elected person, and I've always prided myself on being responsive to my electors. I try to help everybody. I'm not like the Member of Parliament who insists that you have to vote for him

before you're going to get any service. I think that's just plain wrong. I've always believed that as an elected person you have a duty to everyone.

Also, it's only natural, it's only human nature that you have your primary responsibility to the people who put you there. I certainly, Mr. Chairman, have always given priority to assisting my own constituents. We do try to help other people who call, and sometimes people do call, if they can't get the assistance they need from their own elected person. We do try to help, but we always keep in mind the people that we represent. They are our primary responsibility, and I think that that's an important and fundamental feature of the elected system.

What the government is doing is saying that that's good enough for two-thirds of these boards, but it's not good enough for the other third. I don't understand it, Mr. Chairman. I think that you're really shortchanging the citizens who use those health services. You're completely shortchanging them and making sure that by omission you're creating a situation where they don't get the complete responsiveness of the board that I believe they are entitled to.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that I urge the government and all members to support this fine amendment of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Thank you.

DR. TAFT: Mr. Chairman, I don't sense that other members want to speak at length on this particular amendment. We'll move on to others in this series, but I will just close by saying how much I appreciate the animated debate here. I appreciated the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and all my colleagues in the Official Opposition and my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands. I'm sure this is an amendment that would meet with widespread support across the province, and I would encourage all members to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:35]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman
MacDonald

Mason
Massey

Taft

Against the motion:

Ady
Amery
Boutilier
Cenaiko
Coutts
Danyluk
DeLong
Doerksen
Ducharme
Dunford

Goudreau
Hancock
Hlady
Horner
Hutton
Jacobs
Johnson
Klapstein
Knight
Kryczka

Maskell
McClelland
Melchin
Ouellette
Rathgeber
Stelmach
Strang
Taylor
VanderBurg
Zwozdesky

Totals:

For – 5

Against – 30

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to present the next in our series of amendments. I guess we need to distribute these. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A2.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:50

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill 7 be amended by adding the following after section 3. Section 3.1, section 21 is amended by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) For the purposes of subsection (1)(e), a person is not eligible to be nominated as a candidate in an election for membership on a regional health authority board if on nomination day the person

- (a) is a director, officer or employee of a corporation, partnership or other association that receives income from the Department of Health and Wellness or a regional health authority
- (b) receives income from a contract with a regional health authority, or
- (c) owns voting shares in a corporation or holds an interest in a partnership or other association that receives income from the Department of Health and Wellness or a regional health authority.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this amendment is to strengthen the provisions under Bill 7 to control conflicts of interest. I think we need a bit of background on this particular issue. I'll read briefly from a book that I seriously recommend for everybody here. It's called *Honest Politics* – and it's not by me – and it's worth knowing what a conflict of interest is.

A conflict of interest between public and private interests occurs when a public official is in a position to use his or her public office to gain personal benefits or benefits for his or her family or party that are not available to the general public. Conflicts of interest are unacceptable in a society that values the rule of law: the law is to be applied equally to everyone except in the case of justifiable exceptions written into the law. Moreover, public officials who use their positions to provide special benefits to themselves, their families, or their political friends undermine the principle of social equality. We expect public officials – whether they are permanent or contracted public servants, elected representatives or senators – to serve the public interest. Where there is a conflict between the public interest and private, family, or party interests, the public interest should always prevail.

Now, we could go into details on different levels of conflict of interest – potential, real, and perceived – but I won't go there right now for the Assembly. There will be time later.

I am very concerned about the possibility of potential, perceived, or real conflicts of interest in any aspect of public life and in particular in aspects relating to regional health authorities. The way the bill is currently drafted and the regulations are proposed by the minister, there is an area of very great concern. Essentially the concern has to do with the allowance in the bill and in the regulations that people can run for regional health authorities as long as they do not own more than 50 percent of a business that is directly contracting with the regional health authority.

For example, in the backgrounder to Bill 7 put out by Alberta Health and Wellness on April 11, 2001, they talk about eligibility for elections, and the following are not eligible:

- Directors, officers or employees of health service organizations receiving 50 per cent or more of their funding from Alberta Health and Wellness, an RHA, or both.

- Directors, officers or employees of corporations, partnerships or other associations receiving 50 per cent or more of their gross income from Alberta Health and Wellness, an RHA, or both.

What that means, Mr. Chairman, and what is of such great concern to us all is that individuals who get 49 percent or less of their income or whose businesses receive 49 percent or less of their income from an RHA can sit on that RHA board or can seek election to the RHA board. Indeed, it allows possibilities.

There is a situation that is coming close to this in Calgary where several members of one family, each of whom may own 10 or 15 percent of a company, together might own a majority of that company. One of them is allowed or potentially, I suppose, all of them are allowed to run and hold office as a member of the RHA. Clearly – clearly – that raises perceived potential and even in some cases real conflicts of interest. It's a situation we wouldn't tolerate in other aspects of our public life.

If the Minister of Health and Wellness were here, I would like to ask him to explain his repeated comments that the same regulations and rules that apply to us as MLAs apply to members of RHAs. To the best of my knowledge we are governed here under the Conflicts of Interest Act, and that act – and I stand to be corrected here; the Minister of Justice perhaps can help me – does not apply to the regional health authorities. So although the Minister of Health and Wellness has repeatedly indicated that MLAs and RHA members are subject to the same regulations, that's not my reading. I stand to be corrected, and I hope I'm wrong, but that's certainly not my reading. The amendment as I am proposing it closes this gaping hole in Bill 7, and I'm sure that everybody here will agree that this is a real concern.

As the health care system in Alberta is developing, we are seeing the once clear line that was drawn between for-profit businesses and the public sector get blurred further and further. We are seeing that under developments under the Health Care Protection Act in which more and more services are contracted out yet on which questions persist on the legitimacy and the fairness and openness of the bidding process for contracts.

We're also seeing these problems arise in the growing number of public/private partnerships. We had, for example, just announced this week or perhaps over the weekend in Edmonton a public/private partnership in extended care in which we have I believe it's tens of millions of dollars of public money being channeled through the Capital health authority into an extended care facility and a so-called aging-in-place facility that will be run and I think ultimately owned by the private sector.

3:00

Now, the line between public and private there is very seriously blurred. It's also seriously blurred in Calgary where, for example, the Calgary regional health authority is in a large, joint venture corporation with a big multinational named MDS to run Calgary Laboratory Services, a company that I've tried to probe through the public accounts and other matters, but it's eluding that and it's eluding my questioning. It's a big company and handles, as far as I know, virtually all medical lab services in Calgary, and it's a public/private partnership. As we see those partnerships develop and expand, I think in fact we need to have stronger and stronger safeguards on conflicts of interest. Now, why do I say that?

MS BLAKEMAN: Why? Why do you say that?

DR. TAFT: Thank you. Thank you.

One of the things that public officials have and all of us here have is a fiduciary responsibility. We are under a fiduciary trust. Again

quoting from this very fine book, I'd just like to briefly indicate what a fiduciary trust is.

Because public officials always act on behalf of the public, they are trustees of the public interest. A fiduciary relationship with the public is not a form of paternalism - we know what's best for you and it's too bad if you don't understand our superior wisdom - but rather a responsibility to protect and promote the public's best interests in ways the public is fully informed of and approves.

So all the members of regional health authorities and their senior executives, indeed all the employees and contracted officials with the regional health authorities are in positions of fiduciary trust and are under serious obligations as fiduciaries. This amendment is meant to reinforce that, to clarify the rules for them, to help those people stay out of legal problems they might end up in without these rules, because frankly there's a large body of law on fiduciary trusts.

What I hope to achieve through this amendment is a clear line demarking public interest and private interest and reinforcing the fiduciary trust that we place on public officials and precluding conflicts of interest.

Now, I think it's worth going into a few specifics on this just to reinforce for the members that this is a real and serious concern. I have mentioned to you already the case in which the Calgary regional health authority is in a joint venture numbered company with a large multinational named MDS to run all Calgary lab services. That private/public partnership raises any number of questions. Who's profiting? What are the benefits? What are the efficiencies? Frankly, it's made much more worrisome because it has created a monopoly, so there is no functioning market in the Calgary region for medical lab services. As far as I understand, all medical lab services in Calgary are handled by one corporation, and that opens up all kinds of opportunities for real, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest.

Of course, it doesn't stop there. The other day I mentioned a case in which a member of the board of the CRHA is closely tied through his family with a company called Extendicare. Extendicare has three for-profit nursing homes on contract to the CRHA. Again, this raises concerns over conflict of interest. The way Bill 7 stands at the moment, there's nothing preventing any number of shareholders and corporate directors from Extendicare running to sit on the board of their RHA, so they would be there as officials with multimillion dollar contracts to their own corporation.

There are a number of other well-documented cases here. I've mentioned a number of times the case of the chief medical officer and vice-president of the Calgary regional health authority, who is paid over a quarter of a million dollars a year to look after the public interest, who has a crucial role in determining the direction of health care delivery in Calgary, who has access to all kinds of detailed information on costs, on staffing, on waiting lists, on procedures, and at the same time he's a director or at least has been a director and a number of his immediate family members including his wife are significant shareholders in a company that has two or three contracts with the CRHA worth about \$1.8 million over two years.

This raises very serious questions of conflict of interest. While there are policies in place at the Calgary regional health authority on this, they do not require that the conflict be terminated, and there is no question that there is a perceived conflict of interest there. It's not simply perceived by people on the outside. It's also perceived by fellow members of the medical staff in the Calgary region, who in some cases actually are trying to compete with their own for-profit clinics against the business that is owned by immediate family members of the chief medical officer, and they frankly at times are not at all happy with that arrangement. They feel that there is no possible way that they can compete effectively. So that's one case.

A second case involves the chief of orthopedics at the Foothills hospital, which is the main orthopedic centre in Calgary, a well-known physician who appears from time to time in the media and is at the same time a director and shareholder in a company that's known for its for-profit health care activities in Calgary, a company called HRG. HRG is already providing some surgical services to the CRHA and has been lobbying actively at times to expand that role in the CRHA. So there you have a chief of orthopedics in the public system who is paid, if public accounts are any indication, in the range of \$100,000 a year or more to look after the public interest, at the same time in a position in which he can determine preferred procedures, preferred equipment, scheduling, the allocation of resources, the length of waiting lists, and so on, for orthopedic surgery. Again, there is no question that there is a perceived, potential, and even possibly a real conflict of interest in that situation.

The longer it prevails the more serious the implications are for Alberta's public health care system, for taxpayers' dollars, and indeed for the whole Canadian health care system. For once these services become privatized, there is something of a risk that free trade agreements will come into play and open the Canadian health care system to an increasingly American-like form of health care delivery.

3:10

It's worth commenting briefly here that major corporations have much clearer regulations or policies on conflict of interest in many cases than do the CRHA or the other RHAs and are frequently much less tolerant of conflicts of interest than we're seeing in the RHAs. The other day I tabled the conflict of interest policy for TransAlta Corporation. I don't have a copy of it with me here. I might go and get it, and we could talk to it later on. It was clear that real, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest were to be avoided. Period. There was no question that they could be managed over the long term or that they could be tolerated or that people could simply step out of meeting rooms. These conflicts were to be avoided.

I know from inquiries I've made that similar policies exist in other major Alberta corporations including, for example, ATCO. In fact, there was a well-known case last summer of a flight by city councillors in Edmonton to Calgary on the ATCO jet. As a result, the ATCO executive had to resign.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased, delighted to stand . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: To try and convince somebody here.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, I don't have to convince you. I just have to know it myself.

. . . to speak in favour of this amendment A2, which is essentially trying to establish conflict of interest regulations inside this Bill 7, elections of regional health authorities. I think the key to this is that where there is big money, there is potential for big trouble, and there's certainly big money in health care. I mean, let's face it; large American firms don't become interested in the provincial running of our health care unless there's big money involved. They're not doing it to amuse themselves. Those guys are pretty canny. They don't get involved in this stuff unless they think there's an opportunity to make a lot of money. So there's big money here and the potential for big trouble.

On the other side of this equation is an issue that we all deal with every day, which is a perception by the public that politicians are not there to serve the people. Unfortunately, Bill 7 as it stands does nothing to dissuade people of that point of view, because it is allowing people to get involved in a situation that I think anyone would judge as conflict of interest. I mean, in the legislation they're allowing people to own up to 50 percent of a private health care organization or a company and run for a seat in the regional health authority.

When I started to look around for, you know, what was the history of our developing conflict of interest legislation, probably the first and the most thorough is the federal Conflict of Interest Code. That code starts out by saying that "the object of this Code is to enhance public confidence in the integrity of public office holders and the decision-making process in government." So right there that tells you that they were trying to address something that was perceived as being a problem, that the public was experiencing eroded confidence in the integrity of public office holders and an erosion in the belief of the decision-making process in government.

Now, I had spoken previously about the erosion that this government has encouraged and put in place around decision-making and accountability in government with the establishment of the regional health authorities and now the children's health authorities. This long-awaited promise was supposed to address some of that by having members sitting on the regional health authorities elected. In fact, the government was only able to come through with two-thirds of that promise with two-thirds elections. So I think for all of our sakes it's important that we understand how much public confidence in our integrity is eroding.

When we have a government that is refusing to acknowledge this either through naivete, which is a bad enough accusation, or through arrogance, which I think is a worse accusation, I think we're in trouble here in Alberta. For some time the public has been willing to accept what the government has put forward, but I think that as we have more people having access to the Internet, more people having access to uncensored, unfiltered information about what's going on – for example, they have access through the Internet to *Hansard*, and they can see what transpired tonight: who debated, what members of the government participated in the debate and who didn't. I think that's important, and it will also I think lead to more scrutiny of decision-making of government . . .

MR. DUNFORD: You said that two years ago in a speech.

MS BLAKEMAN: And I'm going to keep saying it, because it's true. [interjection] Well, we certainly have members opposite looking to participate in the debate, and I look forward to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment joining in rather than merely heckling me from across the way. I'm sure that when it comes time to vote on this one, he'll be on his feet speaking to the motion.

So there are two parts to what's happening in the public that I think are important. One is that perception of big money, big trouble and a reassurance on a very transparent process with the public that they can see who's making the decisions about their money and how it's being expended, particularly when that money is being expended on health care, which is an area that the public is adamant about leaving in the hands of government for administration. They want a public health care system, but they want to hold the government accountable for delivery of those services. They want to know who's making the decisions and who's influencing the decision-makers, and very strong conflict of interest guidelines help us see that. It puts in place a process for the public to be able to scrutinize

that, to see who is, in this case, running for public office to be in charge of almost one-third of Alberta's budget and also to hold them accountable if they're an elected person, to be able to contact them and scrutinize their decisions and call them to account for it.

I think that's equally important when we have long waiting lists in certain areas, where we have yet to see truly a reorganization and a new way of delivering health care. We're still waiting for that, and I think people will be holding RHA members accountable for the decisions that they make. As I said before, even being in charge of administering this large amount of money, they still do not at all times have both the responsibility and the authority to implement what people are looking for.

Now, let me back up a bit. When you're serving on a body of a not-for-profit agency – and in this case the hospitals fit that definition. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview had talked about fiduciary interest. There's also a duty of care, which is the other side of that coin, in that those people that accept the public office, that seek it out, have to understand that they are obliged to have a duty of care toward their work. They're expected to do a good job. They're expected to be responsible about it, and they're expected to approach the job in a way that is going to serve the public and serve the organization the best.

3:20

That's interesting, because again when I look back to the federal code, when it talks about decision-making, it says:

Public office holders, in fulfilling their official duties and responsibilities, shall make decisions in the public interest and with regard to the merits of each case.

In other words, decisions are not to be made with anything in advance of or taking higher precedence of than the public interests and the merit of each case.

When I look farther down, it's talking about public interest:

On appointment to office, and thereafter, public office holders shall arrange their private affairs in a manner that will prevent real, potential or apparent conflicts of interest from arising but if such a conflict does arise between the private interests of a public office holder and the official duties and responsibilities of that public office holder, the conflict shall be resolved in favour of the public interest.

Again, all of this is about making sure that as we administer public money, the public gets the best deal out of this. I think of some of the examples that have already been raised by Edmonton-Riverview, and it can be argued that those are examples where we don't have resolution in favour of the public interest.

One other part that I found of interest in this is insider information. It goes on to say:

Public office holders shall not knowingly take advantage of, or benefit from, information that is obtained in the course of their official duties and responsibilities and that is not generally available to the public.

Now, that reflects back to the definition that was used by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview when they moved this motion, that is a definition of conflict of interest that states that the use of a public office to gain benefit for themselves or their family, a benefit that is not available to the public. This insider information is echoing that.

Those are the points that I had wanted to bring forward in support of this motion. I don't have a lot of faith that a 74-member government is going to pass this. Nonetheless, it's our duty as opposition to certainly be bringing these points forward. I'm happy to do that at 20 after 3 in the morning because I think it's important that we do continue to bring this information forward and put it out there for the people to understand the choices that the government is making and the issues that the members of the Official Opposition and the third

party have made to bring the government decisions to account.

One more reminder as I close. I think that we have to be particularly careful as we end up with more and more money in the public health care system. Where there's big money, there's big potential for trouble, and we really need to be ensuring that those that are in the position of making decisions are making those decisions with a duty of care and always in the best interests of the public.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this motion.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak for the first time to this very good amendment by my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that there are issues related to conflicts of interest or at least potential conflicts of interest that have been enumerated by other members. Particularly, I think that if someone who has a serious conflict of interest or potential serious conflict of interest sits on a health board, there is a situation that's created that is most serious even if that member absents himself or herself from the decisions which specifically affect their own financial interests. They are a colleague of the rest of the board, and everyone else on the board knows exactly what the interests are, and if they are in any way favourably disposed towards that person, they cannot help but be influenced themselves by that member's interests.

You know, I've served on a number of boards myself, Mr. Chairman, and certainly am aware of the normal procedures for dealing with conflict of interest. In fact, we put together on city council conflict of interest regulations that I think are substantially more strict for boards such as the EPCOR board than this government is prepared to do for its regional health authority boards. I don't know why that is. I think that the government would want to ensure that no one receives financial benefit by virtue of their service on one of these health care boards. I don't know why that wouldn't be a policy objective of the government, and maybe it is a policy objective of the government, but the government is pursuing it in a very weak and irresolute fashion. They are absolutely and without a doubt irresolute on the question of pursuing conflict of interest, particularly as it relates to these health boards.

Now, I've also not only been in a position of having some responsibility for establishing codes of conduct for boards which report to a city council; I have also served on a number of boards, and I know that they have very stringent requirements. For example, the board of Edmonton Northlands, which I served on for six years, requires everybody to disclose at the beginning of the year any potential conflicts that they have, and they must disclose in writing any conflict that they might have at each meeting.

You will find, I think, as other members have intimated, that other jurisdictions, particularly in the private sector, are much more rigorous about preventing conflict of interest situations than this government. Yet the government prides itself on modeling itself after the private sector. Of any government in the country this is a government that admires, supports, and uses as an instrument of its policy the private sector. So why, then, don't they adopt the norms that the private sector has adopted to prevent conflict of interest? Why not is the question, and silence on the relevant question is all that we hear. We hear lots of white noise, Mr. Chairman, but we don't hear any pithy, to the point comments that are germane to the issues that are being raised by this amendment, and again you have to ask yourself why that might be.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

Now, let's look at the specifics of the amendment before us, Mr. Chairman. It says that

a person is not eligible to be nominated as a candidate in an election for membership on a regional health authority board if on nomination day the person

(a) is a director, officer or employee of a corporation, partnership or other association that receives income from the Department of Health and Wellness or a regional health authority.

So why would the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview propose this, I wonder.

Well, suppose there was a person who was, say, a director or officer of a corporation or other association that got income from Health and Wellness or a regional health authority. It would seem to me that that person would be partially dependent for their income on the same bodies with whom they wanted to do business. Could they be influenced? Well, I think we'd all like to believe people are above that, but we know that personal interests can sometimes cloud our judgment and influence our behaviour. Sometimes we might act in our own financial interests as opposed to the interests of the people we're supposed to be serving, in this case the people who are served by the particular regional health authority.

3:30

Clause (b): the person "receives income from a contract with a regional health authority." Now, if you have a contract with a regional health authority and you're on the board, almost everywhere I know of that would be perceived as a very, very fundamental conflict of interest. It just simply wouldn't be tolerated. I don't know any private corporations that would tolerate that kind of situation. I know that at the municipal level, in my experience, that wouldn't be tolerated. I don't think it's tolerated in the co-op sector. I don't think it's tolerated even in the nonprofit sector. Even when there are nonprofits, they have a stronger commitment to avoiding conflict of interest than this government apparently does. Why is that, Mr. Chairman? That's a question I keep coming back to on every point. Why doesn't the government act with the same rigour that other organizations, profit and nonprofit, do? It's the question of the moment.

Mr. Chairman, clause (c) says that the person

owns voting shares in a corporation or holds an interest in a partnership or other association that receives income from the Department of Health and Wellness or a regional health authority.

So here we have someone who has shares in a corporation. Obviously they stand to benefit, then, if the health authority gives their company a contract, particularly if it's a lucrative contract; for example, to operate a private hospital where you might have once had a public hospital.

AN HON. MEMBER: Or a private MRI.

MR. MASON: Indeed, hon. member.

Mr. Chairman, say, for example, the government did a lot of renovations to an older hospital worth millions and millions of dollars and then sold it to their friends for substantially less than it was actually worth. Then suppose they were sitting on this fine renovated hospital, and they were just itching to be able to deliver services for the local health authority. Suppose further that there was a relationship, that some people who sat on the board – and this is all hypothetical – actually were shareholders in that corporation. How could that person serve as a director of the health authority under those types of circumstances? It's hard to believe that such a situation would not be provided for by the government if it should perchance arise.

Now, suppose that the person who had the shares was willing to walk out of the meeting or leave the meeting, declare the conflict. Is that sufficient? Is that sufficient in order to protect the public from undue influence by people who stand to benefit directly and personally? I would submit that it's not, Mr. Chairman. I certainly wouldn't think it would be sufficient, because that person then sits on the board for all the rest of the decisions. That person has a personal relationship with all the other members and would conceivably be favoured by his or her friends on the board as opposed to somebody who didn't have that sort of personal relationship. That's why this particular amendment is very important and, I think, essential.

You know, I think it's a significant omission, Mr. Chairman, that this amendment wasn't contained in the bill in the first instance, because they all seem to make such great sense to me.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I know lots of people who join boards in the public sector for the very best of reasons. I have met people on a wide range of boards – whether they come from the public sector, whether they come from the private sector, whether they come from unions or have been involved in nonprofits – who are sincerely committed to the public good. They are there not to enrich themselves but quite simply to do the best they can for their community. Most of the people, Mr. Chairman, that I have worked with on boards have fallen into that type of category.

So it's naturally hard for me to imagine people who would get involved on a significant public board in order to gain an advantage for themselves. Unfortunately, in our society today it's the case that sometimes that happens, and it's very regrettable. The network of contacts that some people have with movers and shakers in our various communities sometimes lends itself to a little bit of mutual back-scratching, we could call it, and I think the government should not be unaware of those possibilities. It surprises me that they are, but I can tell them that there are situations like that that arise, and there are people who are prepared to arrange so that they benefit from their public service in a way that's not appropriate. It's not common, but it can happen. It does happen occasionally.

Given the government's connections with private business and with the many boards and their great and grave responsibility for ensuring that the administration of public business is carried out above reproach, it disturbs me a little bit, Mr. Chairman, that the government continues to play the game of see no evil. We heard it today. Just a little bit earlier one of the members said: well, you know, if you're suspicious of people, then obviously you're not the kind of person that should be trusted. Well, you know, you can rationalize these things any way you want, but the fact remains that we have health authorities that are responsible for multimillion dollar budgets, virtually a billion dollars – I think that's correct – and they stand to make a lot of money for the people to whom they give contracts to provide services, particularly if we get into the situation where entire hospitals are approved for the provision of overnight care, overnight stays, as was set out in the previous Bill 11, which was simply a bill to legalize private hospitals.

Why would the government pass a bill legalizing overnight hospitals if they didn't in fact intend for private hospitals to exist in this province? I know they call them something else. I think they call them private overnight nonhospital, near-hospital, pseudo kind of close to hospitals but we wouldn't call them one. I forget the term. Clearly, if one were to contract with a health authority for a private hospital which used to be a public hospital, one would stand to make millions and millions and millions of dollars, and that's

what's at stake. Members opposite will try to laugh it off and pretend it's not really an issue. They try to pretend there's nothing at stake, but I can tell the hon. members opposite, Mr. Chairman, that there are millions and tens of millions of dollars, perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars at stake, and this government is remiss in not attending to the potential for conflict of interest and for people to inappropriately enrich themselves at public expense through inattention to the critical issue of conflict of interest.

3:40

I'd ask this question through you, through the chair, to members opposite. As great supporters and disciples of the creed of free enterprise, why wouldn't they model themselves according to the norms of these institutions for whom they have the greatest reverence? There seems to be something missing. I don't know what that missing link is, Mr. Chairman, but I think if we look through the tea leaves of this government, we might eventually find what it is that's missing. I hope that when all is said and done, what's not missing is some money. [interjection]

MS BLAKEMAN: He woke up.

MR. MASON: Yes. Well, I'm glad the hon. member has rejoined the conscious, or rejoined the semiconscious at least, because, you know, there are very weighty matters that need to be considered by this Assembly.

Mr. Chairman, I would again commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Although I was hoping we were going to get another trip back to the early days of democracy in the British Empire, nevertheless I think he has put forward some excellent suggestions, and I look forward to reading the book he referred to, which he did not write but I'm sure is nonetheless an excellent book.

With that I will take my seat, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to amendment A2, the second in a series of amendments. It certainly provides to me a clear answer from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the whole issue of conflict of interest, that unfortunately has appeared whenever there is discussion on health care and regional health authorities in this province.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has obviously worked very, very hard to try to improve this bill. If at first you do not succeed, try again. When you think of the erosion – it was touched on by my colleague for Edmonton-Centre earlier – of public confidence in our health care system, leading up even to the Bill 11 debate which many of us are familiar with, but before that with the regionalization that occurred, there is this skepticism, this nonconfidence in the current government to provide public health care. This suspicion, this lingering suspicion – and I for one hold it as true that the long-term goal is to turn over to various enterprises, whether they be entrepreneurial doctors, whether they be the HMOs, the hand money over outfits, and the outfits that are . . . [interjections] They're going to be eliminated from election, and that is specific in the first part of this amendment.

We think that idea of private health care is far removed from Alberta, but it is not. Within five blocks of this Assembly there was a billboard – I haven't driven by to see if it's there lately – and ironically enough it was on a Tory blue background, and it had an advertisement for an American for-profit health care provider. Now,

what happens if an employee of that company, a citizen of Canada, a resident of Alberta, is to run for the regional health authority? Whose interests would be served here? The taxpayers of this province? The people who have faith in and want to see continue a public health care system? Would their interests be served, or would the interests of the corporation be served?

Mr. Chairman, when you think of that, it's perfectly legitimate because of all the interest that has been expressed in the relationship that is currently occurring between regional health authorities and selected interest groups. I believe these are the special interest groups. These are the groups who benefit from the privatization of our health care system.

When you think that two years ago one of the motions that was being circulated at the AUMA convention, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association – and I listened with keen interest to delegates in the hall discuss this motion. It was a motion to prevent health care workers who were members of unions from participating in the regional health authority elections. Now, I listened to that debate with a great deal of interest, and I'm listening to this debate this morning with a great deal of interest, because it is very necessary that we have conflict of interest legislation in regards to the election of regional health authority board members.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

I would like at this time to commend the member for Edmonton-Riverview, again, for putting forward this amendment. The lack of conflict of interest legislation or rules or regulation – it's been mentioned before. It does not correspond with accepted practices in the private sector or even parts of the public sector. The city of Edmonton was mentioned; TransAlta was mentioned. Since health care is the most important service government provides, Mr. Chairman, there is no better place to start.

3:50

Again, in the aftermath of Bill 11 and the fallout – some hon. members of this Assembly may not realize it, but there will be a fallout from the government's use of closure and this insistence to continue against the wishes of the citizens and increase private health care. You have to go no further than a hockey telecast on television from America to look at what the future is going to hold for Albertans. You see board advertising in every major U.S. rink for some sort of private hospital, some sort of private health care insurance plan. It's private health care, and it's on the boards for everyone to see. Will this come to the Skyreach Centre or the Saddledome in Calgary? It's coming to an arena near you, Mr. Chairman. That is the future.

The lack of uniform conflict of interest legislation applies to all regional health authorities. When you don't have any sort of conflict of interest legislation, how do you monitor and deal with conflicts, potential or otherwise? How is this going to work without amendment A2 here? It can't. It won't.

It's the whole idea that currently the 17 regional health authorities write and implement their own conflict of interest bylaws applicable to all staff of the regional health authority. I don't know how many hon. members of this Assembly have been privy to any of these conflict of interest bylaw meetings. [interjection] Someone has spoken up, but I don't believe it's in regards to conflict of interest at the regional health authorities, specifically in Calgary. No. That's what people need, Mr. Chairman, to stand up and speak out.

I see that there's a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar up and about at this hour of the morning and attending to affairs in the Legislature. [interjection] Definitely. Definitely. Yes.

DR. MASSEY: But not yours.

MR. MacDONALD: But not mine, no. The individual is a distinguished resident of the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I'm pleased to see that he is visiting his local Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: Vocal Assembly.

MR. MacDONALD: You bet. Just down the road.

Conflict of interest rules for the regional health authorities are always problematic. The lack of a coherent strong set of conflict of interest rules for all regional health authorities is increasingly affecting the quality of public health care delivery and, again, as it was mentioned before, the level of public confidence in regional health authorities' ability to deal with these conflicts.

Now, there have been many attempts and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's is just the latest attempt at trying to settle this issue. I believe this amendment will apply comprehensive and uniform conflict of interest rules to all regional health authorities, prospective nominees, successful board members, and in a certain way also to employees, contractors, and independent health service providers that have a contractual relationship with any one of the 17 regional health authorities.

If any individuals are contemplating seeking a nomination as a candidate, then they should have a good look at this after it is successfully passed in the Assembly. This will address current and future conflicts of interest. It will provide a conflict of interest definition and a mechanism by which it prevents any future conflicts of interest. It will not exactly apply a uniform standard of rules regarding conflict of interest, but it certainly is a start since in my view there is currently none, absolutely none.

When you see something that can restore public confidence, I think you should grab it. That's why I encourage all government members to support this amendment.

There are always going to be competing interests between private and public health care. There are always situations where private health care is going to be the provider. But what was clearly demonstrated last spring was that Albertans want a public health care system. They want it administered and they want it provided by the provincial government. They don't want this notion that there is the private, the for-profit, the not-for-profit, all this mixture. The citizens know exactly what they want, and I have not been convinced that the government is sincere in its efforts to provide this. This is why, when we saw Bill 11, as it was forced through the Assembly, become law – the whole debate was coalesced around Bill 11 and the public health care debate. The whole issue was crystal clear. It was crystal clear.

Now, after those comments, Mr. Chairman, I would have to say that it will be full speed ahead with privatization. Maybe the cat is finally out of the bag, and Albertans will see firsthand, up close that if we do not pass this amendment, we will have increased privatization of our health care delivery system. When we have that increased privatization without this amendment, again it will be a blank cheque. In recent months serious concerns have arisen of potential, apparent, or real conflicts of interest between the private interests of personnel, individuals, entrepreneurs engaged in health authority business and the public interest, which health authorities are created to serve. That's the public interest which I noted before.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

4:00

Now, these concerns are especially apparent with respect to the

Calgary regional health authority. The Calgary regional health authority I think is in a world of its own, and it's very ably outlined in this book, that I've had the pleasure of owning. This one is even signed by the author. It's "all the best," but certainly that was not all the best for our public health care system after the debate and the direction that that bill took us last year. The Entrepreneurial Doctors is the title of this chapter, and it goes on and mentions Dr. Gimbel. Now, under this amendment, Mr. Chairman, Dr. Gimbel would be eligible to be nominated as a candidate in an election for membership on a regional health authority board if on nomination day the person . . . I'm not going to go any further. This amendment would apply to Dr. Gimbel. It would also apply to – let me see; I'm going on here – Dr. Peter Huang, Dr. Ian Huang. Now, there are more individuals here, lots more, and they're all part of this . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Give us their names. Read them into the record.

MR. MacDONALD: Read them into the record. That was one of the arguments that used to be used. There was this taunt, this tease: name names. Well, we did name names, and it's on the public record.

The debate on Bill 11 on public health care versus private health care: this is not over. This is certainly not over.

AN HON. MEMBER: Over for the next four years, Hughie.

MR. MacDONALD: No.

In regards to public health care, I would urge particularly the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to support this amendment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to stand in support of this amendment to the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001. I think that when we look at the amendment, there are a number of questions that we should ask ourselves, some questions that I guess underline any public policy debate.

The first that comes to mind, of course, is: what is the evidence that there is a problem? I think that the evidence is very, very clear. The Calgary health authority has raised serious questions in terms of where the line between self-interest and public interest should be drawn. I think that in the case of that authority there's fairly good evidence that it's being blurred if not downright ignored. I think that the mere fact that the authorities will be responsible for spending huge amounts of public dollars through contracts that are let and salaries that are being paid, that those huge amounts in themselves will be too much of a lure for some individuals to resist.

I think the other evidence that there is a problem is the fact that a number of public bodies, including this one, and certainly a number of private corporations like TransAlta and many other larger corporations that operate in this province and in the country have strong and very clearly worded conflict of interest laws that lay out very carefully the behaviour of individuals that are working on behalf of those corporations. So there is some considerable evidence that this is a problem.

What this amendment attempts to do is prevent people being involved in any kind of a conflict and thus prevent the problem from occurring in the first place. I originally had some questions about the amendment. I supported people who were working for a particular authority, not running for that authority, but initially I

wondered if it wouldn't be appropriate for them to run for another authority, one in which they didn't have a direct interest. Yet if you look at the geography of the province, the possibilities that it could still exist I think preclude that happening.

So I looked at the evidence that there is a problem, and I looked at the assumptions on which this amendment sits. There are some fairly obvious assumptions. One is that public institutions must be protected from those who might possibly be in a position to use that position for personal gain to the detriment of the public body that they are supposedly serving.

I think another assumption is that we shouldn't put individuals in a position where they would make judgments that were not in the public interest and were in their own self-interest. The best way to avoid that is to have the kind of legislation that's embodied in the amendment we have before us.

A third assumption is that we can't afford to have the public interest forfeited at the expense of an individual's self-interest being promoted. So three assumptions that are valid assumptions to make undergird this particular amendment.

If you look at the values that underline this amendment, I think there's a concern for fairness on a number of fronts, a concern for fairness for taxpayers, that the money they pay into this system will be appropriately used and not be open for abuse by any individuals. I think there's a concern for fairness in terms of patients and fairness in terms of the hospital staff, that the staff will not be placed in a position where they have divided loyalties. I think another value is loyalty itself, that board members should have only one loyalty and that loyalty is to the regional health authority that they're serving, that they should not be faced with divided loyalties in terms of either serving or being loyal to the authority or being loyal to their own self-interest. I think there's a huge concern in this amendment for integrity, that we must do everything we possibly can as legislators to protect the integrity of public institutions and public bodies. The regional health authorities will be one of the pre-eminent ones in the province, one that to this date will be at least partly elected.

4:10

In looking again at critical questions for public policy, one of the questions we have to ask is: whose interests are going to be served? With this particular amendment I think it's rather clear that the interests of individual citizens, the interests of taxpayers, and the interests of a public institution are being well served by the amendment. I think that the interests in terms of our system of governance and the health care system are also well served by the amendment. I think we'd do well to try to protect that system. There's ample evidence from elsewhere of what happens when a system becomes tainted. We only need to look to the provinces both east and west and the political systems there that have become tainted when self-interest overcame the public interest. We look at the resulting fallout and the lack of confidence that people in those provinces have in a political system that has somehow or other let them down.

One of the things that we can be proud of in Canada is the confidence that the citizens have in various institutions. I'm not sure about health wards, but I know, for instance, that in terms of trust, school boards are high on that list. Unfortunately or maybe fortunately, it may be much higher than members of Legislatures or the federal government, people who are elected to those positions. There is a high degree of trust in local authorities like school boards and city councils, and I think we would do well through this amendment to make sure that that trust is protected and maintained.

I think with those comments I would like to conclude. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just make a few brief comments to wrap up. I appreciate everybody's participation. I feel this is a fundamentally important bill, not for just the specifics of this case but for setting precedents throughout the public service of Alberta and also for protecting the integrity of not only Alberta's health care system but Canada's health care system. So I do hope that those of you who are still awake and listening will seriously consider supporting it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:14 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Taft
MacDonald	Massey	

Against the motion:

Ady	Goudreau	Maskell
Amery	Hancock	McClelland
Boutilier	Hlady	Melchin
Cenaiko	Horner	Ouellette
Coutts	Hutton	Stelmach
Danyluk	Jacobs	Strang
DeLong	Johnson	Taylor
Doerksen	Klapstein	VanderBurg
Ducharme	Knight	Zwozdesky
Dunford	Kryczka	

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 29
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[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do we have the question? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's with great pleasure that I present another amendment to Bill 7, please.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A3.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that Bill 7 be amended in section 4 by striking out subsection (4). This is a briefer amendment and probably would have been unnecessary if the previous one had passed. However, given that the previous one wasn't upheld, then this one is an attempt to provide some of the same precautions that were in the previous one.

Basically, what this amendment proposes to Bill 7 – well, the way Bill 7 is currently presented, it strikes a section of the Regional Health Authorities Act, section 22. The relevant portion of section 22 reads:

(1) A person is not eligible to be nominated as a candidate in any election under this Act . . .

this Act being the Regional Health Authorities Act of some years ago,

. . . if on nomination day

- (j) in the case of a district board election, he or his spouse
 - (i) is a physician and a member of the medical staff,
 - (ii) is a dentist and a member of the medical staff or dental staff, or
 - (iii) is an employee of a hospital or nursing home in respect of which the election is being held.

4:30

Now, Bill 7 repeals that particular subsection, and my amendment would keep that subsection in. The reasoning behind that is simply that again we are very concerned about conflicts of interest. We are concerned, for example, about situations in which a member of the medical staff might also want to run for the board of the regional health authority. If that medical staff, say, were a chief of a medical department, then they would end up in a real conflict of interest being both on the board of the organization and a chief of a medical department. The same applies, of course, to employees. So we would prefer that Bill 7 be amended so that those limitations are kept in place rather than eliminated.

I thought it might be helpful to just elaborate a little bit more on conflict of interest, Mr. Chairman, to drive home the case. We use the term very generally, and sometimes we use terms such as real or potential or apparent, but it's worth becoming more clear on those. I am again referring to a book, *Honest Politics*.

Public officials may find themselves in a conflict of interest, according to the conflict-of-interest code they are subject to, without actually benefitting from it. If someone could benefit unfairly from their public office (for example, by being in a position to influence the awarding of a contract to a company they have an interest in or to a family member . . .), then that person has a duty to remove himself or herself from that situation. This official could sell certain assets, for example, or delegate decision making to someone who would not have a conflict of interest. If public officials fail to remove themselves from a potential conflict of interest, then they are guilty of what is known as a real conflict of interest, even if they do not receive any benefits.

That's an important point. So you don't need to receive any benefits to be in a real conflict of interest.

There's also the question of the appearance of conflicts of interest. That's the kind of thing that this amendment tries to get straight at and that, in fact, the previous amendment did as well. It says here:

Even if all the rules are complied with, most conflict-of-interest codes state that public officials have a responsibility to show publicly that they are attempting to act impartially, in addition to actually acting as impartially as possible.

In other words, of course, justice must not just be done; it must be seen to be done.

Finally, there's a little more elaboration here on a potential conflict of interest.

A potential conflict of interest exists when a minister "finds himself or herself in a situation in which the existence of some private economic interest could influence the exercise of his or her public duties or responsibilities . . . provided that he or she has not yet exercised such duty or responsibilities."

Again, it says here:

A potential conflict becomes a real conflict unless a minister takes action to avoid the situation by disposing of relevant assets or withdrawing from certain public duties or decisions.

Now, both this amendment and the preceding one take a firm stand precluding conflict of interest from being allowed to persist. There are certainly situations in which we can all understand that in the normal course of events a onetime conflict of interest might arise coincidental to some other activity, and in those kinds of circumstances it is normally acceptable for the person in the conflict to

remove themselves from the decision temporarily. However, in situations where conflicts are ongoing, such as being an employee, which is what we're dealing with here in this amendment, or being a chief of a medical department, then stronger steps need to be taken, and that in this particular case means that the person needs to resign their position, in effect, or in fact not run for office in the first place or else they would have to sell their assets.

I'll read one last passage from this book. It talks about the difference between simply creating a blind trust and actually being forced to divest themselves of assets.

Because blind trusts frequently fail and because forcing members to sell non-personal assets is often unfair and might discourage people from running for elected office, the emphasis should shift to broad public disclosure as the cornerstone of modern conflict-of-interest rules.

Well, so far it sounds okay.

The premise is that a "healthy measure of public vigilance," made possible through public disclosure, will eventually result in greater confidence in the integrity of elected officials, as long as they stay away from conflicts of interest.

Now we get to the really crucial part here.

From this perspective, ministers should be required . . .

Here they're talking about ministers, but it would apply to all public officials.

. . . to sell assets only when these assets would be likely to result in a potential conflict of interest so frequently as to seriously interfere with a [person's] ability to perform public duties (for example, a minister of transportation with a heavy investment in a bus company).

Well, a minister of transportation with a heavy investment in a bus company is, I think, a parallel example to a chief medical officer having a heavy investment in a medical service delivery company.

That I hope continues to drive home the notion here that we're up against a fundamentally important principle in Canadian public life and that we are going to take every step, including carrying debate through until 5 in the morning, to drive this message home.

An example that hasn't been discussed in the House concerns yet again the Calgary regional health authority and the chief of ophthalmology in the Calgary regional health authority, the person who's occupied that position now for several years, I believe unofficially since the authority was created and certainly officially for the last four or five years. He and two of his brothers and other family members are owners of a company that bought the Holy Cross hospital in Calgary and then converted it to a private, for-profit clinic especially providing ophthalmology surgery at the same time this person was and remains the chief of ophthalmology for the Calgary regional health authority.

He is responsible for setting all the standards for the delivery of eye surgery, for determining who gets how many eye surgery procedures, how many go to his company, how many go to his competitors. Curiously enough the decision was made in his early days as chief of ophthalmology that all public-sector cataract surgery in Calgary would be shut down permanently so that in Calgary, unlike in Edmonton, there is no public facility for undertaking cataract surgery.

4:40

There's internal correspondence at some length back and forth within the CRHA, and there's been extensive public debate on this. Clearly, there is an ongoing conflict of interest here. Under Bill 7 this person could now run to sit on the regional health authority board, as I understand the legislation and the regulations, further intensifying the conflict of interest. So there is no question that we need stronger legislation and stronger regulations here. Again, I repeat for the record – and if the Minister of Health and Wellness

should ever read this, I would welcome him to respond and correct me if I'm wrong – that the rules on conflict of interest that govern us as MLAs do not apply to regional health authorities. I think that's a matter of legislation despite the fact that the minister has said otherwise, and I stand to be corrected.

So, Mr. Chairman, I commend this amendment, amendment A3, to the Assembly. I think all of us would agree that we need to control and preclude people such as doctors, chiefs of medical departments, nurses, and other employees of RHAs from standing on RHA boards.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm rising to speak in favour of amendment A3 to Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act.

I think that this amendment was necessary if the previous amendment didn't pass in that part of what we've tried to do here tonight is to show the flaws and the setup around Bill 7 in that we're supposed to be now electing regional health authorities. The first amendment was to elect all, not just two-thirds of them; secondly, to set up strong conflict of interest regulations so that not only was it done but seen to be done and clearly transparent to any member of the public that wished to scrutinize that.

This government is very reluctant to put conflict of interest or any kind of restrictions in place that would narrow someone's ability to take advantage of public office for private gain. I've never heard an adequate explanation from the government as to why they're so reluctant to be putting that in place. I think that doesn't speak well for them, but that's their choice obviously. Therefore, we've come to this amendment in which essentially . . .

MR. HANCOCK: We just don't think that everybody is dishonest.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I don't think everybody is dishonest, but it's important that as legislators and as carriers of the public trust, we ensure that we do everything we can to make sure that that system is in fact transparent. My version of transparency and the government's version of transparency are worlds apart obviously. So no. I'm in fact one of the people that's up here saying: why is such intrusive legislation being put in place in this government and in a number of other instances, not trusting Albertans to make the right decision on their own? I do trust them to make that, but the process has to be in place for them to be able to do that investigation. It's why I repeatedly speak against shell legislation in which everything will be decided behind closed doors by the government through regulations, which is every difficult for people to get access to and find and make up their own mind about it.

We've come to a point, I think, in certainly the western sector where the potential to cross over between those positions of trust and abuse of power and money has become more possible to us. That didn't used to be so much of an issue, for a number of reasons that I'm sure some academic could chase down. That is a factor for us nowadays. So in not passing an amendment to put in strong conflict of interest regulations, the government has set us on a course where we feel the need to inoculate against those potential and real conflict of interest situations by bringing forward an amendment that essentially removes that sector of people, in other words health workers, who would be most likely to find themselves in a position of conflict of interest regarding the awarding of contracts and provision of services in regional health authorities.

It's certainly not my preferred method of approaching this problem. I in fact would have preferred that there be involvement from health workers in the governance. I think in fact that's important, but I'll give that up because I think conflict of interest is more important and more of an overriding principle.

I remember when the government did the health roundtables, which were the first of the so-called public consultations. In fact, the health roundtables very much invited people handpicked by the government to participate in these discussions. Interestingly enough, there were no health workers that were involved in this. I think, in fact, health workers, doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals were specifically excluded from serving on the health roundtables. [interjection] Well, the minister is welcome to get up and debate back to me, given the hour, rather than just heckling me.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. HANCOCK: Under I believe it's *Beauchesne* 482, would the hon. member permit a question?

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, but I would look forward to the member's participation in the debate. No, I will not permit a question. Get up and debate. There's lots of opportunity. We're in Committee of the Whole. I urge the Minister of Justice to participate. I welcome your debate, and I'm sure your colleagues would be ecstatic at the thought of you contributing.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Now, the health roundtables. We have to put forward a proposal here to limit the number of people that would find themselves in a conflict of interest. So this is an inoculation amendment to try and address the fact that there is no clear and strong conflict of interest legislation in place around this.

I know that the minister has spoken and said that the 17 different conflict of interest regulations that are in place checkerboarding across the province are based on the conflict of interest regulations that apply to MLAs. There's a long way between based on and the same as, and certainly what the Official Opposition has been trying to do is to encourage the government to put that same expectation upon other elected representatives and that same high standard of behaviour and stewardship and trusteeship in place for other elected officials.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

We have conflict of interest that's in place for school boards and certainly for elected officials in the provincial government. We know there's very strong legislation for the federal government and beyond that to their deputy ministers and senior workers. I think it's important that that be extended to all levels where we're dealing with someone who is in a position to use their insider knowledge or their position to gain access to a benefit that's not available to everybody else. I mean, it's the underlying concept of equity and access to equity that is not being served here, which is what is so troublesome to me.

No doubt that being 74 members strong, the government is certainly in a position to defeat this amendment, but I sure wish they wouldn't. I think it's important that we pay attention to what processes are being put in place here and to set the bar high, to show

leadership and high expectation of ourselves and of others that are to be serving the public and to be serving the public good.

With those brief comments, I will once again state my support. I wish I didn't have to be speaking to this amendment. I wish we could have passed the previous amendment on conflict of interest, but the government doesn't choose to do that, so I will support this one.

Thank you.

4:50

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to again get to try to convince members of this Assembly to support conflict of interest legislation, again as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. The member came prepared this evening for debate with a backup plan in case the first was unsuccessful on the conflict of interest legislation, which is certainly needed. This amendment, I believe, was labeled A3 on Bill 7, the Regional Authorities Amendment Act, 2001.

Now, we need to look at – and the hon. member touched on it – what the Alberta government and its agencies, including all hon. members of this Assembly, have regarding conflict of interest laws and regulations. Across Canada governments at all levels have conflict of interest rules intended to promote impartial decision-making by public officials and to ensure that public officials do not receive any special favours because of their public office. These rules are based on legal principles, and they were discussed earlier: the rule of law and fairness, et cetera. The rule of law argues that a democratic society needs unbiased judges and administrators who provide impartial decisions. Last week I talked about that, and I was quite concerned about certain members of the House of Commons and their view on the independence of the judiciary.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that public officials try to exercise their authority evenhandedly to everyone and that the law is applied equally to everyone, unless exceptions are reasonable and justifiable and clearly spelled out in the law. Fairness is a legal concept that has been developed by the Supreme Court of Canada based on an older common-law practice. We had, I thought, an excellent walk, a brief walk, perhaps too brief a walk through history earlier this evening. According to the Supreme Court, under the doctrine of fairness all public officials who make decisions about the application of law must be impartial. They should not be in a position to gain financially from one of their decisions and should not be in a position to favour close associates.

Now, when you look at Canada and you look at the conflict of interest laws and regulations that we have in Alberta, the Alberta government and its agencies have a range of laws, codes, and guidelines addressing conflicts of interest including the following. We're all familiar with those, so I won't go into them in detail, but there's influence, insider information, decisions furthering private interests, use or communication of information not available to the general public. We all know those, and I'm quite sure that all members of this Assembly understand them and, I'm confident, abide by them.

Regional health authorities as agents of the provincial government and servants of the public interest: now, there's no doubt in my mind that the regional health authorities are agents of the provincial government. Others may deny it, but it is clear to me. It is clear from a review of the legislation and regulations that regional health authorities, again, are servants of the public interest, and the public interest in this case is the provision of health care through public hospitals.

The regional health authorities must act within the terms of the regional health authorities legislation, regulations, and the directives of the Minister of Health and Wellness. They also have a limited scope for independent decision-making. The act and the regulations provide a solid foundation for concluding that members of the regional health authority have a duty to act in the best interests of the public, are required to conduct the business of the authority with impartiality and integrity, and should ensure that there is no conflict between the private interest of any personnel involved in conducting the business of the authority and the public interest. This is why it is vital that section 22, as is proposed in this amendment, be there.

Now, Mr. Chairman, the members of the authority are persons who manage public money and public property, in this case hospitals. Therefore, they exercise a high standard of care in regard to public money and property, no doubt. But it is also well established in law that employees or agents have a duty to their employer or principal and should not improperly use or allow others to use confidential information to further private interests.

If we are to understand this fully, we should have a very good understanding of the creation of the regional health authorities. This goes back several years. The minister of health at the time, in late 1993, designed and implemented a regional health authority system across Alberta, and this is where we're going to have the 17 different elections. The hearing committee of the project, whose members were appointed by the minister, released a report at the end of January 1994. The health plan co-ordination project action plan called for the establishment of the health boards to govern all aspects of provincially funded health care services in Alberta within those geographical regions, which are outlined and we're all familiar with. The health plan co-ordination project recommended the geographic boundaries of the health care regions to the minister.

Now, later on, in March of '94 into this Assembly was introduced the Regional Health Authorities Act. This bill, of course, was the legislative vehicle, Mr. Chairman, and each regional health authority was to be administered by a board consisting of persons either appointed by the government or elected. Well, the elections are a long time coming, are slow in coming, but they're going to be here. I'm disappointed that we're not going to have the full boards elected. We had a chance this evening to act on that decisively. I thought that was a superlative amendment, but unfortunately others did not. In June of 1994, of course, the Regional Health Authorities Act was assented to.

Section 22, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview is so keen to preserve – it's almost like the hon. member is a custodian. If you look at section 22, it empowers the minister to make regulations, and this is why it's very important that amendment A3 be accepted by members of this Assembly. Section 22 empowers the minister to make regulations governing the regional health authorities including regulations to establish standards and guidelines in regard to the provision of health services, the undertaking of capital construction – that would be contracts of many descriptions – the operation of facilities, the selection of auditors, and the amount regional health authorities may charge as fees for goods and services that they may provide.

5:00

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, that sounds like taxation.

MR. MacDONALD: Sounds like taxation of a sort.

However, Mr. Chairman, both the provincial cabinet and the minister have exercised their powers in the legislation to make regulations. Of note, for example, are some of those regulations. One regulation provides that the regional health authority bylaws are

not affected until approved by the minister, if necessary, after the minister directs the amendments to be made and that regional health authority bylaws may not conflict with the act or regulations. Now, if this is not true and an hon. member in this Assembly knows better than I, I would appreciate hearing from him.

There's also a regulation that will prescribe the regional health authority fiscal year – and this would require regional health authorities to apply generally accepted accounting principles – empower the minister to prescribe policies or rules with respect to keeping and preparing financial records, and concern the eligibility of auditors and the compensation packages of members of the regional health authorities. I can see why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, when the staff and the member researched this, decided on section 22.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There's also a regulation concerning the use of requisitions and donated funds by regional health authorities, concerns regarding the availability of minutes for inspection by the public. That regulation certainly would lift the veil of secrecy from the proceedings that occur at the regional health authorities. Now, I have had the opportunity of attending regional health authority meetings in the Capital region but unfortunately not outside the region. After the elections in the fall perhaps the Official Opposition health critic will allow myself to accompany him on a visit to some, because there are going to be very interesting aspects as the chair is selected. [interjection] The chair of the regional health authority is not going to be selected. Excuse me; it's late. I'd forgotten; it's going to be appointed now, because amendment A1, a superlative amendment, was defeated unfortunately.

However, Mr. Chairman, there are also regulations that concern the contents of annual reports to the minister. Now, the regulation is going to determine the annual report and the contents. Am I just of a suspicious nature, that there's going to be information that's not going to be in the annual report that perhaps should be in there? How much contracting out has been going on? I don't know, and if any hon. member of this Assembly has that information, I would appreciate if they would enter in debate on this amendment A3 and provide that information not only to this member but to all members of the Assembly.

Again on this list is a regulation that the provincial cabinet can, will, and probably did make concerning the disclosure of remuneration and benefits payable to management personnel of regional health authorities. Now, I find that also very interesting in section 22, because when you think of the regional health authority in Edmonton and the one in Calgary and the compensation packages, there's a significant difference between Edmonton and Calgary. Edmonton's regional health authority CEO makes significantly less. Now, it's early in the morning, but I think it's \$70,000, Mr. Chairman. I don't know why that is. The budgets are about the same for both health authorities. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is not here, but I hope it's not based on . . . [interjection] I apologize, Mr. Chairman; I certainly do.

I hope that decision is not gender based.

Now, there's also the possibility of regulations to require a regional health authority to adhere to prudent investment standards in making investment decisions. There's also a potential regulation under section 22 to require ministerial approval for purchasing, leasing, or disposing of land for demolishing facilities above a specific value and for entering into capital development projects above a specific value – demolishing facilities such as . . . I cannot remember the name of that hospital.

MR. MASON: Which hospital? Where?

MR. MacDONALD: The one in Calgary in Bridgeland that just collapsed in a cloud of fine cement dust.

MR. MASON: The General.

MR. MacDONALD: The General hospital. That's the name of it. How could I have forgotten that?

There are regulations – I didn't know this – for demolishing facilities above a specific value, and the value of that hospital to the citizens of Calgary, I think, was enormous. Certainly to the Member for Edmonton-Highlands it had emotional value. There are also regulations here that could be used to establish that no regional health authority may confer a benefit on or transfer of property, including money, to any person unless the regional health authority receives fair value in exchange for the benefit or transfer.

There's also a regulation here under section 22 to establish that regional health authorities are required to comply with ministerial directives. Well, I hope they do but at the same time if they get directives after the municipal elections to contract out to the HMO, or the hand money over organizations, that they say, "No; this is not in the interests of public health care." Perhaps some of these individuals who are going to be successful in the election will be the same people who were on the steps of the Assembly last spring and expressed their democratic rights by opposing the health care privatization act, or the old Bill 11.

There's also a regulation here, in the time that I have left, Mr. Chairman – as I understand it, the Capital health authority and the Calgary regional health authority bylaws indicate that the minister controls the compensation levels of the board members of those two respective regional health authorities.

5:10

Now, in summary, Mr. Chairman, members of regional health authorities must exercise a high standard of care and must act always in the best interests of the public. The Regional Health Authorities Act and related regulations and directives provide a firm basis for concluding that members of a regional health authority have a duty to act in the best interests of the public and are required to conduct the businesses of the authority, as I said before, with integrity. They also, at the same time, must be impartial. That's why we must accept this amendment again as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview specifically dealing with section 22. It is interesting that we can have . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on amendment A3.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to speak to this amendment. I referred to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's first amendment as a most excellent amendment, and I referred to his second amendment as a very good amendment, and I'm going to refer to this amendment as an adequate amendment. I'd be pleased to explain to all members present why I am less enthusiastic about this amendment than I was about the other amendments proposed by the hon. member.

It has to do with my history of getting involved in politics for the first time. Some hon. members may know that I was at one time making my living as a bus driver for the city of Edmonton. At that time there were provisions – I believe it was the Municipal Government Act rather than the local authorities act – that said that city

employees along with bankrupts, mentally deficient persons, and judges, I believe, were ineligible to seek a nomination for municipal council. That caused me quite some pain and discouragement, Mr. Chairman, because I wanted to be a politician, not in the worst way as some other hon. members opposite want to be a politician, but I did want to be a politician. So I sought redress through the courts and argued that it was very unfair that I shouldn't be permitted to be nominated while I was an employee of the municipality. Now, we weren't successful in that application, and the nomination day intervened before the appeal could be heard.

Mr. Ray Speaker was the Minister of Municipal Affairs at that time, and when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands at the time, who was Pam Barrett, stood up and asked that minister questions about it, he readily agreed that there was an injustice and agreed to bring forward amendments to the Municipal Government Act. So after I had resigned my position with the city in order to run and been elected, the wheels of government ground on, and changes were brought through the Legislature amending the Municipal Government Act so that city employees could run without resigning their positions. Some have subsequently done so and been elected to councils in Edmonton, Calgary, and I believe some other municipalities. So the government can at times be responsive and sensitive and actually, although not quickly, with minimal delay at least bring about the changes that are sometimes desirable.

Now, the point of all of that, Mr. Chairman, is that I do not believe that in every case an employee of an organization should be completely prohibited from seeking to have a position on the board or council which has the responsibility for operating that entity. So it brings us to the question here, and the section that would be repealed by Bill 7 – and that section would be deleted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview – says that

a person is not eligible to be nominated as a candidate in any election under this Act if on nomination day

- (j) in the case of a district board election, he or his spouse
 - (i) is a physician and a member of the medical staff,
 - (ii) is a dentist and a member of the medical staff or dental staff, or
 - (iii) is an employee of a hospital or nursing home in respect of which the election is being held.

This causes me some difficulty because I don't believe that someone who works for an organization should necessarily have their democratic right infringed and curtailed in order to seek election as a citizen to a democratically elected body of any kind. Being an employee per se does not in my view represent a conflict of interest except and in particular that the employee, if they are elected, would need to abstain from any matters that might pertain to their employment. That is to say contract negotiations, collective agreements, and so on.

The question of conflict of interest is a little bit different. If someone is doing business with an authority and the decisions being made would mean a financial benefit for them or for the company they work for, that is clearly an example that I think has to be dealt with by the government sooner or later. We only have to wait for an inevitable unfortunate development to become a matter of public knowledge. Some sort of scandal or another will eventually emerge if the government fails to take proper steps to deal with conflict of interest for health authorities.

The government is the one that is going to be embarrassed. It won't be the opposition. The opposition will probably jump all over it. I mean, I wouldn't, but I know some members might and make a lot of hay out of it. The government is going to pay a price for neglecting a serious approach to conflict of interest. Sooner or later it's practically inevitable, because the lack of strong conflict of

interest guidelines in this legislation is an invitation to trouble. It's an invitation to people feeling that they can push the limits and get away with something that they ought not to get away with, and it's going to come back to haunt this government. Mark my words. This government is going to pay a price for refusing to deal with the amendments that have been put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and supported by both the Official Opposition and the New Democrat opposition in this Assembly. I think it's too bad, but it certainly won't be on our head.

5:20

Now, if I can return to the amendment before us, Mr. Chairman, it would remove a section. I'm not sure this section ought to be removed. If someone is a physician or a member of the medical staff, does that automatically place them in a conflict of interest? An employee of any kind: does that mean someone who works in the cafeteria or in the laundry or on the ward or just as a secretary or someone in an administrative position?

AN HON. MEMBER: Just a secretary.

MR. MASON: I should correct myself. I should not say "just as a secretary", I should say "as a secretary." What I'm trying to convey is that people work in organizations that are very distant from influencing or making administrative decisions. They're far from being counted as management or having large influence over management types of decisions. I think we ought not to preclude those people from exercising their democratic right to seek nomination and election for those positions that are established for the administration of public affairs.

So as I'm going along, I'm getting a little bit farther from supporting this amendment than when I started out, but I still think it's worth discussing. I'm pleased to discuss it this morning. I think that in general we need to draw a distinction between people who are employed by an organization and people who stand to benefit as a result of business transactions with that organization. That is a traditional definition of conflict of interest which I think ought to apply in this regard.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I think that I've covered most of the points that I want to cover. If I can find the actual amendment, I could sum up. Well, I'll talk a little bit more about it.

On balance and given my experience, I find that this amendment attempts to do in a rather different way what was attempted by the previous amendment, but the previous amendment was much stronger and it was much clearer. It specified what there was by way of positions that would put one directly in a conflict of interest. So it was a more positive, a more direct approach that I think had a lot of merit. I don't mean to debate an amendment that has already been before the House and has been defeated. I just mean to contrast the two approaches.

The approach of the second amendment, which I called the very good amendment, was very direct. It said that someone who is a director, is an officer who receives income, who owns voting shares is ineligible. That is a positive, direct, and very clear statement of policy which makes a lot of sense, very good and practical sense. Not just health authorities but any organization could benefit a great deal by having this kind of system. In fact, there are many organizations that do have that particular approach, and I think it has a great deal of merit.

Now, if we contrast that with this approach, it is just to maintain the wording of the present section 22, which the government proposes to remove from the legislation as part of Bill 7. So, again, the government is weakening the control, but I think they are at the

same time taking out language that may deal with people who are not directly in a conflict of interest situation. As a result, I think that we would not weaken the legislation. We would not weaken the existing Regional Health Authorities Act by removing this section, as the government proposes.

So I finally come to a conclusion, Mr. Chairman, as to how I stand with respect to what I called the adequate amendment by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I regret to say that I cannot support this particular amendment and will have to stand with the government when we stand in a few minutes. That will be harder for me than for the other members opposite, I assure you all. Nevertheless, I think one has to do in the House what one's conscience dictates, and based on my experience, I certainly would be loathe to restrict the rights of employees to participate in democratic forums that we have in our society. As a result, I cannot support the amendment, as well intentioned as it is.

I perfectly understand the intentions of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. He is simply attempting to retain even the slightest semblance of protection under conflict of interest that may have existed in the old legislation. I admire him for that. I respect his attempts to do that, because having defeated the other two amendments – by those I mean the excellent one and the very good one. I've come to realize that he has been frustrated in those attempts, and I'm sure he is very frustrated but not perhaps as frustrated as some other hon. members.

Nevertheless, he's grasping at straws in attempting to find some way to do that which ought to be done but which is being frustrated by the government side when they stand up to protect legislation that is clearly inadequate. So I understand where the hon. member is coming from, and I certainly appreciate it, but I regret to say that I cannot support this somewhat less than adequate amendment that he has put forward.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and invite other fresh voices to enter with vigour into this excellent debate.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak in support of the amendment before the House, an amendment that would try to address the conflict of interest concerns that we've raised in the last number of hours. What it does is try to reinstate the current section 22, which outlines a number of individuals who are not eligible at the present time to be candidates for election to the health boards. Specifically, it includes physicians and members of the medical staff, dentists and members of the dental staff, and employees of a hospital or a nursing home who are working for the authority where election is being sought. This, as has already been indicated, is a second best alternative to the previous amendment.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

5:30

One of the things it does raise is: why was this section deleted from the act in Bill 7? Obviously, in the previous legislation there was a need seen for addressing conflict of interest, and then suddenly it has been dropped. I know to this point that we haven't heard an explanation for that from the government.

If you look at the need to be very careful in terms of those individuals and their role in a regional authority and if you start and

look at the job descriptions of the individuals, for instance, a chief of a department, who is typically under contract to the hospital or directly to the regional health authority and is paid according to that position – in a large organization that pay can range from perhaps \$30,000 per year for a smaller and simpler department to over \$200,000 for the position of chief medical officer of a regional health authority.

The time commitments of those individuals to the authority can be quite complicated and quite extensive. So they're deeply involved in the operations and are in a position to have great influence on the work of the authority. To put them on the board seems to be, first of all, making life difficult for them in knowing exactly when they are and aren't in conflict, but also for the unscrupulous it puts them in a position where they may take actions that are not in the interest of the authority or in the public interest.

The chief of a medical department has a range of roles and responsibilities. They work on the day-to-day management of the departments. They're scheduling times for operating rooms and diagnostic facilities. They do a lot of the planning and trying to match services to the demand that comes their way. They're closely involved in budget decisions although they may not have direct budget control. For an individual like that to be elected to the authority, again, seems to place them in a very clear conflict of interest.

On the last amendment I looked at some of the questions that are commonly asked when we look at the public policy question or an amendment such as the one before us, and that's looking at the exercise of power. If you look at how power is exercised in terms of this amendment, the whole amendment is designed and aimed at avoiding the abuse of power, trying to make sure that individuals are not placed in a position where they can abuse the power that they have been given by being either appointed or elected to a regional health authority.

I think the amendment recognizes that board members on those regional health authorities are going to be in a unique position of power. I've given some examples of some of the employees and their involvement in the day-to-day operations. They are going to be in a position where they'll have knowledge and they'll have access to decision-making that could be used for personal gain or gain for others and, again, not in the public interest. Those individuals hold power that obviously other members of the public do not and are in a position where they can exercise that power for good or for ill.

I think the Member for Edmonton-Highlands raised a good point in questioning the range of individuals that are included in this particular amendment. You can ask yourself exactly how much power some of these employees exercise, and certainly for a lot of them it would be far less than a physician or a member of the medical staff. Many of them would be very remote from any situation that would possibly put them in a conflict of interest. But I think, as has been indicated, this is a second best amendment in terms of trying to deal with the problem and to highlight the problem of conflict of interest and I think for that reason alone deserves support.

We've been through a lot of amendments, a lot of discussion this evening and this morning, Mr. Chairman, and it seems to me that the point has been made time and time again that conflict of interest is a major concern with Bill 7. Unfortunately, to this point the amendments that have attempted to deal with those conflicts have been rejected.

I can only echo the words of a previous speaker, and that is that we're going to be back here dealing with this legislation again, because what Bill 7 does is open the door to possible abuse. You can only be in the halls of power for so long before someone will try

to take advantage of that. I think that that will be unfortunate for the health care system, and it's unfortunate that the opportunity to make, I think, a couple of very good proposals in terms of avoiding conflict of interest was lost so far in the debate on this bill.

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

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

5:40

Bill 16 School Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate May 8: Dr. Massey]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great pleasure to rise this wonderful Tuesday morning and see all these cheerful faces to speak to the School Amendment Act, 2001. I did have some amendments that I would like to hand out to everyone, so if we could get those out, that would be very helpful. I'll wait for a moment till we get those out to everyone.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: We'll refer to this amendment as A1.

MR. HLADY: Okay. Most members have them now. The first section is 5(b) of Bill 16 that we're looking at an amendment for. The Alberta School Boards Association expressed a concern about the proposed amendment, section 24.21, and asked that it be clarified that the applicant for the establishment of a chartered school is limited to relying upon the same request for an alternative program that was made to the school board in making the application to the minister.

The next amendment is for sections 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 27, 28, and 30 of Bill 16. All of these sections will be amended to indicate that only separate school electors in the newly expanded areas of a separate school board within a separate school region will be able to elect to remain a public school resident and elector or to become a separate school resident and elector.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The next is under section 15 of Bill 16, and that's an amendment to section 90.

A superintendent of a school board or the operator of a private school or charter school shall make a report in writing to the Registrar regarding the suspension, termination, resignation or retirement from employment of a teacher if the . . . [employment action] results from conduct that brings into question the suitability of the teacher to hold a teaching certificate.

The next section, Mr. Chairman, is section 33(a) of Bill 16: "(2)

A Regional authority must be composed of at least 3 members and not more than 7 members," who represent proportionately the number of separate school electors and public school electors in the region but at least one of whom must be a public member and one of whom must be a separate school member.

Under the next section the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association has proposed that the word "composed" be changed to "comprised." So it's housekeeping really, Mr. Chairman. I think that's a big part of it, and that last amendment certainly affects a number of subsections and so forth.

That's pretty much the substance of the amendments, Mr. Chairman. I'll take my seat and let other members speak to the amendments.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to the amendments put forward to Bill 16. There has been a tremendous amount of discussion about Bill 16 and the provisions, the concerns about the naming of charter school programs or the application for charter school programs being first an application to a local board as an alternative program. I've not heard a great deal of discussion. There seems to be, I think, general concurrence that it was a good move to have those seeking an alternative school to first apply to a local board and expect that the local board would take them under, that they would be able to be umbrellaed and looked after, and that the interests of the parents that want a charter established would be looked after by a local board.

One of the questions I did have and that I took the opportunity to ask the minister was on the loss of the ability of a local board to declare a charter. That has been taken away. Local boards will no longer be able to issue charters themselves. If charters are issued, they'll be done by the minister but only following an unsuccessful bid to have the charter recognized by a local board as an alternative school.

In terms of teachers who may be in difficulty with a board and in terms of having those difficulties reported to the registrar, I think that has had wide support. I think the Teachers' Association, trustees that I've spoken to, everyone agrees on the provisions that would have a teacher who for some reason or other had come into difficulty in terms of employment with a board, no matter what that difficulty was, whether they had been suspended for a time from the board, whether there had been a termination, some reason for a teacher being in difficulty with a board – that difficulty would be recorded centrally and available to all boards in the province and throughout the country for future employers so that a teacher who has had some sort of action taken against them in their role as a teacher would not be able to move from jurisdiction to jurisdiction without the knowledge of an employing board. Again, as I said, there has been a great deal of support for that kind of registry.

Mr. Chairman, given the limited time we've had to look at the amendments and have not had an opportunity, unfortunately, to share them with a number of interest groups to see if they go any ways to satisfy the objections of the various groups that we have heard – there have been some very strong and heated objections. Should Bill 16 have been passed in its original form, I think that some of those objections would have resulted in some court action. As I said, I haven't had the opportunity to study at length the kinds of amendments that are before us and the changes that they actually make to Bill 16, but on first glance they don't seem to meet the kinds of objections that we've heard.

5:50

The concern as I heard it expressed from the Catholic community was that on regional boards the Catholic members of that board had to have full sway over the Catholic schools. That included having the power to appoint the superintendent. It included the power over programs that were offered in the school. There was a plea from the Catholic communities for complete control over the Catholic schools that were part of a blended authority. Again, as I said, I've read these quickly, but I don't see these amendments in any way answering that concern from the Catholic community. If that's the case, then, I think that we're going to find ourselves in a great deal of difficulty in terms of the provisions of this bill and the wishes of the Catholic school supporters.

One of the concerns from the public boards was that the provisions of the act didn't allow for a Catholic population to say no to the establishment of a division. There was a consultation, to be sure, with the public board, but once the process was under way, there was no point at which the majority of Catholic electors in a region could stop the formation of a division, and that is unlike the legislation that is in place at the current time.

I'm sure that all members of the Assembly have heard the objections from both Catholic and public school supporters, particularly in some rural and smaller centres of the province, in terms of what the provisions of Bill 16 will do to their schools and to their communities. A number of them are concerned that given the few numbers of students they have, if a division is formed, the small population that they have now attending one school will be split into two and result in the school no longer being viable and the youngsters in a community having to be bused off to centres elsewhere. We've heard that most strongly from public boards, who are really concerned and concerned, too, that those decisions will be made when the division is formed by electors that can be very remote from the community in which they live. There's worry about that decision-making.

Now, I think for their part, as I've heard the Catholic supporters answer that, they indicate that it's in their best interest, too, to have viable schools. Certainly they have no interest in taking and splitting apart a student population so that neither the public school nor the separate board can offer programs that are needed by youngsters in a region. They point out that the practicalities involved in establishing a school division would lead them to not establish a division in those areas where there isn't a viable population in terms of the Catholic school. If that was the case, then likely the same would prevail for the public school system.

So there are concerns that I don't see initially addressed in the amendments before us. I think that I'd be interested to know from the government if these amendments were shared with the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, and the Public School Boards' Association, the three groups who have been most involved with this legislation. I think if the amendments weren't passed by them, that would be a tremendous mistake. Their interests in this run deep, and they're quite emotional. Maybe someone on the government side can let us know just the extent to which that consultation has taken place.

A major objection was the understanding by the Catholic School Trustees' Association that the matter of choice in being able to choose either a public or a separate district would apply only to the new divisions that were created, that it wouldn't be a choice for established areas. Again, I don't see that having been changed from the original bill. I haven't had a chance to look at it that closely, but I expect to be able to do that shortly. I would like to know how that could not be in an amendment, because it seems to me that the Schmidt case has established and reconfirmed the notion that

Catholics are born into a Catholic school district, where those districts exist, and constitutionally that is the way the Catholic minority is protected. It cannot be a subject of a piece of legislation like this. It can't be changed by legislation.

I would be interested in knowing, Mr. Chairman, the arguments that have been used to not include that as one of the amendments to the act. Again, it's an issue on which I've had a few words with the minister. The position he had at the time was that this was democratic and that the provisions prior to Bill 16 were undemocratic. So concerns about the ability of Catholics to choose and the concern about the provisions that were in Bill 16 and the issues that were raised.

6:00

Now, I know that the three associations were providing the government with amendments on Bill 16. Again I would ask the Government House Leader or the presenter of the amendments if those amendments were considered by the government and if in any way the amendments we see before us today are a reflection of the positions that were put forward by those bodies. If they weren't, Mr. Chairman, I would think it very unfortunate if we were to proceed through committee consideration of Bill 16 without having heard from those associations and the positions they put forward.

I think it has to be remembered that those three groups came together to meet with and to offer to the government some solutions, some changes for Bill 16. Unfortunately for some of the amendments, they fell apart at the last moment, but they have been intimately involved in trying to come up with a solution to some of the problems that Bill 16 was to embody, so I think it would be extremely unfortunate if we proceeded through committee stage of this bill without some assurance that those groups have been contacted and have at least been made aware of the provisions that we see before us this morning.

The concerns about regional authorities – and I'm looking for the section on the Francophone authorities, Mr. Chairman, because there were, again, a number of concerns raised about the composition and the jurisdiction of those authorities and the kinds of protection it provided for the Francophone population and how far it went in terms of meeting the amendments that had been agreed to by the members as they took part in the discussions that the government had put together. There's some mention of the separate school members under 223.34, but on first scrutiny that's the only mention I can see, and again there were a good number of issues raised before Bill 16 was introduced.

I think with those preliminary comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to conclude and have an opportunity to look a little more closely at the amendments that we have before us and then have an opportunity to speak again.

Thanks very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister for Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to rise today in support of the amendments that have been brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I want to assure the House that the amendments that have been raised and brought forward today are based on discussions with school boards, with trustee associations, members of the community, and of course members of the church.

The recommended amendments include some changes simply to enhance clarity. For example, under the section related to charter schools we are proposing to include the words "the request" to make

it clear that the application forwarded to the minister is the same request that was sent to the school board.

We also propose to clarify the section dealing with teacher conduct by designating the school superintendent responsible for reporting as well as clarifying the scope of reporting a job action to a suspension, termination, resignation, or retirement. This change, Mr. Chairman and hon. members, is consistent with the protocol that's been adopted by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada relating to the suspension or cancellation of a teacher's certificate in order to provide further protection for students.

More significant amendments are proposed to the sections of the bill relating to Francophone governance. The amendments being brought forward will make the number of Francophone public members relate to the number of public and separate school electors. It also allows the separate school members to sit as a separate corporation within the regional authority corporation. These changes have the support of the majority of trustee associations and the Francophone and Catholic communities as these changes respect both minority language educational rights and separate school rights as guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada.

These changes will ensure that Bill 16 accomplishes the goal it set out to do, which is to clarify a number of administrative and governance processes for the benefit of Alberta students. I urge all members to support the amendments to this bill.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to get an opportunity – this is my first opportunity – to discuss Bill 16 but specifically the amendments before us. As I understand it, there is a series of amendments here early in the morning: A, B, C, D, E, and F.

MS BLAKEMAN: Fourteen different sections.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm told by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Centre that there are 14 different sections as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

I believe it is a significant change to the Assembly, and I'm very interested to know the discussions that have occurred around these amendments with the various school boards and organizations across the province. I certainly have received literature, letters from the Edmonton public school board: with respect to your deliberations on Bill 16, please be advised that the board of trustees of Edmonton public schools has previously expressed the position that the Minister of Learning not change the School Act provisions relating to the formation of separate school jurisdictions.

Now, I would much prefer, Mr. Chairman, to deal with the amendments specifically, one at a time – we could call them quite accurately the group of six – but I doubt if that will happen.

6:10

There are other groups. The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta informed all members of this Assembly that "the majority of public school boards are opposed to the proposal for the expansion of minority jurisdictions." How are they going to feel about these amendments at this hour? This is also a question of the suggested new process. They certainly outline their main objections. They believe in an inclusive system, and they mention here the constitutional protection.

The constitutional protection at issue does not exist for only one minority faith; it exists for two, and any new mechanism must treat the two even-handedly. The proposed new mechanism does not

treat both potential minorities (Protestants, as well as Roman Catholics) even-handedly.

In the brief time that I've had to have a look at this, I see particularly with amendment – I'm going to label them if no one else is. With amendment E, section 34 is amended by striking out the proposed section 223.33, and it is to be substituted under the "designation of schools" with "A Regional authority must designate each school either as a public school or as a separate school" and the "responsibility and authority of Regional authority." Now, if I'm looking at this correctly – and any hon. member can please point out if I'm not – that is a significant change. We need to look at that, and we need to look at it in the context that it was presented. I believe that when you look at the designation of schools – there's a lot of paperwork around here now – the proposed amendment E states: "is amended by striking out the proposed sections 223.33." That is, I think, significant.

When you look at this entire matter and you look at some of the questions and some of the answers that have been presented and you look at, for instance, the "duty to report," the onus has now shifted, in my view. It has shifted from "a school board or the operator of a private school" to "a superintendent of a school board or the operator of a private school or charter school." What sort of consultations went on with this? Now, it's unfortunate that there are not many members present, but I would be interested to know what led to this amendment, what led to this precise change.

You know, it's amazing. As it's described here in the expansion, it's a separate school education in Alberta, but in casual conversation the word "right" is often used in ways that suggest that all rights are the same. They're not. Perhaps we are forgetting in our haste that separate school rights are not Charter rights. Every Canadian has the right to enjoy free speech and freedom of religion, but not every Canadian has the right to enjoy a separate school education. I don't think that we would know it by this legislation. In fact, the separate school system which is provided in Alberta is only available in one other Canadian province, and that is our sister province to the east, Saskatchewan. In Manitoba, B.C., New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and P.E.I. there are no separate schools.

Now, earlier in the evening we were discussing regional authorities, and I notice the frequency with which they're mentioned and discussed here. Is this the ultimate goal of this government with this bill? Is the ultimate goal to change around the board of governance for our education system and turn it into regional authorities, very similar to what we have with health care? Are we going to dismantle the school boards and set up this system of regional authorities? I look here and I see we're going to start amendment D, Mr. Chairman: "A Regional authority . . ." A regional authority again and again, again and again, and yet again. Am I to conclude that this is the ultimate objective of the School Amendment Act? Because this is the first stage in a fundamental change of our delivery of education – public education I would like to say, but it's also for charter schools – to the students of this province.

Now, I think we need to take a breath here and hold on, because if this is the case, then I would have a lot of concerns and cautions about this. If there is this notion that we're going to set up a regional authority format for delivery of education, what will be next? As night turns into day, we get these amendments, which are significant, and what is the next stage in this? This is certainly a large majority that the current government enjoys, and I don't know if this is a prudent or a wise use of that majority, Mr. Chairman.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, you should have thought of that about seven hours ago.

MR. MacDONALD: I hear an hon. member speak, and certainly that is their democratic right.

We need to ensure – and I don't know if these amendments do it – that there is a strengthening of all education systems across this province, reaffirming the government's commitment to separate schools, providing Francophone education in a way that supports minority language rights and separate school rights. Are these amendments going to do that for the charter schools? There are many parents interested. In fact, Mr. Chairman, they will line up well into the middle of the night to enroll their children in charter schools because class sizes are lower. That's an issue that certainly is not dealt with in this amendment, and the government for whatever reason or measure is very reluctant to deal with it.

6:20

It's astonishing the parents that will line up in the middle of the night to ensure that they can secure a placement for their child in the charter school in my neighbourhood. That's their choice if they like, but are these amendments going to ensure that groups must apply first to the school board – I think it does – to be included as an alternative program?

Now, I don't see in here in the time that I've looked, if it is turned down by the board, the duties of the minister.

Last week I received a letter from the Francophone community. These amendments, specifically that the separate school members of a regional authority "are a corporation under the name of" – this continues, I think, to allow Roman Catholics to claim minority status both for language and denominational rights, but eventually we will get to the bottom of these amendments. There's no doubt about that. If the hon. member who moved these amendments could possibly explain "separate school members" and how that will affect blended authorities within a region.

Now, getting back to my earlier comments on the superintendent and the duty to report, this is going to change. Yes, it's the superintendent's or the operator of a private school's duty to report any employment action. That's still going to mean that the record is available to employers not only across the city but I believe across the country, and teachers in trouble will not be able to move to other schools with their record following them. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View perhaps could clarify that.

With those questions, Mr. Chairman, at this time I would like to review my preliminary look at these amendments. Again, I would like to express my dismay. This important legislation I certainly hope isn't a reflection of the government's view toward our public education system nor the children in it. The problem with this is that my questions regarding the governance of the Francophone education by religious minority I believe are unanswered.

With respect to the expansion of the separate school education, I don't believe that this is an adequate proposal to some of the concerns that were expressed, but the manner in which this has occurred certainly is astonishing. If the view of this Assembly is to propose new legislation and to improve existing legislation, then I can't say that there is a great deal of interest in the consultation process. Who was consulted? I went through a list of individuals. The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta: I'm interested to know how extensively they've been consulted. Diane King, Nicole Buret, the Francophone community again, individuals across the province which have the charter schools, the religious communities: how exactly have they been consulted?

Now, there was some concern that the process to develop this legislation was divisive, and the manner in which these amendments were put together in a group like this and presented to the Assembly at 6 in the morning I think is going to add to that feeling, Mr.

Chairman. There certainly is the idea, again, that this is a government that is marching to the beat of its own drum, not to the stakeholders that I mentioned previously. [interjection] I hear from the hon. member from Medicine Hat that they have the mandate to march but I don't think in this manner, Mr. Chairman.

I look forward to more on this issue. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I begin by noting that we are, as I understand it, debating a series of amendments, I believe 14 altogether, that are amending an act that amends an act. So maybe we should be considering amending the amendment to the act that amends the amendment act. Anyway, I think it's a worry that we are amending the act when it's still at this stage of debate. The government is amending their own bills. Maybe they're rushing them through too quickly. It's a sign of hurried and sloppy legislation.

So as we read it through paragraph by paragraph, section 5(b) is struck out and the following is substituted: "(b) by repealing subsection (2) and substituting the following."

There's at least one grammatical error in the next sentence. It says:

An application may be made to the Minister only if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program under section 16 as requested by the person or society.

Now, it's I suppose ironic that this is a school amendment act because there's a need for whoever drafted this to consider the use of commas. If we read this sentence as it stands now without a single comma in it, it's not clear which phrase the word "only" refers to. So it may read: "An application may be made to the Minister only, if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program." On the other hand, it could be interpreted as: "An application may be made to the Minister, only if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established . . ." I suppose I should propose an amendment to the amendment, and my amendment would be to insert a comma at whichever was the suitable point decided by the sponsoring member, who I'm not sure is even here at the moment.

6:30

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, it is not customary to refer to anyone's presence or absence in the House. I'd just caution you on that.

DR. TAFT: Thank you. So there's the first reaction here. I think we need to decide where the comma belongs and maybe amend the amendment.

In section B section 15 is amended in the proposed section 90.1 by (a) striking out subsection (1) and substituting the following:

90.1(1) A superintendent of a school board or the operator of a private school or charter school shall make a report in writing to the Registrar regarding the suspension, termination, resignation or retirement from employment of a teacher if the suspension, termination, resignation or retirement, as the case may be, results from conduct that brings into question the suitability of the teacher to hold a teaching certificate.

Now, right away the question comes to my mind when the superintendent makes a report in writing: what's the nature of that report? Do we need to be concerned? Undoubtedly, if they are making such a report, it's going to end up, I imagine, before some kind of a tribunal or appeal committee. We may want to consider the nature of the report, what the report would include, whether it's

a report that will be subject to legal consideration. So there are those kinds of questions on this particular portion of the amendment.

As we carry along through the amendments, I now move to section D. Section 33 is struck out, and the following is substituted. Section 33, section 223.3 is amended (a) by repealing subsection (2) and substituting the following:

(2) A Regional authority must be composed of at least 3 members and not more than 7 members.

Now, I assume this is the clause in which the word "composed" replaces the original draft, which said "comprised." Certainly the use of those two words is commonly confused, and I will accept this as a reasonable amendment.

Then we move on to the very next paragraph.

(2.1) Subject to subsection (2.2), the number of public school members of a Regional authority must, if practicable, be in the same proportion to the total number of members of the Regional authority as the total number of public school electors in the Region is . . .

I think there's probably another comma missing there. It should be "is," I think.

. . . to the combined total number of public school electors and separate school electors in the Region.

Now, aside from the problem with commas in this clause, I tripped right away over the only two words that are offset by commas, which are "if practicable." In what circumstances would it not be practicable to implement this? By leaving those two words there, it seems to me to render this particular amendment virtually pointless or meaningless. Who is to determine if something is practicable? On what basis do they determine it?

Frankly, if we have legislation that has clauses in it that refer simply to whether something is practicable, then it strikes me, at least, as a pretty weak statement. If it's not practicable, then this legislation, this particular clause won't apply. It's about as big a loophole as I can imagine in something. So that particular section of these amendments probably needs more attention.

We move on. "A Regional authority must have at least one public school member and at least one separate school member." So we could have one person out of seven, say, one public school member and six separate school members or one separate school member and six public school members. I'd propose that we correct this or improve this particular paragraph by not speaking in terms of absolute numbers but speaking in terms of proportions. You may want to say: a regional authority must have at least one-third of its members who are public school members and at least one-third who are separate school members. It's one thing to have one public school member on a regional authority if that regional authority has a total of three, but it's quite another matter to have one member if there is a total of seven. So I think we might want to reconsider the structure of that particular amendment and switch from absolute numbers to a proportion there.

The next clause, I think, is probably pretty straightforward: "The Minister may appoint the first members of a Regional authority." Fair enough. Once the regional authority is established, there'll be another mechanism – I'm not clear what that is – for selecting members. Section (2.3) as presented here seems sensible.

Finally, we have:

Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada are protected in the Region.

Well, once again there's a problem in grammar here. I'm not sure who drafted this, but it's unclear to which phrase the word "both" refers. Does it refer to both minority languages – I don't know if there are more than two – does it refer to both minority language

rights, or does it refer to “both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges”? The word “both” is lost in that sentence, and it again should be sent back for a careful editing.

A Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada are protected in the Region.

So there's confusion in that particular amendment.

Let's try the next one.

Subject to subsection (3), the separate school members of a Regional authority have the responsibility and authority to ensure that the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada are protected in the Region.

That seems clearly enough presented.

If a Public Regional authority and a Separate Regional authority are established under section 223.31 or continued under section 223.32,

6:40

- (a) the Public Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that minority language educational rights guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada are protected in the Region . . .
- (b) the Separate Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada are protected in the Region.

So we have here different authorities and responsibilities, dependent on whether the regional authority is a public one or if it's a separate one.

It looks to me like the separate regional authorities will be carrying a heavier burden than the public regional authorities, because the public regional authorities merely have the responsibility and authority to ensure that minority language education rights are guaranteed. In addition to that, the separate regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools under the Constitution are guaranteed. So there's a distinction there between public regional authorities and separate regional authorities, and it makes me wonder if the separate regional authorities may be granted more resources to carry this extra burden. They may well, for example, be caught up in legal appeals and legal arguments and may be needing to proceed as far as the Supreme Court of Canada for their activities.

Now, I have on my desk an extensive amount of correspondence on Bill 16. I can see why the government seems in a hurry to push this through, because there is a great division of opinion on Bill 16. The amendments that we are currently debating are not likely, I don't think, to sort out some of the concerns. Indeed the government is in a genuinely difficult spot on this one. I don't think, for example, that the amendments, if they go through once they're edited and corrected, are going to address the concerns of one of the correspondents I have here, a senior player in the education sector in Alberta, saying that they're opposed to provisions of Bill 16 which relate to the expansion of separate school jurisdictions throughout the province. Will the amendments address that? Not that I could see, but maybe the sponsoring member would address that for me.

I'm also concerned that the amendments may not address the issues brought forward by another major player in Alberta's education sector, who wrote: it was with considerable surprise that our board received the news that the Minister of Learning is under the impression that our organization is a strong supporter of the proposed changes to the School Act regarding the establishments of school districts as introduced in Bill 16, currently before the Legislative Assembly. In other words, the writer of this is surprised

that the minister feels that he has their support and clearly feels that the minister doesn't have their support. So I don't see how the amendments we have here are going to address those kinds of concerns.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I'm also noting that a number of other groups have serious questions on various angles of Bill 16, and I don't see any way in which the amendments we're currently debating will address these concerns. One of them, for example, is an erosion of local decision-making. Again I stand to be corrected, but as far as I can tell from my close reading of the amendments, they do not address the concern over the erosion of local decision-making.

So, Mr. Chairman, with those comments I think I will take my seat and hope that whoever drafts the amendments will take my comments to heart. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm somewhat alarmed at the tone in terms of these amendments from the government side. These are very serious amendments and very serious changes to the School Act. I think they're deserving of the kind of serious debate that the individuals who've been involved in trying to bring about these amendments to the School Act expect them to be given. So I just express that concern.

The minister indicated, if I recall, in his remarks that this had the support of the three groups involved. I find that rather interesting, Mr. Chairman, because if I take a look at the amendments that the government has presented and I compare those amendments to those that were presented by the Public School Boards' Association and those that were presented by the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, I don't see those amendments reflected in what the government has put before us this morning.

I'd like to start with those amendments. The first amendment that was proposed by the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association was to amend section 2(b) of Bill 16. They would have the preamble to this bill amended, and the amendment would be adding “the following phrase in the fifth recital after the words ‘in the Region’ and before the words ‘and’.” The amendment they had proposed was “such that the principles of francophone educational governance are distinct from, not transferable to nor a precedent for the anglophone educational system.” Now, that's a proposed amendment by that association to the preamble. I don't see that reflected nor did the minister in making his comments indicate what the disposition of that suggestion from the association was.

6:50

A second amendment that has been suggested by the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association was in terms of section 13 of the bill. This is one of the most controversial sections in terms of the Catholic trustees' presentation. Their suggestion was:

Delete section 13 of [the bill] in its entirety and substitute the following:

- (a) by adding ‘Except as provided for in Division 2.01 of Part 8,’ before ‘Where a separate school district is established . . .’

They would put in that phrasing as a substitute for section 13 of Bill 16.

I would be interested in hearing from the government their response to the Catholic trustees' association. This was one of their major concerns, because section 13 now allows the elector, whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic, to

elect in a form prescribed by the Minister to be a resident

- (a) of the separate school district or a regional division made up only of separate school districts, as the case may be, or
- (b) of the public school district or division, as the case may be.

So this section is one that I know was very important to the association when it made its presentation, yet if we look at the amendments that are before us today, section 13 has been skipped over completely, and the first amendment applies to section 15.

I would be interested in knowing, Mr. Chairman, what happened to the amendment that was put forth. The minister indicated to me that there were going to be amendments accepted, and certainly I thought that that was one that would be looked at, if for no other reason than the possibility of this one ending up in the courts following the constitutional rights of Catholics and the Schmidt case, where the Roman Catholic citizens were deemed born into a school district where a Catholic school district existed. To ignore that advice without some explanation I think is unfortunate.

If we look at a further suggestion for amendment, the suggestion was that section 14 would be deleted in its entirety and, furthermore, that section 18 of the bill in its entirety be deleted and the following be substituted: "Section 132 is amended by adding 'Except as provided for in Division 2.01 of Part 8' before the word 'When'." So again a wording change suggested by the association, and I don't see that reflected in the amendments that we have before us, Mr. Chairman.

A proposal that section 19 of Bill 16 be amended by deleting section 19 in its entirety was also put forward and seems to be not part of the amendments that we have before us. The suggestion had been that

section 134(5) [be] amended by adding the following phrase at the end of section 134(5)(b) after the words 'established the separate school district.'

What would be added is:

or, as provided for in Division 2.01 of Part 8, he has notified the Municipality that although he is a member of the same faith as those who established the separate school district, he continues to support the public school district.

Again, an important provision, and one that's not included in the amendments as we have them put forward by the government.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that I heard the minister right when he said that the government had the support of the three associations involved, because it's very difficult to understand how these amendments are supported by those associations when there's such a discrepancy between what was shared with the Official Opposition and what appears before us.

There was a proposal that section 20 of Bill 16 be amended and in turn section 135(1) of the School Act. The proposal was that section 20 be deleted and that the following be substituted: "Section 135(1) is amended by adding 'or, as provided for in Division 2.01 of Part 8, public school purposes,' after 'separate school purposes'." Again, a lack of attention to that suggestion in the amendments that we see before.

The next suggestion. The government has an amendment for section 31, but there was a proposal that section 21 be amended and in turn section 150 of the School Act. That was the suggestion that detailed wording is to be left to the draftspersons in Municipal Affairs, Assessment Services because of the technical nature of the necessary wording. What is proposed is that these amendments utilize "live assessment" as provided for in the Municipal Government Act, and as applicable to public school jurisdictions, so that calculations as between separate school ratepayers and public school ratepayers are made upon the same type of assessment, with the same calculation date and amount of assessment base, so that they will be at all times equal.

I think that in Bill 16 that was the thrust of the bill. I think there was uneasiness with the language as it existed. I think the intent was

clear that both the Catholic and public systems, as far as taxation is concerned, would be equally treated. I think there would be a concern that that has been left unaddressed in the amendments we see before us.

The suggestion that section 22 of Bill 16 be deleted. That is the section, Mr. Chairman, that deals with the enrollment of a resident student of another board as requested by a parent of the . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I'm having some difficulty following. I am, as you know, a relative newcomer here. Amendment A1 is what we're talking about, not what should be in there but what is and why you dislike it. You seem to be referring to sections that I can't find here.

7:00

DR. MASSEY: I understand that, Mr. Chairman. What I was trying to point out was that we were assured by the minister that the amendments that had been proposed by the groups that have been most closely involved in this bill had been considered and that these amendments somehow or other accommodated those requests. It seems to me that what I tried to point out is that there's a great discrepancy between what was submitted to the government in terms of changes and what has appeared in the act as it's here in the amendments, and I was asking for some explanation, if we could, in terms of why those particular items were omitted from the amendment.

So that was the line of reasoning I was using, Mr. Chairman, in trying to, I guess if nothing else, put forward the case that was made so eloquently by the three associations. Albeit on many of the points they disagreed, they did work hard. They've been part of the consultations right to the last minute on this, so I thought that they at least deserved the airing of those suggestions.

I looked for the suggestions that section 27 be deleted and the suggestion:

. . . where a separate school district is established, is of the same faith as those who established the district, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, and has elected to be an elector of that separate school district.

And the suggestion that

in the case where a separate school district is established, is of the same faith as those who established the district, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, or, as provided for in division 2.01 of Part 8, has notified the municipality that although he is Protestant or Roman Catholic, as the case may be, he continues to be an elector of the public school district.

This goes back again to the concerns about choice, Mr. Chairman.

The amendments don't take into account the concerns that section 28 be amended, nor do they take into account – I'm sorry; they do.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: I know that some of you are anxious to fill in the newcomers with all of the wonderful details of how you've spent your night, but we still are in committee, and it would be appreciated if we could be able to hear the hon. member speak without being drowned out by the conversations that seem to have sprung up in all corners of the Chamber. So if we could be a little courteous, that would be helpful.

Hon. member.

Debate Continued

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Just for clarification, if I might, Mr. Chairman; I was out of the Chamber for a minute. Were the amendments split into six discrete amendments, or are we talking to

all? I assumed we were talking to all six of them, that they hadn't been split.

THE CHAIRMAN: That's the reason why we were allowing a little bit more of a ramble, because we didn't have discrete items. There are three pages of amendments, and it is amendment A1, the whole lot. So go ahead.

DR. MASSEY: I appreciate that. Thank you.

There were proposals amending sections 31, 33, 34, 35, and 36 of the bill, and in the amendments we have a proposal that would address three of those sections: 31, 33, and 34. The suggestion was that sections 31 and 33 through 35 in their entirety be struck. Of course that hasn't happened, and we have not had an explanation as to why that advice was ignored.

The suggestion was that section 31, section 223.1 of the act, would be amended

- (a) by adding the words 'Public or Separate' before the words 'Francophone Education Region' in subsection (1) and in the first line of subsection (2);
- (b) by adding the word 'Public' before the words 'Francophone Education Region' in the fourth line of subsection (2).

That was part of the amendments that were put forward and that we don't see as part of the proposal by the government.

Again, as I proceed through this analysis, Mr. Chairman, I am most alarmed that the really very important issues have not been addressed.

Point of Order Admissibility of Amendments

MR. MASON: Mr. Chairman, I rise on a point of order, and I would cite *Beauchesne's* 698(4)(b): "An amendment may not make the clause which it is proposed to amend unintelligible or ungrammatical." I would bring to the chair's attention that as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview had pointed out in his remarks, there are two ungrammatical sentences in the amendment which render them unclear at least and I think indecipherable.

Section A says that section 5(b) is struck out and the following is substituted.

- (2) An application may be made to the Minister only if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program under section 16 as requested by the person or society.

Now, there needs to be a comma before or after the word "only" in the first line to indicate if it is "the Minister only" or "to the Minister, only if the board of the district in which the school is to be located." So this is unclear, very unclear. It has two meanings without the comma.

The second one, Mr. Chairman, relates to section 223.35(1), and it says:

Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools . . .

and so on. As it's written, this refers to "both minority language education rights"; for example, two such rights. Or it could say, "both the minority language and the rights . . ." and then there would be a proper parallel construction. So clearly in this one, Mr. Chairman, we don't know if it's both minority language education rights, as in there are two of them, or both minority language rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools.

Again, because of the construction of the sentence it's not clear, Mr. Chairman, what the meaning of the mover is. I would therefore request under *Beauchesne* 698, The Admissibility of Amendments

in Committee, 4(b) – which, I repeat, says, "An amendment may not make the clause which it is proposed to amend unintelligible or ungrammatical" – I would ask that you rule these amendments out of order.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

7:10

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to the point of order.

MR. STEVENS: Obviously, it's a well-drafted amendment, and I don't agree with the comments of the hon. member.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Deputy Government House Leader, we can assume that you don't agree with it. What specifically? We're dealing with a specific point. For instance, if you go back to . . .

MR. STEVENS: As I understand it, you listened to his comments, you've heard mine, and you rule. The point is that certain representations were made, and it's up to you. My point is that there's nothing wrong with the amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the point of order as raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, we've consulted with Parliamentary Counsel. I don't know whether on your copy you have it, but the Legislative Counsel of the province of Alberta has also indicated that they feel this is adequate, and, with such powerful legal advice as that, the chair would be in concurrence with them. Perhaps as a former teacher going through them, trying to look at them, they seem to mean what's intended, and on the basis of that, then I'll rule no point of order.

Point of Order Explanation of Chairman's Ruling

MR. MASON: Mr. Chairman, pursuant to the standing rules I would ask for an explanation of the ruling. Specifically, which of the two meanings is meant in the two examples that I've cited in the government's amendments?

THE CHAIRMAN: Well, first of all, I think I've given the explanation after seeking Parliamentary Counsel's advice and my own reading of it and, secondly, knowing that in the original copy, which is up here, Legislative Counsel has indicated that this meets his approval and meets the standards. Those are the two things.

Now, with regard to the second request then: which of the two understandings that you may have? I would deem it to read as follows, in the absence of anyone from the government telling me anything to the contrary: an application may be made to the minister, only if the board. So it's "to the minister," would be my reading of it, but you're asking me to be the grammarian, and I'm not. What this is is a legal description, and that's better suited for lawyers. As I say, the two legal advisements that have been given to me would be that it stands as it is. I don't know that it's the role of the chair to be arbitrating with regard to grammar in these issues. It's more of a legal part, so I don't think there's anything further on that. Although, as I say, from my scan of it, it looks fine to me as well, but for all intents and purposes that's a gratuitous remark on my part.

Debate Continued

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question? No?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, a

surprise amendment A1 that we are dealing with, brought in after a night where four of the Magnificent Seven and one Lone Ranger have kept the government at bay while important things were debated. And at quarter to 6 in the morning a surprise amendment is brought in, which is what is before us now, an amendment that contains no less than 14 changes, 14 suggested amendments contained in six different sections amending Bill 16. Interesting, because the first question that springs to mind is: why was the government in such a hurry that they had to rush this through at the end of a night in which five people have been trying to uphold democracy and put this in front of them? But the government seems to feel a need, with its 74 members, to crush and annihilate and not to respect what's being done on this side. [interjections] No, no. They're trying to crush and annihilate. We are not being crushed or annihilated on this side; we're ready to go.

So we're looking at an amendment with some 14 different sections that are being amended here and are of some grave concern. Our stalwart Official Opposition critic on Learning, having had a bare 90 seconds to examine a three-page document containing, as I said, 14 different sections being amended while the proposing member spoke in a very cursory fashion about what was in here, was able to get to his feet and attempt to make sense out of this. A dishonourable action, I believe, on behalf of the government to bring this in in this manner and to give a critic absolutely no time to look over a three-page, 14-section amendment. For shame. Nonetheless, it is morning. We have had a cup of coffee. It is 20 after 7, and I shall plow forward in looking at this amendment.

7:20

The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods had already expressed concern that what is being proposed here is going against what was put forward by various school boards. We are still seeking confirmation from members opposite that in fact the government has secured support for this three-page, 14-section amendment which is making some substantial changes to the intent of the bill.

Now, it's interesting that the bill itself was brought in, very little debate at the beginning, and then disappeared off the Order Paper for some two or three weeks, and now we were in a big rush to get it passed through second reading earlier in this day, which is now going into its second day, and now we're in a rush to pass it through Committee of the Whole. So I have to question what stakeholders have been consulted pursuant to this amendment and whether they are supporting this.

Certainly the documentation that we've received from a number of different stakeholder groups on this – and without digging too deep in my pile here, I have information from the Edmonton public school board, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. I'm sorry; my French is very poor, but the Conseil scolaire du Sud de l'Alberta – so I'm taking that as the southern Alberta scholarly council or school council – is expressing a number of concerns about Francophone education. Plus we have additional concerns from the Sturgeon school division, Fraser Milner Casgrain. So a number of concerns had been raised, and that's what struck me about what's happening here, that there have been a number of very strongly held opinions and very strongly held concerns around this bill, and I am deeply suspicious of a process which tries to push through an amending bill in the wee hours of the morning.

Another member has joined us. There seems to be great celebration that someone on the government side can manage to get out of bed. I suppose that's something they need to celebrate.

Now, starting from the beginning, we have section 5(b)(2), the change being:

An application may be made to the Minister only if the board of the

district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program under section 16.

And the new part to this is: "as requested by the person or society." The Minister of Human Resources and Employment did manage to get up about half an hour into the debate and give us a bit more background on this bill, which I thank him for, because it was a bit more of an explanation than we got from the person who moved the bill, who managed to put in about 60 seconds of description on this before it was sprung on members of the opposition.

So one takes it that somehow a person or a society requesting that a school establish an alternative program makes a load of difference to this. I haven't noticed specifically, in what I've looked at thus far out of what's coming from the different stakeholder groups, that this was an area that was of particular concern. It may well be of particular concern at this point, because I think it is substantially changing what's been proposed.

Now, we're working back and forth between three documents, which was the original Bill 16, School Amendment Act, 2001, and that itself is amending the original School Act – most of the sections that I see here that are being amended are, in fact, a little bit of a change to what's already in here, and as I said, our critic has already expressed severe concerns that there are substantial changes being made here. So my question is: why the substantial changes? If the bill had been researched, had gone out to consultation with the groups that are concerned with this, and legislation had been developed, why do we end up with such a massive amending document coming forward to us in the last few hours or perhaps the last few days of this spring sitting? Again, I'm looking for: who was requesting this? What has been the feedback loop from the stakeholders involved? What was the great cause for concern that the amendments are attempting to deal with? Those questions have not been answered by the members opposite, and I would like to hear what their reasoning is.

Now, when I look at section B, which is the second of six sections, we have "striking out subsection (1) and substituting the following." What seems to be of particular interest in this is that what's been added is "a superintendent of a school board" rather than "a school board." Well, the superintendent is a paid staff member as compared to a school board, which in fact is an elected board of people. So we have a very different take on how something is being delivered.

The substance of this amending section is that a report shall be made in writing to the registrar regarding a teacher being suspended, resigning, or retiring if this is resulting "from conduct that brings into question the suitability of the teacher to hold a teaching certificate." So I'm taking it, then, that if this is a concern that is significant enough to require that a teacher retire early or be fired or resign, this report is to be made to the registrar. But it is substantially different if you have a paid employee, this superintendent, making this report as compared to an elected body, the school trustees, making that report. It may appear subtle to some, but in one case we have a group of people who are elected and are responsive back to those who elected them. In the second case the superintendent is hired by that elected body and reports only to them.

What we've done, depending on how you look at it, is taken away a layer of accountability or put an extra barrier in the way there. It used to be that the elected body did the report. Now we're saying that the person that reports to the elected body makes the report. So what's allowed there is that if there is influence or direction to be coming from the school board trustees to their employee, the superintendent, in the way the report is written or how the matter is in fact handled – I think that's an important difference.

For example, here in the Legislature we've often said that the chief commissioner of the Human Rights Commission should report

directly to this Legislature as do other legislative officers, like the Chief Electoral Officer or the Privacy Commissioner or the Auditor General, so that information from their reports doesn't pass through any minister. Currently with the Human Rights Commission it very much passes through a minister, and there's an opportunity for the minister to influence or change, add or delete what's in the report. #So it's a very similar situation. You've got the Human Rights Commission, which is supposed to be a somewhat arm's-length group, but with them having to report through the minister to the Legislature, it's a very different line than having an independent Human Rights Commission report directly to the Assembly with the elected official. We have been given no explanation as to why that significant difference has been instituted in this amending document.

7:30

The second part of that, which is really interesting, is partway through where it's talking about the "employment of a teacher if the suspension, termination, resignation or retirement, as the case may be" – now, that's another new phrase that's going in there – "results from conduct that brings into question the suitability of the teacher." Again, that's an interesting little phrase to have in there. What's the significance of it? What is trying to be captured by that, and why? Who requested it, and which groups have had time to react to this? Is this responding to one particular group and the other groups haven't seen it, or have all groups seen it?

Also, under section 15 we have subsection (4)(a) adding "superintendent" again in front of "school board".

No action lies against any of the following in respect of any report made under subsection (1) in good faith when acting or purporting to act under this Act or the regulations.

Oh, my goodness. We're not being very successful in writing legislation in plain English. But that's section (4). Under that we have previously just:

- (a) a school board,
- (b) the operator of a private school or a charter school,
- (c) a person appointed as an official trustee,
- (d) the executive secretary,

et cetera. Now instead of a "school board" we have "superintendent of a school board" inserted there. That's again making the same change in definition and in reporting structure that I was just discussing in 90.1(1). We're under section 15(b), which is in the amending act, which is in fact amending section 90.1 in the School Act, again making a significant change, and we don't have an idea or an understanding why. That may well be perfectly legitimate, but as I pointed out, given a 90-second overview, we don't know why this is coming or what the reaction to it is.

I suppose we'll be able to get on the phone in about half an hour and start phoning back some of these stakeholder groups to find out exactly what their reaction to this is.

Then we have an entire section that is essentially correcting a typo. In the amending act there were significant references to section 31 of Bill 16, which is amending section 223.1. There were references in the amending act that keep referring to "223.34." That's all the way through this section. I think it turns up in (a), (d), and (e). So in those sections, obviously a mistake was made there. Boy. You know, you'd think with all of the resources the government has in these departments and all the amount of time they have – the government totally controls the agenda about when these bills come forward, when the amendments come forward, and that they would make a typo like that shocks me. I guess better proofreaders are needed. So that's correcting what's appearing as 223.34 to 223.33.

I believe that what that's doing is changing the reference from 223.3(4). We've got:

The board of a district or division required by the Minister to do so

must enter into an agreement with the Regional authority respecting any matter the Minister considers necessary, including, but not limited to, dealing with assets and liabilities and the transfer of employees.

So now I think what they're saying is that it applies to:

Members of a Regional authority appointed under subsection (2) hold office until the first organizational meeting of the Regional authority held after the first general election held after the Regional authority is established.

Good heavens, can't they write this in plain English? I think that's what that's supposed to mean. It's not subsection (4) that's being looked at. It's subsection (3), but I'm asking for clarification on that, please, because it makes a significant difference here. One of them is talking about organizational meetings, and the other one is talking about entering into agreements on financial agreements, assets and liabilities, transfer of employees, which is significant, so I'm looking for the explanation there.

Now, you see, my time is getting close to up, and I've just managed to get through not even three of the six sections in 20 minutes. So I'll obviously have to come back to follow up and complete my scrutiny of the other half of these.

In section 33 of the act this is interesting. Who approved of this? What's being suggested here is that

a Regional authority must be composed of at least 3 members and not more than 7 members, at least one of whom must be a public school member.

That last clause has been cut so that it would now read: "a Regional authority must be composed of at least 3 members and not more than 7 members," period. It doesn't say anything about them being a public school member or a private school member or anybody associated with the teaching or the learning profession. It just says "members" without giving us any further definition of who the member is supposed to be representing, and that again gives me cause for concern. I mean, obviously this was being set up in such a way that we would have some representation from the school or some representation from somebody working in that area.

I've run out of time, but I'll be coming back to speak on this more.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning, everyone. It's nice to see that this is what a deal by the government looks like.

AN HON. MEMBER: How are you this morning?

MS CARLSON: I'm just fine. I can't believe that this government who has such a vast majority would care to run roughshod over such a very small opposition and try to drive legislation through this quickly and also to not keep to a deal, which is very interesting, very interesting. Bill 16 was not supposed to come up. We were supposed to be finished when Bill 7 was done.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, deals that are made between House leaders and so on have nothing to do with the chairs, and so we are unable to enforce or uphold or deny any such arrangements.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I recall, negotiations made between House leaders certainly come into the House leaders' agreement and certainly do have relevance when we come to talk in debates at this time in the morning and on issues, but I will stick to amendment A1 in my comments, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for that direction. It is still very amazing to see that a government can be scared by such a small opposition and feels that it must push

legislation through and amendments through in this fashion. So we see before us . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: We're not scared.

MS CARLSON: Well, then, what are you still here for? What are you still here for?

On amendment A1, Mr. Chairman, we see a series of amendments before us, in fact one, two, three pages of amendments on a very significant bill in this Legislature. The problem with seeing these amendments at this late stage of an evening sitting is that there is no opportunity for us to get any feedback from the groups who are keenly interested in what's happening in terms of this legislation. What we see before us is a piece of legislation that has been quite controversial in the community. Once again this government has had no problem with pitting Protestants against Catholics and bringing through legislation . . . [interjections] Well, then, stand up and defend it. Don't just sit there and whine. Stand up and defend it.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if you choose to involve everyone individually in debate, then you get this back. The procedure in the Chamber and in committee is through the chair, so if you could address your remarks to the chair, that may eliminate many of these other extraneous interruptions.

7:40

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. I was provoked. I'm quite happy to keep it clean and honest and on the point, which is that we have a lot of problems with this bill out in the community. This government should know that if they were listening to the feedback they've been getting. We have people who are very upset with the legislation who have . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Speak for yourself.

MS CARLSON: Well, I am speaking for myself, and I am speaking for the feedback that we have heard throughout the province, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry to engage, but I'm being provoked, certainly, and I'm happy to go . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Ignore the provocations, please.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

On this amendment we have got many, many groups who are very upset with the legislation and who have been keenly waiting for the amendments to come forward. When this bill was in second reading, we had people on both sides of the gallery yesterday afternoon come forward to hear what was being said and who were expecting the amendments to come from the minister at any point in time. Exactly what they expected was that they were going to see the amendments, that they were going to have a chance to give some feedback on them before they came to the floor of the Legislature to debate.

But not this government; no. What did they do? We see them roll in here at about 6:15 or 6 o'clock in the morning, and they're going to stay here until they're done. Now, tell me how any of these groups who have interest in these amendments have a chance for any feedback. That is exactly the tactic of a domineering government who doesn't want to listen to any feedback. [interjection] I have a right to say that.

Mr. Chairman, I have a right to make those comments on behalf of the people in Alberta who would like to participate in these amendments and who now will have no chance. By the time they get to work this morning, they're going to see that these amendments have been passed in this Legislature . . . [interjections] Nice to see you're all awake again. Thank you for that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, there's only one person standing and talking recognized at a time. I wonder if we could show the courtesy to allow the member to continue her remarks on amendment A1.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So now we have a situation where these people will get to work this morning, and they will find that they have absolutely no chance to participate in what should have been participatory democracy because this amendment will have been passed. So we're going to get their feedback, and I hope that the members of the Conservative caucus also listen to that feedback when they get it. I don't think they're going to be too happy.

What do we see before us in this package of amendments? Minor changes, Mr. Chairman. Minor changes that don't address the key issues that are still outstanding in this legislation. You know, there was an opportunity with these amendments to correct what were some quite critical flaws in this legislation, and at that point we would have been quite happy to support it. But what we see here are minor changes, mostly technical in detail, that don't go a whole lot of the way to addressing the outstanding issues.

What we see here also, with the introduction of this amendment in the manner it was introduced, is a lack of respect by the Minister of Learning for my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, who he knows is the critic of this particular area. What normally would happen in a situation like this on a controversial bill is that the minister would have the courtesy to contact the critic in the area and discuss the amendments with him. When that happens, Mr. Chairman, we try to be absolutely as accommodating as possible. We'll stand up in the Legislature and congratulate the government on work well done where we agree with them, thank the minister for taking the co-operative effort to get together and thoroughly discuss the intent of the amendments, and then point out the differences we would have with those amendments that we feel don't meet adequately the needs of the legislation.

But not this time, Mr. Chairman. Not in accordance with what had been agreed upon, we see this bill introduced back in at committee. We see the government bring in two and a half pages of amendments that mostly are minor in nature without any explanation, without any discussion or debate, and they're just going to try and ram them through. Of course, they can run several shifts in here to try and wear us down and get through this legislation as fast as possible.

MR. MacDONALD: Debby to the rescue with Tim Horton's muffins.

MS CARLSON: Were they good?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes.

MS CARLSON: Good.

Mr. Chairman, what happens then is that we get a little cranky, too, and we're not quite as eager to pass amendments without a thorough scrutiny. That's what we're going to see here this morning: a thorough scrutiny of every line in amendment A1 as it comes through.

So now I will start with that specific scrutiny. Let's talk about the first section that's being amended with this particular amendment, and that would be section 5(b). If we take a look at it, what it talks about is that section 5(b) is struck out and the following is substituted, (b) by repealing subsection (2) and substituting the following:

An application may be made to the Minister only if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program under section 16 as requested by the person or society.

That's interesting. All it is, it looks like to me, is a beefing up of the wording, Mr. Chairman. Nothing substantive there at all. What we had there before was "the charter school," and we are substituting "an alternative program under section 16."

So there are some words that have been added. The part added is:

An application may be made to the Minister only if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program under section 16 as requested by the person or society.

In essence, what we have here is the addition of who's doing the requesting: an individual person or a society.

What if the representation, Mr. Chairman, is by a group? In terms of this, I know in my constituency we have the Singh Sabha gurdwara, which is a large Sikh gurdwara right on Mill Woods Road, on Gurdwara Road. They have recently done an addition to that gurdwara at the back of the building, for which they got some support from the government, CFEP grants, and I thank them for that. Certainly they're going to be at the government's door again as things progress in terms of where they're going.

What they're wanting to do is establish a charter school there. That charter school will be teaching children in their first language – for most families, that would be Punjabi – and the key part of the school would be religious training in Sikhism. So while they'll certainly meet with all the conditions and requirements of the educational mandate as seen in other systems, what they really want to be able to focus on is carrying on the traditions, the culture, the training, and the language of their native region, which is the Punjab in India, and basically their religion, which is the teachings of the gurus. What they are doing in the process is looking at the kinds of options they have for moving forward, and what they have seen in the past as one of those options is charter schools. So let's see how this particular amendment applies to their particular circumstances, Mr. Chairman.

Now, what it's saying here is: "as requested by the person or society." When they are at a stage where they've got to make the request to the government, what happens? Does a person or the society come? Is this charter school actually going to be run by the society that runs the church, or is it going to be somewhat independent of that and be another kind of organizing body? What kind of an organizing body could that be, Mr. Chairman? They could be an incorporated organization. They could be a partnership that comes together. They don't necessarily have to be, I think, an incorporated society. It certainly wasn't ever my opinion that that would have to be a requirement.

7:50

So they would have to take a look at whether or not they fall within that particular mandate, Mr. Chairman. They could send a person, a representative. Well, I'd be a little concerned about that in terms of whether or not that would meet more overreaching and overriding criteria. If you're just sending one person to make an application to the minister, as is established here, first of all what they have to do is go to the board or the district or the division in which the school is to be established. So what you're saying with this is that one person on behalf of that gurdwara could go first to the

public board, make the application, and potentially be turned down. Can one person properly, then, in fact represent the interests of the group? What are the chances of one person coming before a board like that and actually being given the mandate to pursue a school which would be on behalf of many children?

If I were sitting on that school board, I would look a little apprehensively at a single person coming as a representative of an organization to incorporate a charter school. So if a person comes, then I would think that likely they would be turned down. Then they would go to the separate system and perhaps have the same circumstances occur.

Then they've got to go to the minister. How does the minister establish the criteria for deciding the validity of a single person coming to them for an application for a charter school? What kind of background material does that individual have to bring in order to get the minister's okay in terms of independently establishing a school? That would be a question that I have in that regard.

So what you're forcing people to do is either come as a society or come as an individual, and I'm wondering if in fact this bill is enhanced by that particular aspect of the mandate. It would have been nice to have an opportunity to talk to the minister about this, but unfortunately we weren't given that opportunity, and he doesn't seem to be willing to participate in the debate of the amendment at this stage. It'll be interesting to see what he has to say about that.

Mr. Chairman, has this been discussed? Have any of the pros and cons been debated here in the Legislature or within the minister's office or within outside groups in terms of those organizations who may not wish to be affiliated with one of the existing school boards? Has there been any discussion on this amendment in terms of that? What if an organization clearly only wants to be an independent charter school? Would this amendment A1, section A, section 5(b)(2), address that specifically? There is no provision now for people who don't want to be affiliated with either the public or the separate system for whatever reasons. I can see not wishing to be affiliated with the separate system based on religious grounds, and that certainly fits the criteria of the example that I have in my constituency.

Would they want to have some ties to the public school system? Well, Mr. Chairman, that's a good question. I don't know the answer to that question. If these amendments had come out for discussion and review and debate prior to this morning, I would have had the opportunity to take the amendments to the gurdwara and to call a meeting of those people who are organizing this charter school and ask them what they thought about this. It would have been very beneficial to get the feedback of this organization in terms of where they wanted to go on this issue. You know, they would have appreciated that. I know that anytime I have gone to that organization with questions or concerns, they have very much appreciated the opportunity to be participants in what we call democracy here in this province. They like to be asked their opinion, they like to be asked for feedback, and they particularly like the opportunity to be able to improve legislation that will in some way affect their lives and the lives of their children.

Unfortunately, it's not the case with this particular amendment. I'm going to certainly take the copy of *Hansard* that I have and run it by them, and I apologize in advance if there are any omissions or errors in the descriptions that I have made in terms of what their expectations are or the direction they are taking. I do know that they will be starting the first of their educational services this September. If I remember correctly, there will be kindergarten classes starting in that addition. It's at the back of the gurdwara, and there are certainly entrances through the gurdwara. That's really as much information as I have about what's going to be happening there.

I know that over time they expect to expand the school to a level which encompasses all the grades. I have to applaud their dedication and their thought with regard to what they're doing, Mr. Chairman. They've spent several years now starting to get that school ready and jumping through all the appropriate hoops with the minister of education. Then they're caught off guard a little bit when something like this amendment comes along, when something like this legislation comes along. They have to stop in their tracks, take a look at what they're doing, and evaluate the progress they've made so far with the legislation and with the amendments, amendments that they will have no opportunity to refer to or to have any input on in terms of what happens with this legislation.

They're going to have to adjust. Instead of being participants in this form of democracy, they're going to take a look at this amendment and are going to see that it really does not matter what they think about it because it's already a done deal. So what they're going to have to do then is sit down, call a meeting of those organizers within the gurdwara, and decide how these amendments and these changes are going to affect them. Will it alter the progress they've made so far on this school? I certainly hope not. I would think that if it does, it will only be specifically section 5(b)(2) in part A of the amendment that affects them. I haven't really had a chance to read through the rest of the amendments at this stage, but I'm sure I'll have many more opportunities before the morning is over to do so, and I'll be happy to do that.

In fact, I expect to go through this amendment A1 with a magnifying glass and address every particular word that may apply to constituents' concerns or other concerns that I have heard throughout the province. Fortunately, I got a good night's sleep, so I'm certainly ready to have many discussions in this regard on this particular issue and be able to review them.

So as soon as I get out of here today, I'm going to fax off a copy of this amendment A1 to the gurdwara and ask for their feedback on it and express my concern that I hope it doesn't impede their progress with what they're planning to begin this fall and which they have spent many years planning and organizing for. [Ms Carlson's speaking time expired]

I'll be back.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Nice to see you early in the morning, the first time, I guess, in my tenure here in this Assembly for the last four and a half years. Nice to see you all. Good morning.

Mr. Chairman, it's interesting to be sitting here early in the morning starting debate on a bill when most of those who are going to be impacted by the bill are still asleep. At 6 o'clock, I guess, it started. In my speech yesterday and then during the second reading on the bill I drew the attention of the House to the widespread, broad-based opposition from major stakeholders of our public education system, who are stakeholders in the system, and they have very serious reservations and concerns about this bill. I was arguing yesterday to the House, trying to get the message out to the government and to the minister, that we need to slow down the pace at which the government appears to want to move on this in order to engage in consultations, take seriously the concerns of those stakeholders, and then incorporate perhaps new elements into the bill, make changes to the bill, make amendments to the bill as it presently appears before us, and then proceed.

Public education is one of the most critically important enterprises in our society. To deal with it in such haste, in such a cavalier fashion, I think, is not becoming of any government that sees itself accountable ultimately to the people that it represents.

8:00

It's regrettable that we have come to a stage where we are forced as an Assembly – certainly those of us in the opposition feel absolutely under duress in engaging in discussion on this bill, when, in fact, the people of Alberta, whose interests are at stake in terms of what's in this bill, are sleeping. It says, I think, a great deal. It sends a symbolic message that this legislation is being proceeded with by stealth.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, just so that we could be on the same point, we're dealing with an amendment called A1.

DR. PANNU: I have that in my hand, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I will be certainly paying some attention to it in a few minutes.

The amendment certainly deals with the very – part of the amendment. It's not one amendment. It's obviously five, six amendments bunched together, and that's another reason, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to draw attention to this fact that there is some terribly indecent haste apparent here with which this bill is being pushed through. Six amendments in amendment A1 dealing with six different sections: A, B, C, D, E, and F. Six amendments under one amendment.

That in itself, the procedure that's adopted here by the government, is quite intriguing. It shows a degree of desperation that I haven't seen on the part of the government in this House to get this bill through, to get these so-called amendments debated as one package in such a short time so that those who are concerned about the bill outside of this House, those who have expressed serious concerns, those who are opposed to certain important sections of the bill that are embodied in the so-called amendments or referred to at least in part will not have any opportunity to influence the course of events.

That's not how democracy works. That's a way, in fact, of abandoning democracy. Governments, when they become so entrenched, forget that democratic processes do require that citizens, that stakeholders have an opportunity, are given an opportunity, are afforded an opportunity to speak to the pieces of legislation that they think they have a great deal to say about and that they want changed.

People want to see legislation subject to public hearings in certain circumstances where the legislation is so important that it will impact greatly. This legislation, Mr. Chairman, and these amendments here are about communities, about residents of those communities being able to live together in harmony. It's about young children growing up in those communities not only as former residents of those communities but growing up as friends, growing up as citizens seeing each other's interests, binding them together. That's what public education's role is.

That's why how many schools we have in a community, whether we want all children to go to one school or two or three different schools, is of concern to all citizens. The role of the local communities to be able to make those decisions is exactly the one that's at stake in this bill, the inability of residents of particular communities to determine locally by debating with each other, by sitting together, by consulting with each other what kind of school they want, where they want their school, whether they want their children to go to one school in the community or they want them to be shipped out of the community to some other school that's been designated as appropriate for their use by legislation. I think those are the matters that are entailed in this bill.

Amendment A1 simply doesn't address any of those concerns, and that's why I find it particularly objectionable that we are sitting here at 8 o'clock in the morning. We have been at this bill, I understand, since about quarter past 6 while Albertans, whom we are supposed

to listen to, whose views we are supposed to be receptive to and respectful of, are being ignored, not even being sought, unaware of what's happening with respect to the debate on this bill. We are here engaged in pushing this bill through, and in order to do that, the government has decided to put six different amendments under the amendment here called amendment A1, that's under discussion.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

The changes that are being sought through this amendment A1 are certainly not substantive. They don't change the substance of the bill. They are cosmetic. They are poorly worded. I'll give you just one example. Here we have amendment 5, I would call it, or amendment E as part of amendment A1. The language is quite strange. I don't know exactly what it means to say when the amendment phrases the matter in the following way. It says, "Subject to subsections (2) and (3), a Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights . . ." What are "both minority language educational rights"? The reference here, the language of the drafting is misleading; it's confusing. It will cause more problems than it will solve down the road.

I don't understand why we are rushing through this bill when in fact we haven't even got right the language of the amendments that are before us today. So to be able to seriously discuss and debate the proposed changes in the bill, one has to first be clear what those amendments mean. If the amendments are so poorly drafted that that meaning is in itself in contention, if that in itself is in dispute, then obviously the whole exercise tends to become fruitless.

Mr. Chairman, the contents of amendment A1 will impact lots of players in the field of public education. Let me just mention a few. The Alberta School Boards Association is concerned, has raised serious objections about this bill. This association includes all the school boards in this province. Its president is Lois Byers, and its executive director is David Anderson. I had the opportunity to talk with Mr. Anderson just a few days ago, and they are very concerned about this bill, and this amendment A1 doesn't address their concerns at all.

8:10

Another player is the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, exclusively a Roman Catholic school board. The president is Lois Burke-Gaffney, the executive director Stefan Michniewski. Again, representatives were present there, and they were sympathetic to the concerns that were being raised by their counterparts on the other boards and associations.

The Public School Boards' Association: again, I put on the record yesterday their concerns, a two-page letter in which they detailed the concerns and, based on those concerns, their opposition to this bill in its present form.

The other stakeholders: Alberta Teachers' Association, Catholic Bishops of Alberta, Francophone school regions. There's the Northwest Francophone education region No. 1, the Greater North Central Francophone education region No. 2, the East Central Francophone education region No. 3, and the Greater Southern public Francophone education region No. 4. Again, I read from the letter from region No. 4 representatives yesterday to draw attention to the serious concerns that that group has with respect to the bill, and this amendment, so-called A1 with six different amendments in it, falls, I'm afraid, terribly short of addressing those concerns.

There are a whole number of charter schools in this province, some of them just struggling to stay alive. Again, yesterday, while speaking during second reading of the bill, I made the point: why do

we bother to continue with an experiment which has clearly failed? Should we not, in fact, rather than amending the approval procedures and processes for charter schools, moving them right into the hands of the minister, simply say that this experiment has failed and it's no longer necessary for us to pretend that it's working and therefore simply take out of the School Act any reference to charter schools? We can have alternative programs in public schools. We have those programs; they work. They keep our children together, and they provide choices as needed relative to the specific needs and preferences of parents and their children. So why continue to talk about these schools?

Mr. Chairman, it really is, I think, quite distressing to see a government which claims to be very responsive to public input, which claims that it solicits public input and respects this input and integrates this input into its legislation, a government making those kinds of claims, ignoring clear, vocal, broad-based, widespread opposition from so many of the stakeholders in this province whose interests are really tied to what we are doing here in such a way that they found it necessary to go public, not just lobby the government side or the minister privately, but they have taken the risk of going public to put pressure on the government to stop meddling with a system that's working, to stop changing it in such a hurry, that whatever changes are desirable to be made have yet to be agreed on.

Consensus has to be developed on those changes. Therefore, they're saying that it's premature and it's unnecessary and it's in fact offensive to the norms of democratic ways of establishing and proceeding with legislation.

It is this kind of concern that they have a broader concern about now, the fact that they're not being heard, that they're not being listened to. They're being ignored. They see problems down the line. They see problems particularly in smaller communities and rural areas where this new legislation dealing with the establishment of separate schools will lead to all kinds of potential divisions within communities and could put new physical demands on young children who have to sit in buses and travel, be bused 50 or 100 kilometres away from home just so they could go to a school that now fits the definition of the changes in the legislation, changes that have been made without full consultation with those communities, with the parents. Three persons in one jurisdiction or one little community somewhere could simply cause all this disruption in the lives of individual families and in the lives of communities across this province.

When the stakes are so high, Mr. Chairman, Albertans expect this government to come up with legislation which shows and reflects a consensus, if not unanimity, a broad-based consensus, on what changes need to be made in order to fix the minor problems that have continued to be seen as of some consequence by some members of the minority religious communities in this province. But what's been proposed in the bill doesn't by any stretch begin to address those problems. The amendments that are being proposed here to those sections of the bill, particularly those sections in the bill that deal with the establishment of separate schools, simply are not addressing the issues that are a matter of concern.

Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to speak to the amendments that we've been provided with for Bill 16. I just want it to go on record that it's really kind of unacceptable in terms of democracy to have almost five pages of amendments stuck in at 6 o'clock in the morning for the opposition. They don't get a chance

to see them before then, and if you expect any kind of a reasonable presentation of an analysis of what these mean in the overall context of the bill – that has to be reflected as absolute arrogance on behalf of a government that does that kind of stuff. They could at least have given us these, you know, a couple of hours earlier. They would have obviously known that this is the trick they were going to play on democracy, that they were going to try and bully through these kinds of things. So they should have been able to provide us with these with at least a couple of hours of review on them.

Basically, what we have now are five different significant amendments to a bill that is very controversial, yet when we look over these amendments, not one of them addresses the issues that are being raised by both the public school boards and the Catholic school boards across this province. They want to be able to say that they're reflecting what the interests of the community are and the kind of approach that the community has in the context of how they get a choice to deal with the constitutional authority that allows for the minor religion in a community to have a school system that reflects the appropriate structure, whether it's a separate school board or a public school board.

8:20

When we end up now looking at how this is going to work in the context of bringing forward these kinds of changes, what we see is basically a situation where the amendments that we see here now in the five sections don't really address the concerns that were being provided to us from the participants in the community, whether it be the actual members of the boards or individuals from school councils, individual parents, or even individuals who have historically had an interest in the appropriate structure and administrative process for education in Alberta.

When we looked at this, we wanted to make sure that within the separate school boards there was some degree of stability created, and those separate school boards have basically created a situation where what they wanted was that stability for the existing boards even though new boards would be able to come in and deal with the choice that they have in terms of offering education to their children under the chosen administrative structure. We would expect some of those kinds of concerns to be reflected in these amendments and they aren't. There were a lot of concerns, and they wanted to be able to have time to explain this to their members, to their communities so that there would be appropriate input given to the government as they dealt with these kinds of changes. What we see now is basically the structure that's going to be put in place not reflecting what either the public school boards or the separate school boards in this province have been asking about Bill 16, and we have to look at it.

Mr. Chairman, as we go through and look more specifically at some of these amendments, we want to look at them in the context of how they improve, or not, the operation of the bill and the choice that's there for Albertans in the administration of their school system. What we're basically seeing here is that the choices even further erode the flexibility that exists under the current system.

When we look at amendment E, they're talking about the Franco-phone schools. The situation that we see here is that the regional authority under which they operate has to designate every school as either a public or a separate school. This is basically telling the regional authority that they have to be making choices for the people rather than allowing the individuals to do it on their own basis, and you would think that the rest of the act is set up so that members of the community have the authority to designate within their own choice, their own wishes, their own beliefs about the structure and the form of education, that they're the ones who get to set up what's going on and how it comes together. So I think that we're looking

here at a situation where really very little is happening that will give us any kind of confidence that these amendments are strengthening Bill 16.

If we want to look at what happens in the communities, essentially the parents who are making the choices in terms of how their children are going to be educated, the structure under which they'll be educated, still don't have the ability to deal with it in the context of their community and the community's wishes.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

When we look at how the former process and this process came about, we look at the public school systems that are out there now, and basically they cover all of rural Alberta. The separate school boards are not yet all inclusive of the province. The school boards that have come along and talked to me have said that what they want to do is have the option so that communities can have a say and that what, in effect, we're doing is creating a situation here where before we can have a separate school board established in a community, then we have to have consultation with the public system. I guess that's kind of implying that the new boards won't have the same freedom to establish and provide education of choice to their children the way Albertans had prior to Bill 16. So I think what we're looking at here is essentially a bill that will erode the opportunity for the free choice that has been part of the premise or part of the basic aspect of our education system and the parental right to have their children educated in the school structure that they choose.

If we look at the way that this might impact on some of the rural communities, we end up with a new separate school being formed, and what we're going to have is some of the children that are currently attending public schools in what are small communities – then what we've got is basically a further reduction of the size of the school, a further slippage of that school's utilization characteristics. Probably this could result in the closure of some of these rural schools if they end up having to split the children into two different school facilities and two different school administrations.

What we want to do, then, is look at what that means in terms of the cost of education. It further adds to the transportation costs, because what you'll have are children designated for the separate school board now being transported to a school facility that will provide them with their education under the structure of the separate school board. That will leave a school in the public system that is potentially going to be closed because of the utilization factor, and then we'll end up transporting those children. I guess this is the kind of thing that we have to look at in terms of what some of these decisions mean in the context of the overall operation and structure of our education system.

The thing that we see here also, as I understand it and as it's been presented to me by the separate school boards and I guess with agreement of the public – the original 4 by 4 concept is still there. It still does provide, in essence, a double standard for the process in the sense that what you end up with are the individuals who are potentially part of a separate school board – if they move and choose to have their children stay with the public system, they can then make a choice and further weaken the opportunity for a separate school board to have the appropriate control over the funding of the residents and the children that are associated with their faith in the context of the establishment of that kind of offer in terms of the education system.

Mr. Chairman, as I look at the rest of these amendments, we basically see that they don't do much in terms of changing some of the aspects of the bill, but also in other areas we see that they do basically further add to the complexity of the kind of approach that

has to be taken. The thing that we have to look at here is whether or not the bill reflects, I guess, the current thinking, the current trend, the current wishes of a lot of people in Alberta, where they basically recognize that there has to be the choice between the public and the separate schools. There needs to be the ability of parents to have their children attend whichever kind of structure of school that they believe will best suit the educational needs of their children.

8:30

We also want to look at it in the context of what in effect is the issue of how we go about creating some degree of buy-in from the participants that are there as we deal with how they come about in terms of the choice. What we're looking at here is essentially the process that might come up in the context of Bill 16 and dealing with how it works. Basically, we're now going to have a set of separate school regions or separate school areas that have the jurisdictional function of what would be the equivalent of a separate school board in today's format. What we want to do is look at it from the perspective of how that gets administered, and when you allow for a region to be created that overrides or encompasses an existing separate school board, what you're going to have is, effectively, the parents having to make choices: do they want them to go to the current school board, or do they want them to go to a school region? How do they make sure that their children have that choice?

The issue that we have to look at there, then, is how these kinds of inconsistencies can be worked out. I don't see anything in these amendments that deals with that kind of concern that has been raised by some of the members out there in the community. This is I guess the focus that a lot of them have expressed in the context of how they wanted to approach that in terms of making sure that as this bill went through, they had a chance to inform their members and get feedback from them. I guess if there was one thing that was common from all of the people that I talked to or that approached me over the last couple of weeks about Bill 16, it was that what they would like to see is a chance to have this bill held over till fall so that they could have a chance to get input to the government and express their concerns.

A lot of them felt that their major organizations were effectively trying to negotiate in too much of a hurry without consulting back with the local boards. What they would have appreciated would have been more of a chance to have some input and to go out and consult with their members, consult with the participants, and come back and decide whether or not they truly wanted to support it in this format or whether they wanted to work to suggest some real changes.

I guess as we go through and deal with the idea, what we're going to look at here in the section D amendments is the creation of the regional authorities that are talked about here. This is going to be some mix of public and separate school members. The interesting part here is that we're falling into the same trap that we fell into with the regional health authorities in the sense that we give the minister the option to appoint the first members of a regional authority. I don't see why. If we're going to go through the process of striking a regional authority for education, then why not give the members within that regional authority the chance, as part of that process, to develop and hold their elections rather than have the minister come in and say, "Gee, we're going to tell you who you can have on your board"?

In many cases what you'll see is that the people who are going to be appointed to the board are the ones who approached the minister to establish the regional authority. What we'll then have is a situation where in essence the input from the other members who will be affected by that regional authority will not necessarily have a chance to be participating in the founding structure because this

will be done by the people who originally approached the government to create that authority.

Mr. Chairman, I think we recognize that this is within the context of the Francophone discussion. What we need to do is look at it in the context of the traditional school board or school authority. Now we're dealing with it in the context of the Francophone authority, and we have to make sure that those individuals have the same degree of choice and the same degree of opportunity as what is presented to Albertans that want to have their education system administration reflected through the normal either separate or public school authorizations.

The other interesting aspects that we don't see in some of the changes here in these amendments include some of the questions that came up about how the relationship was going to be maintained between charter schools and the public school system. I had a couple of individuals approach me about the conditions in here that will basically require charter schools to initially apply through the local school boards to be an alternative program. What we end up with is the option, then, that some of them wanted to be able to apply directly to the minister. So these kinds of concerns were raised. I think we have to make sure that these kinds of issues that are being raised by Albertans get a chance to be heard and do in essence then become part of the debate on how we're going to structure or put together the aspects of how our education system will best meet the needs of individuals and best meet the needs of the structural changes that we're proposing in the amendments to the amendment bill of the School Act.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

I guess as we look through it in the context of the other aspects that come up, section E of the amendments deals again with the Francophone area. What I read this to mean is that what we're going to see is that the Francophone and the public regional and separate regional boards have to deal with some kind of joint responsibility and issues that work out for them.

Thank you. I'll continue later.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a distinct responsibility and of grave importance that I rise today to speak to the amendments to Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, 2001.

As I look forward to speaking to the chair and through the chair to all members of the Assembly, I see that the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is wearing her Graham tartan, I believe. What a fitting tartan, because the Scots were long proud of their tartans, and the red tartans were worn by the hunters. That is exactly what we're doing today: we're hunting for good legislation for our school boards. We certainly are hoping that all members of this Assembly do join in this debate, because it is critical to the future direction of education in this province.

In speaking to amendment A1, I certainly want to commend those four members of Her Majesty's Official Opposition who spent the majority of the night here as well as the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, who also spent the night here, and spoke so proudly to keep this major issue progressing and at the front of our deliberations today.

8:40

Now, then, as other members have said, amendment A1 was a

surprise amendment. When we have such a major amendment, members of this Assembly generally are afforded the opportunity to look at these amendments. They are afforded the opportunity to take amendments to the stakeholders. They are afforded the opportunity to bring different views and different ideas for consideration by members of this House. In all of this whole process this certainly hasn't taken place with members of this Assembly. I think that the public at large in this province are being cheated in the fact that they are not going to get the best possible legislation that they could.

As well, Mr. Chairman, I look here and I see that there are some 14 changes covered under amendment A1. It covers six different sections of the bill, and it really is a massive set of amendments which have come forward and have come forward very, very quickly. When I look at government bills that are proposed here in this spring session – and there seems to be such a huge, huge push on to get out of this House – I see that of the first 16 bills leading up to the School Amendment Act, 2001, 11 are amendment acts. If we know that we are making changes, changes in bills and changes that this particular amendment A1 covers, if we are looking at massive changes through so many bills, of which this is one, then what is the haste? Why are we so desperate to push this through without giving all stakeholders, without giving the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta school trustees the opportunity to look at these changes and to comment?

The number of us that attended the informative session of the Alberta School Boards Association, zones 2 and 3, last Thursday certainly heard from those people that they do not agree with Bill 16. They certainly haven't had the opportunity to see amendment A1. Therefore, what I'm having difficulty determining right now is why we've taken this approach of damn the torpedoes, it's full speed ahead, and we're going to ram this through no matter what.

Now, as well, Mr. Chairman, I noticed with a great deal of interest, when we were discussing the budget and line items that saw the teachers set at a 6 percent raise over the next two years, at 4 percent and 2 percent, how proud the Premier was to stand up in this Assembly and note how many educators were in his caucus. Yet we have not heard one person, not one of those educators speak to these amendments and the impact it's going to have on education. We had a provincial election a few months ago. We had people that said: "Oh, well, I can be your voice. Even though I'm a backbencher on the government side, I'll be your voice. I can contribute more." Well, where is the contribution?

I look forward to the Minister of Learning arriving and to hearing his comments on this particular bill and this particular amendment. I think it is absolutely critical, since he is the one responsible for overseeing education in this province, that he as well provide his comments, not only to make comments but to defend these massive changes, to defend the fact that members of this Assembly were not provided these amendments earlier and that all the stakeholders throughout this province were not afforded the opportunity to witness these amendments, to study them, and to make suggestions.

In dealing with this amendment, Mr. Chairman, I was very happy to see that people throughout this province had responded, had taken the time to write some very good letters to a number of members. I see a letter here to the Member for West Yellowhead from the Grande Yellowhead regional division that certainly outlined their problems with this bill. I saw a letter to the hon. Member for Barrhead-Westlock constituency, and this was written by the Pembina Hills regional division No. 7. I see a letter in here to the hon. Member for Leduc from the Black Gold regional schools. I see here a letter to the Minister of Learning from Aspen View schools. I see letters in here to the MLA for Redwater, again with concerns about this bill. They also wrote to the hon. member for Lac La

Biche-St. Paul, for Athabasca-Wabasca. I see a letter here to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose from the Wetaskiwin regional public schools. This list continues to go on and on.

All of these, Mr. Chairman, are outlining grave concerns with Bill 16, yet these concerns, as far as I can see, have not been addressed in any of these amendments under amendment A1. Why have people in this province been shut out of this process? This expediency certainly doesn't seem to serve democracy well, particularly when we think of this Assembly and what it affords each and every member. It affords us the opportunity of free speech. It affords us the opportunity to get on our feet and make our views known. It affords us even more the opportunity to speak for the people of this great province. This type of expediency, this type of democracy is not what we were elected for.

So I think this is a very symbolic message to the people of Alberta. It is a strong message as well. It is a message that we in this House are not prepared to listen to the people of Alberta, and because of that we can say that this legislation is not going to be as strong and as good as it could be. It would not surprise me at all, Mr. Chairman, for us to be back in here with other amendments, again because we have rushed through and we have not done the job that we were given the responsibility to do.

Now, then, as I mentioned earlier and as I mentioned in debate yesterday, many members of this Assembly had the opportunity to attend a function just down the hill here at the Royal Glenora Club with the Alberta School Boards Association, zones 2 and 3. I can honestly say that in all the functions I've attended in the past four and a half years, I have never had concern about any piece of legislation exhibited to me to the same extent the people in that room did. These were people that were involved in both public and Catholic education. These people did have grave concerns.

8:50

It's amazing to me, Mr. Chairman. I was at a forum last fall. It was an educational forum on the establishment of a new high school very close to the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry, one that would have served a number of my constituents very well. I heard a prospective candidate that wanted to represent people in this House express his concerns about how he would make a difference if he were elected. So I look forward to that person making comments in this House so he can reinforce and support what he said at that meeting. Certainly with his grave concerns on education I would think that he would certainly be more than willing to take the opportunity to get on his feet and comment about amendment A1.

As well, when I look at amendment A1, what we have here is a total disregard for the local governments that we have elected to take care of our schools, our local school boards. It continues to be a disregard, in my estimation, of the respect that some of us hold for public education. There are substantial changes here in the way education will be administered in this province by, first of all, the bill, the School Amendment Act, 2001, and more specifically by amendment A1 to Bill 16.

Again, with so many amendments, Mr. Chairman, it certainly indicates that we are drafting legislation which has not had adequate consultation. We are drafting legislation which has been rushed. We are drafting legislation here that is not complete and does not meet the needs of Albertans. So why are we here in an all-night session introducing amendment A1, to the best of my knowledge, at 6 a.m.?

I thought the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona made some excellent points when he said: here we are debating amendment A1, which is going to affect all children in this province and their education, yet the rest of the province is asleep. Why are they not

afforded the opportunity to look at this legislation? Why are they not afforded the opportunity to speak and put forth their recommendations to amendment A1? We know they are interested. This group of letters that I referred to earlier from all across this great province urge the government not to speed through this, to seek input.

In drafting these amendments I think we are making a huge mistake. We are doing a disservice to Albertans when we do not afford them the opportunity to scrutinize the amendments, particularly when we look at the amendment to section 5(b), where we certainly have the opportunity to deal with grammatical errors that could drastically change the intent. Yet we have not put the brakes on. We have not said, "Well, are there mistakes here?" Should, in fact, that comma be placed after – and I'm looking at section 5(b), subsection (2) – "An application may be made to the Minister only . . ."

Now, then, in hearing the chairman rule previously, he said that the way it is written is correct. So what does this mean? Is the minister the only one that can deal with an application now? Or do we go on and say: an application made to the minister

only if the board of the district or division in which the school is to be established refuses to establish an alternative program under section 16 as requested by the person or society.

So we have ambiguity here and no clear direction. Therefore, I think this is one of the sections, Mr. Chairman, that we would be well-advised at this point to stop debate on to allow for further clarification. Of course, that would also give the stakeholders, the people that are affected by open and responsible government, the opportunity to speak to this amendment.

Now, then, as well, Mr. Chairman, I see that under these amendments – and it was mentioned earlier by one of the speakers – separate school boards presently do not go across this province. When we look at the reason, there is a very good reason. The major reason that we do not have separate school boards across this province is population.

At the reception last Thursday it was very evident that Catholic members who spoke to me were quite concerned about the impact of this legislation on small communities and the long-lasting effects that it would have if in fact separate schools were established where their population is very, very small.

Now, as well, Catholic education in this province also has some very serious concerns when we start dealing with blended jurisdictions. What these amendments will do is remove control over Catholic education in blended boards across this province, and this certainly is not in keeping with what is presently in the act and the powers that have been given to Catholic boards in this province.

When we look at amendment A1, the changes that it will make, it also eliminates the choice for electors. When this proposed legislation was sent out to these particular boards, the choice for the electors was only for newly formed divisions, yet I see that with amendment A1 this provision will be removed and it will be for all divisions in the province.

So, Mr. Chairman, as my time winds down here for comments on amendment A1 to Bill 16, I would like to urge all members of this Assembly to stop, to allow all Albertans to have an opportunity to speak to these amendments. Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to speak to the amendment A1, A through F, and to urge everybody here to hasten our consideration of these amendments. I'd like specifically to address some of them in particular: section A,

subsection (2). There has been some discussion this morning on the grammatical correctness of section (b)(2), and I'd like everybody to go back and remember what happened when you took grammar in grade school. Quite frankly, "only if" is a recognized conjunction, and "only" here is not used as an adverb. So it is a grammatically correct sentence.

I would like everyone to recognize the fact, too, that the substance of this amendment speaks to the fact that we are looking for co-operation and for consideration among the parties involved, and if they are not able to arrive at it, then at that point the minister would assist them in their decision. So it is a very wise and judicious amendment that is being proposed here.

Section B speaks to the duty to report. I have spoken to a number of people in my constituency, and section 90.1(1) does make reference to some action of duty to report. When I spoke to the people in my constituency, they said: surely to goodness this is already in the School Act; provision for this kind of action and, in fact, red-flagging this issue is there. I told them it wasn't, and they said: well, thank goodness, then, that this proposal is to be put into it.

9:00

I'd like to make reference, then, to section D: 33(a),(b),and (c). They again speak to the proper proportional representation that would be there on the regional authority so that there could be harmonious and direct resolution to issues that would be all-encompassing for that area. So definitely there is attention being paid in these amendments to what must be the detail of how these boards would function.

Section E: 223.35(1), (2), 3(a) and (b) all make reference to the responsibility and the authority of the respective regional authorities to make sure that the respective groups mentioned in our Constitution and the rights of the minority are respected. So I take great umbrage at the fact that someone earlier this morning made reference to the fact that we were pitting Catholics against Protestants or public against separate. Quite frankly, this is in recognition of the rights and privileges that are inherent in the Constitution with respect to separate and public and also, I would add, further in the act with respect to the Francophone in section 23 of the Charter.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to urge everyone here to look at the wisdom of these amendments, to stop making reference to what might happen under the worst scenario, because quite frankly these amendments are put here so that the wrong things will not happen and the right course of action and procedure will take place. They are good, they are appropriate, and I would ask everyone in this Assembly to support them.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was pleased to listen to the previous speaker and the comments that were made. The fact that the amendments don't address the key issues in the ongoing debate, I think, has not been properly noted by that member.

I was remiss the last time I spoke in looking at section 33 under the amendment D on page 2 of the amendments. It talks about the representation on a regional authority and the proportions of that representation and then goes on in section (2.2) to indicate that "a Regional authority must have at least one public school member and . . . one separate school member." As I went through my list of things that weren't there and were expected by the Alberta Catholic

School Trustees' Association, I was remiss in indicating that this in fact was an amendment they had suggested, and the wording is almost the wording that was provided by the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association. That was my expectation, Mr. Chairman, that we would see more of the proposals put forward by the three associations and that that would be reflected in the amendments before us. We could look at an amendment and say, yes, that was put forward by the Public School Boards' Association or the Alberta School Boards Association and we can see the reason for it being there. That, I guess, is the failing we see, or at least I see, in the process we're involved in in the consideration of these amendments.

I think underlying the amendments was a set of proposals from the Public School Boards' Association. They set forward a set of principles which I thought would've made it easy for the government to draft these amendments. They had, as I said, a set of principles, and there were six of those principles. One of the very first was that they did not support any legislation that promoted the separation of students one from another or which promoted the fragmentation of community interests. If you look at the provisions of the amendments and of the bill itself, that fragmentation is actually promoted, and I'm sure the Public School Boards' Association had some suggestions as to how that might have been relieved in the legislation.

A second principle they had was that both potential minorities, Protestants and Roman Catholics, be treated evenhandedly, and that would seem to be a reasonable principle to work on. Again, Mr. Chairman, as we look at the amendments in A1 and the bill itself, I think that's not a principle that's being adhered to by the drafters of this legislation.

In the provisions we have, another principle they thought was important was that the minority faith have the opportunity to say no to a separate education for their children. Again, I'm sure there were amendments they would bring forward for consideration that would have addressed that principle. Mr. Chairman, as with the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, I didn't put them forward as amendments that had to be supported, but I put them forward as examples that have come from highly interested organizations and suggestions that had been ignored.

A further principle that the Public School Boards' Association thought was important was that decisions about education and minority faith should be made by people living in those communities and not in communities remote from them. They gave as an example Jasper, and they raised the question: why is it better to have the decision about separate school education in Jasper made by separate school trustees who live 50 or 250 miles away rather than the residents of Jasper itself? So that was a further principle they had put forth as being one they would like considered as adjustments to Bill 16 were undertaken.

One of the further principles is that any process in place should be fairly simple, that we shouldn't make the whole process of forming school divisions and of dealing with minority rights a complicated and convoluted process. I think they would maintain that that is still the case with Bill 16 and that the amendments we have before us do little to alleviate that.

9:10

The last principle they had drawn to the government's attention as being an important principle to follow was that any process that is put in place should reduce conflict. I think this is a matter of disagreement, and I think the government would maintain that by putting an alternative into the formation of four-by-fours, they have in fact reduced conflict in a community. The Public School Boards' Association for their part would argue that conflict is going to be

increased as a result of Bill 16 and the amendments to it.

So unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, we don't have the specific amendments from the Public School Boards' Association or the Alberta School Boards Association, should they have them. The Catholic school trustees were quicker off the mark and did have their amendments in, but I think it's unfortunate that the timing is such that all those amendments weren't gathered and considered and made part of the amendments we now find ourselves considering in A1.

As I indicated before, the process has been from the outset one that sought to bring groups together to resolve differences. Unfortunately, that effort broke down with one of the partners near the end of the process, and all three of the associations weren't able to endorse a common set of changes, but there was a feeling among those groups that an effort should be made to resolve differences. I think this was an opportunity lost when the government failed to wait for all three associations should they have wished to provide suggestions in terms of how Bill 16 could better meet the needs of children and citizens in this province.

My fear is that the amendments, as they exist now, are going to cause more controversy. Hopefully not, but having ignored the fundamental beliefs, seemingly, of the Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Public School Boards' Association, it would seem to me that conflict is a real possibility. We've all heard from – and in fact government members have tabled in this Legislature letters that indicate their unhappiness with the provisions of Bill 16 and, particularly, their unhappiness with the creation of divisional boards that have the potential of changing quite dramatically their communities and the kind of education their youngsters receive. Instead of being a goal that we finally reached in the long-standing difficulties with the provision of minority education, this seems now to have just become one more mark along the road and again leaves both sides unhappy with the legislation they're going to have to work within.

I think that concludes my comments, Mr. Chairman, and I again would like to express my disappointment that the efforts that had been made by so many in the associations and school boards across the province were seemingly ignored in the formation of these amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. When I spoke earlier – it must have been about 7 a.m. – I commented at the end of my remarks that there was far too much and I would have to return, and I have.

This is a right shemozzle, this is. It's no wonder it had to be brought in at 5:30 in the morning, hoping that no one would notice or be awake, but wrong, wrong indeed. We have the Magnificent Seven and a replacement Lone Ranger to indeed speak for the people . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: On the bill.

MS BLAKEMAN: . . . which is what I'm going to do here, on the amendment. Heavens, no. We're to speak to the amendment here.

What's interesting to me is that now that we've been able to pull together the various bits of information we have on this, I hear the Member for St. Albert saying: support this with haste. That always makes me wonder. What's the haste? I guess that has to do with bringing this in at 5:30 in the morning.

MS CARLSON: What are they afraid of that they've got to do it with such haste?

MS BLAKEMAN: I don't know what they're afraid of that they have to do it with such haste. Boy, they're in a hurry for it. I guess they're hoping before the switchboards open at the school boards and they find out what has happened here. [interjection] Oh, I think . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I'm sure a conversation can be held at some time out in the lounge, but right now we're in debate, and if only one member would debate at a time. Edmonton-Centre has the floor.

MS BLAKEMAN: This is not a conversation; I'm translating. But thank you for that reminder. It's instant translation.

The issue here is doing the right thing. I look at a stack of letters that have been mentioned previously, some indeed addressed to the Member for St. Albert, from various regional school divisions going: please don't do this; we object so much that we're asking you to please table this letter in the Assembly to prove that we don't want you to do this. They're asking for one set of things. I'm looking at what the Francophone schools have expressed as concerns, and they're asking for some different things here. Then I'm going back and looking at some notes from the public schools, and they're asking for different things again. So we have a right shemozzle here.

The amendment, three pages long I might add, 14 different sections that are being amended here, had to be snuck in at 5:30 in the morning, giving our critic a grand total of between 60 and 90 seconds to review this before he had to speak to it. Not the actions of honour, I would say.

When I look at the issues that the Francophone regional authorities have brought up – this came to mind when I was reading through the three-page amending document, and it's amending sections 33 and 34, which of course is what I'm speaking to specifically, Mr. Chairman. This is where we're talking about regional authorities. What they had been concerned about with the regional authorities – we're talking specifically minority language rights here with the Francophone regional authorities.

I'll just stop and point out that the Francophone regional authorities include the following. The Northwest Francophone education region No. 1; St. Isidore has 268 pupils. The Greater North Central Francophone education region No. 2; Edmonton, with 1,426 pupils. The East Central Francophone education region No. 3, in St. Paul, with 476 pupils. The Greater Southern Public Francophone education region No. 4, at Calgary, with 223. The Greater Southern Separate Catholic Francophone education region No. 4 – I wonder if that isn't a typo for No. 5 – in Calgary with 691 pupils. So it's the strong preference of the Alberta bishops that there were no blended authorities for the three northern Alberta Francophone regional authorities.

9:20

Now, I am not seeing that reflected in what's being put forward under sections 33 and 34. The board of directors had noted that even if the provincial government rejected the bishops' proposal for no blended authorities, it would have been in the alternative appropriate for Bill 16 to reflect the newer model of blended authority recommended by the Ducharme committee, which met between the 4th of April and the 11th of April of this year. I agree it's disappointing that the amendments negotiated with the Ducharme committee between April 4 and April 11 have not been reflected in Bill 16 or in fact in this amendment. If you scrutinize this amendment to

section 33 and section 34, we're not getting that at all. We don't seem to be getting anything from the Ducharme committee, and I'm assuming that that's reflecting the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. That doesn't seem to be in here either, but I can be corrected. I hear the Member for St. Albert making comments, so I'm sure she'll be up and on the record again.

MS CARLSON: She could be recruited to our side if she'll get up a few more times.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, that's true.

Now it's the choice of separate school electors in new expansion areas to support either the new Catholic separate board or an existing public board. So the board of directors were looking for and supporting amendments proposed in Bill 16 which allowed the creation of separate school regions and the expansion of separate school districts to fill entire separate school regions, either by agreement with public school boards or by a process that's already in the School Act. I'm not seeing that in these amendments either. So how did this group get consulted? How were their strongly stated preferences and the issues that they definitely did not want included – how do I find these reflected in these amendments showing up under section 33 and section 34?

I mean, what we are getting out of that is the issue I raised previously about cutting out that "a Regional authority must be composed of at least 3 members and not more than 7," and that used to include a public school member. Now we've got

the number of public school members of a Regional authority must . . . be in the same proportion to the total number of members of the Regional authority as the total number of public school electors in the Region is to the combined total number of public school electors and separate school electors in the Region.

Man, I love this stuff. Somebody wrote this one very late at night. Perhaps they wrote it very early this morning, which would account for the language used in this.

Again, that's not reflecting the issues that have been brought forward. We're looking at: "A Regional authority must have at least one public school member and at least one separate school member." Well, that's very equal of them, but again I'm not seeing that reflected in what anybody had been talking about.

"The Minister may appoint the first members of a Regional authority." Now, that's obviously to get a grand kickoff here and make sure that the government has control over the people and chooses the people they want to fulfill their wishes.

Then we move into section 34, which is amending Bill 16, which amends the School Act. Just so everybody is tracking here, we've got a triple layer thing happening. You know, specifically what we've got are amendments that look like they were possibly drafted in the wee hours, brought in at 5:30 in the morning with no chance for the opposition to really have a look at them or consult with anyone, seeing as no one was up at that time. These amendments are amending Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, which in turn amends the actual School Act. That's how you're getting the triple layer here.

I'm going back and looking at section 34: "A Regional authority must designate each school either as a public school or as a separate school." Well, certainly when I started with this with the notes from the Francophone regional authorities, they wanted blended authorities rejected, or if they had to have the blended authority, the newer model. What we've got here is: "designate each school either as a public school or as a separate school." I look at "separate school members of a Regional authority are a corporation under the name of" blank, and then you fill in the blank. "The Separate School

Members of the Regional authority of' blank, and then you fill in the blank, "Francophone Education Region No." blank, and you fill it in again there.

Then

subject to subsections (2) and (3) [above], a Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools guaranteed under the Constitution of Canada are protected in the Region.

Hang on a second here. We've got minority language rights, minority language education rights, and languages and privileges with respect to separate schools. This is an interesting dilemma here. Is there an assumption that a minority language right is French? What happens if you've got a school area where a minority language is in fact not French or where the minority school is not a separate school? Do they get the same choices that are being laid out? That's not how this is reading. The choices only go when there's an assumption that the minority language is French and the minority school division is separate. So in those areas that have either/or or a combination – a minority language that is English, for example, or a minority school district which is a public school – those people are not granted the choices that are being put forward elsewhere, if I'm reading this properly.

Well, you know, I'd hoped that members opposite would get up and clarify, but I think I've stopped hoping for that. It just doesn't happen.

Okay. So continuing on, we've got that

separate school members of a Regional authority have the responsibility and authority to ensure that the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools . . . are protected.

Oh, here we go. Here's the blended stuff. This is going backwards here. Section 34(3):

If a Public Regional authority and a Separate Regional authority are established under section 223.31 or continued under section 223.32,

- (a) the Public Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that minority language educational rights guaranteed under the Constitution . . . are protected in the Region, and
- (b) the Separate Regional authority has the responsibility and authority to ensure that both minority language educational rights and the rights and privileges with respect to separate schools guaranteed under the Constitution . . . are protected.

This isn't doing what was asked, so what was the additional consultation that took place with the Francophone schooling group? This is not what they were asking for.

Now, I'll admit that this is my 13th and a half hour in the Assembly and I may not be tracking this with quite the usual sharpness I have, but this is not reflecting what's been asked for. In fact, the Francophone groups are noting that Bill 16 went well beyond the granting of choice to separate school electors in the expansion areas. First, it granted choice to all separate school electors. Secondly, it required that those wanting to support the separate school board be required to give notice to the municipality to that effect.

Well, from a constitutional perspective, legal counsel advised that under the provisions of chapter 29 of the North-West Territories Ordinances, which is now under the Alberta Act, whenever a separate school district is formed or expanded by use of constitutionally mandated four-by-four expansion provisions, all persons of the same faith as those who establish the district, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, are required to be residents of the new separate school district.

I think what's happened is that's no longer there. In fact, I think this is going to cause a real problem in rural areas. If this is opened up, we'll have Catholic students that were attending a public school

that could now be looking for their own school to be set up, which is going to draw students away from the already small public schools. You're going to have a bunch of one-room schools here with six kids in them. I thought the government was moving away from that, so I don't understand why these provisions have been brought in.

9:30

Now, I go back and look at what was brought forward with grave concern from the public school board. They point out that the amendments assume that the only faith minority entitled to separate school education is Catholic, where Catholics are the minority. This is the point I was making earlier. Indeed, there are communities in Alberta where Protestants are the minority compared to Catholics, and the amendments make no provision for this reality. Well, there you go. That's what I was talking about. These amendments, in effect, discriminate against the Protestant minority, and they also assume that local members of the minority faith invariably want separate school education. So there's no provision for these people to say no to separate school education.

There's a transfer of control of this issue from local electors to politicians who do not even live in the affected community. There's a lot in the letters that have come with concern around that issue, that decision-making is moved from local electors to politicians who could be miles away. Again there's schizophrenia, a disconnect in choices that this government makes. You know, it's supposed to be about flexibility and empowering on a local level, and then we see some of what is being talked about here being put into place that works against it. It works against citizen control. It works against local control. I really am coming to believe that this government is all about centralizing control and having absolute authority over things but dispensing the responsibility for providing service, whether it's to a regional health authority or a children's authority or in this case now these new kinds of school divisions. But it really is about the cabinet sitting behind closed doors with all the threads in their hands pulling and tweaking, I suppose, at the expectation that somewhere out there school boards and interested, committed parents and people affiliated with the school system are going to dance like puppets.

You know, as the members like to point out, they had lots of people vote for them, but I'm also conscious of the fact that 70 percent of the people didn't vote – I mean, half the people didn't vote that were eligible to vote. You can halve that 60 percent that the government did get, and that comes down to 30 percent, and that tells me that 70 percent were not supportive of what's going on here or in truth we don't know. We just know they didn't vote for them. Well, who knows? We'll see in the next election if people wake up and care as to what kinds of things are being put through here. They are obviously concerned about fragmentation, and I can certainly see that. We don't have local autonomy that somehow rolls up into a larger coalition or a matrix structure. We do have fragmentation that all seems to be controlled by the central Wizard of Oz. It is Oz-like; isn't it? It's not quite Emerald City, but certainly everybody's wearing funny-colored glasses.

Now, the provision of separate school education within the Francophone governance model. This is again coming from the public.

Oh, I'm going to run out of time right away. I may have to come back on this again, because I certainly haven't managed to get through the issues that I wanted to raise. I see that my time is up.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to speak on amendment A1. This amendment is to Bill 16. Bill 16 is about our public education system, K to 12.

You know, Mr. Chairman, I've kind of been reflecting on this. This bill came before this House early this morning, in the dark of the night, and I asked myself: is this a way of keeping people in the dark? Is this what this government is doing?

It also kind of reminds me of all kinds of historical events. We seem to be making history in this Legislature today by continuing this debate, starting debate on a bill as important as Bill 16 in the way we have, as I said, in the dark of the night, in the middle of the night, so that Albertans don't get an opportunity to watch what we're doing, to oversee and monitor how we operate in this Legislature, and such interesting symbolism of darkness, keeping people in the dark about your real intentions about the debate that's so vital to their interests.

I tried to think of some metaphors to understand why this is happening, you know, what's going on, and Pearl Harbor comes to mind. It's a legislative Pearl Harbor. That's the only way I can encapsulate my feelings about what's going on. We are under attack; Albertans are under attack.

So this is one way, I guess, of remembering this night, this morning, today, Bill 16, and this sort of clandestine way in which this government has broken all the rules, all understandings, and come to attack just as the attackers came to wake people in Pearl Harbor that night with their destructive force. I guess it's the Pearl Harbor of our legislative process here. That's a quite a memorable way of thinking about it.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Mr. Chairman, A1 as an amendment I think mocks at the concerns of Albertans as they have been expressed. It makes a mockery of public participation, of public consultation, of listening to Albertans. Why this mocking? I guess it comes from the presumptuous view that this government has taken, that since 60 percent of those who voted in the last election voted for the government, it has now the licence to ignore the other 40 percent.

What a strange way of looking at democracy. What a strange way of building consensus in the province. What a strange affront to many decent values of democracy that all of us, I presume, subscribe to. So it's quite an assault. It's quite a frontal attack on those basic understandings of how we should govern.

I think the people of Alberta, while they understand that there are 74 government members sitting over there, won't undertake legislative debates in a way which look indecent, which smell of arrogance. So when Albertans wake up this morning, they have quite a shock for them, news for them, that what's happening in the Legislature is happening behind their backs, when in fact we're supposed to be accountable, answerable to them, accessible to them, transparent and public about what we do, but, no, we have turned this Assembly, it seems to me, into a private club which closes doors on everybody.

9:40

It's ironic that we are talking about closing doors, this government side trying to shut the doors in the face of Albertans while it debates this important bill, and the bill itself is about opening minds. That's what education is about, opening up and caring. The very word education comes from the Latin language and is about awakening, opening up our minds. What we have here is the opposite happening in this Assembly, happening opposite in this province, as we speak to this amendment to Bill 16.

I want to refer to a couple of letters, Mr. Chairman, with your permission, and these are letters that are quite telling in their poignancy, in the kind of language that they use and the concerns that people express. I was speaking with a member of Sturgeon school division No. 24 last Thursday. This trustee stopped me as I was about to leave – some of my colleagues from the government side were with me at the time – and she was trying to access their ears as well. She reminded me, she said: you guys who live in urban areas have no understanding of the challenges that we who live in rural Alberta face. She said: I want to remind you that there are lots of Albertans who live in rural areas, and their concerns better not be ignored; we'll remember that. [interjection] I'm glad the Minister of Energy is listening to this as well. Being a member from Calgary I'm sure he knows the problems and the concerns that rural Albertans have, which is very good. I'm glad that members of the cabinet as well as backbenchers are attentive. They are not asleep, and we are all paying attention to matters of vital importance.

MR. SMITH: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: A point of order.

Point of Order Inflammatory Language

MR. SMITH: Citation 23(h) and (i). There are no members of the Conservative government that are referred to as backbenchers. All members are private members, and I would ask that the member retract his statement.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, the point of order clearly is not of much consequence. I mean, we use the language, you know, the metaphors, the idiom that's common. I'm willing to call them private members. Many of the members sitting on the back benches on the government side see themselves as private members, so I take the point that maybe I should call them private members. With your permission, I would like to continue.

The private members, so-called, on the government side, sitting on the back benches as opposed to the front benches – I'm referring to those private members, and indeed there are those benches all around, some in the very back of the House. Such a specious metaphor. You know, when we use these metaphors, we're trying to use habitual ways of looking at things. I think it's quite appropriate for us to do that because that facilitates communication. I'm using these terms essentially to make my message rather simple, rather than use some obscure jargon to refer to those who don't get a chance to be sitting there in the front benches.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I hope . . .

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are you finished on the point of order?

DR. PANNU: I'm finished with answering the point of order. May I continue with your permission on A1?

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your contribution to the point of order. I think the point is well made. It would behoove you to speak directly and clearly and accurately in all cases, and we'll expect that you would continue as you resume your speech.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your generosity. Thank you for your forbearance. Thank you for your understanding. You have been very lucid in what you said. Thank you for that.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: I want to refer to two letters here, Mr. Chairman. The

first one is dated May 22, just about seven days ago. It was written by Judy Muir, chairperson of Northern Gateway regional division No. 10. This division falls within the constituency of the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, I believe, and this is about Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, 2001.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I want to read this short letter into the record of the Assembly.

The Board of Trustees of Northern Gateway Public Schools discussed the above noted act and the particular section dealing with Separate School District formation at its regular May 22 meeting. The Board asked me to raise the following concern about pending changes to this section of the School Act. Many of our rural schools are finding it more and more difficult to maintain programs and even to keep some of them viable. Further fragmentation of our student populations in rural areas will cause greater hardship. Our Board would ask . . .

And this letter is addressed of course to the Minister of Learning. . . . that you reconsider this legislation as it can easily decimate some of our rural schools.

Mark that word, Mr. Chairman: decimate.

As I said, I heard from a trustee from the Sturgeon school division and her language, her message was just as powerful and poignant as this brief letter that I've just read into the record.

Another letter here, Mr. Chairman, that pertains to the concrete fears that rural Albertans have about the consequences of the further fragmentation that they fear may result from these particular provisions in the bill. This letter is a bit longer, but I'd like to again read this into the record of the House. It's from Renee Seitz from Medicine Hat, and it's also to the Minister of Learning. It says:

I'm writing you this letter as a concerned parent in southeast Alberta. My children attended Manyberries School and because of budget cuts my children will be triple graded next year. This makes me very angry when we live in a province that prides itself in a provincial surplus this year. Should we really be bragging about a surplus when there are schools out there such as ours that are fighting to maintain an adequate education for our kids. I don't think so.

This year and for many years we have been double graded and this seems to be workable. It has been workable due to the fact that we have an excellent teaching staff as well as some paraprofessional help.

This year we have 7 teachers including our kindergarten teacher. We can not count her into the picture because our kindergarten will more than likely become private next year or non-existent due to the fact 2 years ago our board decided that they would not fund any schools who have a kindergarten program of less than 10 kids. We also have 2 paraprofessionals on staff right now taking care of secretarial duties, librarian, and also aiding teachers in the classroom. Included in these 7 teachers is our principal also. So his time is split among administration and teaching.

Next year with these cuts our school will be left with 4.25 staff. This includes 3 teachers for the triple grades, our principal who will still split his time between administration and teaching, and 1 paraprofessional who will become the secretary, librarian, and aide all in one. This is a skeleton of a teaching staff in my opinion.

9:50

The writer continues, Mr. Chairman.

Sure the numbers do show that we have a great pupil teacher ratio, but not when you take the whole picture into context. Our school will not even have a full time secretary to answer the phone or just monitor the comings and goings in the school. As a very informed person you should know . . .

The reference is to the Minister of Learning.

. . . that in this day and age with all that has been happening in our schools (e.g.: bomb threats, shootings) that we need to be in contact with the schools at all times and should have someone in the office to report any strangers or incidences.

Have there been enough studies done to prove that being triple graded does not harm our children educationally?

That's the question that she asks.

If there has been any research done to prove my fears wrong about triple grading I would like to see that research. I need some convincing that it will not harm them. It is also a possibility that our children from grades 1-6 could be taking option classes together. To me that does not make sense mentally or physically when you are dealing with a child in grade 1 and a child in grade 6 [at the same time].

The teachers in our school that we have now are wonderful teachers who enjoy their jobs. What will happen to them teaching three grades together, having little or no preparation time, and no help from an aide that they can count on when they need the help? I feel that this is a fast recipe for teacher burn out. Once our teachers are burnt out how do we attract new teachers to our school with working conditions like this?

With possible teacher burnout and the lack of attracting new teachers to our area who suffers? Our children are the ones who suffer. Is this fair to them when all they are trying to do is obtain a good quality education? Our children already lack in the area of options due to the fact that there are just not enough children to offer a variety of programs. Options to me are totally different than core subjects. Core subjects are needed to further their education and to just have a solid educational background.

In the concluding paragraph, Mr. Chairman, Renee Seitz says:

I am asking you as the Learning Minister to take a serious look at the situation because it is a very serious situation. Please do not let our children become guinea pigs in a society that is supposed to be ahead not back in time. Rural children's educations are just as important as urban students are. We all have the same educational right in this province no matter where we live. Children are our future.

Mr. Chairman, I read this letter into the record of the Assembly because I think it speaks to those very fundamental concerns that I have heard about directly from trustees who represent their rural constituents on school boards and school divisions. There are these concerns about how the rural schools are doing even before the changes that are anticipated in this act after amendment A1 goes through. Given the fact that these problems exist already, if further fragmentation of our public school system were to arise from this bill as it becomes law – and amendment A1 doesn't seem to give us the slightest assurance that the potential for fragmentation that's implicit in this bill will be in any way remediated, mitigated, or reduced – then I think it's important for this Assembly to ask: why go that route? If we go that route, what we will do will be doing a serious disservice to our rural communities and our children who are going to schools in those communities where triple grading and double grading are already a reality.

It is deplorable that our government is allowing such conditions to obtain in our rural communities. It simply says to rural residents that their concerns are not the primary concerns of this government, that it will do things regardless of the concerns that may be expressed by ordinary concerned citizens, by parents, by teachers who teach in those schools, and by the community leaders in the rural areas.

Amendment A1 is a serious disappointment to the people, and furthermore, Mr. Chairman, the manner and the speed with which we are discussing these amendments give no opportunity whatsoever, deny any participation to these very concerned voices that are desperately trying to speak to us before we proceed any further with this bill.

So, Mr. Chairman, I implore this Assembly, I call on the Minister of Learning to stop this bill at this stage, engage in consultation, bring this bill back after having consulted and having made changes that will meet these concerns from rural communities in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. members, I wonder if we might consent to briefly reverting to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some special guests who have traveled from outside the province to visit us here. We are joined by a group of 44 junior high students who have come from Fort St. John. B.C. They regularly attend Dr. Kearney school, and I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 16
School Amendment Act, 2001
(*continued*)

MR. CAO: Mr. Chairman, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 16.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:58 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Parliamentary Counsel began calling the standing vote. Several members entered the Chamber accompanied by the Sergeant-at-Arms]

THE CHAIRMAN: This is quite a different procedure, that we're not familiar with. The committee is voting. Now, I know there are two functions going on at the same time, so with your indulgence I think we'll all sit down and we'll start again because we ran through the middle of *O Canada*.

10:10

The committee was asked to have a standing vote. Normally, for those that are in the gallery, no member is allowed to come back in when the bells finally stop ringing. However, we did have another formal function here in the Legislature at the same time, and actually our bells rang right through the middle of the national anthem, that we didn't know about here but was going on outside.

So what I would ask is unanimous consent for us to begin the division again.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Now to explain the division. We are having a standing division on a motion by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort that the committee do now rise and report progress.

For the motion:

Abbott	Hlady	McFarland
Cao	Jablonski	Norris
Danyluk	Jonson	O'Neill
Ducharme	Knight	Pham
Evans	Lord	Renner
Fischer	Lougheed	Smith
Forsyth	Lukaszuk	Snelgrove
Friedel	Lund	Stevens
Fritz	Magnus	Tarchuk
Gordon	Mar	Vandermeer
Graham	Marz	Woloshyn
Graydon	Masyk	Yankowsky
Haley	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Herard		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Carlson	Pannu
Bonner	Nicol	

Totals:	For – 40	Against – 5
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[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 11 and 7. The committee reports progress on Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

Before we commence with third reading, I wonder if we might have consent for a brief introduction of guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a young lady named Rebecca Demoissac. Rebecca is our summer student in our constituency. Rebecca is attending Grant MacEwan college this fall. I would like to say that I did meet Rebecca as a volunteer in our constituency. She did all the data input for us and all the research and phone surveys, and I can say that she was .3 of a percent out. So, ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, I'd like to introduce Rebecca Demoissac.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

(*continued*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before we commence third reading, just

to refresh our memories and refresh mine as well, debate on third reading is similar in process but not in kind to second reading. "Debate on third reading . . . is more restricted than at the earlier stage, being limited to the contents of the bill." This is from *Erskine May*, and you can go on to read the rest of it.

The point is that we can't talk about, as we do in second reading, what might have been, should have been, and isn't in the bill. We can only talk about what is in the bill. With that, we'll commence third reading on Bill 1.

Bill 1

Natural Gas Price Protection Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the clarification in terms of what the parameters are for speaking on Bill 1 in third reading.

This is, of course, the Premier's flagship bill, a flagship bill that comes in after the fact. We had the regulations passed and the moneys spent long before we saw the legislation, which is really the way this government likes to do business these days. It isn't very informative, it isn't participatory, and it isn't really democratic, if you ask me, but that's the process they like to pursue.

This bill comes to us now in third reading, which is the final stage, so we're going to see royal assent to it very quickly and it becomes legislation for this province. It looks like this week, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the way this government is going today, it could be tomorrow.

It's interesting to see the process of how we got to third reading of Bill 1 today, which is really the continuation of Monday's business. We haven't had Tuesday yet because we haven't recessed, and all the commitments we thought we had in terms of progress in this Assembly were for naught. We're now talking on final reading of a bill.

10:20

MR. WOLOSHYN: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Minister of Seniors is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, you just instructed the House that the debate must remain on the content of the bill. I do believe that since the speaker started, we haven't referred to anything in the bill yet.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. Certainly I have talked about a number of issues: this being the Premier's flagship bill, this dealing with legislation that is being put in place after we've seen regulations made and moneys spent.

I will refer that hon. member, who understands the rules very well, to *Erskine May* on page 378 in terms of relevance. I took the Speaker's ruling to heart in terms of sticking to the matter of the bill, but I would remind that hon. member that if we take a look at "Relevance in Debate," the appropriate sentences for us to consider are:

A Member must direct his speech to the question under discussion

or to the motion or amendment he intends to move, or to a point of order. The precise relevance of an argument may not always be perceptible but a Member who wanders from the subject will be reminded by the Speaker.

We have had many instances in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, where it's taken nearly the full 20 minutes to get to the point. In fact, hon. Speaker Kowalski was one of those members in this Legislature who liked to expand on his points.

So I would like to state that there is no point of order, Mr. Speaker, because I did preface my remarks directly referenced to the bill, and I am shortly to get to the point of my comments on it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would observe that much of what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has said is correct so far. I think the hon. Minister of Seniors was making the point that we are, as the chair had reminded all hon. members, dealing with the bill as it is. To a certain extent one was beginning to stray, but I'm sure that you were going to bring back very quickly the point and remain on the point for the rest of your talk.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You're absolutely right. I was soon to get back to the main points in here, and it's nice to see that the minister was paying attention to my comments, so I thank him for that. [interjection] Perhaps some of the rest of you would like to participate in this debate too. That would be great, because that would help us out with the timing of when this gets passed.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the object of the bill was to establish in legislation the ability to provide rebates to Albertans for high natural gas prices. Already done. Already accomplished. We look forward to seeing what kinds of regulations get passed in this blank cheque bill as we move forward so that we can see what kind of support and sustainability Albertans will see in the coming winter season when prices will be high.

What we saw with this bill was really it being introduced to follow up on the government's promise to provide long-term protection for Albertans from the high natural gas prices. Good news, except that this government was partially responsible for those high prices. We had talked about, way back in 1995, what they needed to do in terms of ensuring that there was some security in the marketplace as deregulation moved forward so that producers could in fact know they were in a position where they could bring new production on-line. That didn't happen. As a result, these producers didn't bring new production on-line to meet the anticipated needs to the extent that was required. In fact, I would suggest that it would be very hard for them to have secured financing in the kind of unsettled market they were dealing in.

So what happens is that we get into a real crunch, Mr. Speaker. Not all the fault was the government's, for sure. No doubt world prices had some impact, I would even say perhaps up to two-thirds of the impact, on the instability in the marketplace. But certainly there is some responsibility at the government level.

Interestingly enough, they didn't react very fast. If we remember back over the Christmastime period, there was a great deal of unsettlement in the marketplace and concern by consumers and producers alike, and the government made several comments that caused great concern on both sides and then decided to go forward with some changes. Some of the changes were those that directly follow on this bill and that being the rebates themselves.

The government has already provided the two \$150 rebates to every Albertan 16 years of age and over who has filed an income tax

return. Interestingly enough, they couldn't even get that right, Mr. Speaker, because we've had some significant problems with people receiving their cheques. So while the legislation is being passed at this stage, we still have some people with outstanding issues. Most of those are being worked through. I certainly know of a few people who haven't received any of the money yet. Primarily those were people who didn't file a tax return in the year because they had no income, but of course that was the requirement for receiving the rebate.

There have been a number of situations where there has been an interesting management of this process by the federal government. I think they were wrong in the way that was handled in most cases. They're correcting the problem, but interestingly enough they're taking their sweet time doing it.

I just talked to someone yesterday, a young man who has been trying to pursue his rebate. Filed the return sometime in November of last year with nil income and didn't get the January rebate and still hasn't got the January rebate. We heard from the minister here that even if they didn't get their January rebate because of some sort of problem, they would get the April rebate on time. Mr. Speaker, guess what? He didn't get that one either. So after repeated phone calls trying to find the appropriate department people to talk to, he called our office. We were able to get hold of the minister's office and get a direct line, so I thank her department for having put in process a number that could resolve these issues in a somewhat speedy fashion.

I say "somewhat" because subsequently what's happened is that he's found out that even though he had never filed a tax return before and the return he filed was with his current address, the cheque was sent to his former address. I'm not quite sure how that works, but that's what happened, and of course he didn't get it. So that was the January cheque, and then the April cheque went to that address too. Subsequent to that, he filed this year's tax return some time at the beginning of April, and they realized that there's been an address change, and that's why the cheques had come back to Revenue Canada. So they were just sitting in his file.

So he filed the first week of April. He called on, I guess it was, Monday, May 28, and was told that – and they already processed his 2000 tax return, Mr. Speaker, and apparently he got the rebate cheque for that. They've said that they will begin the process of reissuing the two \$150 cheques now that they've talked to him, even though they had all the information in place, and that he should receive the money some time by the end of June.

Well, that's quite an interesting process, Mr. Speaker, not very timely and not very efficient. I'm wondering in retrospect if the minister wouldn't have preferred to have issued the cheques directly herself from her department to Albertans, that that might have been a better process. It would have eliminated the other problem, and that was people who filed their returns owing some small amount of money and whose cheques were withheld or the amount of tax owing was deducted prior to getting the April 30 rebate. Her opinion on that would be interesting as we pass into the very final discussions of this Bill 1 in third reading. So that's an interesting process that people have had to go through to receive their money here in this province with regard to this particular bill. Not very efficient.

You know, Mr. Speaker, we didn't have an opportunity to ask all the questions we would have liked on Bill 1. I would like to put a couple of them on the record that speak directly to the content of the bill, and I hope the minister, who is acting on the Premier's behalf on this bill – the Premier is the sponsor of the bill – will address some of the issues for us.

10:30

We heard lots of concerns about this bill being a blank cheque. It's a very thin bill. It doesn't have very many specifics in it.

Certainly in two separate cases within the bill it talks about all decisions being made by regulation, which of course is of some concern to us, Mr. Speaker. In section 7 it states that through regulation any rebate program can be brought in through orders in council, which bypasses all legislative scrutiny. So we have an issue with that. One, we think that money bills, particularly, should always be brought into the Legislature and debated. This rebate is clearly a money bill and clearly fits that kind of criteria. It's a great deal of assumption the government takes on with the idea that Albertans are quite happy to see money bills, the degree of money and how and when the money will be spent, being passed through orders in council rather than having at least some cursory examination of those issues made here in the Legislative Assembly.

So our question to the Premier and to the minister who is responsible for the enacting of this bill is: why do they want to skirt the legislative process by determining all the details of the rebate program by orders in council rather than through legislative approval? There's got to be some reason why they want to be able to make these decisions behind closed doors. Perhaps it's an issue of timeliness, deciding what the caps are going to be, but I don't buy that argument, Mr. Speaker. We saw the decisions being made and the cheques sent out before it was brought in here for approval, so it can't be timeliness, because they'll just do what they want any time they feel like it anyway.

Why couldn't they bring in the issues of what the dollar amounts were going to be and the other regulations through legislation for debate? It could have been a much more substantive bill, Mr. Speaker. We could have seen the details in this bill. Certainly the government had enough time, and certainly they have enough resources. When they can spend over \$19 billion a year, certainly they have the resources to be able to put the meat into a bill like this rather than us opening it up and seeing that it's really just a blank cheque.

Another question for the Premier and the minister is: how can they bring forward such legislation that clearly eviscerates the role and responsibilities of legislators? Where is the accountability, and what is there to hide? You know, as legislators we have a responsibility to scrutinize what happens in legislation, the kinds of rules and regulations and laws that this government wants to pass. That is a part of the democratic process. It is the right of Albertans to hear what is happening, the detail of the kind of legislation the government is passing. It is the right and in fact the responsibility, Mr. Speaker, of the Official Opposition and any other oppositions involved in the Legislative Assembly to scrutinize legislation, to be the watchdog of what government is doing, to report it back to the people, to have enough time to get feedback from the people and to hear what parts of the legislation they support overtly, in great numbers, mildly, or not at all.

Mr. Speaker, if we have a situation where people do not support the legislation, then we have an additional role as the opposition to oppose that legislation and to ensure that through the processes available to us through debate and through amendments, we have an opportunity to either have the government withdraw the piece of legislation or amend it adequately to meet the bare-minimum needs of Albertans. When the government takes that role away from the Legislature, then what they're doing is undermining the responsibilities of legislators.

We don't hear much from private members on the government side on some of these bills, and the question is why. Certainly we heard throughout the campaign in the last election that they said they would be the people's voice in government. Part of their role is to be that voice here in the Legislature. We haven't seen that happen on this particular bill, Mr. Speaker. My question to those folks is

why. How do they explain that, or do they just skirt over the issue when they go back into their communities and choose not to address it?

You know, we've heard them talk about how they can have a say in their caucus and how they can talk to the ministers and so on. All good, Mr. Speaker, and we don't disagree that that's an effective way to understand the issues and to find out more information on them, but they have a legislative responsibility to have their voice heard on behalf of their constituents and on behalf of other Albertans here in the Legislature. The floor of this Legislature is where they need to put their comments on record. Even if they're completely in agreement with what their cabinet is doing, then it's important, I think, for their constituents and for Albertans to hear that.

We look forward to in another session, because this one will shortly be over, having more participation by private members in this Legislature on legislation that comes forward, and we would hope those people would take the message back to their government that they also support legislation being debated in full, not blank cheque legislation as we see in this particular bill but comprehensive legislation, so that very little needs to be done behind closed doors and in regulations.

My third question on this bill, Mr. Speaker, is also to the Premier and the minister who's directing this bill through the Legislature. Can they tell us how a government that says it believes in market forces can work to create this kind of blank cheque for interference in the market? We've had some degree of debate about that in this Legislature in second reading and committee, and I'd just like to remind members of this Legislature why it's a problem for us.

When governments directly interfere in marketplaces, you skew the marketplace and create an artificial environment, and in the long run that hurts everybody. It hurts players in the market for a variety of reasons. One, what happens in this case is that when you give the rebates, what you're doing is artificially deflating the cost of energy at the time. What does that do to providers of energy? There's no incentive for them to find efficiencies in their operations. There's no incentive for them to support putting research and development dollars into alternative sources, and there's no incentive for them to incorporate alternative sources into their process. So in the long run what does that do? That puts them at a disadvantage in the global marketplace.

I know that Canada has a long history of protectionism in terms of its industries and regulations and imports and the ability for other companies to move in and be competitive. So on the one hand we have this real protectionist kind of environment that Canada has historically lived in, and on the other hand we have a government here that says it's going to deregulate the market in order to open up the market. Well, those two systems are incompatible. While the government is saying that they're deregulating and that this bill meets that need by temporarily providing a rebate for people, what they're really doing with the rebate is enhancing the protectionist mind-set of the government. We have seen traditionally over the decades that that is precisely what inhibits Canadian businesses from moving forward and being globally competitive. We may be a G-7 country, but in fact on many levels we aren't competitive. We just need to take a look at our labour costs in comparison to other countries', and we can see that there is a problem here. If you look at it historically, that is the reason why.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have to talk about rebates in that perspective. Is it really what we want to do for the benefit of companies in this province, to provide a level of protectionism or a blanket on top of market forces which will inhibit their ability in the long run to compete globally? I don't think it is. The government has decided that it is, but I don't think that is a reasonable place to be going.

The second reason why this is a really bad idea is because it inhibits research and development. We know that gas is a nonrenewable resource. Members of the government and I have had many debates over the years in terms of how nonrenewable it is. I think gas has about a 10-year life in this province. We've seen a real change happen in terms of the kinds of pools of gas they're finding. Instead of large, deep pools, now we're finding a scattering of shallow pools around the province, so that's really the beginning of the end, Mr. Speaker. I know that a former cabinet minister of this government, Steve West, would argue that there are 50 to 75 years of gas left in the province, but I don't think that's true.

10:40

The government has also said that gas and other resources are available from the territories and so on. That's true. However, it doesn't help us in terms of long-term sustainability in this province. It certainly doesn't help companies who need to be taking a look at alternative sources or supplementary sources for energy production to have the markets artificially deflated.

I wish I could be back, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately that's all the speaking time I have at third reading.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled at a quarter to 11 this morning to rise and move third reading of Bill 1. For those who have spent many hours in the House in the last day, day and a half now, I say particularly to the members of the opposition party that there is a bright world out there. Just about everybody in Alberta is working. Alberta's business forecast for growth this year is 4.2 percent. It's going to lead the nation. It's not gloomy out there.

As Bill 1 clearly points out, there is a need for a commitment to the protection of natural gas rates in this province. From the time that the member from the opposition speaks about this, Alberta gas exports were about \$2 billion. This year there will be over \$10 billion in natural gas revenues and crude oil revenues accruing to this government, this province, and to all Albertans.

Not only do Albertans benefit from the royalties of world prices but also from the economic benefits that accrue from having those world prices. In fact, in the time the member speaks about, there was a syndrome or a situation known in the marketplace as a gas-on-gas problem. This gas-on-gas problem did not allow for world market prices to function in Alberta. The Alliance pipeline helped ameliorate that. We're now exporting more gas than ever before. We're exporting enough gas now, Mr. Speaker, that we are the number one importer to the United States, the largest energy-consuming market on the globe. Alberta is responsible for 15 percent of that natural gas. This year Canada replaced Saudi Arabia as the number one crude oil importer to the United States.

Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas reserves that we have in this province are of tremendous benefit to all Albertans and to all members. Whether you're from Grande Prairie-Smoky and you're looking at the tremendous oil reserves that are there or you're from Drayton Valley-Calmar and you're looking at the important gas reserves there, you see that there is a market functioning out there that brings in investment, that creates jobs, that creates opportunities and allows Albertans to develop a world-best technological sense of skills and of being able to develop these resources as they are appropriate to the benefit of all Albertans.

Bill 1, Mr. Speaker, simply enables the government to react to situations that accrue quickly. If the member can speak, on the one hand, about being here in the Legislature and looking at the scrutiny of the legislative process and then at the same time be able to keep this group of good government members in action for well over 24 hours, it tells me that they're asking to find another way to move

quickly into the marketplace. Bill 1 does exactly that. Bill 1 enables the government to react to gas spikes, a spike that last September was at \$3.35 an mcf and then went to as high as \$12.20, \$12.35 an mcf by Christmastime.

If this member of the opposition speaks to this bill and doesn't realize the importance of setting up in a clear and transparent manner the way in which the government can react quickly to a situation to assist Albertans in an Arctic climate who need relief from high prices during a period of high consumption, then clearly, Mr. Speaker, as the number of representatives here from the past election proved, they just don't get it.

In fact, that's what the bill intends to do, Mr. Speaker, allow people to move quickly, with direction, with transparency, with a series of regulations that indicates the amount of protection that would move forward. Bill 1 simply enables us to move towards the development of this set of regulations. It's done in a very normal legislative fashion. The bill is an enabling bill. The regulations follow it. They're developed after the passage of the bill. Clearly, there's no concern. To see the amount of Legislature time taken up in comments about one particular bill out of 1 million households – we can deal with that on an off-line basis. We can deal with that issue with dispatch and, may I even say, alacrity.

So it's very clear in my mind that any further debate in third reading by the members of the opposition would simply be more of a time stalling, a delay tactic, more evidence that the Liberal opposition party is not here to advance the causes of all Albertans. It's not here to talk about the difficult issues that exist in Edmonton and Calgary and the problems of rural Alberta. They're simply here to try and get the next headline in the newspaper, and they've been eminently unsuccessful in that, and that's why they are actually looking at debating third reading of Bill 1, Mr. Speaker, which is a topic I am very pleased to represent, very pleased to move third reading of. I think there should be no further debate and we should move along.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister has mentioned both earlier on in his talk and now at the end that he cares to move third reading. We thank him for that, but the hon. Minister of Justice moved it earlier in the day and it only needs the one moving.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I think I'm in my 15th hour here, but I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak in third reading now on Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. The Speaker was very kind in pointing out as we commenced this that in fact third reading is examining the effect of the bill, and I take his wise words to heart. I was also very interested to see that the Minister of Energy did indeed rise and join in the debate. Most commendable of him. I wish I would see more of his colleagues rising and actually participating in debate so that the public got a chance to see how in fact the government is considering this bill and what their thoughts on it are, because it's always a bit of a mystery. We get a bill put out and a press release and silence thenceforth.

One of my issues around the effect of this bill, the way it's been presented and the information that's been provided, is that in fact we don't know what the effect of the bill is. We have tried repeatedly through the debate to get some answers. We brought forward amendments which were attempting to clarify definitions that were included in this bill so that we would have some idea of in fact what the government intended. It is not clear from anything that's in here – almost 100 percent will be decided maybe by the minister and through regulation or decided as an order in council by cabinet. That's what we get out of this bill.

So the Official Opposition and certainly this member have repeatedly asked: what exactly is the government intending here? Are there going to be rebates? If so, what kind of rebate is it going to be? If it's going to be distributed through a vendor, what's the definition of "vendor"? If it's going to be distributed to individuals, how is that distribution going to happen?

10:50

The member for Edmonton-Ellerslie told the story of a constituent who repeatedly tried to get the first installment of their \$150 rebate, which I think was released at the end of November to most people, a nice little pre-election cookie there. Actually, I'm one of the members who are calling the special 1-877 line looking for information on exactly what's happened to rebates. I will, if the Speaker will allow me, note that the staff are prompt in answering that line and very friendly and do their best to be very helpful, which tells me they've had a lot of practice answering that line, but in fact credit where credit is due on that one.

There's one example of a rebate program that was set up to work in a certain way and in fact a number of stumbles have appeared – a hitch in their git-along is another way of putting that – to get the rebates sent out and to explain to people exactly why they might have had money deducted at source. That was happening in cases of chronic nonpayers for maintenance enforcement, chronic nonpayers of student finance, and in some cases the federal government got a piece of it where they were able to by law collect on arrears owed to the Crown.

We don't know if that's the kind of rebate that's being planned here, because when I look at that section, section 2, "the Lieutenant Governor in Council," which is cabinet, "may authorize a rebate to eligible consumers" – well, we don't know who the eligible consumers are or what the definition is there; there was never any elucidation on that – "under the regulations to assist eligible consumers in the cost of marketable gas." We have not had any of this clarified. We still have a bill that is full of: we'll do this by regulation; we'll define it by regulation.

So for Albertans that are trying to determine the effect of this bill – I am getting tired; I almost used a colloquial expression that would have been expletive deleted there. It started with an S and it had three letters. Okay; I didn't do that. But essentially any Albertan that was trying to determine exactly what the effect of this bill is going to be would have a very difficult time determining that.

Now, we can have people download and look at the bills off the web site www.assembly.ab.ca, which is excellent innovation. But much harder to find are the regulations. It's very difficult to track and be able to discover when a regulation in fact comes out from cabinet and then to follow up and be able to actually get your hands on the regulation and understand how it applies back to the act. This is a reoccurring issue that I have with this government. It reinforces that things are done behind closed doors. It reinforces that there's a secrecy there. It reinforces that the government does not want to communicate this kind of information directly to Albertans. So that is one of the effects of this bill that has been clearly reinforced over and over and over again through all stages of reading of the bill.

The Official Opposition did try and clarify by bringing forward a motion that there be a definition of "vendor" included in the legislation, not merely left to the regulations, and that of course was voted down by the government. We were also looking for an audit, a very good idea. It certainly would assist the government in being transparent and accountable. Again, voted down by the government. Not interested in audits, not interested in accountability, not interested in transparency obviously.

The other issue that was continually raised, the effect of which we

cannot determine from this bill, was the section at the end which is talking about making regulations for other kinds of substances, which was meant to cover things like propane. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar raised a number of times what was happening with propane and more specifically ethane, which in light of what we've just had in the news over the last couple of days about stripping substances out of natural gas as it pipelines its way through Alberta becomes increasingly important to us. One of the effects of this bill is that we cannot tell if as Albertans we are going to be getting the full value of the natural gas that's under our feet or whether it gets into a bullet line and leaves the province without our being able to strip anything out. We already know that the Alliance pipeline is a bullet line through Alberta, and again, we're not able to strip anything out.

So when I look at the effect of this bill, Mr. Speaker, very few questions are answered by this. It's a shadow bill. I'm tired of the clichés that are coming forward about it, but frankly clichés exist because they're true and because people get an instant identification and grab hold of what's going on here. We do have a shell bill, a blank cheque, a shadow bill: all those things are absolutely true about this.

The Minister of Energy had said that the opposition members are spinning doom and gloom. No, not so. We were looking for clarification. We were looking for a piece of legislation as per promises of this government some time ago that it was going to be something that would be written in easy to understand language and that all Albertans could get access to it and understand it. We're still waiting for that to happen.

The minister talked about: it wasn't gloomy; it was creating jobs, and it was creating opportunity. That may well be very short term, but one of the effects I see as I examine Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, in third reading is that we have no sense of the long term with this bill. We have no sense of the sustainability that's built into this. We have no sense of the stability that's built into this act. Lots of talk from this government about family and intergenerational and blah, blah, blah. In fact, we don't get any sense of what's being anticipated here when we look at this bill. It doesn't seem to be long term.

There seems to be a willingness to pull as much gas out of the ground and ship it off to wherever as fast as possible. But again, we can't tell. Nothing is spelled out in this bill about what is being planned. I would like to be more specific, Mr. Speaker, but I can't be specific about something that ain't here. So we don't know long term. It doesn't look like it's sustainable to me, and if we're looking at an intergenerational effect, if we're looking at, you know, whether we can guarantee our kids or our grandkids that there's going to be a natural resource there for them and that we the legislators have in fact been responsible with this, it's not in this bill. The effect is not here.

11:00

Now, the minister at the same time was complaining that we were at 24 hours. I think he was indicating that we'd been 24 hours on this bill. For a point of clarification there, in fact since 8 o'clock last night – and it's now 11 o'clock – I'm the only member still here that was on at 8. I'm still standing and haven't slept.

In fact, in a period of nine and a half hours between 8 o'clock last night and 5:30 this morning we covered 12 bills, including one bill that had three amendments. So I don't want to hear about how there's been any stalling here. That's pretty quick business, moving through approximately one bill every 45 minutes. We are still here. That is now five hours later. I'm speaking to points that were raised by the Minister of Energy in debate on this bill. So if it's relevance,

it should have been called on the Minister of Energy for raising it in the first place. I'm certainly entitled to debate it now that he's put it on the floor.

Again, since 5:30 this morning to 11 – that's another five and a half hours – we've spent some time on Bill 16, and we're now on Bill 1. So indeed there has been a great deal of progress made, and I felt it necessary to clarify lest anyone misinterpret the remarks of the Minister of Energy that we had spent 24 hours on Bill 1. Not true. We in fact have spent – I don't know – 15 hours or something on 14 or 15 bills. I'm losing count here.

Now, going back to the specifics of this bill, what doesn't this bill do? What is the effect that is not covered here that was looked for? It certainly doesn't make any attempt to promote conservation.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, you're starting into the second reading speech. That's what second reading is: what this bill misses, what it should have done, that kind of thing. Third reading is on the bill itself, what it is and what it does. You don't go into what might have been, could have been. Is that okay?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes. That's fine. Thank you.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: There is no effect that would be promoting conservation. Certainly the effect on my constituents in Edmonton-Centre is a continued puzzlement over the discrimination on rebating. There continues to be in this bill a discrimination regarding rebates for people who are living in high-rise condominiums and apartment buildings in that rebates that are forthcoming – not that they're spelled out in this bill. The act has not corrected the discrimination that exists. Therefore, the effect of the bill is that the discrimination continues to exist, and that is a real concern for, I think, every Member of this Legislative Assembly, because we are knowingly allowing discrimination to go on with our constituents, for anyone in what should be considered a residential unit. It's where people live. It's their home.

There is a different history here of treating the way people who live in single-family residences are able to get pricing and get rebates. There is a different pricing level and there is a different rebate system for those who are in a high-rise condominium or apartment building because they are being classed as commercial. When I have asked questions in question period, trying in fact to determine the effect of this bill, as to why there was the choice that these high-rise apartments buildings and condominiums would in fact be classified as commercial and rebated and priced as that, the minister was unable to tell me. I think the effect of this bill is to clarify none of that.

The other issue around the effect of this bill is equitable distribution of the royalties. The bill does not have as an effect a determination of how we value the natural gas under our feet. It doesn't determine or set forth for us whether all Albertans own and share in that natural resource. The effect of this bill, in other words, is that it's difficult to determine if the plan being chosen is an equitable one for all Albertans. Are we going to rebate based on every Albertan having a piece of this, every Albertan getting an equal rebate? That is somewhat what we saw with the rebate that was announced in September. The first \$150 cheque came to some people in November and slowly trickled out to the rest of the people. The second \$150 rebate cheque came in late April, and that was essentially saying every Albertan over 16 that filed an income tax return, was

resident in Alberta on such and such a date, and wasn't in jail. So that attempted to be an equitable distribution. All Albertans shared in that.

We don't know what the effect of this bill is. We don't know whether it's choosing to be across the board, that all Albertans would share in these rebates, or whether in fact it's going to be a rebate that comes out saying: this is a user rebate; those that use it are going to get some kind of rebate back. Well, I think there's an argument there that we have yet another discriminatory effect of this bill, then, because if all Albertans truly share in that natural resource, then why are some people getting it because they're users but other people wouldn't get any of it? I think there's an argument there about discrimination.

We've got discrimination in the way the pricing and the rebates work depending on where people have their residences. We have discrimination there in the way the benefits of the money would be distributed amongst Albertans or amongst users. The effect of this bill is, I think, that we've got a hybrid which doesn't work for anybody.

I think the effect of this bill is confusing. I think it allows the government to do whatever it wants, yet again behind closed doors, without consultations with Albertans. I don't know that that's necessarily a gloomy thing, as the Minister of Energy seems to think, but it certainly is a shady thing, all done in the shade of a closed room behind a closed door. There's a real disconnect between what this government says and what this government does – and I think this bill is a perfect example of that – all this hullabaloo about how we were going to have a rebate bill, but in fact none of us can figure out what the rebate is about because nothing is spelled out in the bill. So once again it underlines more than anything this government's disdain for Albertans, for equity, for respect for our nonrenewable resources.

Thank you.

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

11:10

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good morning. It is a fine morning. We get to debate Bill 1 in third reading, and I do enjoy the opportunity to speak to Bill 1 in third reading.

Now, when I'm looking at Bill 1 here, Mr. Speaker, I see that it is enabling legislation. It will come into effect when this act is passed and given royal assent. It will come into force on July 1, 2001. Also what Bill 1 will do is that our present method of supplying rebates, the Natural Gas Rebates Act, will be repealed upon this proclamation. So that brings us to the many, many interesting points the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre have brought to our attention here in third reading. I might add, as well, that I enjoyed the Minister of Energy getting up and offering some insights into Bill 1.

One of the things I want to address in third reading of Bill 1 is that this is the flagship bill. This is Bill 1, the first bill on the floor of this Assembly in the 25th Legislature. It was sponsored by the Premier. For a bill of this nature, for a bill of this importance, I would have loved to have heard comments from the Premier in support of the bill he had sponsored. It appears that we are not going to have that opportunity, and that is unfortunate, because this particular bill will certainly have a huge impact on Albertans.

In looking at the bill and speaking to it in third reading, I think we have to look at this whole idea of rebates. Rebates certainly do

distort market value. We have all seen that gas prices over the last year have increased dramatically. When we are looking at rebates, we also have to look at whether they are equitable, whether they are available to all. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre certainly raised a number of those issues when she talked about whether Bill 1 was equitable and whether this enormous resource, that makes windfall profits for this province, and the advantages and the benefits that we get from our royalties are in fact being distributed throughout our population equitably or whether some people are not sharing in those profits.

Certainly when we see what has happened in rents across this province and what has happened to the cost of housing across this province, we have to look at both sides, Mr. Speaker. Whereas it is good that we are having construction booms in this province and are having rapid development, certainly people that live in high-rise condominiums or apartments, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre pointed out, by definitions in this bill presently are not sharing in those benefits. So I think we have some spade work to do on this bill even yet, even though it is in third reading. Those people are not sharing in the benefits. We are putting the rebates in the hands of the owners with the hope that in fact this will be passed on to all the people in the apartments. From the phone calls I've had from constituents in Edmonton-Glengarry, they certainly don't feel they have that opportunity.

The other thing is that when I look at this bill, I have to say: is a permanent rebate a bad thing? Is this a long-term solution? What is the cost of this program? Those are certainly very, very important questions and questions that again we don't have a clear answer to. Particularly when we look at nonrenewable sources such as natural gas and we look at what our reserves are in this particular province, then I think we have to look at what is best for Albertans not only today but in the future. We do have to be cautious as we move forward in this regard. We certainly know the advantages of research and development. We know that for us to have a prosperous and bright future, this segment of our industry must have the benefit of a great amount of research and development and particularly when we look at the reserves of natural gas here in this province.

Now, then, Mr. Speaker, we have the majority of the western Canada basin situated in Alberta. Part of it, of course, cuts into the northeast corner of British Columbia and also touches up into the Northwest Territories. So in looking at what has happened in Alberta, I think we have a number of concerns, and certainly one of those concerns is how much gas we really do have in this province.

Now, then, looking at our reserves, there are in the western Canada basin approximately 307 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 2.8 billion cubic metres of oil. The western Canada basin is the largest on our continent, in North America. It certainly was not by coincidence, I think, that President Bush, when he was mentioning his energy blueprint for the United States, included to work closely with Canada to develop new energy supplies.

Now, I also noticed that when the minister was making his comments on the third reading of Bill 1, he mentioned that we had, I believe it was, a \$10 billion industry that we had many royalties from last year. Not only did we get the royalties, but we got an additional number of benefits from the support services to this particular industry. Again, that is reflected to some extent in Bill 1. But my concern with Bill 1 is the speed with which it allows us to move forward with this particular protection act, and as I see it, there isn't a great deal of protection.

Earlier the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar certainly raised the point that even though we have branch lines coming from many parts of the province and those sections that are included in the

western Canada basin, presently this gas entering the Alliance pipeline is not being stripped. It is shooting down to Chicago. It is in the United States where we are stripping all the additional things out of that gas and leaving the methane for distribution throughout the north-central and northern parts of the United States. Of course, the Alliance pipeline did provide investment and jobs and opportunity, but it also increased the amount of flow going out of Alberta, and it increased it to a great extent. It also, in doing so, allowed a great amount of our reserves to be shipped out of this province without being stripped.

11:20

I also noticed here that when the hon. minister was talking, he said that we have surpassed Saudi Arabia as one of the suppliers to the United States for more oil. Again, that comes at a huge price, because we are finding in this province, Mr. Speaker, that even though we had more wells drilled last year than ever before, we haven't had any increase in production, so it tells us that our supplies are starting to be tested and that they won't be here in the future. As well, the wells that we are drilling continue to be deeper and deeper. Yet when we look at Saudi Arabia and some of the other members of OPEC that do a tremendous amount of drilling, they can drill and hit oil at 150 feet, and they can extract that from the ground much, much cheaper. So my concern with Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, is the fact that we haven't looked long-term, that here we are using up our reserves extremely quickly and yet other nations in the world that have greater reserves than we do are not using their reserves to the same extent.

Again, I think that if we are going to protect what we have here in this province for future generations, we have to have a very, very sensible method in which we allow those reserves to be drilled and a way in which they are distributed not only to Albertans but to other people here in the province.

Now, then, I think Bill 1 was a very, very quick reaction to a situation that certainly people in Alberta did not react well to. I look at, for example, the fact that last winter we had somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$4 billion in rebates given to Albertans. I have to say that I certainly enjoyed mine, and I know many people in this province enjoyed theirs. But, Mr. Speaker, where were our legislators, where were our people with an eye on the future that said, "Hey, we know the Alliance pipeline is going to increase the price of natural gas here in this province, because there's going to be such a great amount of demand for it"?

Now, I also noticed when it was announced within the last two weeks that we are going to have a Mackenzie Valley pipeline that is going to be shipping gas down to the States – it has just a huge demand – that our aboriginals who have unsettled land claims in northern Canada certainly were front and centre. They were there to protect their rights. They were there to be a player in negotiations. They were there to protect their people. Without that, this Mackenzie Valley pipeline wouldn't have gone ahead. But where were we when the Alliance pipeline was proposed? Where were we in protecting Albertans with these enormous costs that we have witnessed in the last six months alone?

I look at and refer back to comments made by the Minister of Energy, that we certainly do get as a result of our natural gas industry in this province a great amount of investment. Any number of new jobs have been created because of this and opportunities for our youth to work, and we certainly wish that. It is certainly one of the benefits that a resource of this nature gives us, but as well how long are those benefits going to be here?

I look at our huge petrochemical industry in this province. We have Joffe, Union Carbide, Dow Chemical, and all of them have a

huge stake in this province, particularly with the natural gas. What have we done to protect them?

Now, we did hear the Premier speak earlier of how any pipeline that passes through Alberta – they are going to strip that methane and use those products to develop industry here in the province, yet we let an enormous opportunity with our oil and gas flow into the Alliance pipeline. Every bit of it. We did not strip any part of it. So grave concerns here in third reading of Bill 1.

Now, then, in looking at Bill 1 in third reading, I again have grave concerns over regulations. As I glance through this, in section 1(b) we have a reference to regulations; in section 1(b)(ii) we have a reference to regulations. In part (d) we have a reference to regulations. In part 2 we have a reference to regulations.

Again, if we are open, if we are accountable to the people of this province, particularly with a resource that is nonrenewable, then why are Albertans not given the benefit of an open and free discussion in this Legislature? Why do we have to rely on regulation?

Again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre spoke, she said certainly that in trying to find on the web where all these regulations were, they were very difficult to find. Not only were they very difficult to find; they were difficult to track. When you're trying to compare your regulations back to this particular bill, there is just a huge, huge difficulty. So I do have concerns with Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, in regards to the continued reliance on regulations to let Albertans know just how things are going to be implemented.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I see that my time on Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, is running out. As I said, we still have many, many concerns with Bill 1 and how this enabling legislation is going to be of total benefit to all Albertans, in residences, in businesses, and more importantly how it's going to impact our future generations.

Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 11 in its third reading, rushed as all these debates are.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. member, we're on Bill 1.

DR. PANNU: Bill 1. I'm sorry. I was talking about Bill 1. Okay. All right. All right. I stand corrected, my colleagues.

11:30

Mr. Speaker, supporting the amendment of Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, in its present form would be reckless, I think. To do so would undermine the Legislative Assembly and its powers and the duties that each of us, as representatives of our constituents, have here. The specific provisions of Bill 1 set out in sections 1 and 2 give way too much discretion to the provincial cabinet in making regulations. These sections of Bill 1 are nothing more than an empty shell. They do nothing more than delegate from the Legislative Assembly to the provincial cabinet as to who is eligible to receive rebates, the amount of these rebates that they will receive, and when they will receive those rebates.

I'm really quite concerned about the fact that the government hasn't sought a more clear direction and authority from the Legislature with respect to these matters. As I said, the bill has very little substance to it. The substance will be determined in the process of drawing up those regulations, so the debate then becomes somewhat meaningless if we can't deal with the substance of these issues. So I can't, obviously, go on to support the bill. I don't think it surprises

my colleagues on the opposite side. The bill that we would have been able to support would have required major changes in it for which there was very little opportunity.

I want to make a note here, Mr. Speaker, that there was an understanding, I understand, among the three House leaders with respect to the fact that when Bill 1 is brought back into the House for study in committee, all parties will have an opportunity to propose amendments to it. It was brought in in contravention of that understanding at a time when we couldn't respond to or introduce amendments of our own in the House. So that's regrettable. That breach of trust, I think, is something that will take some effort to restore.

What the government is asking the Assembly, of course, by way of this bill is to give it a blank cheque to the provincial cabinet.

What this bill does is give power to the provincial cabinet to decide, based on considerations – I guess political considerations primarily – when, how much, and to whom the natural gas rebates will be provided. This bill fails the test of good governance, in our judgment. A feature of good governance is that the legislative bodies, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in this case, cannot pass a law that transfers the powers of making laws to other hands. The specific provision of Bill 1 fails to limit the discretionary powers of the provincial cabinet. That, I think, is a serious flaw in this bill. This Assembly should never, never willingly, voluntarily, give away its powers to legislate to the executive branch of this government.

Why do I say that the provisions of Bill 1 fail to meet the test of good governance? Well, Mr. Speaker, section 1(b)(ii) of Bill 1 allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council discretion to decide both who is and who is not an eligible consumer. If rebates are to be given from the public chest, the Legislative Assembly should decide who is eligible. For example, is it the cabinet's intent to only make residential consumers eligible? Will rebates also be provided to farmers, to small businesspersons, to school boards and health authorities, or even to large industrial consumers? Or will the eligible consumers depend on how close we get to the next important political event, be it an election or whatever, or who exerts the most political pressure? Who knows? You sure won't find any answers to these questions in Bill 1.

Section 2, again, raises similar kinds of questions. We are in third reading, but I'm drawing attention to why I don't think this bill represents or meets the criteria for good governance. Section 2 deals with when a rebate might be provided. This section reads:

Where, in the opinion of the Minister of Energy, the Alberta price is or is likely to be greater than the amount prescribed in the regulations, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize a rebate.

Provisions like this are not delegation but rather abdication of our responsibilities as legislators of our powers. Here again, we are faced with a provision that allows the cabinet wide discretion on matters that should properly be put within the bill itself and should receive careful, detailed scrutiny on the floor of this House. That has not happened. That's not likely to happen given the nature of the bill, so I harbor very, very serious reservations about this bill. There's no formula set out whereby there is any indication of what the rebate levels will be or at what price levels they will kick in.

Additionally, the bill is named the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, but a careful reading of section 1(d) and section 4(1) indicates that an elevated price of "other substances" might entitle one to a rebate. However, "other substances" are not clearly defined. Section 1(d) states: "'other substances' [include] propane, heating oil and any other substance used for heating purposes."

Again, "heating purposes" is not defined within the bill. What does this mean: home heating, heating of schools and hospitals,

heating of greenhouses, heating for the purposes of generating electricity, or some other industrial purpose? Again, who knows?

So this really is an indication of the highly flawed nature of this bill, a bill that is going to mean fairly sizable expenditures of public money. It's going to mean demands on the public purse, on taxpayers' money in this province, and for the Legislative Assembly to give these powers away without satisfactory answers to the questions that have been raised in this House, including the ones I raised moments ago, I think would be the wrong thing to do.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this bill, Bill 1, is riddled with serious flaws, with gaps and holes, and it would be irresponsible to leave solely to the provincial cabinet the discretion to fill these gaps and plug these holes instead of providing some certainty to Albertans about what kind of protection they can expect to receive from high natural gas prices. This is strictly a political bill, which gives the provincial cabinet a blank cheque to decide who, how much, and when politically motivated rebate cheques can be sent out. Therefore, I will not be able to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

11:40

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today. Actually, I didn't even rise this morning.

I do want to address Bill 1. This bill has absolutely no association whatsoever with straddle plants, ethane-plus stripping, petrochemical feedstock, or any of the myriad of possibilities to do with an international delivery system crossing our province. The bill deals with fair, equitable, and transparent handling of possible future rebates to Alberta consumers. If some people don't understand how it works, ask a consumer who paid a utility bill this past winter and they will undoubtedly say it works very well.

Further, Mr. Speaker, this bill is absolutely unassociated with Alliance. Where were we when the Alliance pipeline was being built? We were there with a billion dollars worth of investment in the province of Alberta in jobs and continuing technology with respect to delivery of natural gas compression equipment and maintenance of the same. The Alliance pipeline also, I would have to point out, was 65 percent plus full of gas before it reached Alberta's boundary. It doesn't predominantly carry Alberta gas; it's B.C. gas.

The price spike that we had over the winter was not due to Alliance but due to a number of factors. We had an increased demand from Alberta's business industry and residential growth, severe climatic conditions in the eastern U.S. and central Canada, and, I might add, a rebound effect in the United States from Kyoto that encouraged some electrical generators to burn natural gas.

Those are some of the points, Mr. Speaker, that have been a bit muddled here with respect to Bill 1. I would encourage every individual in this Assembly to support this very worthwhile piece of legislation that does now and will in the future assist all Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take this opportunity to rise and speak to third reading on Bill 1. Bill 1 is kind of one of these pieces of legislation that you look at from one perspective and say: yes, this has a lot of potential. You look at it from another perspective and say: what's this bill all about? When we look at it, really, it's a bill which says the government – if it wants to, when it wants to, how it wants to – can do something about natural gas prices and

the associated prices of fuels that are used as substitutes for natural gas or are component parts of what we normally think about as natural gas.

I guess the end result is that if we were truly trying to reflect to Albertans that this was going to be a true price protection bill, in the debate and the evaluation of how this bill is going to be applied, what we would do is include information that would reflect on how the consumer can develop expectations as to the application of this bill. With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that this bill needs to include in it a strong statement about what constitutes a base price that we're going to try and deal with. Does it include a mechanism for providing the support to Alberta consumers when prices get too high?

I agree with the last member that spoke who said that we did get protection last winter. But, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that protection – even though it was necessary, Albertans appreciated it – was given in the wrong way because it didn't send any signal to the consumer. What we should have done was separate those payments from the actual price and bill that the consumer had to pay. When you go out there and talk to Albertans now – and I've done it with a number of people in my constituency and people across the province as I've traveled – they all say: well, gee, you know, my gas bill didn't go up this winter. No, it didn't, because they had \$150 support on that bill. What we should have done was send a signal to those consumers that, yes, we're giving them \$150 to help them in their high gas price scenario, but here is your gas bill.

In my case, as an example, Mr. Speaker, I got a bill that said \$158 when it should have been \$308. That would have told me: Ken, look at what you're doing in terms of using natural gas and in terms of how you should be thinking about conservation. Then over here I get \$150 that says: we as a government, we as the people of Alberta are looking out for each other; we're trying to protect each other from this spike that occurred because we didn't send the right direction to the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board last summer when we should have. So, in essence, it was a whole combination of events that resulted in what we saw last winter, but we're going to help ourselves as a group, as a society to get through it.

Now, that sends two messages. One is that we're a compassionate society, that we need to look out for and help each other. That's what Bill 1 potentially says. But if we make the payment in association with the utility bill, then I look at my \$150 bill and say: gee whiz, that's actually \$40 less than it was last year. We as a family undertook a lot of effort this winter to reduce our consumption, so our bill wouldn't have gone up in proportion to the rise in the price because we already undertook some activities for conservation.

If we deal with that kind of signal system, we still could have used the utility companies to distribute the bill, to make sure the bill went out in an appropriate way. What we also could have done was say: "All right. You send out your bill, and the next day you send out another envelope with a cheque for \$150 in it, and we'll even pay you the 46 cents for the stamp." This separates the situation and basically creates an opportunity for the consumer to recognize that there are two issues they have to look at in the context of what we're doing.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that as we deal with the implementation of Bill 1, we have to not interrupt what in effect is the market signal system that has to provide for consumer price responsiveness. We don't want to be out there saying that what we're going to do is send a market-distorting signal like we did this winter. It doesn't help when people don't get the message. If the message comes with a separate \$150 cheque and a high bill – and in the case of some individuals for a period this winter the \$150 was

more than their bill. They could actually take some of that money and invest it in conservation measures so that when the rebate program ends, they would then also benefit from their conservation activities. In essence, we would have provided them with both the signal and the means to act to conserve energy. I think those are the kinds of things we should be dealing with as we look at where this is going.

The other signal that I want to make sure we look at as we put this into implementation, Mr. Speaker, is: what do we set as a baseline price? This bill doesn't address that. It doesn't talk about at what level we are going to deal with the protection of Albertans from high gas prices or high heating costs or whatever you want to put into that collective measure that includes all the gases that are going to be looked at under the options that are provided to the minister as they set the regulations and as they apply the regulations.

The thing we want to make sure of, first of all, is that we don't set the price in Alberta too much out of line with the price that we see and that is experienced in adjacent jurisdictions, whether that's the other provinces in western Canada or whether it's the northwestern U.S. We've got to make sure that the price signals we're sending to Albertans fall in line with the price signals that are being received by those other individuals in those jurisdictions so that we can in essence make sure our process deals with the idea that we have to look at that in the context of how Albertans respond.

11:50

Now, the other part is that we have to make sure that price level we're going to protect is contingent upon and tied to the price we use in the budgeting process for revenue generation and revenue estimation within the province. If we set the level of protection at or about the level we expect for the price that's associated with natural gas exports, natural gas sales, what we'll do is always be sure that the excess royalties, the royalties we haven't committed to other expenditures in our budget, are available to provide support in terms of the payment that's necessary to deal with the rebate, the price protection value that we're going to pay out to Alberta consumers.

So as we look at how this gets implemented, those are some of the signals that are really important to convey to Albertans to make sure they look at the context of how they appreciate and recognize that Bill 1 is, first of all, a protection bill, but it's also one that's not meant to distort the marketplace in the sense of the price signals that get sent, and it also doesn't create a lot of angst, if I might say, within the context of the legislative process.

If we go ahead and estimate the price of natural gas for our budgeting process at \$7, let's just say, and we want to start protecting the price at \$5, what we've got is a \$2 margin there that we basically either have to put into our budget to debate the dollars that are necessary to cover that difference between what we're expecting out of revenues or else we have to be able to make sure our forecasts are such that, in essence, we've covered the expectation. Otherwise we'll end up running a deficit budget, and in Alberta we don't want to do that.

So the aspect we have to look at here is: how do we make this bill operational without influencing or without disrupting what is a strong commitment to a marketplace economy and a process that effectively gives us a chance to deal with the issues that are important to Albertans and a sense of stability?

Mr. Speaker, I guess the other aspect I want to address as we close out the debate on Bill 1 is the whole process that surrounds where the bill came from and how it was put in place. We've heard on a number of occasions already the fact that within our legislative agenda we already had legislation that would have allowed us to do basically everything that's available here within Bill 1 with possibly

just a couple of small regulatory changes. So what we end up with is a situation here where we're debating a bill right now and dealing with sending out signals to Albertans that we're living up to a commitment that was made in the context of an election campaign when energy prices and the cost of energy was a significant part of that debate.

The other option we could have undertaken was the fact that, yes, in the process of the election debate and the heat of discussion there was a commitment made to make sure that under the new legislation there would be a price protection process in place. I guess it would have been just as easy to have stood and said: "You know, we're going to revise the old piece of legislation; we're going to review the regulations; we're going to make sure that it works," in effect saying that all we're going to do is modernize and bring forward a version of legislation that already exists and make sure it's consistent with the intent.

To go ahead and make sure we actually go through the whole process and the whole debate of undertaking a bill that effectively creates a scenario that's already existing in another bill, and we repeal that bill as part of the process – it seems that, in essence, what we've done is send a message out to Albertans that either one of two things occurs when we're doing this. First of all, we didn't know that we already had a price protection bill in place or, two, that what we're dealing with is a situation of just playing to public image. I don't think that either one of those is an appropriate way to deal with constructive legislation and constructive development of the issues that are important to the role we want to play in conveying to Albertans the fact that we think there are situations and there are scenarios where price protection and the ability for us as a province to share with Albertans the ownership of the resource is really quite important.

I guess the other thing I would comment on in terms of the application and the implementation of this bill deals with the idea that as we go through the process of developing the regulations, one of the things, again, that's left up to the minister is the definition of who's actually going to get the payments. In the last round of this, this winter, we made sure that that went out to individuals that were basically consumers of the natural gas or the heating fuels that were necessary to carry them through the winter.

I guess the thing we want to look at here is: what is the intent? From the base title of the bill we're out there to protect consumers from the high costs of natural gas. So, in essence, this is not a royalty rebate program, and we have to make sure that the terms we use are truly reflective of the concepts that are going to convey our intent to Albertans. We shouldn't be talking about royalty rebates in connection with Bill 1. What we should be talking about is what it is, a subsidy to the price of natural gas or natural gas substitutes for consumers in the province. We have to make sure that as we implement this, we end up with a true sense that the consumers and the people who experience the out-of-pocket cost of the gas are the ones that truly receive the dollars that are portrayed here.

This is one of the things that, you know, we've talked about in connection with some of the other activities of the session, this period, in the sense that what we've got is a commitment here that a vendor, in other words an intermediary, must pass on the rebates. If they are the ones who receive it, they must pass it on to the person who actually writes the cheque or digs into their pocket and brings out the cash to pay for the natural gas. I would suggest that that kind of concept, Mr. Speaker, might be appropriately applied in some other areas of our policy as well.

As an example, when we make the acreage payments for farmers, we should pass it on to the appropriate name that we have recognized with a piece of land with the provision that under law they

must pass it on to the current farmer of that land. I have received a number of complaints where individuals who were actually farming the land are not the ones that get the money. This bill provides us with a very straightforward mechanism for defining a vendor and consequences of that vendor not passing the money on. That same concept could be applied in some of the other aspects that we deal with in terms of our ability to be up front and to be directive in terms of who we are targeting our support programs to, and that makes it important for us to deal with this.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the clock, I see that my time is just about up. I just want to conclude by saying that . . . Oh, I got a signal that I've got another four minutes yet, so I've got a couple more ideas to deal with in the concept of where to go.

12:00

I think the most important thing that we want to look at is how the bill can be put into play and make sure that the signals that are sent out to Albertans are really appropriate. As we pass this bill into law in Alberta, I think it's truly appropriate that we look at the aspect of how to deal with the issues that are important to Albertans and the issues that are important to the concept that we are dealing with in terms of Alberta and the way that these kinds of issues are being brought forward.

I think I catch the signal from the table that I've got a few more minutes than I really was expecting. I guess the Official Opposition leader gets a few more minutes in the normal speaking process.

What we can do is look at how this bill can be brought forward in terms of how to, I guess, satisfy the whole concept of Albertans in terms of our election commitments and our approach to sending the appropriate signals that are necessary for the appropriate time that we can deal with. I guess, looking at the little memo here, I didn't come prepared to speak quite that long, but I'll continue with a few more comments.

The main aspect that we have to look at here is kind of the message that we're sending out to all Albertans in the process of our legislative approach to dealing with the signals that are provided to them. What we want to do, then, is make sure, as we go through this, that the definitions are clear, that a lot of the controversy that was associated with last winter's legislated rebate program actually gets cleared up in terms of how we want it to apply.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, given the situation and that I've covered almost all the issues that I really wanted to raise on this, I will conclude by saying that what we're looking at here is a bill that probably wasn't necessary in the context of our existing legislative agenda. It's a bill that is sending signals to Albertans that as a society we're going to effectively look out for each other. I just hope that as we make sure that this bill gets applied, we don't disrupt the basic belief that we have and that Albertans have that a market economy has to operate and that the signals of that market economy truly get through to everybody, whether they're a buyer or a seller of a product.

We want to make sure that the regulations that are allowed, in the context of the section at the end where "the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations," really reflect that kind of a commitment to Albertans, you know, the ability to deal with how we want to reflect our commitment and our ability to be up front and to create expectations for Albertans, that they can look at it from the perspective of being sure that they're getting the right message, that they're basically going to be involved, with an understanding that the signals that are coming shouldn't be built into kind of their everyday decision-making.

You know, in the context that the bill doesn't delineate on a very definite basis an absolute price that we're going to deal with, I think

that's a good part of the bill. But we also have to have within the context of our legislation and our operation as lawmakers an ability to understand when Albertans should be encouraged or not encouraged to ask for this bill to be triggered. I say that in the sense that if we are trying to make sure that Albertans appreciate when this is going to happen or when this bill will kick in, they can say: "Okay, anytime there's a 10 percent increase over last year or anytime there's a 50 percent increase over last year or anytime we get out of line with the other residents in associated jurisdictions, then it can trigger."

I think one of the things that's kind of missing even in terms of the regulations is that what we've got to do is make sure that Albertans understand when this bill can come in, how it can be targeted, and that in the context of how Albertans operate, their decisions, we're not going to be using the section that talks about who can get the rebates and who may not be eligible to get the rebates, that we don't start creating inside and outside conditions, people who are eligible and people who are not eligible, who are, in the context of my comment just now, people meaning consumers. That's one of the important things that we need to start reviewing and dealing with in terms of how these approaches get put in place, because if the bill gets applied with appropriate definitions of who are the recipients and who are not, what we're going to potentially do is create discrepancies in the industrial sector or even in the consumer sector, the residential sector.

We saw a lot of conflict come up this winter with the issues that were there: how do we deal with a residence that happens to also be a condominium, which also happens to be zoned commercial? How do we deal with those in comparison to a single-family dwelling or a condominium that has individualized meters instead of a common meter or a condominium that has a different zoning regulation? What we end up with there is a whole series of discriminatory situations arising that allow for some individuals in the province to have a sense that they're not getting equal access to the dollars. We also have to look at it again in the context of the industrial sector.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that's important, as we go through looking at how the industrial areas will use this rebate process or rebate eligibility, is that we have to watch and make sure that we don't disrupt the comparative advantage of competing firms in the industrial and commercial sectors. As an example, if we start providing, as is provided for in the bill, options that would allow for, say, gas-fired electricity generators to receive a rebate, what we're doing is not sending the appropriate signal to potential new entrants into the electricity generation market that they have to be aware of the fact that there probably will exist in the future in Alberta a much more volatile gas market system than there would be if they were using another energy source such as coal or wind power. What we've got to do is make sure that we don't use this bill, in essence, to create a stability in a market that doesn't send the right signals to the industrial and commercial consumers in that market.

That's why it goes back to what I said earlier. We have to make sure that we deal with the issues that are important in sending the right signals and make sure that the signals don't disrupt the decision-making process. We wouldn't want to use this bill to make sure that individuals or companies that might be interested in coming to Alberta and generating electricity with natural gas have a sense that, "Well, if the price of natural gas gets too high, what in effect I can do is rely on a government rebate," and they build that into their decision-making process. That's not good economic or business relationships with our government.

The government is there to make sure that within our base beliefs of a free market system of commodity exchange, those commodities have to reflect both the absolute price but also the volatility of that

price so that the signals get sent that deal with uncertainty and with the issues of how to compensate for that uncertainty. You know, if businesses assume that they will be getting support through this program to deal with their commodity management, their price management, they will not be out into the marketplace hedging the way they should. If they're not out into the marketplace hedging the way they should, they're not sending the signals to the speculators that are there that then get transferred back into the decision-making of all consumers of that industry, because you don't see the appropriate volatility showing up in the pricing system in the way that the system operates so that the total cost of that input is built into their decision-making.

12:10

These are important factors that I just wanted to bring out in the context of how we deal with identifying the relevant people or industries or consumers that are going to be given a chance to participate and be included in the recipient groups of the kind of program that gets put out.

Mr. Speaker, also in there under the regulations section we talk about the ability of the Lieutenant Governor in Council to, in essence, put in limits that would control the amount of rebate that an individual could get in the context of any single payment. Recognizing the flexibility of a lot of our business community and the organizational options that exist for them, it seems to me that we have to be very careful when we start putting structural limits on how we deal with the payment that goes out.

In a previous role that I had, I worked extensively with the U.S. government in evaluating some of their farm programs. They always had these maximum amounts of payments that could go out to individuals who owned or operated business ventures. The ingenuity of some of those individuals in terms of how they could take a very large enterprise and operate that enterprise under a number of, if you want to call them, corporate identities was quite interesting. We actually uncovered a case where there was a little two-year-old individual who was the sole owner of a very significant agriculture corporation, but it was operated under an umbrella of another corporation that was controlled by the father.

In essence, what we've got to do is make sure that as we go through the process of putting together these regulations that will deal with how we're going to control the recipients and send a signal that might indicate that there could be a possible maximum amount of dollar payment, we have to make sure that within that framework we don't allow for – we might put it in one way as ingenuity in developing corporate structure. What we want to do then is make sure that if there is an umbrella corporation, that umbrella corporation becomes the identity that has the maximum payment associated with it rather than a set of subsidiary corporations all operating and dealing with the same kind of product output, if you want to call it that. Resource input, I guess, is even a better way of putting it, because we're dealing specifically with the purchase of a resource on input.

I guess the other thing in here that we can also look at is the issue that the Lieutenant Governor in Council will be able to deal with the timing and the frequency of the rebates. Here what we've got to do is make sure that as we deal with that, we don't in any way, I guess, create natural burdens on one group of consumers as opposed to another in the sense that if we're making them on a quarterly basis or an annual basis, the financing charges end up becoming part of the business cost associated with that activity. We've seen that, Mr. Speaker, in the electricity industry this winter, where with putting in price caps, effectively we've forced into the business decisions of those industries a deficit financing situation.

Well, we could do the same kind of thing with the improper timing of rebates here, where the business or the resident that is buying the natural gas in effect has to finance it from the perspective of making the payment up front and then at a time later getting their payment. This is, you know, an issue that has to be tied very closely as we put them together with the concern that I raised earlier when we talked about the idea that the separation of the utility bill from the rebate or the support payments sends a signal of conservation. But we also want to make sure that that separation is not time sensitive to the point where we can actually create economic hardship for individuals by making them finance the ongoing cost of their utility. For most of us, Mr. Speaker, that's probably an insignificant financing charge, but when we look at individuals on a very fixed income or corporations that are very large consumers of our natural gas or eligible products, then what we end up with is a situation that will reflect the necessity of basically making sure that they don't get themselves into a financial difficulty because of the financing that's associated with having to wait for that support payment and maybe a competitor is getting it because they fall under a different class or a different classification.

An interesting point on section (k) is where you're looking at the administration of those rebates. I guess this is where we're going to look at how pass-through conditions would occur, how pass-through requirements may be enforced or be suggested as they build to working with the relevant recipient of the dollar and how they have to be applied. I think that what we want to make sure here is that if there are administrative charges associated with that rebate, they become part of the rebate program rather than be a charge that gets passed on to the actual recipient of the dollar and it comes out of their pocket. This is, you know, consistent with the comment that I made earlier when I was talking about that separation. We might want to pay even the postage stamp to the company so that they can send out an additional envelope with a cheque in it as opposed to having it go out as a deduction off the bottom of the utility bill.

The issue here also is the fact that they would probably have to run their computer for a specified period of time so that they can make sure that the costs associated with that are reflected, because what we end up with is a situation where the marketers of our eligible products may find that if they're going to participate or if they're going to be expected to participate as the delivery agent for the government, then what we're going to deal with is their aspect of how to make sure that they're not put in a financial difficulty for the operation and the actual application of the program in terms of their participation. So those are some of the issues that we need to talk about.

12:20

I guess the final comment that I want to address is the second section of the regulations for the Lieutenant Governor in Council. There's a lot of leeway when you look at the first set there, where effectively the minister under the umbrella of the Lieutenant Governor in Council can make designations of other substances. I wonder if this might be an opportunity for a minister to become innovative in the context of support for new technologies, you know, the fuels that are necessary to run some of our emerging fuel cell technologies, maybe hydrogen-based support.

You know, are we effectively saying to the minister that they can be that flexible, that broad in the context of how they look at "other substances"? I guess we want to make sure that here what we're dealing with is making sure that as we go about this, the true balance of the competitive market and the price signals that get sent are reflected in the way that we as a society want to use it even if that might mean that this kind of program becomes part of a process of

providing incentive support to an emerging idea like the concept of using grain alcohol as a substitute for gasoline in terms of some of our fuel-based consumption.

The interesting idea that comes out under this section (2) is the whole idea of looking at other substances, and the process that's associated there is a matter of extending the whole idea of what we're, I guess, normally thinking about in terms of Albertans' perception of what Bill 1 is all about. Bill 1 was kind of presented to them from the perspective that this was going to be a bill that would protect their interest in stability, their interest in a sense of security that the fluctuating prices of natural gas and the gas-associated products wouldn't create a hardship for them.

But this second section of the regulation provision of the act basically provides the minister with a true ability to expand the whole mandate and the premise behind the bill to one of providing economic incentive and becoming effectively an economic development tool for the province. I don't know whether that was the intent of the bill originally as we look through and see what approach and what the implications of the wordings are that are put into the bill, to see whether or not it effectively will deal with the possibility of providing Albertans with that kind of price protection and other aspects.

That's the part that really comes out in terms of the application and the potential uncertainty that surrounds this bill in terms of what was the real intent of the government, first of all, in putting in Bill 1 when they already had a mechanism to protect Albertans specifically from high prices of natural gas. But when we're specifically identifying a whole section of the bill that allows the minister to extend way beyond the price protection of natural gas, how this bill can be used and where it can be applied – and I think we want to look at maybe whether or not some concern should be put on the record that we have to make sure that if we're going to step broadly away from this basic public idea that Bill 1 is a natural gas and associated fuel price protection bill, then we should have provisions in there that would deal with the idea that that application of this bill will have some focus of a public debate before it actually gets out and being used in this way so that it deals with how Albertans perceive it.

The final section there, Mr. Speaker, deals with the aspect of how to make regulations so that the bill can in essence be retroactive. I guess this is kind of a situation where we're looking at a final clause in the bill that basically says: well, the bill is going to come into effect on July 1, 2001, but between the period of the end of the current rebates, at the end of April 2001, and the implementation of the possibilities of this bill, if we really want to and if we really have to, we can use this final section of the bill to actually step out and go back and deal with some of the concepts that are associated with trying to protect either residential consumers or the industrial consumers of natural gas during that interim period. I think that if that is the intent of that section of the bill, then what we've got are a lot of Albertans that will be looking at this and saying: yes, this actually provides us with an alternative.

What it does also, Mr. Speaker, is make sure that we end up in a situation where the process is open to political influence. What we're going to have is a situation of a whole number of people coming out and saying: "You know, we were under the impression that this bill wasn't going to apply in the interim period. Now we in essence have to become political activists to deal with the interim period, between the end of April and the 1st of July."

I don't know whether that's the kind of signal we wanted to send. Wouldn't it have been much more appropriate to basically say that instead of dealing with that, let's make sure that this particular piece of legislation has a starting date that would have been consistent

with the ending date of the current rebate program? In effect, what we could do is say: "Look; even though it's now almost the end of May when we're finally giving third reading to this, we're in a position where what we're dealing with is a one-month period."

As I was saying that, Mr. Speaker, I also thought of an opportunity: is there something more here, where we're looking at a possibility that the ability of this section of the bill will be to allow the government to go back and in essence review what happened under the rebate program that's been in place for this winter and use that section of the bill to effectively correct or to redirect or to add to some of the subsidies and some of the support that was provided even prior to or inclusive of that period of support from January to April? I guess that kind of creates a whole open area that we have to look at in the context of how the bill is going to be dealt with and how the bill is going to reflect the true commitment that we're making to a degree of certainty in the process.

Mr. Speaker, as we've gone through the bill, we've had a lot of debate about what the real meaning of the bill is and some of the applications of it. What we have to do is look at the perspective of how we are now going to use this bill in terms of our protection of Albertans from escalating prices. I think the important part of it is that in the not too distant future the regulations be publicly debated, the regulations be publicly discussed so that we send the right signals to Albertans both in terms of their expectations about what conditions might be out there to trigger this bill and what conditions within the bill's framework would identify them as a recipient of this kind of support. I guess I would just encourage the minister to deal with the development of those regulations in a very open way, in a way that is put together to form a consensus-building process around Alberta. One of the ideas, if we see a reasonable stability in our gas prices for the summer, is to tie this possibly to some of the debate of the Future Summit, when we start looking at how Albertans will have input into determining our Alberta over the next five, 10, 15, or 20 years.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I think I'll take my seat and allow the debate to move on with others to participate. Thank you very much.

12:30

THE SPEAKER: As we enter our 24th straight hour, let me call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for those encouraging words. I'm pleased to rise to speak to third reading of Bill 1, which is really the bill that started it all, if the truth be known. Maybe a little bit later I'll get a chance to explain to members opposite the key role that this bill and the government's handling of it have played in bringing us to the point we're at this afternoon.

I am pleased to address this bill. This bill has as an objective the establishment of protection for natural gas and other heating substances, price protection for those commodities on behalf of the people of this province, who might otherwise have to pay exorbitant prices for their own natural resources.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

So, Mr. Speaker, it brings me to the point of asking why the bill is necessary in the first place. That's a very good question. That's a question that I've thought a lot about. It seems to me that we ought to all have a good understanding of why this bill is necessary in the first place before we give it final approval in the Assembly. One of the main reasons – and the Minister of Energy said it yesterday in some of his responses to questions put in question

period. He repeated essentially the same thing that I had said several weeks ago in the Assembly, which brought about a very, very vigorous spate of heckling and unofficial denials across the way. But when the minister said it, in almost exactly the same words, there was an appreciative silence on the part of the government members, and that is that the Alliance pipeline has created a continental energy market for our natural gas.

Mr. Speaker, I think that's an important statement and an important acknowledgment from our Minister of Energy, because that's precisely what the New Democrats have been saying since the by-election in Edmonton-Highlands last June. The reason that Albertans are being asked to pay natural gas prices that are three to four times higher than they were just two or three years ago is because the government has supported the creation of a continental market for our extremely limited resources of natural gas. The result is that all Albertans end up paying prices that you would expect to pay in California or in Chicago for our own natural resource. Of course, the government didn't do anything about that until they were faced with an election. We certainly raised it as a major issue in the Edmonton-Highlands by-election, which is very nearly a year ago now. We certainly trounced our opponents and particularly the government opponent in that riding.

What happened was the government decided to bring about some policies. Now, it was clear that the government's policies were being developed very much on the fly, so to speak, and they were kind of making it up as they went along. It wasn't until we on our side had raised this as a significant public issue that the government glommed onto the fact that they needed to do something about it not only to protect consumers but to protect their hold on power. The government proceeded to introduce a whole series of different rebates for energy.

Of course, they had the same problem, which also was a self-inflicted problem, and that was around the prices of electricity. By messing up a perfectly workable electricity system in favour of radical experimentation, they had created not only high natural gas prices for Albertans . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Highlands, we have a member here rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. MARZ: Yes, Mr. Speaker. *Beauchesne* 459, relevance. I've been listening for the last five minutes. I've heard very little, if anything, that is relevant to the effects of this bill, and that's what we're discussing in third reading.

MR. MASON: Well, I'm sorry if I've wandered, Mr. Speaker. I was attempting to deal with the reasons behind the need for this legislation, but I'll try and focus more closely on the legislation itself if that's your wish.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Are there others on the point of order?

Seeing that no one else is concerned about this issue, it's encouraging that the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was listening so attentively and noted that you strayed perhaps a little bit. So keeping that in mind, to the bill, please.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and of course the point of order will not be deducted from my time, as per the rules.

Debate Continued

MR. MASON: So I guess what I want to do, then, is talk about how

the bill deals with it. The bill deals with it in a way that is wide open. In fact, as I said at second reading, I think this isn't so much a piece of legislation as a framework for regulation. It's simply a superstructure put in place to allow the government to do almost anything it wants around rebates. I know that that's pleasing to members opposite, but it disturbs this hon. member and I'm sure many others who have some familiarity with the principles of responsible government.

We heard last night from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview an excellent elucidation on the development of responsible, democratic government in Canada. This flies in the face of it, and this is why we're fundamentally at odds with this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. The principle that ought to be contained in legislation is the principle that it is the people's elected representatives – the people who are elected here as a whole, not just who is the government but the Assembly itself – that have got to have the responsibility for overseeing the expenditures of the government.

Here we have a situation where the government has recently spent, not just on natural gas rebates, of course, but on rebates of all types to fix the energy mess that they've created, \$4 billion – \$4 billion – enough to run a small country. They have spent that in order to achieve whatever goals they may have, including possibly the protection of Albertans from high energy prices.

12:40

Now, the government has got in this piece of legislation a whole bunch of references to regulation, and I think that it flies in the face of the tradition that the elected members of this Assembly or of any Assembly have a right to oversee expenditures by the government. These expenditures ought to be made by the government in a responsible way, and the rules, the regulations, the restrictions, and all of the other important factors around the expenditure of significant amounts of money ought to be spelled out in the legislation, not left to government regulation.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I would point out that the act mentions “regulations” at least seven times. For example, in section 1(a) the Alberta price is “determined in accordance with the regulations”; in 1(b) “‘eligible consumer’ means, subject to the regulations”; in 1(b)(ii) “with reference to other substances, an eligible consumer as defined in the regulations”; and in 1(d) “‘other substances’ means propane, heating oil and any other substance used for heating purposes as specified in the regulations.” So the government can determine what types of fuels or substances can be subsidized without the authority of the Assembly except indirectly.

In section 2 under price protection “regulations” appears a couple of times. It says:

Where, in the opinion of the Minister of Energy, the Alberta price is or is likely to be greater than the amount prescribed in the regulations, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize a rebate to eligible consumers in Alberta under the regulations to assist eligible consumers in the cost of marketable gas.

Then we go down to section 4(2). It says:

A rebate under this Act made to an eligible consumer for marketable gas or other substances consumed or used in Alberta for industrial purposes is subject to the maximum amount of rebate prescribed in the regulations.

Then again in section 7. This is the regulations section, Mr. Speaker. It says that “the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations” concerning a long list of things. There are, in fact, 16 subjects of regulation in this act. So if you talk about the number of references to regulations in the act, which is seven, and the number

of things that are the subject of regulation, which is 16, it comes, according to my arithmetic, to 23 things that are regulated.

I did have a chance to pull out the Natural Gas Rebates Act, under which previous rebates to consumers were made. I found that in that act, which this one is intended to replace, there are far more protections for the principle of responsible government, far more protections for the taxpayer, far more restrictions on the government's arbitrary use of regulations than there are in this bill. So the question I have is: why does the government want to take a piece of legislation that, notwithstanding its serious limitations, at least provides some control over the government expenditure in this area and replace it with a bill that has virtually no restrictions over the government's authority to issue rebates in any way they want, to whoever they want, for virtually whatever they want? As long as, I'm assuming, it can be burned, then it can be provided for under this act.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to just mention, in fact, that it's very unfortunate that this bill is required in the first place, because I think a better approach for the government to follow is to fix the actual problem that we're dealing with, and that's high energy prices for the citizens of Alberta.

I think there are ways that they could go that would render much of this unnecessary. If they in fact wish to provide a cap to the price of natural gas as it affects at least domestic consumers in Alberta, we believe they could do that, and we wouldn't have to have the government making decisions around the cabinet table about when and where they're going to apply taxpayers' money to this. They could provide some permanent protection for Albertans. Alberta New Democrats suggested that on a number of occasions: that it's a better approach, that the government could actually control the prices paid instead of simply coming up with expenditures to offset these high costs, which merely reside temporarily in an individual's chequing account before they are then passed on to the gas company and through the gas company to the natural gas producers.

It could be financed, Mr. Speaker, in a very simple fashion. As we all know, for every additional dollar that the government receives from natural gas revenues, the oil and gas producers receive somewhere between three or four additional dollars, so the natural gas producers are making out very, very well in this particular market. I'm sure that that excites some members opposite no end, but for us it's a concern because a lot of that money is coming out of the pockets of Albertans. So if the government introduces a rebate program as envisaged by this act, they simply take some of that royalty revenue or some general revenues from the government and send it by way of a cheque to people who then put it in their bank account who then write it to the gas company.

So all of these rebates are simply hidden subsidies for energy companies. That's what the government's price protection policy amounts to. It is simply an indirect means of subsidizing energy companies. It does that very simply because the money goes into our pocket, into our account, and from there it gets written as a monthly cheque to the gas companies, who have to buy the gas at higher prices so then they have to write a cheque to the gas producers who are the ultimate winners in all of this subsidy that's taking place. The people of Alberta know this, Mr. Speaker. Even though they're very pleased to get the money – many of them are – to get \$150 before the election and then another \$150 after the election, it isn't lost on many of them, that this money ultimately ends up in the bank accounts of natural gas producers in our province.

So our approach, on the other hand, would be to see a small increase in royalties. That's not a bad thing. I'd recommend it to the government. Certainly places like Alaska and so on have much more rigorous royalty policies than Alberta, and it hasn't stopped

exploration and development in those places. What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is by slightly increasing the royalties, and only slightly, you would be able to provide permanent price protection at the level of two years ago, which is \$3 per gigajoule for every Albertan, yet the government has rejected that approach, and I can't understand why the government would reject that kind of approach. I think it's shortsighted for the government not to take a more holistic and systematic approach to dealing with the actual costs instead of using taxpayers' money essentially to subsidize high energy prices and high profits by oil and natural gas producers in this province.

12:50

I think it's very unfortunate, but I would just in conclusion say, Mr. Speaker, that this particular bill flies in the face of 800 years of British parliamentary democracy, which has a cardinal principle that it is the Assembly that has control over the expenditures of the government. This is a real play around the authority of the Legislature, giving enormous power to spend money to the government without reference to the Assembly, and that I think, is a serious thing, something that ought not to be dismissed lightly, because it has been a principle of our governments for a very, very long time. In fact, it's the foundation of this place and the reason this place came into being and had a life and a vitality that has served the citizens in our type of political system very well for a very long time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, your time has now expired.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a third time]

Bill 2 Cooperatives Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Cooperatives Act updates 53-year-old legislation to keep up with substantial shifts in the co-operative sector and recent changes to legislation in other provinces. It has in fact seen a wide-ranging consultation during the formation of this bill, and frankly I believe the co-operative sector is anxiously awaiting the passing of it.

With that said, I would like to move third reading of Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to participate in third reading of Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act. It comes as a surprise to us that this was the next bill on the agenda. In spite of a history of co-operation in terms of listing what bills will be next up for debate in this House since I have been here, which is since the spring of 1992, we have now been told by the government that it's a surprise package in terms of what comes up next for debate.

It is important to establish what's happening here today, as we're in our 24th hour of debate, nearly twice having seen 1:30 since Monday afternoon in this Legislature.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Speak to the bill.

MS CARLSON: I am quite prepared to speak on whichever bill comes up in third reading this afternoon. I'm quite prepared to deal with a government who refuses completely to be co-operative. It's too bad that that's the process that happens, Mr. Speaker, because it means on Bill 2, a bill which in essence we support, we will have

everybody in our caucus speak to it. I'm sure that the other opposition party, the New Democrats, will also be putting that forward.

AN HON. MEMBER: Assumption.

MS CARLSON: Assumptions are allowed in this Legislature, and if you want to respond to it, you have every opportunity to get up and speak.

In terms of Bill 2, the highlights of this bill are . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You sit down, and I'll speak.

MS CARLSON: We'll see. We'll see when I sit if you do get up and speak.

The highlights of this bill, Mr. Speaker, are that they modernize and replace co-operatives legislation. They are a good idea. I would like to applaud the member who has introduced this, the Member for Calgary-North Hill. He has worked quite diligently in terms of trying to get our co-operation on this particular bill.

It's unfortunate that in a Legislative Assembly where we have seen so many bills, some of them of a very substantial and significant matter, we have had little time to devote to this particular bill, which certainly in terms of outstanding issues is a lower priority. The Member for Calgary-North Hill has lobbied us aggressively and repeatedly in terms of any outstanding questions or issues we have with the bill so that it could see a relatively speedy passage in this Legislature. We appreciate his efforts on that behalf. If we had seen that kind of co-operation from other members who are sponsors of bills, I believe that we would see a much speedier passage of legislation in this Assembly at all times. We perhaps didn't give him due regard in that process because of our small numbers and the large numbers of legislation being passed this spring in a very speedy fashion.

It's amazing to note, Mr. Speaker, that we are now on the 14th or 15th bill that we have debated since 8 last evening. While we have heard many people complain about the length of time that we have been in here, in fact that doesn't even average an hour and a half per bill. What we have seen being forced on a very small minority opposition by a bully government is closure. There are many ways to bring closure into a Legislature, and we see that this is one of them. What we are seeing now is a large number of third readings by a government who is so arrogant that they don't even care to share the order of the bills that will be debated next. Bill 2 is one that comes up to mind.

REV. ABBOTT: Unparliamentary terms.

MS CARLSON: If you don't like it, stand up on a point of order, my friend. Otherwise, be quiet.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar on a point of order. Citation please.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

REV. ABBOTT: *Beauchesne's* 489.

THE SPEAKER: Please proceed.

REV. ABBOTT: I believe "arrogant" is an unparliamentary term.

THE SPEAKER: I appreciate that the hon. member has referred himself to *Beauchesne*, and I suspect that he's done a thorough

reading and will continue to do a thorough reading of *Beauchesne*. In section 489 it says, "since 1958, it has been ruled unparliamentary to use the following expressions," but nowhere on the list is "arrogant." The hon. member might wish to refer himself to section 490. In section 490 it says, "since 1958, it has been ruled parliamentary to use the following expressions," and "arrogant" is one of those words that is acceptable.

No point of order. Please proceed.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am quite happy to withdraw that particular word and replace highhandedness and indifference, if that suits the member better.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: So to continue on with my comments on third reading of Bill 2. I would like to take a look at this bill which in essence we support, certainly the streamlining process, the updating that has gone on here, the providing of a variety of tools which will help these co-ops to compete with business corporations and take a look at an area of co-ops, I think, that is very important for us to understand as legislators and to support, Mr. Speaker, and that's aboriginal co-ops in Canada, their current situation and potential for growth.

1:00

In referencing the comments that I'm about to make, I would like to refer to the report on Aboriginal Co-operatives in Canada: Current Situation and Potential for Growth by Dr. Lou Hammond Ketilson, associate professor, management and marketing, College of Commerce and Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, and Dr. Ian MacPherson, director, British Columbia Institute for Co-operative Studies, University of Victoria, dated March 2001. We see that there are many co-ops in Alberta. If I have read the notes correctly, we have about 400 or so in this particular province. In terms of aboriginal co-ops, there are 133 throughout Canada whose membership is predominantly aboriginal.

Most of these can be found in the northern regions of the country, and they are different from the majority of the co-ops in Alberta, which primarily focus on agriculture. Most of the aboriginal co-ops serve a wide variety of needs, the most common being the provision of food and supplies in remote communities. Also, they've become important as marketers of arts and crafts, wild rice, fish, and shellfish, and some have been acted on in terms of the possibilities for housing in urban communities, which is interesting, because that seems to be where the most participation has been in Alberta at this particular point in time. This is, I think, a critical need, urban housing, and it has a considerable future and potential in this province, particularly when we see the kind of shortage of affordable housing that we have in this province and we see particular needs in the aboriginal community for this kind of housing. It is, I think, important for us to understand that this legislation that we will pass in Bill 2 will move forward to some degree enabling the aboriginal community to work within the framework of a co-op and help to facilitate some of those key needs.

I would hope that the sponsor of this bill will continue to take an ongoing interest in what happens to co-ops and new co-ops coming on-line after the bill is passed, and perhaps he could directly focus his interests on the aboriginal community, because I believe that this is a key issue and that we can find here, in supporting these co-ops, a key answer to identifying and solving some outstanding issues in the community. We see that aboriginal co-ops are very important within the history and the development of the Canadian movement of co-ops but also very important to their own community.

In total, co-ops in Canada have more than \$169 billion in assets and more than 15 million memberships in Canada, so that's very interesting to see. Housing co-operatives house some 250,000 people in more than 2,100 co-ops with nearly 90,000 units. Pretty significant, Mr. Speaker, and something we need to take a look at as a reasonable solution to the housing crisis that we have for the low income and working poor in this province.

Aboriginal co-ops are members of both the Canadian Co-operative Association and the French counterpart, and they've done some serious work in this area in terms of solving some issues. The suitability of the co-operative model for what aboriginal leaders say about the kind of economy they wish to encourage is important. The paper that I'm looking at actually drew upon the findings of 11 case studies to make a series of conclusions and recommendations about the potential of growth for co-operatives owned by aboriginal people for their own purpose.

So why is this important in terms of Bill 2, where we've seen some changes in the legislation? It's important because aboriginal people in Canada, as we know, have an unacceptably low standard of living and consequently suffer from a range of complex social problems, all of which I hope the government is serious about addressing. We've heard some indications of that, and we'll see what happens over time on some of these issues. There have been a number of efforts by governments to encourage economic development among aboriginal peoples, but they haven't achieved the desired results.

You know, we see a small number of people who are just having phenomenal success, but we still have vast issues outstanding in the communities, not just in Alberta, Mr. Speaker, but I would suggest that we need to take a look at our neighbours in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where the issues are perhaps more outstanding than what they are in Alberta. We need to, whenever we can, support our neighbours in helping them to help themselves and find a way out of some of these issues.

We've heard aboriginal leaders expressing a preference, Mr. Speaker, for economic development in a kind of process that takes into account their history and the kind of framework that they naturally work within, which is really a collective kind of framework. I'm quite familiar with the collective framework having worked in the women's movement for many, many years, and it's very much a similar kind of framework as to what aboriginal communities work very well within. That certainly is the kind of framework that co-ops fit in. Co-ops then can be adapted to address the underlying realities of each aboriginal community, which is also important. This approach can conform well with aims and preferred methods for the community development, as we hear from the aboriginal communities themselves, in terms of what they wish to accomplish and how they wish to accomplish it.

So if we take a look at what's happening in terms of conclusions of what aboriginal co-ops are doing so far in Canada, we see that the 133 co-ops, particularly those in the Arctic, are very successful. They make significant and substantial economic contributions to the communities they serve through local businesses and through the wholesales they own, which return surpluses back to them, which is, of course, a bonus, not only to sustain a reasonable standard of living for those people who work within the co-ops and contribute to them but also profits back to them. We see also that co-ops are major employers of aboriginal people, and they have made and are making significant contributions through the training and education they provide their elected leadership and employees. So also a very positive movement. There's no one here in this Assembly, I don't think, who isn't quite dismayed by the high unemployment rates faced by aboriginal communities and look toward solutions to solving that as an issue.

So what can happen in the future, and how can this bill relate to facilitating that, Mr. Speaker? If you think about further success in this regard, you can talk about what is an existing barrier right now. The system we have now, in terms of a very complicated political and policy environment, really is a barrier to economic and community development to many people in the province but particularly disadvantages this community. The barriers help explain, I think, the mixed success rate and low take-up of the co-op model over the past few years. Some of the barriers have been eliminated in this legislation and replaced by some facilitating aims. One of those certainly is the access to better capital financing that we see in this act. Aboriginal communities often don't have direct access to start-up funds, and this will help streamline processes and give some increased flexibility and look at harmonizing legislation, all things that will significantly, I think, facilitate this.

What we don't see particularly addressed in this legislation but that would have helped and that perhaps the sponsor will take a look at are things like more educational development material on co-ops so that people can get a good grounding on them, and then they can take that information and customize it to their own individual realities and to their culture. If we could take this act one step further and build some frameworks and provide some examples of existing aboriginal co-operatives, we would be well on the way to giving a hand up to a community that is really looking to solve conditions for themselves, and I think that would be very positive.

1:10

We've seen that most provincial and territorial representatives contacted have suggested that co-operative federations need to do more work in outreach and advocacy. Certainly, that's the next step that could happen in a bill like this, and it really looks like it might be a logical step there. Of course, what can happen is that with our new resources, staff and specialists in aboriginal economics can make links and promote the model to communities. We've seen some excellent pilot projects being conducted by industry players in terms of working with aboriginal communities and providing this kind of assistance to them. The one that always comes to mind immediately for me is Al-Pac. I think they do some outstanding work in that regard, but there is no doubt that the government could easily be a facilitator in this regard.

We need to see aboriginal development corporations play a centre role in controlling decisions over community development and then subsequently a crucial role in the success of co-operative enterprises. Formal links should be encouraged between co-operative federations and aboriginal development corporations. The views and priorities of these corporations with regard to co-operative enterprises should be identified in the next phase of research on aboriginal co-ops. That next phase is the next logical step for this bill to take.

We've seen that they've started to develop co-operatives to meet clearly identified needs and to address pressing needs in the community. This is important not only in terms of solving outstanding issues but in terms of determining future success. If you can provide a framework and a little bit of assistance when people don't know how to carry on with the framework or they fall outside of the mandate and if they can see examples of systems that have worked in the past and if you can link them up with contact people, to successful co-ops, what we end up getting, Mr. Speaker, is a huge phenomenal success, and that's really good and positive for the community.

There are huge contributions, then, that they make in the areas that they're in. They contribute to the physical infrastructure of communities by contributing to better transportation, communication systems, employment, and essential services. Those are all signifi-

cant and not to be sneezed at. We've seen them contributing substantially to the social capital of communities. They do that by enhancing educational programs. People learn skills, business management skills and employment skills. Community action often falls out of this kind of work. They work with other cultures and communities, so they learn how to negotiate and compromise and find solutions. Those are all important.

But, Mr. Speaker, there still are a number of challenges. Secured funding is still important. This bill goes some direction in talking about that in terms of providing better access, but secured funding is fundamental. So we need to see a greater collaboration of the government on this. We'd like to see some dedicated dollars in one of these upcoming budgets in terms of that issue. We need to see some more research on the issues of co-ops. This is a good start in terms of reforming some of the legislation and updating it, but more research is needed. Education is important in terms of educating potential memberships.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I enjoy the opportunity here this afternoon to rise and speak in third reading to Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act.

I would like to compliment the Member for Calgary-North Hill. Obviously a tremendous amount of work went into this piece of legislation, and he did exhaustive research. He had many, many consultations. Not only that, but he lobbied for any concerns or questions with the bill. As such we do have a very good piece of legislation here.

As I said, I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments on Bill 2 and to certainly say that I do support Bill 2. It is legislation, Mr. Speaker, that modernizes and replaces co-operative legislation that has been in this province for quite some time. I heard the Member for Calgary-North Hill indicate when he was introducing this legislation that it is 53 years old and that this will modernize it and bring it up to date and not only bring it up to date but provide a clear path for co-operatives in the future. I think it is something that all members appreciate, that all Albertans, particularly those involved in the co-operative movement, welcome.

As well, what this legislation will do, Mr. Speaker, is attract more co-operatives to Alberta. Historically when we look back at the role that co-operatives have played in the development of not only this country but this province, we see the need for the continued growth and the continued development and prosperity of co-operatives.

Now, we see that we have more than 400 co-operatives in Alberta. The majority of these are involved in agriculture, farming, industry, and definitely some in housing. Co-operatives continue to play a very important role in the lives of many Albertans who certainly wouldn't have the financial resources themselves to be involved at this particular level. I see that in Canada there are more than 15 million memberships in co-ops. So that is why I think we do have such a piece of extensive legislation and very good legislation.

Again, when we look at the success of co-operatives in this province, they do have some challenges. They have some challenges in regards to their sustainability. They have challenges in membership. They have challenges in how they pay back profits to their members. So when we look at this particular bill, I'd like to make some comments, and these primarily will deal with membership and how people in this province can join co-operatives and how they can use the services of the co-operative and who is willing and able to accept the responsibilities of and abide by the terms of this membership.

As well, my comments this afternoon will, Mr. Speaker, indicate how people can vote and how each member or delegate can vote. Also I notice in here that no proxies are allowed in voting.

Again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said, one of the major challenges faced by co-operatives today is investment income. What this legislation does as well is spell out the responsibilities of any member on a loan, and the interest on any loan is "limited to a maximum rate fixed in the articles." It also spells out in this act, Mr. Speaker, that "dividends on any membership share are limited to the maximum rate fixed in the articles," and finally, "to the extent feasible, members provide the capital required by the cooperative." As I said earlier in my comments, this certainly is a major challenge for all co-operatives.

1:20

Co-operatives as well provide education on co-operative principles. These are noteworthy, Mr. Speaker, and I think I would like to speak in regards to these as I'm making my closing comments here on Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act. Hopefully this legislation will clear up any problems that the co-operatives are facing.

In looking at the bill and specifically part 2 of the bill, Membership in Cooperatives, what this legislation will do is provide protection for all Albertans who are involved in co-operatives. It spells out accountability; it spells out the responsibility of members. As well, it spells out who can use the services of the co-operative and who is willing and able to accept the responsibility of and abide by the terms of membership.

Now, another very important part of this particular piece of legislation is that we can have a delegate system of voting, and it is provided for in the bylaws of a co-operative. "A member has one vote on all matters to be decided by the members." Again, I think this is a very important part of this legislation.

As well, the legislation goes further as to how we will have a redemption of membership shares and loans. So this, again, is very open. It is spelled out very distinctly so that members know exactly the rules and regulations they are bound by not only when they enter membership but also the responsibilities in regards to shares and loans when they leave.

The legislation has done much in the way of spelling out the termination by directors of any member that they feel for whatever reasons they do not wish to have anymore. As well, what I see is that there is a right of appeal. So the rules of natural justice in regard to co-operatives are certainly open, they are equally applied to all members, and they are transparent, certainly totally different legislation here than we see when we see legislation that we discussed earlier today.

Now, then, the termination of any member does not release debts. So, again, we have this whole idea of sense and fairness and reasonableness not only to the members that are involved in a co-operative but also to the co-operative itself. Mr. Speaker, when we start talking about how loans are repaid and dividends, again it is a very well-balanced approach where the directors can provide a redemption of the shares of payment, and they can do that as long as the financial well-being of the co-operative is not jeopardized. I think that is very key, particularly for co-operatives who, as we said earlier, do not have a huge financial investment, who rely on membership, and as well in many cases have to rely on debt, on the borrowing of money in order to grow.

Again, Mr. Speaker, looking at Bill 2, I think it is a very good piece of legislation. I think it is a piece of legislation that all members in this Assembly should support. I certainly see that with this piece of legislation co-operatives in this province not only have a magnificent past; they have rules that are governing them that are

going to give them the direction to continue in a very positive direction in the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and listen to those of other hon. members. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before recognizing the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: I call on the hon. Deputy Speaker first.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a group of nine STEP students who are working in the Legislative Assembly Office this summer. Tiffany Ferguson is with the office of the Clerk, Warren Maynes with the Legislature Library, Catherine Nissen with financial management and administration services, Helen Park with Parliamentary Counsel, Terris Schultz with human resource services, Vincent Tong with security and ceremonial services, along with Kathia Legare, a Quebec/Alberta exchange student, Debra Weibe with information system services, and Brian Storseth, who is assisting in your office, Mr. Speaker. They are seated in your gallery, and again on your behalf I would ask them now to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly some 23 grade 12 students. Incidentally, they held their graduation last Saturday night, another very good event. Along with their teacher, Mr. Darren Brick, and parent helper Dale Murray they are seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Brick has brought students to this Assembly each year for many years, so we want to thank him for that. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a remarkable 12 year old from the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. This young man spends most of his free time making little clay pins which he sells as a fund-raiser for the Cancer Society here in Edmonton. I would ask the young man, Taddes Korris, to rise along with his grandmother, Emilia Karosas, and his mother, Nejolla Korris, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Legislature 33 visitors from Chipman school. They are accompanied today by a teacher and president of VALID, Mr. Allen Dubyk and teacher assistant Mrs. Brenda Lesoway, and by parents Mrs. Janet Effa and Mrs. Karen Schickerowsky, and bus driver and also councillor in the village of Chipman and carpenter

extraordinaire Mr. John Stribling. I'd ask the students and the parents and the company to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Would there be additional hon. members who have introductions at this time?

1:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 2
Cooperatives Act
(continued)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on third reading of Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act.

I think this act is, quite frankly, a fine piece of legislation. I commend the Member for Calgary-North Hill for his comprehensive approach to this legislation and for his consultative approach. I think I indicated at second reading, Mr. Speaker, that I certainly appreciated being buttonholed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill on three separate occasions outside this Chamber demanding to know if I had any issues, and if there were any real issues that I had, he would fix them. I appreciate it. That's how I think we ought to do business. If we had more consultation like that, I think we would have fewer late sittings. So I really recommend it to all members opposite, including those who are members of Executive Council and ministers responsible for various departments. I think some consultation with those of us on this side would not only improve the legislation, but it would certainly speed the passage of pieces of legislation through the House and allow us all to get on with life.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, certainly there is a great deal of comprehensiveness evident in this bill. It begins, of course, in part 1, division 1, with spelling out the steps that need to be undertaken by a group of individuals who wish to form a co-operative. It says who can incorporate a co-operative, how they are to apply for incorporation, what needs to be in the articles of incorporation. It talks about the capital structure that needs to be in place, and it talks about the various conditions for incorporation and the director's decision. Those are really important things, Mr. Speaker.

I have actually been involved at a relatively early stage in the formation of a co-operative. You often have people from very diverse backgrounds with different levels of experience and different expectations, and if they don't have a clear set of rules laid out as to how they're going to go about it, then they can pretty easily get into trouble. If they don't get into trouble, then they certainly run the risk at least of wasting quite a bit of time as they sort these things out. So I find the section that deals with that to be quite comprehensive and quite strong, and I really think it's a good piece.

Now, division 2 of part 1 talks about bylaws and, of course, the ability of the people entering into a co-operative to come to an agreement about how they're going to run it, who's going to be responsible for what. What the accountability is for financial affairs, for membership, for the operation of the organization is critical. It's fundamental to the future success of that co-operative. Also to see in the articles clear language about the adoption of bylaws, about the content of bylaws, how you make or amend the bylaws, when the bylaws come into force – because that's sometimes important. You

need to be clear. If you pass a motion to change the bylaws, you need to know when in fact that's going to come into effect. That's an important piece. The need to provide copies of all the bylaws for everybody in a timely fashion, to maintain them in records, including not just bylaws but any unanimous agreements and contracts that might be entered into prior to the incorporation of the co-op.

We all know that sometimes the process of creating a co-op is a lengthy one. People come together and talk for a considerable period of time. They have a number of steps and hurdles that they have to overcome before they can actually become incorporated. In the process of getting to that point, you will find that it's quite clear that they will actually have to enter into contracts and other agreements before they're incorporated. This is a really important piece of the legislation as well, Mr. Speaker, because it recognizes that co-ops just don't spring into being at the will of the members, that there's a long and sometimes a little bit rocky road before they actually become officially a co-op. The fact that this is taken into account in the legislation is another reason why I commend this particular piece of legislation to all members of the Assembly.

Now, of course, names have become increasingly important. Branding is important in the commercial world. Your name is your badge; that's what you're known as. Particularly for co-ops that may be involved in commercial activities and so on it's very, very important that the use of names be clearly regulated and well defined. So we have a section that deals with the names. It talks about the ability of people forming a co-operative or in a co-operative to actually reserve a name and protect their name, and it protects people who have a name for their co-op from people who would otherwise usurp their legitimate name. I think that's very important especially for co-operatives that are involved in commercial activities. It also deals with the names that are prohibited. So, again, we see a systematic approach to the legislation, and that's quite a good thing.

I guess I could talk just a little bit about co-operatives. Some co-operatives are for the simple purpose of providing services to a small group of members; for example, a housing co-op or a food co-op. Some co-operatives exist where they buy food collectively and obtain lower prices for their members by buying in bulk. Those kinds of co-operatives I think are valuable, but a name would be less important to those types of co-operatives than it would be for a co-operative that's engaged in competitive, commercial activity. Some of those take place on quite a large scale, Mr. Speaker.

For example, the Federated Co-op is a very significant force, I know, in many parts of the province. Not so much in Edmonton, but I know it's a major player in the retail grocery business in Calgary. In Calgary, which is considered the heart and soul of the free enterprise ethic in this province, you actually have a very, very successful co-operative organization that is able to compete with and sometimes outcompete very large multinational corporations that provide groceries in our society. I commend the people who have worked over the years to build a strong Federated Co-op movement in Calgary and in other parts of the province. I think that it's really appropriate that they be given some very strong protection for their name and for their brands and so on because they're actually out there competing in the private sector against, in some cases, much larger corporations.

1:40

There is a section here, division 4, that deals with the legal capacity of co-operatives. It also deals with a very, very important question, Mr. Speaker, and that is the personal liability of members and shareholders in a co-operative. People want to know, when they participate in some kind of co-operative organization, whether or not

they are somehow going to become liable for decisions that they have no role in making. I think it is essential to people freely entering into co-operatives in our province. They need to know that their liability is well protected. I think that's a key thing. I'll just briefly quote section 26:

The members and holders of shares of a cooperative are not liable, by reason only of being members or holders of shares, for any liability, act or default of the cooperative except as provided in this Act.

That's a very, very comforting statement to have enshrined in the legislation. It lets people know that they can join a co-op and can participate in good faith as members of that co-op and receive the benefits of the co-op without incurring liability for decisions that they have nothing to do with. So I again commend the member for the comprehensiveness of this particular piece of legislation.

Division 5, of course, deals with some of the corporate elements, that are very important: the importance of keeping a registered office, keeping good records, how the records need to be kept, lists of memberships and shareholders, and so on, and of course the corporate seal. Those are all important pieces in the type of commercial environment that co-operatives work in.

Now, that brings me to part 2, which is the key, the heart of co-operatives, and that's the members. Without the members co-operatives just don't exist. They don't have any kind of existence at all. They're about members. They exist by and for their members in order to provide some service or financial advantage to their members. So it's really important that the membership section be very strong and very comprehensive. I believe it is, Mr. Speaker. I believe that we have bylaws which govern the membership, how you apply to be a member, your right to vote, which is very important and needs to be specified, because we don't want to take away the right of anybody to vote on anything.

It even provides for members under 18 years of age. I thought that was a really interesting section. It's section 35, and it says: "Subject to the by-laws, an individual under 18 years of age may be a member of a cooperative and may vote at meetings of the cooperative." Then it goes on to say that the bylaws "and any unanimous agreement are binding on a member who is under 18 years of age." I think that's good. I think it's a good thing to recognize that many of our young people become actively involved in organizations in a responsible way before they reach the age of majority, so I think that's a good piece and an important one.

Division 3, of course, deals with the terms in office for the directors. It talks about what happens when a vacancy exists on a board of directors, it deals with the unexpired term of the director's office, it specifies the right of directors to attend meetings, and it talks about their continuation in office. So, again, we see the comprehensive approach of the legislation evident, Mr. Speaker. I think I'm satisfied with the whole way the act deals with membership. Of course, it deals also with the resignation and the termination of directors, talks about when they cease to hold office, how they're removed, what has to be in the statement of resignation, and that notice of changes have to be provided, so I think that that is beneficial as well.

Now, we come to the question of the directors, the quorum, and the meetings of them. It deals with where directors' meetings can take place, what needs to be in the notice, when notice can be waived. It deals with quorum and how a quorum is constituted. It even provides, Mr. Speaker, for an electronic meeting. I think that's a really modern feature of legislation and it's good. It talks about what kinds of actions on behalf of directors are valid and what kind of resolution can be put in place of a director's meeting.

We come back to the question of liability, Mr. Speaker. I think

that's an important element, because even though you want to protect the members completely from any liability, you want to make sure that the board acts responsibly and acts within its authority and acts in the interests of its members. So there has to be a section dealing with the liability of the directors. Of course, if the directors perform due diligence and act according to their constituted authority, act in a democratic fashion, and act in the best interests of their members, having followed their duties of due diligence and their other duties, then of course they need to be protected from liability. If they don't, then they can incur liability either individually or collectively, and I think that's a very important thing. Anyone that takes on the responsibility of managing what could be a very large organization and is responsible for handling a great deal of money needs to be aware that they have to perform their duties in a responsible fashion and with due regard to their obligations both under the law and to the membership.

Now, we come to an interesting section here because it relates a little bit to some of the things we were talking about under Bill 7, which is the whole question of people having other interests and how you protect people when there are people sitting on the board who may have an interest that could tend to create a conflict with their responsibility on the board. It requires and quite appropriately so, Mr. Speaker, that the people on the board must disclose those interests. It says when they must disclose their interests. It talks about disclosure of interests by the officers. It provides access to the disclosure so people have a right to know what the interests of members of a board might be and changes to procedural requirements.

It talks about voting on contracts and transactions when there is a conflict. It requires disclosure to be continued, to be provided on an ongoing basis, and it deals with the effects that disclosure could have. It allows the courts to set aside any transaction that they may feel is in violation, and I think that's important. It talks about the appointment of a managing director or a committee. It talks about the deemed consent of directors, the defence of directors, and the remuneration, and that's important. It talks about indemnification, and I think that's important. It talks about unanimous agreements, the rights of members, financial information that needs to be provided when an annual meeting is not required.

Now, it talks about capital. That's important, because one of the weaknesses of co-operatives in our economy is that they have a reduced access to capital as compared to joint stock companies. That's something that needs to be dealt with. If that were effectively dealt with, I think we would see a significant increase in co-operative forms of economic endeavours in our province.

Well, that's my time, Mr. Speaker, and I would just like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill for producing a most excellent piece of legislation.

Thank you.

1:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to hear some compliments from the other side, a good exception to the rule, I guess.

At this time of the day on a normal day we would be engaged in holding the government to account. That's what question period is about. We have been deprived of that opportunity today – I just want to make note of that – and Albertans are the poorer for it. The government must provide time for the opposition, for elected members to hold it to account, to ask questions, tough questions, and seek answers, although we never get them, particularly from the

Minister of Environment. He always sidetracks and sidesteps the questions.

However, I rise to speak on this very important bill, Bill 2, Cooperatives Act. I also want to compliment the Member for Calgary-North Hill. He and I worked together on an all-party committee which held public hearings on justice across this province, and I certainly enjoyed working with him and several other colleagues from the 24th Legislature of this province on that venture. That showed how we could all work on some common goals in a very co-operative way.

In spite of a bit of an eerie feeling today that we are talking about specific bills at a time when we should be asking questions, a sort of surreal sort of context in which we're talking about it, I want to certainly say that this act in a sense underlines and reaches out for us to remember the long history of co-operation in this part of Canada, particularly in western Canada. The co-operative movement arose very much as part of the history of the settlement of this part of the continent under other difficult climatic and other technological conditions, and co-operative spirit, co-operative values played a very significant role in making us into what we are today. So co-operatives do have a long history and I think a history that we can be proud of.

Similarly, I guess, Mr. Speaker, I should just lay out in context when we are talking about Bill 2 in its third reading – fishing villages along the east coast had similar ventures, co-operatives. Fishing families, communities, fishers used to join their resources together to not only catch fish but also then market and profit from it in the pursuit of their collective interests.

We are living in an era where in a sense competition and market competition have been put on a sort of pedestal. It's been turned into almost a sacred value. In the context of this, it's refreshing to see a fairly comprehensive piece of legislation, the details of which have been referred to and discussed at some length by my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands, so I won't go into those. I really want to put myself on record in terms of what in my view co-operatives represent in terms of our collective experience in the past and values that not only were good for us in the past but we need to keep alive and indeed nurture if we're going to remain vibrant, healthy human communities in the long run. So the values of co-operation in which this bill is embedded, the values that have historical roots in this province will benefit from this piece of legislation. Once you have those values incorporated, embodied, in a comprehensive piece of legislation, then each interacting with the other helps to strengthen those values and those activities that make use of those values to do business.

The co-operatives movement, of course, also represents and in a sense is based on a participatory model of decision-making. Members of co-operatives have rights, they have obligations, and the rules are nicely set out here to help them conduct their business and work within that framework. That framework is healthy, and I think it certainly reflects that there is room even in today's world for a participatory model of democracy and decision-making. Certainly my hope is that this bill will strengthen those values and those tendencies in our society.

Co-operatives and public enterprises and institutions, you know, have a sort of common heritage, particularly in a province like ours. You know, public enterprises such as Alberta Government Telephones, Alberta Treasury Branches, ATB – these are two really outstanding examples of how the spirit of co-operation, the ability to work together to put in place services that would otherwise not be available – have resulted from this experience of co-operative movement. The building of co-operatives as business entities allowed us to take some innovative steps in the form of establishing,

not shying away, public enterprises simply because it somehow challenged the sacred value of profit and competition.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, again, in my view reinforces those traditions and those commitments that Albertans and western Canadians in particular have to the use of public enterprise, the use of public resources and means in order to achieve our collective goals. The collective interest, the public interest, again, I think is reinforced, emphasized by the traditions of the co-operative movement and the co-operatives themselves through their operating procedures and business activities in Alberta and neighbouring provinces.

The bill itself I think provides a good road map for Albertans when they decide and seek to set up co-operatives, be they nonprofit or profit, be they in the area of agricultural rural communities or in the urban areas, dealing with housing, low-cost, low-income housing. These rules and procedures outlined here in law will provide, I think, a very useful road guide and road map for Albertans to undertake such ventures.

I want to close by saying that I'm supportive of this bill and want to congratulate my colleague from Calgary-North Hill for shepherding it. May I take this opportunity, not to forget of course, to compliment and thank those people who always remain in the background but who are responsible for preparing this very complex piece of legislation: our staff, the LAO, and others. So I thank them for the hard work and effort that they have put into this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 2, the Cooperatives Act. Maybe what I should have said is that I rise this continuing evening to speak to the Cooperatives Act.

I want to address a couple of issues. I just came back across from the Annex, and for all that have been in here quite a while, it's actually raining outside. It's really beautiful out there. That is probably doing as much for the mood of people in the area as anything. So what we need to do is look at how that mood that gets generated by the nice rain can be conveyed to dealing with the issues here in looking at Bill 2.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that has been developed over, I guess, almost a couple of years of working with members of the community, members of the different co-operatives in Alberta, the associations that have affiliations from across Canada. What we've got to do is basically look at the process it went through. I guess it works out to be quite convenient for all of us here in the Legislature in the sense that the Alberta co-operative association had a little get-together not too long ago. We got a chance to chat with the board members and the executive of a number of the co-ops across Alberta.

I can tell you that one of the things that was common to almost every discussion and every hello that was said there was: how's progress coming on the Cooperatives Act? As legislators, most of us responded with: "Well, it's in the Leg. It's moving. What do you think of it?" It was quite rewarding and a real compliment to the individuals that were involved in developing the act that there were very few if any concerns raised about how the act was going to impact on them or whether or not they found any conflicts in it that wouldn't be consistent with the kind of operation their co-op was actually undertaking or some of the extensions their co-ops wanted to move into. I guess the approach we have to look at as we deal with evaluating whether or not the act accomplishes the objective is to look at it in the context of that kind of response.

One of the interesting things we can look at is all the flexibility that's built into this act in the sense that as we talked to the individuals at that meeting, there were members there from almost all the different kinds of structural co-ops and situational co-ops that you could imagine. In the process of discussions in the last year or so I've talked to individuals in the input and the output and also in the service types of co-ops. All of them felt that the basic idea of what was involved here was very useful to them and very supportive of where they wanted to go with their organizations.

When we look at the structures there, one of the things that came out that I found quite interesting was when we got to the back part of the bill and started talking about specific types of co-ops. One of them was even defined as a kind of new-generation co-op. I'm not so sure if this was really the term the associations were putting to their own structure. Really what it amounts to is that it basically means it's almost like an equity co-op as opposed to the standard partnership, pass-through type of co-op. The share structure and the value of those shares are determined by market tradability and market valuation, where in a normal co-op the value of your participation in the co-op is a function of basically your accumulated retained capital and your equity in terms of unpaid shares.

So the idea that this new-generation co-op actually gets into some type of market valuation and market reflection of where the worth of that co-op is going does create quite an attractive structure. I guess the thing we have to watch here is that what we're seeing a lot of now in terms of some of the co-ops is their trying to convert their organizational structure into the corporate model basically to facilitate the idea of capital financing and capital availability so that they can actually have the capital that's necessary for them to expand and to move forward.

I think what we're seeing here in this bill is a real proposal that is going to give us a structure for co-operatives in the province that will truly reflect almost every possible concept of how a group of people in Alberta would like to get together and organize to achieve their end. We can see within the model structure that is provided here both where we're going from the perspective of the board of directors that control the votes, the memberships, and also the patronage part of it that comes out with the volume of service. This reflects essentially a real flexibility that's going to be there so that the group can put together under this act any kind of joint venture they see as being important to them.

Mr. Speaker, it was interesting to note that in the one section we were looking through, with all the debate that's gone on in other associated areas, division 7, section 80 of the act really goes through and at length defines the structure that has to be implemented to deal with the conflict of interest and the disclosure of possible benefit from an action of the co-op that might come to any of the board of directors from an action. It goes through and defines a number of the cases and situations where disclosure has to be proactive. It also talks about the option that board members in this concept of disclosure don't have to deal with the normal protocol if their perceived benefit is a general benefit available to everyone as a member.

I think this is kind of how we need to start looking at some of these issues in terms of the corporate responsibility, or the co-operative responsibility as we're dealing with in this act. In the general sense of decision-making and administrative responsibility, what we've got to do is look at how we can have a true sense of accountability, transparency, and most of all a sense that when decisions are made, they're made to the benefit and under the umbrella of the collective well-being rather than any concept of a self-directed benefit.

I guess the comment I'd like to make is that in that section 80

there is a very long set of discussions about where the disclosure has to occur, the timing of that disclosure, and essentially the fact that the board has to deal with it. Also, the openness is there in the context of these disclosures in section 83, when "the members and investment shareholders may examine the portions of minutes of meetings of directors, of other documents that contain disclosures under sections 80 to 86." I guess this basically shows that we are putting co-operatives that are formed and operate under this bill on notice that they basically have to be prepared to be accountable to their membership, to their partners in the co-op and deal with it in an open way by having such access provisions in there.

I think it's important that we see both the disclosure aspects and the prohibition from voting when there's a conflict and, as I said, the access to minutes that discuss or relate to the declaration of any kind of possible conflict. We have to kind of look at it from that perspective and see what kind of approach or what kind of implication that has for the overall operation and direction that these kinds of businesses have.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of material here that talks about how these kinds of co-ops can be structured, how the different objectives of the co-op have to relate to different structures, different financing, different accountability. But I think the thing we have to look at in the overall context of this bill is that it really has the support of the communities. It brings forward a lot of the credibility that gets into a piece of legislation when the consultation and the joint participation by the affected groups becomes a real integral part.

I guess I go back to the original Water Act, when we started dealing with the process of public discussion and the public development of the legislation, which was so important to get buy-in from the number of possible participants who might eventually have conflicts. I think we should recognize that effort, and I think the two bills I've talked about, that Water Act and this bill now, the Cooperatives Act, should serve as models of the kind of work we do as legislators when we want to put in place significant changes in our legislation and have this kind of consultation with the community groups in an open way, not just dealing with a small group of, you might want to call it, participatory administrators, people at the top of an association. They in essence in some cases don't necessarily represent the community they are part of in the context of developing legislation, so we need to go below that.

I think that was done here, that was done in the Water Act, but we see that in a lot of cases – we discussed previously Bill 16. There seems to be a consensus among the organizations, but when you get down to the participating members, there's very little support for that bill. I think the difference here is who you're doing the consultation with and the level at which you have that consultation out in the public.

Congratulations to all the staff that worked on the bill. Congratulations to the members for bringing it forward. This is a bill that I think will serve the co-operatives industry in Alberta well into the future. We have to remember that these kinds of things are dynamic. As it gets put into practice, if there are issues that come up when individual groups start to or continue to operate under the Cooperatives Act, we should be prepared to listen to them. We should be prepared to recognize that this is done to facilitate them, not to impose on them. So we should always keep this as a living document that responds to their needs and gives them guidance. I'm sure the attitude that was in place when this was developed will carry forward. I would hope that all members of the Legislature do support Bill 2.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before the chair calls on the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill to close debate, I wonder if we might agree to a brief introduction of guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 15 international students attending the University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension. These students are enrolled in the English as a Second Language program and have come from two continents, some from Central and South America, from Columbia, Mexico, and Peru, and some from Japan and Korea. They are accompanied by their instructor, Mrs. Penny Deonarain, and they are all seated in the members' gallery. I would now ask the visitors to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 2
Cooperatives Act
(*continued*)

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:13]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	O'Neill
Bonner	Jonson	Pannu
Cao	Lord	Pham
Carlson	Lougheed	Rathgeber
Danyluk	Lukaszuk	Renner
Dunford	Lund	Smith
Fischer	Magnus	Snelgrove
Forsyth	Mar	Stelmach
Friedel	Marz	Stevens
Fritz	Mason	Strang
Gordon	Masyk	Taft
Graham	McClellan	Tannas
Graydon	McFarland	Vandermeer
Haley	Nicol	Woloshyn
Herard	Norris	Yankowsky

Totals:	For – 45	Against – 0
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[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

Bill 8
Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: I think, hon. members, that someone had better move this bill.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. minister responsible to move third reading of Bill 8.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 8 today. I did speak to this before and am once more quite happy to speak to it for the final time in third reading. We've got some information that we wish to share with the government on this particular bill.

I have to say that we believe in general that corporate tax rates and the manufacturing and processing rate are competitive with other provinces. The Business Tax Review Committee said: Alberta's general rate of 15.5 percent is lower than all other provinces except Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland; Alberta's manufacturing and processing rate compares favourably with most provinces. So that's the good news for this province.

The bad news, Mr. Speaker, is that this particular amendment doesn't help the overall performance of organizations and incorporations in other areas, and that's in terms of user fees and increased electricity costs. I heard a question in the House yesterday that addressed this particular issue, which particularly talked about issues such as the increased costs for businesses to do business and the kinds of job and business losses that we may see as a result of other increasing electricity costs.

2:30

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Minister of Economic Development was quick to point out that we've seen an increase in migration of businesses to this province, but the fact is that we have to talk about the cost of business not only in terms of businesses that close down but also businesses that don't expand, Mr. Speaker. It's just dandy to lower the income tax rate as long as businesses have profits to tax, but if, due to other increasing costs in their overall organization and expenses of the business, they don't have any profits, then what good is a lower corporate tax rate? So I think that's one of the issues we have to talk about when we talk about this bill.

There's no doubt that we like to have the most competitive rates in the country and have had for some time. This government is very happy in their pursuit of the race to the bottom in this particular area, but there are other factors that need to be brought into consideration. It's important and probably more important I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that the business sector see stabilization in the costs they have so they can do some forward-looking planning and they can legitimately compete in the global marketplace.

Where specifically do they need stabilization, Mr. Speaker? It would be in electricity and natural gas prices in the province so that businesses could operate profitably. With the windfall incomes that the gas and electricity companies have faced in the short term, they're going to benefit significantly by this bill. Decreased tax rates to them will be additional windfall income that they can incorporate into their business planning strategies, but those who pay the increased costs don't have that same benefit. The amount of taxable income they will have available to benefit from this lowering rate will certainly be substantially lower, if it's even existing at this time. I ask what the government has done with regard to that.

So I think that's a very interesting discussion that hasn't been fully debated here. I don't see a lot of members from the government side discussing this. Hopefully we can provoke the minister to enter into debate again as we did earlier today. It's always enlightening to find out how the government seems to be positioning itself when we can talk them into entering into debate. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen all that often, but we would hope we could on this one,

which is really a flagship kind of bill for them, in terms of the race to the bottom for tax rates. It would be interesting to see if we can get them involved in debate. Usually they have to be fairly well provoked to go there, Mr. Speaker, and if that's what it takes to get their involvement, no problem. We're happy to go there as well. Let's see what they have to say about that. In the long run certainly the Minister of Energy had something to say about it earlier today.

If we take a look at the alliance of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters and see what they have to say about this, we have some very grave concerns about the lack of potential profitability in this particular instance and have some concerns about what happens there. The energy program of this government, or the KEP as we have often called it, certainly can lead to a loss of investment just in accordance with what the alliance has to say of about \$264 million. That's significant. That's significantly greater than the loss we are seeing in tax revenue by lowering the rate.

So what does the government intend to do about that shortfall, Mr. Speaker? We haven't heard them address that issue throughout this debate primarily because they haven't entered into the debate. They've dictated, as they usually do, and that's as good as it's got in terms of any participation by them. They don't really want to debate; they just want to tell. There's no show part of show-and-tell, just the tell part, and that's too bad.

What we see potentially here as projected by the association is a loss of more than 31,000 jobs. Not only do we lose those jobs with the kinds of increased costs, just direct costs in terms of electricity, but we lose the corporate tax profits, because there aren't any profits to be had, and we lose the potential from those taxpayers in terms of their own personal tax contributions and other user fees that they would be contributing to this government as a result of being spenders within the economy. So what does this mean then? It means a loss of cash of about 12 percent in Alberta's manufacturing sector.

So those are serious issues in terms of our concerns with this lowering of the tax rate. You know, it's a window-dressing kind of bill, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't really address the kinds of serious issues that are outstanding for this government. There was a time when we thought they were going to address them, and that was when the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee was struck. As I recall, the hon. Steve West was the Provincial Treasurer at the time, and we know that he was a key contributor to the race to the bottom, but this sounded like a really good idea.

The reports and recommendations of the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee came back in September of 2000, Mr. Speaker, and we were quite intrigued by what the committee had to say and then subsequently to see how those recommendations were integrated into this piece of legislation, the Corporate Tax Amendment Act, because it was the intent that the outcome of this report and these recommendations ultimately was changes in legislation that would lead to some tax reform in this province. That's how the Provincial Treasurer of the day talked about this program, and this is what he committed to seeing being done.

So in this last stage of being able to read this particular bill, let's just check it against content and see what we had implemented. The report, as we'll see, contains recommendations for changes that this committee under the auspices of the government felt were necessary to strengthen the competitive edge in today's marketplace, which is a high-tech global economy and which needs to be sustainable. Does the lowering tax rate that we see in this bill actually meet that mandate? Is it important in a high-tech world to have a low tax rate?

The high-tech world is a world of great innovation and rapid change, Mr. Speaker, so what's needed there is money up front for research and development, for attracting key performers and very

edge-of-the-market kind of people with great technical expertise to them. They need cash up front, so at the first glance it wouldn't seem that a lower tax rate is a huge advantage to a high-tech world. They're happy to pay taxes when they're making profits. What they need is an environment that is conducive to them attracting key staff, people with excellent qualifications.

What is it that provides that kind of environment? No doubt an overall lower tax regime in terms of personal taxes contributes to that. Residential taxes contribute to that. There are corporate taxes. Do they really care about the corporate tax side? No. Unless you're an owner of a business, you don't really care about whether a corporate tax rate is high or low. So in terms of the first-priority interest and need of high-tech industry, this bill doesn't meet that mandate, because it doesn't provide lower personal taxes. It doesn't provide lower municipal taxes. It doesn't look at such issues as user fees or other kinds of areas. So we have to take a look at the other sustainable factors that Alberta provides to meet that.

2:40

Does it provide an opportunity to increase research and development dollars? It doesn't seem like it, Mr. Speaker, except in terms of some of the other streamlining we see that goes with the federal amendments, so there could actually be some benefits in that regard. So when we talk about transfer pricing and foreign tax credits and the cost of tax shelter investments, assessments and reassessments, and the legal representations of corporations and penalties, potentially there is a little bit of a window in there or some push room for the corporations to benefit, but definitely have to have legal advice and accounting advice in terms of whether that would be so. So in the big picture, very small benefit, if in fact there's any benefit at all.

Let's ask ourselves: does this lower tax rate as outlined in this particular bill benefit us in terms of the global economy? At first glance, Mr. Speaker, it would appear that it does, because if you take a look at the global economy, what is a good incentive to attract multinational investment or other kinds of investment to Alberta? A lower tax rate certainly contributes to that, but if you take a look at any of the findings or readings or case studies that have been done in the past few years, the past four or five years, on the shift in locations of organizations and businesses in terms of the expansion of the global economy, I think what we will find is that these organizations take a much bigger view of the picture than just corporate tax rate. They're looking for quality-of-life issues, of which a lower corporate tax rate is only one minor piece in the whole pie and really only affects business owners.

Well, now, why would we want to stimulate innovation and new companies and spin-off companies? That really only is a factor for a small percentage of people in this population, not just in Alberta but around the globe, Mr. Speaker. For the most part, people work for somebody else. Not that many proportionately as a percentage basis are self-employed or employ others. So once again we see that there is a minimal kind of effect this bill has.

Let's ask the final question that the Alberta tax review committee had as part of that mandate: is what we are doing sustainable? Is this lower tax rate sustainable? We would have the government argue that, yes, it is. I would say that, yes, it might be, Mr. Speaker, but not necessarily is. What are the factors that we need to talk about when we are determining sustainability? They are factors of what other pressures we have on cash inflows to the province. It isn't really how well the businesses do, because the receipt of corporate tax income at this particular stage in our province is a small percentage of our overall revenue input in the province.

What we need to talk about is: what are the other pressures that can affect the cash flow in the province? Primarily in this province

there are three things that we're counting on: oil and gas revenues; perhaps in the future larger coal revenues; gambling revenues, which now make up a high percentage of the income we receive; personal tax revenues; and user fees. In order to keep this corporate tax level as outlined in this bill low or sustained at this particular level, the government has to have some guarantee that oil and gas revenues and potentially coal revenues are at least going to maintain their price levels at this particular point in time or increase, Mr. Speaker. Because as populations increase and as we age and as general prices go up due to inflation or any other aspects that we need to take a look at, what we know is that, generally speaking, there is more pressure on governments to retain more dollars in their coffers. Generally speaking, historically speaking, that has meant that the taxes go up. So if they don't go up on the corporate tax side, they need to go up somewhere else.

This government has been very lucky over the years in terms of their being able to rely on natural resource revenues increasing, so they were able to take their royalties and use that to sustain our economy. It's one of the main reasons why, when those prices bottom out, we find ourselves seeing huge economic difficulty in this province, because this government still is resource dependent in terms of its revenue flow. So in order to be sustainable, it needs to ensure that at the very least prices stay the same and quantities of output stay the same. If not, then we could see pressure on the corporate tax side, and that pressure could cause an increase in prices.

What else? Let's take a look at gambling revenues. We've seen quite a change in the percentage of gambling revenues received by this government since '93. I believe at one point the gambling revenues were substantially under 3 or 4 percent of the total revenue generated by this province.

MR. SMITH: They're still the same.

MS CARLSON: No, they're not the same.

MR. SMITH: Yes, they are. Figure it out.

MS CARLSON: I don't believe they are the same. If the Minister of Energy wishes to participate in this debate, I'd be happy for him to table some information which would clarify this. [interjection]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, you'll have an opportunity to speak and to correct whatever needs to be corrected when it's your turn. Right now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has the floor and is entitled to her opinions.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So far I haven't said anything that needs to be corrected, but I'm quite happy to go there.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: You know, I said that in '93 gambling revenues were at or around or potentially less than 3 percent of the total revenue that flowed through to this government in terms of their total revenue mix, and then the Minister of Energy wished to get involved in the debate and told me that they're still the same and that I have to get my facts straight. Well, what I was going to say is that the total dollars collected since '93 have substantially increased, Mr. Speaker, so I believe that we are at a point in time now where it would be very difficult for this government to opt out of having them as a part of their revenue stream.

Now, perhaps that's what the Minister of Energy wished to correct, and I certainly hope that that's the case because that would be very good news for this Assembly and for the people of this province if that were in fact true. Unfortunately, I don't think that's the case, and I'm sure that the Minister of Energy will be prepared to enter into debate when I am done or at the very least have the good grace to table or send to me the information that he is basing his statements on, which is that the total inflow of revenue has stayed the same and that it is not more than 3 percent of the total revenue received by this province. I don't think that's true, Mr. Speaker, but let's wait for the paper to hit the floor of the Assembly, and then I'm sure we can debate sources and so on. It seems to me that it's significantly higher than that, and there comes a point of no return when a government is so reliant on that source of income that they can't look at alternate sources.

So what does increasing gambling revenue mean for corporate taxes in terms of their being sustainable in the long run? At first glance it would look like that would be good news for corporate taxes. If gambling revenue is increasing, then there's more margin even for corporate taxes to be lowered than increased because there's more revenue coming from other sources. That would be true in terms of gross dollars, Mr. Speaker, but the real problem with gambling revenue is that it takes \$3 for every dollar of gambling revenue received . . . [Ms Carlson's speaking time expired]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

2:50

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak at third reading of Bill 8, Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001. As I was preparing to speak, I was looking at the government release on Bill 8, and I think a few things that I find there are relevant to what I want to say here this afternoon in the concluding phase of our debate on Bill 8.

The intention, of course, as stated by the government for bringing Bill 8 forward, is that the changes that it embodies, incorporates, "will help ensure that Alberta businesses remain in a strong position not only nationally, but also on the world stage." These are the words of the Finance minister. It goes on to say:

Making it easier for business to invest and operate in the province helps strengthen our economy, create jobs, and make Alberta attractive to outside investors.

Interesting code language here: "making it easier."

This party has been in power now for well over 30 years. [some applause] Hearing that noise which just came as naturally as sunrise comes after sunset, I'm not surprised that there is that arrogance, but let me return to the substance of it.

Has this government worked all of those 30 years to make doing business in this province hard for businesses? Why is it that today, when the Alberta economy is booming, most businesses are, I presume, doing well because our economy is doing well, yet the government finds it necessary at this particular stage to come to the comfort and relief of businesses, particularly big ones? Small businesses are another matter; because they are starters, we need to provide them with some support. This is really, I think, an argument which one hears from of course corporations themselves, but when it comes from a government who is responsible first and foremost for serving public interests, not private interests, you begin to wonder what the real intentions of this bill are.

Those intentions are precisely what characterizes this bill, Mr. Speaker, so I will take a little time to talk about some of the concerns that I have about this bill and why I would not be able to vote for this bill. This bill of course makes a number of changes to the Corporate Tax Act. Some of these changes are positive,

particularly those pertaining to small businesses. Others, in our judgment, in the judgment of the New Democrat caucus, are not.

A change that we support as New Democrats involves a reduction in the tax rate of small businesses and an increase in the threshold at which businesses qualify for the small business tax rate. These changes which are present in this bill I think have our support. The problem is that the bill has to be supported as a totality. I wish I had the opportunity to vote in favour of reductions as proposed for small businesses and vote against the other part of the bill somehow. That opportunity is not going to be available to me, Mr. Speaker, and I regret that.

The first installment of a three-year plan to reduce small business tax rates from 6 to 3 percent ultimately and to double the income threshold qualifying for the small business tax rate from \$200,000 to \$400,000 is a good one. These changes will be particularly helpful, Mr. Speaker, to smaller, startup businesses. The threshold to qualify for the lower tax had not been increased for many years, so it was overdue, and with this increase that's being set, I think the level now is more reasonable. So I'm happy to lend support to this particular part of the bill.

More questionable and troubling, however, are the two other major corporate tax changes being made through this bill, Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act. The first, Mr. Speaker, involves a reduction over four years in the tax rate charged to larger profitable corporations from the current rate of 15.5 percent to the ultimate low rate of 8 percent, virtually cutting corporate taxes in this province in half. These changes have ramifications for the future revenues of the province. I noticed in the news release here that these tax cuts will mean a total of \$286 million worth of tax cuts. Much of this benefit will go, of course, to large corporations.

This reminded me of the priorities of the government. When in fact the economy is good – and Alberta's economy is particularly good – and corporations are doing well, where lies the rationale for such a radical reduction in these tax rates, while at the same time claiming that postsecondary students, who are paying ever increasing tuition fees at a rate on average of 5 to 8 percent every year, don't deserve any relief? I don't see the logic here. Well, the logic is there. It's a question of priorities, and the priorities of the government lie with the interests of big business here, big corporations. That's clearly reflected in the provisions of this bill, which will become a law pretty soon, I'm afraid.

I would like to again raise the question raised earlier, I guess, by my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands as to whether the government has prepared any reports by reputable sources or done any studies about such deep cuts in corporate taxes and their ramifications both for the future health of our economy and certainly the future health of our public revenues. One problem with this continuing thrust to give more tax concessions year after year after year to big corporations is the freeloader problem, the very problem that that side of the House, the government side of the House, associates with people that for all kinds of good reasons have to go on social assistance. Social assistance is seen as bad because it creates this tendency of dependency on the public purse. I would ask the members on the government side to not apply that logic selectively but to apply it also to large corporations.

These corporations benefit enormously from public expenditures that we make on infrastructure. Without those facilities available, it would be very difficult for these corporations to do business. Should they not be paying their fair share of this investment in the infrastructure which directly supports their economic well-being, success, and future expansion in this province?

So the freeloader problem is something that's neglected here. How far do we go before we say that enough is enough? That

question is not asked, Mr. Speaker. That's why I raise the question of any reports, any serious, hardheaded questions that might have been asked with respect to how these tax cuts will further deepen the tendency of large business in the province to continue to feed upon the public resources in order to generate profits for their private stockholders.

3:00

The other question. Of course, in this era of high demand for natural gas and oil and the high prices that these two commodities in particular enjoy at the moment, in terms of merely saying, "You know, we can afford it, and therefore we should do it," maybe we can afford it this year. But we've been reminded by the government side over and over and over again about the fact that we still have in this province an economy that's subject to very, very serious levels of volatility, unpredictability. We are not able to control that volatility and constrain it all on our own. Therefore, we are at the mercy of international forces and factors which make life rather interesting and exciting at times in this province. So given that volatility, given that unpredictability of the basic resource revenues that we have, how can we justify these cuts, saying that we can afford them this year? The question is: how about next year?

The government has set out a four-year timetable for cutting corporate taxes, but there's no similar timetable for cutting personal income taxes and no timetable at all for either rolling back tuition fees in this province or for cutting or scrapping ultimately such regressive taxes as the health care premiums in this province. I keep asking myself: why is the government being so blind to contradictions in its own tax policies and reduction of tax burdens in a very, very selective manner, providing more relief to corporations which are shareholder owned and no relief to public institutions such as colleges and universities and schools, before this is done?

Now, if they had taken care of all of those other things – tuition fees at postsecondary institutions, providing postsecondary institutions with good resources so that they could keep and retain and attract world-class scholars and scientists and researchers here – and also if they had invested enough money in our education system from K to 12 to make sure that teachers are well paid as well as that classroom sizes are reduced to a size which everyone agrees is a particular size which is most conducive to optimizing the learning of children when they're very young, then I could see some merit in this. But under present conditions all it does is show me the wrongheaded priorities that this government has which seem to drive the contents of this bill.

I am also concerned that if the current high energy prices are not sustained, this province could find itself in the unenviable situation of having to continue with its planned deep cuts in corporate taxes, on the one hand, and to make up the shortfall by increasing personal taxes and/or by cutting spending on important social programs. I deeply feel this and am concerned about it. Corporations, as I said before, benefit immensely from the healthy and well-educated labour workforce that we have in this province and are proud to have in this province as well as from spending on public infrastructure like roads and highways. Asking them to pay their fair share towards sustaining these important programs is only fair and reasonable.

Another concern that I have about Bill 8 involves the changes being made to the Alberta royalty tax credit program. These changes are set out in this bill in a way that raises several questions. The changes to the royalty tax credit program have already been in place for some time, but it's only now that the government is getting around to making the necessary legislative amendments to accommodate the changes that have been in operation for some time.

In 1989 it made sense to provide relief to the oil and gas industries

in this province. Now it makes no sense to continue with that handout to these massively expanding, healthy, huge transnational operators. One argument that is given is, of course, to make sure that new capital comes in here, stays here, and that as a result we'll all benefit ultimately from this. This trickle-down model is well known not to deliver benefits evenly and efficiently to all members of our province and in other places.

Alliance Pipeline comes to mind here, Mr. Speaker, as an example of how the government's thinking is flawed in its desperate attempt to chase investor capital in this province. Just yesterday the Premier confessed in his press availability that perhaps we made a mistake in not requiring Alliance Pipeline to have the gas stripped of ethane in this province before it could be shipped all the way to Chicago. That's a confession that he made himself. He said: hindsight is 20/20; I wish I had known this. [interjection]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister is now on my list, and when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has completed his talk at third reading, we'll invite you too.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was referring to the statement or the observation that the Premier made yesterday. He finally acknowledged that the government made a mistake. I'm trying to get to the root of why this mistake was made. It is this desperate attempt to attract investor capital in the province under any circumstances. Alliance Pipeline is a good example of how that kind of policy doesn't serve the interests of Albertans, the interests of the Alberta economy, the interests of particular industries in this province which depend on ethane as a feedstock for continuing their operations, expanding them and thereby providing good-paying jobs.

Now, I don't mean to call the Energy minister on it. I mean, he's certainly welcome to continue to defend his own policies that are indefensible. My job as opposition member and leader of an opposition party is to continue to try and focus his attention so that one day he will see the light. None of us is immune to seeing the light. The Premier yesterday saw the light all of a sudden, in my presence. So my job is to continue to work on making sure that members on the government side, particularly on the front benches, pay attention to what we have to say so that maybe they will make some amends as time goes on.

While the government claims that this bill in fact represents their attempt to implement some of the recommendations of the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee, that's not really accurate when it comes to the royalty tax credit program. The Business Tax Review Committee recommended that . . . [Dr. Pannu's speaking time expired] Time runs out, Mr. Speaker. What can I do? I think I'll let other members take over.

3:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, I paused for a moment because I had understood that a couple of others were going to join the debate, but they haven't.

Edmonton-Gold Bar, you have the floor.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise from my chair this afternoon and get an opportunity to speak at third reading on Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001. Before I start, it was delightful to walk across to the Assembly this afternoon in the rain. I certainly hope for the sake of northern Alberta that this rain is right to High Level and Chinchaga and beyond, because it's certainly needed and is welcome relief for the firefighters, who are working on behalf of all members and all communities in this province.

At this time I was listening with interest to the remarks from the hon. leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I, too, share his concerns about the ethane supply. I know that the hon. member spent the majority of his adult professional life as a university professor. There's a university professor, not at the University of Alberta but at the University of Calgary, who has stated in a rather widely distributed and well-known report that a major policy shortcoming of the current government is its lack of a sound ethane policy.

In regards to Bill 8 at this time, Mr. Speaker, there is the notion to implement recommendations for cuts in corporate tax rates that originated with the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee. There are changes to the Alberta royalty tax credit. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford earlier today had an amendment. For the oddest of reasons there seems to be an accumulation of paper on my desk. That has not happened in the Assembly in my time previous. I cannot find the amendment at this time, but I'm certain that the royalty tax credit is still applicable to sections of this bill. If there is guidance from other members of the Assembly in this matter, that would be welcome.

Mr. Speaker, I think all Albertans believe that the general corporate rate and the manufacturing and processing rate of tax are competitive with other provinces. It's not unusual. We need to have, particularly with small business, competitive tax rates. Alberta's general rate is significantly lower than that of a lot of the Canadian provinces. I believe that in B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba it would be significantly lower. Alberta's manufacturing and processing rates compare favourably with most provinces. But it is important that we also think of the employees who are working for those businesses as these tax rates will be reduced.

I thought at one time that the reduction in the small business tax rate from 6 to 4 percent could be implemented and that at the same time there could be perhaps an increase in the minimum wage. I wanted an increase in the minimum wage in conjunction with a tax cut to small business. Now, the minimum wage went up in three stages, and I believe some of the members of this Assembly who at that time were responsible for the increase of the minimum wage are present this afternoon. The minimum wage increased I think in three intervals: 25 cents, 25 cents, and 45 cents.

Now this act reduces the small business tax rate from 6 percent to 5 percent. Although not dealt with in this amendment act, according to government plans, this rate will be further decreased to 4 percent, which was the policy of the Alberta Liberals for a long, long time. In fact, I almost call this the Lennie Kaplan policy, because Mr. Kaplan was very anxious to see that this would be implemented, and I think he would be also anxious to see that it would be reduced to 3 percent in three years.

Now, 3 percent was the original recommendation of the Business Tax Review Committee. I could settle for 4 percent, but if the government wants to go a little better, well then that's fine, but at the same time, we should start reconsidering the minimum wage in this province; \$5.90 doesn't go as far now as it did even three years ago. Just take the cost of energy today. It's just not near a living wage. Many of the members of this Assembly are very familiar with their barbers. Certainly \$5.50 for a haircut – perhaps a student at NAIT, an apprentice hairstylist, could cut your hair for that price, but it would be difficult to find that, as the hon. member has pointed out. To implement the recommendations of the Business Tax Review Committee is noteworthy.

In February of 2000 Mr. Stockwell Day announced the establishment of the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee to investigate the competitiveness of Alberta's business tax regime and to make recommendations for improving the system.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who?

MR. MacDONALD: Who? Mr. Stockwell Day.

The committee reported its findings and recommendations several months later, in September of 2000. This bill is the initial implementation of six of the Business Tax Review Committee's recommendations: the reduction in the general tax rate; the reduction in the manufacturing and process tax rate, which is something that needs to be done in regards to when you compare operating costs in this province for electricity; the reduction in the small business tax rate, which I discussed earlier; the increase in the small business threshold, which was also an item of great concern to Mr. Kaplan. He spoke about this at length.

The whole outlook for business and small business in this province would be thriving more than ever, with a few exceptions: the high cost of electricity. When you think that we'll squander the heritage of this province by selling ethane. Now, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Alliance line, 1.3 million cubic feet a day, 42 inches from the Peace River arch down to Edmonton, then it decreases to 36 inches and goes on south of Chicago, there's a lot of gas that can be moved through that. One would have to wonder: why would the Alliance, the 37 or more groups of companies that are involved in this – and it's a very successful alliance. It's one of the more successful alliances that's been attempted, the Alliance pipeline, for sure.

3:20

I have no problem with exporting natural gas, but the rich ethane stream in it has to be used here in Alberta for value-added manufacturing. Whenever you look at it from the perspective of Alliance, they will say that instead of building two pipelines, one to transport NGLs, or natural gas liquids, and one to ship dry natural gas, they built one line. Now that this line has been built and we have essentially two process streams in it all the way to Chicago, you have a change. Now the liquid extraction plants will be built at the southern terminus of those pipelines, and this is unfortunate. Will we see further expansion in Lacombe, the Ponoka area, Joffre? It is highly doubtful, and I'm saddened.

I'm really disappointed to read in the National Energy Board report about our ethane supply, the 25-year projections. These projections were available in September, in the late summer of 1999, Mr. Speaker, and these projections suggest that we're going to peak at ethane production, and then we're going to . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Point of Order

Questioning a Member

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is hallucinating again and making some comments that are not accurate relative to the intervention in the Alliance pipeline. I was wondering if the hon. member under *Beauchesne* 482 would entertain a question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member has been asked if he would entertain a question. You don't have to give your reasons for either yes or no. It's just simply a yes or a no. If it's yes, then the hon. member may ask the question, and if the answer is no, then you continue on. Okay? There isn't a debate on the issue.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, may I ask for some advice from the chair first, please?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the advice that the chair would

give is that you'd be on third reading. The Alliance pipeline: I've been trying to read through here, and I cannot find it in this bill. Third reading, as you know, is on the issues of the bill, not what might be. If it is on related topics, it has to be directly on that. Is that the advice that you were seeking?

MR. MacDONALD: The information, Mr. Speaker, that I'm seeking from the chair is: at the end of my time allotted to speak, can I entertain a question at that time from the hon. minister?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the answer is within the question: at the end of my allotted time. You don't get extra time. Then we would have to go to unanimous consent. But if you stop at two minutes or whatever it might take and then offered it to the hon. member, then you would have the time. If that answers your question, then give us a yes or a no and continue.

MR. MacDONALD: Well, with respect to the minister's diligence and persistence in questioning me over the years, I'm going to again have to say no because I have very little time left.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: When you consider that the process stream in the refining royalties, the Alberta royalty tax credits specifically – and the minister is dead wrong, because in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act this government has the right to take ethane in exchange and give it to the producers.

AN HON. MEMBER: Relevance.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm sorry. You look at section 26 of this bill, the Alberta royalty tax credit, and this applies, Mr. Speaker. Just the other day in question period we were talking about the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, and the remarks that are given here are relevant.

The Alberta royalty tax credit is a program that refunds a portion of conventional oil and gas royalties back to corporations. If the hon. minister would please read the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, that is one of the processes that the government has to protect the downstream users from a shortage of ethane, because they can receive it in kind.

Between 25 and 75 percent of up to \$2 million in eligible royalties may be refunded to a claimant. The price-sensitive refund rate is based on a combined oil and gas price. Now, with the \$2 million limit, benefits range from a high of \$1.5 million per year to a low of \$257,000 per year, Mr. Speaker. This Alberta royalty tax credit refunds royalties but, as I understand it, is also independent. It's independent of Alberta's royalty regime, and as prices go up, the refund rates go down. The decline in the Alberta royalty tax credit rate is .31 percent for every \$1 price increase between blended oil and gas prices of between \$15 and \$22 per barrel and a little over 4 percent for every \$1 price increase between blended prices of \$22 to \$33 per barrel. Although the maximum amount refunded has fluctuated over time, the basic design of the program has not changed in over 25 years, and 25 years takes us back to long before the ethane policies that are outlined in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act.

In 1994 the government proceeded to give industry three years' notice of any intention to make changes to the program. Notice was given to the industry again in December of 1997 when the Minister of Energy announced a review of the program to set out better target objectives for a small program and to address administrative difficulties that industry and the government are experiencing.

In the past the Auditor General pointed out that the government has had no basis for assessing and reporting the effectiveness of the program, and he recommended that the goal of the Alberta royalty tax credit be defined in terms of the results expected and the performance measures identified.

Mr. Speaker, my time on this bill is unfortunately coming to an end. It disappoints me that hon. members of this Assembly and particularly those in Executive Council still have difficulty with our current ethane policy, and I hope to see that changed.

In the time that I have left – regarding Bill 8, the government is decreasing taxes on the corporate side but on the personal side is shifting more of the tax burden onto the middle-income Albertans through their flat tax scheme. They're going to say that it is . . . [interjection] No; it's fair. It's a single-payer user system, and it's fair. I hadn't had the time, but I received from the library downstairs a very interesting study that I plan to read, and it's not from the Parkland Institute either. It has similar concerns to what I've just pointed out.

3:30

It is more important to the business sector at this time to stabilize electricity and natural gas prices in the province so that businesses can operate profitably. Now, according to another alliance, another successful alliance, I might add, the Alliance of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, the KEP, or the Klein energy plan, could lead to a loss of investment of \$264 million, Mr. Speaker, and the loss of over 30,000 jobs and a cash flow loss of 12 percent in Alberta's manufacturing sector. Now, I as well as other members of the Official Opposition and the third party and members of the Alberta public have been given rather smooth assurances that electricity prices are going down, but compared to what they were two years ago, they're very, very, very expensive.

When you compare our electricity prices to those of Manitoba, B.C., those of Saskatchewan, which has a very similar sort of grid to what we have where the majority of the electricity is generated from coal-fired power plants, Saskatchewan has much cheaper electricity. Sometimes I feel it is not fair to lump us in with B.C. and Manitoba because of the hydraulic capacity that those provinces have for generating electricity. However, we have because of ideology squandered a competitiveness for our business sector that we've had through many different periods of the business cycle. In good times and in bad times we had a reliable, economical source of electricity, and that is no longer the case.

At this time I need to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, and cede the floor.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, might we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Gordon Smith, who's a constituent of Edmonton-Whitemud, who has come down to observe us this afternoon, a resident of the Blackburne area in the lovely constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. I welcome him to the Legislature and ask the members to give him the traditional warm welcome.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 8

Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001

(continued)

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 8 today, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001. Of course, the object of Bill 8 is to implement recommendations for cuts in the corporate tax rates made by the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee.

This certainly was quite a review that I was reading over here, and I see that there are some very recognizable names when we look down the list, made up of a group of engineers, some MLAs, some accountants. I notice one, Hugh Bolton, who has had an association with my mother-in-law's second husband for many, many years and is a well-respected member of the community. I also see that we have two former MLAs here, again very well-respected members of this Assembly when they were here. So the credibility of this tax review, the Alberta business tax review, certainly, I think, was very good.

We have to look at Bill 8 in the sense of how the implementation of their recommendations is not only going to help business here in this province but is going to help the average Albertan. We do know, for example, that the impact of Alberta's business taxes on the province's economic and business climate and our international competitiveness is all reliant on the price that we can manufacture and do those other things that are so requisite of good business practices and make us competitive in a world market. Now, then, not only are we looking at a tax structure, Mr. Speaker, that will keep us competitive in this province and in this country, but as well we're looking at sustainability.

It was quite interesting. I was watching very intently as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and myself one day. We were looking at sustainability in our oil and gas divisions in this province, and he drew a graph. It was a very simple graph, but it pointed out the situation that we find ourselves in today and why Bill 8 is so essential at this particular time. What he did was draw a graph of our overall production of oil. This included the sweet crude, which, of course, was flowing so abundantly in the early '70s in this province and which, as I understand it, the majority of the moneys in our Alberta heritage savings trust fund came from and were built upon.

As well, when he was showing us this graph, he also drew another graph which indicated how our supplies of sweet crude in this province and our reserves of sweet crude had diminished. After many years of successful drilling and exporting and using our oil reserves, our sweet crude had definitely pretty well run its course here in the province. It was amazing when he showed that graph and how our reserves had depleted, how the royalties that we were receiving also decreased.

Now, of course, we all know what happened to the world price of crude during the Getty years. It was very tough for anybody to look good with oil at \$10 a barrel. Mr. Getty certainly did some wonderful things in regard to bringing spending under control during those years. It is a big ship, and it takes quite awhile to turn around. It was amazing what they did. What happened was we entered the '90s, and of course our production of natural gas started to increase and continued to increase for most of the '90s. At this time it has

leveled off, and our royalties for natural gas are quite extensive. As we deplete our known reserves of natural gas, the process of discovering others, of drilling for them at deeper depths, certainly becomes more expensive. So as this process continues, the profits and what makes up what we've so often heard of as the Alberta advantage become harder and harder to sustain.

We are in quite a position right now, Mr. Speaker, in that we want to remain competitive in the world markets, but as well we want to continue the sustainability of the advantages we do have here. Certainly one of those is making the climate for business in this province competitive.

3:40

To do that we did introduce Bill 8 and looked at some of the recommendations of the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee. There were a number of areas that they did look at. Certainly one was a reduction of the general tax rate. The second area that the committee made recommendations in was a reduction in the manufacturing and processing tax rate. A third area was reduction in the small business tax rate. Another was an increase in the small business threshold. Another was that the capital tax on financial institutions should be eliminated. So those are some areas where the Alberta tax review committee made some recommendations.

When we look at that we certainly have to be competitive, and we have to be competitive not only in Canada but also in North America and globally as we continue to move to a global economy. The Business Tax Review Committee, Mr. Speaker, had noticed that Alberta's general rate of 15.5 percent was lower than all provinces except for Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland. We compared very favourably as well with all other provinces in Canada.

It is also important to note that the business sector at this time wanted to stabilize our rates for electricity and natural gas in this province, and considering our northern latitude, considering the fact we certainly have much different building requirements than, for example, Mexico, then certainly we have a greater dependency in the manufacturing business on electricity and natural gas. So certainly those are two very, very important issues when we look at what it costs to do business here in this province.

I was very happy to see that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had brought out how the Alliance of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters had in their findings indicated that under the Klein energy program with our higher electricity and natural gas rates we could have a loss of investment of \$264 million and also the loss of somewhere in the neighbourhood of 31,000 jobs. This would also look at a 12 percent decrease in Alberta's manufacturing sector. Those were some pretty startling observations, and I think they are well within reason and pretty well on target. We will see in this next year what will happen. We will see, as well, if there are no rebates in the next year, how those prices for electricity and natural gas will impact that.

DR. TAFT: Who pays for those rebates? Who pays for that?

MR. BONNER: It is an interesting point. Who pays for those rebates? Well, we had somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$4 billion in rebates put out here late in the year 2000, early 2001, coincidentally just before the election, and we certainly cannot sustain that. I'm sure these people would not agree to that type of spending as well or could see that this type of spending would not be sustainable. So we do have some issues in regards to the sustainability of business when we have high rates for electricity and natural gas.

Now, then, as well, when we decrease the taxes, Mr. Speaker, on

the corporate side, we also have to look on the personal side. Somewhere we have to make up the loss of taxes, and with the flat tax that was introduced, this burden is then being shifted onto middle-income Albertans. Again they require moneys in order to keep our economy going too. As we move forward, I look at the recommendations towards small business. For the last seven years we have advocated as a party that we reduce small business tax from 6 percent to 4 percent. I see in Bill 8 that this rate is going to be decreased from 6 percent to 3 percent, and that is certainly a good move.

I have a constituent, a constituent whose judgment and knowledge I certainly admire and respect. This gentleman's name is Samuel Lee, and I'm sure Samuel Lee is known to a number of MLAs in the House. He said to me one day: "You know, Bill, our problem in this province isn't with the creation of wealth. We are one of the most fortunate provinces in Canada. We really have it all, but we have a problem in the distribution of wealth. How do we get that down to the people who really need it?" One of the ways, obviously, is that we can set a standard for minimum wages here in the province. In doing so, we bring that bottom sector up, and if people are gaining on the one hand, then they should be willing to share some of that on the other.

So we do that, and at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we want to realize and we have to realize that we can not handcuff small business in this province. That is the engine that leads to growth, and for that engine to work, they also need people supporting those businesses. For them to do it, they also must have disposable income to use. So we want to be cognizant of that at all times as well.

Mr. Speaker, I see that when it comes to small business taxes, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business – of the 115,926 employers in Alberta during 1998, 74 percent employed less than five people, and a further 19 percent had between five to 19 employees. In 1996 small and medium-sized business enterprises accounted for 62 percent of the total private-sector employment in Alberta. Now, that is quite substantial, and we certainly want to encourage small business.

We have seen over the last few years a prosperity in this province, Mr. Speaker, a huge increase in the influx of people from out of province, from out of country, flocking to Alberta for opportunity. With the implementation of a number of these recommendations that were put forward by the Alberta business tax review, we certainly hope that we can maintain that edge, that when people in this province prosper, hopefully we all do. One of the ways we do that is with a very healthy small business sector and an increasing and growing small business sector, but again one of those that has to be sustainable.

As well, according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business – they had a survey entitled *Our Members' Opinions* – 92 and a half percent of Alberta respondents cited the total tax burden as a high priority issue. So in speaking to that, Mr. Speaker, the tax burden is a high priority; it definitely is. We want to spread this corporate success in this province around to all Albertans.

3:50

Now, then, when I look at the bill, I also see, Mr. Speaker, that there are provisions within Bill 8 that parallel changes to the Income Tax Act as set out under federal bills C-28 and C-72 with respect to such issues as transfer pricing, the cost of tax shelter investments, assessment and reassessment of penalties. Again, there were some loopholes in the legislation, as I understand it, where companies could transfer assets from province to province and, as a result, ended up not paying tax in either of the provinces. So I did see that this loophole was shut down.

As well, earlier the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had referred to the Lennie Kaplan tax plan, and it certainly had a very, very huge impact in impressing upon the people in the Liberal caucus how important it was that we did have a corporate tax structure in this province that allowed all people in the province to share in the success. He certainly did some outstanding work for us, and we were very, very fortunate to have him as one of our researchers for quite some time.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are many members in this House that wish to speak to Bill 8. It has a huge impact on this province. We really want the opportunity for all Albertans, not only the ones that are presently in the workforce or the members sitting in here, but more importantly we want a structure that is going to carry us forward, carry us into the future and provide those opportunities for our children and for our grandchildren so that they can continue to have the success that so many Albertans have had over the years.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my seat and say that, overall, I certainly support Bill 8, and I would urge all members of the Assembly to support it.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we proceed through third reading, Bill 8, as some of my colleagues have said and I think all the government members would agree, is an important bill. It's a significant bill that cuts to some of the core issues that are at the centre of the Alberta economy and Alberta society. The Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, which comes out of the work of the Business Tax Review Committee, will have the effect of reducing the general tax rate, reducing the manufacturing and processing tax rates, reducing the small business tax rate, and of course increasing the threshold at which small businesses will pay taxes.

Every politician, of course, loves to cut taxes, and I'm not an exception to that, although I am perhaps more skeptical about the effect of tax cuts after a certain point in helping out our society. If the Business Tax Review Committee is correct – and I have no reason to doubt this particular statement; I've heard many other people make it – Alberta's tax system is already very competitive not just in Canada but in North America. Further reducing the tax rate raises the concern for me that when we come around to tighter times in Alberta, when things such as the price of natural gas decline and royalties are diminishing, we may have a tough time. We may find that our tax rates are simply not enough to sustain a viable, modern infrastructure, education system, health care system, and so on.

So one of my concerns here is that we need to have a sustainable tax system. If we move quickly to cut taxes when times are booming, we may find that we're in the position of raising them again when times are slow. In fact, that's exactly the time when you wouldn't want to raise taxes because you would be draining from a weakened economy. So there are two sides to the tax-cutting issue.

I'm also concerned that while we're reducing the general tax rates under Bill 8, the taxes are sometimes overrated as an influence on business locations. Many of the other things that influence business choices to locate, say, in Alberta versus Manitoba or Ontario or another country go well beyond taxes and include issues of quality of life, issues of public service, issues of education levels, access to land, a well-trained workforce, and so on. So I am concerned that this bill perhaps overestimates – or at least let me say that I don't want any of us here to overestimate – the impact of tax cuts on making Alberta more attractive for business and even more importantly for individuals to live.

One of the commendable effects of Bill 8 – it crosses many sections and is touched on in sections 6, 14, 16, 43, 44, and various subsections within those – has to do with tightening the loophole that was opened up around interprovincial transfers of assets which could be used by corporations to avoid paying provincial taxes. Bill 8 closes this loophole that has allowed corporations to avoid paying provincial taxes by transferring assets to another province before disposing of that property. I'd like to talk about that in a bit of detail, Mr. Speaker, because it is touched on in so many different sections of Bill 8, and it is I think an important aspect of the bill and a commendable one.

This particular loophole was known in some circles as the Quebec shuffle because it entailed shuffling assets on paper to the jurisdiction of Quebec and then using that shuffle as a way to avoid paying taxes in Alberta. Prior to the closing of this tax loophole, corporations were able to enter into interprovincial asset transfers to avoid original taxes on the sale of assets. Of course, when you have a rising asset value base in Alberta, if you can get away from being taxed on that increase in value, it's tempting to do. This tax avoidance was done by transferring the asset to a non arm's-length corporation located in other provinces, typically Quebec, and then selling the asset to the ultimate purchaser.

These avoidance transactions were accomplished, and I suppose until this bill receives royal assent are still being accomplished perhaps, by using the elective provisions of section 85 of the Income Tax Act of Canada. Under these elective provisions corporations can transfer assets on a tax-deferred basis from one province – in this case we'd be particularly concerned about Alberta – to another without necessarily making provisions in both provinces. So, for example, an Alberta resident with appreciated capital property – and many Albertans over the last decade have seen their capital property appreciate – can incorporate a Quebec subsidiary that has its residence and its only permanent establishment there. So you open up a subsidiary in another province.

4:00

The property is rolled into that subsidiary for federal purposes by electing at the adjusted cost base. Then no election would be made for Quebec purposes, and the adjusted cost base becomes the fair market value. The property is sold without provincial income tax being paid in Alberta. Clearly unfair since the gain and wealth occurred in Alberta. So it's a loophole that it's a good thing Bill 8 closes.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then it even became a bit more complicated when corporations in addition did elect to transfer assets for federal or provincial purposes. They could then choose different elected amounts in different provinces, so they could end up actually for various purposes choosing one province over another and having a whole array of choices to avoid paying taxes on the assets that had gained value in Alberta. To the credit of this government, in July of '97 Alberta announced that it was closing this tax loophole, and under Bill 8 Alberta will adopt rules that prevent the reduction or elimination of provincial taxes through the manipulation of the Income Tax Act's section 85 rollover provisions.

Now, these new shall we call them anti-avoidance rules will prevent corporations from increasing the cost of an asset when transferring it to a non arm's-length corporation located in another province on a tax deferred basis. In cases like these, either the proceeds of the corporation's disposition will be adjusted or the cost to the non arm's-length corporation will be adjusted to eliminate any

loss of provincial income taxes. So these transfers would have to be recorded and adjusted to reflect the real value in the assets involved.

In Bill 8 Alberta, as I understand it – and I must say that it's obviously a substantial and very complicated and in many respects quite a technical bill – has also enacted changes to the Corporate Tax Act that will adopt the elective rules under the Income Tax Act of Canada, section 85, in a more rigid fashion. So this has the effect of tightening rules, making them clearer, and I hope – and I'm sure it's the intent – protecting the public interest and reducing the sort of manipulation that can occur.

Under Bill 8, where a corporation transfers an asset and makes an election under the Income Tax Act for federal purposes, Alberta will deem the election to have been made for Alberta purposes. When a corporation transfers assets and does not make an election for federal purposes, it will not be allowed to make an election for Alberta purposes. In other words, the opportunities for corporations to manipulate and play one province's tax system against another are tightened up. I think that's to be commended. I think that was good advice from the tax review committee, as I understand it, and it's a good aspect of Bill 8, one of the reasons we are supporting it.

Frankly, this is a big bill for the Minister of Revenue. I'm sure all the administration will come under the minister, so it's going to be very important for his people.

Bill 8 also allows the Minister of Revenue to assess or even, if need be, to reassess a transaction involving the transfer or disposition of a property by a corporation from July 10, 1997, so they can actually go back and do some reassessments if necessary. The reason they chose July '97 is that that's when Alberta announced the closing of this tax loophole. In other words, from the day that announcement was made, which if memory serves correctly was July 10 in '97, right on through till now and into the future that loophole is closed. Bill 8 will bring into force the provisions necessary to formalize that.

When a corporation has filed an election under section 85 of the Income Tax Act on a deferred basis with respect to the proceeds of the disposition of property or an excessive capital cost allowance, the provincial treasurer – and it may now, I suppose, be under the Minister of Revenue – could even reassess the corporation's tax in order to take into account the elected amount. Now, it will be interesting to see how either the Minister of Revenue or the Minister of Finance is going to implement this and how vigorously they are going to reinforce the provisions of Bill 8 going back the last nearly four years. Are they going to be rigorously enforcing this? Are they going to be going back through their files? Perhaps they've been keeping their files very actively up to date because they have known since before July of '97 that these provisions would be enacted. Maybe they are ready to go on a number of cases that stretch back over the last four years and bring those to action under Bill 8.

Then the question could arise, of course, of whether the corporations involved, who at least presumably will want to resist the effects of Bill 8, might even pursue legal options and argue that this is an action that goes back through time and is therefore not legitimate and reasonable. It's going to be interesting and undoubtedly a delicate act for the two ministers involved to retroactively implement some of the sections of Bill 8, but I would encourage them to be aggressive in doing so. Whatever files they have that may be affected I hope they pursue with full vigour to ensure that the taxpayers of Alberta, whose resources and efforts have added to the wealth of these corporations, enjoy the fruits of that wealth by getting their reasonable tax rates. After all, the tax load they would face compared to most other jurisdictions is reasonable. There's no doubt about it.

There are a few other aspects of Bill 8 that affect the federal Income Tax Act, and we could go into those. I think, however, that I would like to switch to a couple of less strictly technical discussions here.

4:10

Shifting from the technicalities to the effects of Bill 8, I am concerned that what we are doing in Bill 8 – and this is one of the aspects of the bill that makes me less than happy – is that we are continuing to shift the tax burden of this province onto the people who already carry the heaviest burden, which are the middle-income earners. Various efforts of this government have trimmed the tax load that's paid by low-income earners, and that's terrific. I'm much less enthusiastic about the efforts that have trimmed the tax loads of the very high-income earners. The effect of all of that in combination with Bill 8 is to shift a larger and larger percentage of the tax burden onto the middle-income earners, the very people who are typically at a stage of raising children and paying off houses and cars and trying to save for retirement and so on and in many ways have less flexibility and less ability to take on even more taxes than they are now.

If you go back through the decades, you will find that the portion of the overall tax take that is carried by the corporate sector in Canada has consistently fallen, and the effect of this bill is simply to increase and continue that trend. I think it's a regrettable trend that threatens the very core of Canadian society in the sense that we are, after all, a middle-class nation. Our values, our commitments, our views of the world are shaped mostly by the middle class, and one of the great things that we've achieved through the development of Canada is as close as I think has so far been achieved in the world to a society in which class distinctions are minimized. One of the concerns I have with Bill 8 is that it continues a trend that has arisen over the last 10 years or so of accelerating and increasing the differences between the rich and the poor, shrinking the size of the middle-income group and adding to the wealth of the corporate sector and the higher income group. So that's one of the aspects of Bill 8 that I am not very enthusiastic about.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my seat. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to continue debate on Bill 8, the Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001. This is an act that basically brings into legislation a lot but not all of the recommendations of the Business Tax Review Committee, that operated in Alberta with its report coming in last year. It was also initially brought in as Bill 22 last year and ended up not being passed to give people a chance to have a look at it, to react to it, and deal with what its implications were for both the province and the business community as a whole.

It's been interesting to follow the government's information distribution on this bill in the sense that they've talked about it in terms of trying to set the province's tax rate at a competitive level in terms of how they define it. If we go back and look at when the Tax Review Commission did their report, they kept talking about the idea behind the Alberta Business Tax Review Committee being to deal with the issue of the competitiveness and sustainability of Alberta's corporate tax structure.

One of the things this kind of focuses on in the sense that we see it being reflected on a number of different of occasions when the government puts together their kind of information that deals with their perception, I guess, of Alberta and what's our advantage and

why we want to look on Alberta as a favourable place, is that they've measured it totally in terms of the dollar value that comes out of it.

Mr. Speaker, in my previous life while I was at the University of Lethbridge in the faculty of management, there were a number of articles that came out – I apologize that I don't have the references to them – where surveys were done of corporate Alberta, corporate Canada, corporate America. They were asked to define the issues and the parameters that effectively brought their business to a particular locality. The net effect of these surveys was that the relative level of business tax was not high in their decision-making priority. The idea that what we want to do is make sure that our tax is the lowest in all of Canada basically says that we don't believe there's anything else in Alberta that would attract a business to locate here.

I would suggest that when we look at the parameters that were high in those surveys, it was the community – community facilities, community services – the health care system, but specifically, Mr. Speaker, the education system that they could use as a means to attract quality employees. Employees want to go and settle where they can have a good education system so that it allows them ease of both upgrading their skills and providing opportunity for their own children to get the education that will allow them to advance and participate in the economic world to their best ability. This is one of the things that I guess is missing in this whole thing. The real focus we have is that all we want to deal with is the perspective of whether or not the dollar value is the measure.

It would have been nice to have seen the tax review committee at least make reference to the fact that the criteria for advancement of our business community and the promotion of our business community is attached to and surrounds a whole package of characteristics of Alberta that will attract those businesses. We want to make sure that they're all there, including the recreation and environmental aspects of the province in terms of the environment, the landscape, the recreation facilities in the mountains, the openness of our countryside, and these kinds of attitudes, at least that kind of a reference to the trade-offs that businesses make and deal with when they look at how they focus on dealing with a new location selection process or selection criteria.

The aspect we want to look at in terms of Bill 8 is in terms of reflecting on whether or not it contributes to this. Basically it is designed to make sure that in Alberta we do have a significantly competitive tax structure. The tax review committee made reference to the appropriate reductions that are about the same as what we see in Bill 8, and this will then effectively make the major cities in Alberta, being Calgary and Edmonton, the number 1 and number 2 tax advantage places.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I guess what we see here is that by making that measure, they're also rolling together the accumulation of taxes that businesses pay in the sense that it's measured in terms of both the provincial level taxation on business and the local municipal taxation level on business. What we want to do is make sure here that we're not forgoing provincial level tax revenue from our businesses just in the context of trying to offset high levels of local municipal revenue or taxation for our businesses. I know there have been some changes even in that area in the last little while as we looked at how these kinds of structural changes occur.

4:20

The main thing that we want to look at is dealing with how this act will build into and provide for an incentive to deal with the kind of fair treatment of the tax and the tax mix across all of Alberta based on the corresponding benefits that come out of it. When we start going through and looking at that kind of analysis – the Business

Tax Review Committee looked at that aspect – what we need to do is have a whole perspective of who pays and where the burden of paying the tax resides and kind of tie it back to some of the other aspects.

It was really interesting to note in the tax review committee report that they felt that with this kind of level of tax reduction, the economic incentive that would be created in Alberta would in effect over a period of five-plus years promote economic growth in the province in the sense that that growth stimulant of having the lower tax would in essence in that period of time offset the lost revenue for the province in the general revenue fund. So this basically gives us a reflection of what a lot of the growth columnists have been talking about in terms of the tax policy as an economic stimulus or as a development tool. It would be interesting to see the model that they used in making that conclusion, because there are some aspects in terms of how that works.

I would hope that we would look at much more than just our competitive level of taxation. What we need to do is look at how we are as a province in terms of attracting new business relative to other jurisdictions, where we can look and see whether or not those businesses are coming here solely because of our tax or because of all the other aspects that we offer as a province both in terms of service and support for them as a business and also in terms of the activity and the associated lifestyle that's available for their employees. One of the things that we do have in Alberta through the quality and the level of access to our advanced education system is a really high level of workforce. That's kind of what we need to look at also.

I know that on a number of occasions there have been businesses that have approached southern Alberta, and one of the reasons they're coming there and one of the reasons they're interested in establishing there is the ability to keep training programs in place through the college or the university so that their employees can remain current and the business, in essence, gets support in that aspect of upgrading their employees rather than having to move them off to a different centre or having them rely on doing that on their own.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, that what we need to do is look at, you know, the whole bill. I think that, in effect, what we've got is a fairly appropriate and quality recognition of the fact that Bill 8 does incorporate a lot of the aspects of that Tax Review Commission, and it does bring into that debate the focus that we have to work within this whole framework to keep Alberta competitive. So we want to make sure that as we do that, the tax structure for both our corporate taxpayers and for our individual taxpayers does provide us with some degree of – I guess we'd want to call it competitiveness but in a fairness way as well and make sure that what we're going to look at is a true reflection of where we're going.

Mr. Speaker, I think that with those few comments, I will take my seat here. From the note I was just passed, it looks like a new agreement has been reached. So we'll see how far we can make it with this one tonight.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Bill 10

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would move for third reading Bill 10, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001.

As has been discussed previously at second reading and in

committee, it brings in some improvements, some advancements that have resulted throughout the consultation that's happened on the Traffic Safety Act and will assist in being able to move the Traffic Safety Act to its final proclamation at an early date. I'd commend it to the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make some comments about Bill 10 at third reading. Of course, third reading is an opportunity to look back at the principles of the bill and the discussion that we've had in committee with respect to the specific clauses.

One of the underlying principles of Bill 10 is the need for a mechanism to relieve new drivers of their licences if they have been involved in alcohol consumption. A second principle is related to just that, the alcohol consumption, and is a policy for zero tolerance for that consumption. So really those are the two principles that seem to make their way through the bill: the suspension process and the zero alcohol tolerance principle.

Much of the bill is administrative fine-tuning as a result of the changes that were previously considered. In terms of the concerns that we raised, we fully support of course the zero tolerance for alcohol consumption and driving. That's not in question, and I think we've made it very clear throughout the debate that we fully support the notion that people behind the wheel should be there responsibly and that overdrinking and driving are not to be tolerated on the highways of the province. So for us that has not been a question or a concern.

What has been a concern is the issue that has been raised previously when we discussed this bill or a related bill, and that is the ability of the police to hand out 24-hour suspensions for a person refusing to give a breath sample. That continues to be a nagging concern with the bill, Mr. Speaker. It's a change in terms of allowing, virtually, roadside justice. I think that we have tried to make the point before in debate on this bill that that should be done before a judge rather than being done, effectively, on the side of the road with a peace officer. The proposal that we had considered was whether or not the person charged should be given an opportunity within seven days to determine whether or not they should lose their licence. So those concerns are very serious concerns, Mr. Speaker. We are supporting the bill but as long as we're cognizant of the encroachment of the peace officers in having the matter dealt with at the roadside by a peace officer.

4:30

The other changes I think we're fully supportive of. The notion that this bill will help deter drinking and driving I think is one that we all support.

I guess if there's sort of a caveat, there was some concern that this kind of administrative cleanup is needed, not just with this bill but with a number of bills before us, and I think it has been as a result of a hasty passage of bills in the House. The result is that we find ourselves back doing the kind of work we're doing on Bill 10 to try to rectify errors and omissions from the previous legislation. I think there's a lesson to be learned that when it's sometimes expedient to get legislation through the House, we pay a price for that in having to come back and revisit the same issue two and three times. We've seen that, as I said, in a number of acts before us at the current time.

The novice licence is something, again, that we supported, and that there would be stringent rules surrounding the use of that licence because of the drivers involved I think is most appropriate.

I think, Mr. Speaker, with those comments I'll conclude. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add a few comments as well to Bill 10 in third reading, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001, and once again compliment the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for sponsoring this bill and providing a bill with changes which I think will strengthen our Traffic Safety Act and which will also assist in making our roadways much safer for many people.

Now, we are talking to the principles of the bill. In speaking to the principles of Bill 10, one of the changes that occurs in this particular bill is that a 60-day seizure will be triggered when a suspended driver is charged a second time within three years of the first charge. A vehicle seizure where the vehicle was released earlier will not be counted as a first seizure. Of course, this is a very big change, and what it really does is it puts a tremendous amount of responsibility on people to operate vehicles in a manner which is within the law and that they will have to take responsibility for not only themselves but for the vehicle. Certainly when they are given this opportunity, we would expect that they would be much more cognizant of the fact that this is a possibility and that they would not operate their vehicles in a manner that would lead to any possibility of a second charge. So we would certainly hope that this change will have the desired effect of impressing upon those people just how severe we feel it is for them to be driving when they are already suspended.

A second area that we liked in this bill, Bill 10, was the Alberta administrative licence suspension prohibitions. Currently there is no provision in the Criminal Code for a 24-hour suspension, and under the proposal there would be an immediate 24-hour suspension for anyone charged with impaired driving.

Now, then, following this, there would be a 21-day permit period which would apply, and it would be followed by the longer three-month suspension. The permit period of course is, I think, a good situation in that it does balance what is already there and allows these drivers to get their affairs in order.

Now, then, the third change that we are going to see in Bill 10 is to allow better communication between other jurisdictions by providing information to them in regards to violations. What this would do is enable the registrar to forward records relating to convictions, reportable accidents, and on-road inspections relating to commercial vehicles to the jurisdiction where the driver was licensed and/or where the vehicle was registered for the purpose of that jurisdiction's carrier and the driver profile system. So, again, what this ensures is that what is unacceptable in other provinces – and it's also unacceptable in ours – would be shared with other provinces.

Now, as well, we are going to see another change, and this is in regards to graduated licensing. It pertains particularly to novice drivers who could lose their licence for an immediate 24-hour suspension if they provided a breath sample in an approved screening device and there was any indication of alcohol in a novice driver. Of course with this we will be seeing some regulations coming forward by the fall for public viewing. Again, I think it is essential that we impress upon our novice drivers just how important it is that we have zero tolerance for liquor with this particular group and hopefully that this continues forward once they receive a more permanent type of licence.

As well, Mr. Speaker, you know, it is one of those areas where I think our younger generation certainly have done a much, much better job than older generations in this province when it comes to accepting the responsibility of driving and driving without being under the influence. They certainly look out for one another much

more. They certainly have their designated drivers. So I think that an immediate 24-hour suspension, followed by a seven-day temporary permit, followed by a one-month suspension is a very, very good idea.

Now, then, another change that we're going to see is the approved screening devices. It is proposed under this bill that the referral to approve screening devices be made under the Criminal Code as well as under the Traffic Safety Act. It is not required presently, it's my understanding, to be listed in the Traffic Safety Act, but this will take place.

4:40

As well, we have to look at changes to learners and the accompanying driver, and certainly those supervising the novice driver could not be a probationary driver. Also, this legislation would be expanded to include the supervising driver for a motorcycle learner, and the accompanying driver could be on their own vehicle or could be sitting behind the learner. In this case, Mr. Speaker, the only passenger that would be allowed with a learning motorcycle driver would be the supervising driver of the learner.

There are a couple of other areas that I think are very important in Bill 10. One certainly is suspension for Criminal Code convictions, and under the proposals in Bill 10 the Traffic Safety Act would be amended to impose a disqualification period for a new offence under subsection 249(1) of the Criminal Code for failure to stop a vehicle when being pursued by a peace officer. The proposed disqualification period would be one year, which would be increased to five years if there was an injury or death. This would also become an automatic suspension. I think, again, this is one of those pieces of legislation that is critical, one part of the bill that is critical, because these drivers have to know that if they are involved in a pursuit and do fail to stop, this is a very serious violation. I think we've all seen the horror stories of pursuits that have been filmed by television crews and shown on television as to just how dangerous they are and how in some cases innocent people can be affected dearly and sometimes with the loss of life.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the last area that I want to talk about is the change in legislation here for the failure to stop at the scene of an accident. Under our current bill it is proposed that this increase in penalties will be reflected in the provincial disqualification period, and the proposed operator's licence suspension is one year when there is no injury or death and five years when there is injury or death. Currently this is normally court imposed, but if for any reason a judge neglected, then these suspensions would be automatic.

There are a number of other minor technical amendments to the bill, but certainly the major parts of the bill were the changes that I have outlined. I think it's something that's going to strengthen this particular piece of legislation. It is going to put conditions on drivers where responsibility is placed upon those drivers, and as an end result, I think our highways and streets and roads are going to be much safer. So I think this is a very good piece of legislation. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo certainly did some consultations with others in this regard, and I feel it is a good piece of legislation. I would urge all members of this Assembly to support it.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 10 read a third time]

Bill 11

Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move for third reading Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001.

As we've heard discussed in the House through second reading and through committee, the bill essentially puts into legislation what has been implemented through regulation, and that is the provisions for maternity and parental leave which are now enjoyed by Albertans. The opportunity to have a position with an employer held while a person on parental or maternity leave is drawing employment insurance benefits and other provisions makes Alberta consistent with other jurisdictions across the country. I think, as I've listened to debate, that members from all sides of the House have agreed in debate that this is a good bill whose time has come.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time in third reading I, too, have a few remarks regarding the Employment Standards Amendment Act. First, I would like to say that it's a pleasure to support this bill. I feel that it is good legislation. Again, it is important that the province finally puts its money where its mouth is, and this is in support of families.

We certainly have concerns, and they've been expressed at committee and at second reading, specifically by my colleague for Edmonton-Centre, regarding the different treatment of fathers and adoptive parents. We've also expressed our concern about the legislative process. The regulations were announced in February, before the election, and I feel there was no regard for the Legislative Assembly. This bill is coming back now and getting a rubber stamp of what was already in place. It is good legislation. It supports Alberta families and Alberta children. Business has concerns certainly about this legislation, but they have been discussed at length in the Assembly.

Now, in summation on this bill, certainly it's going to give legislative force to maternity and parental leave regulations passed, as I said earlier, in February. There is an entitlement of up to one year of unpaid, job-protected employment leave to care for a newborn or adopted child. That's a significant increase. Unlike federal and other provincial legislation, distinction is made for fathers and adoptive parents, who are entitled to 37 weeks of leave. Adoptive parent groups are opposed to policies that differentiate them from other parents. This was noted again in committee and at second reading of this bill.

I look forward to further amendments to the Employment Standards Code – I expressed this earlier – specifically to deal with the chronic violators of the Employment Standards Code. I'm sure they're coming from the Human Resources and Employment ministry to ensure that all working Albertans, who look to the Employment Standards Code to regulate their workplace, can have confidence in the Employment Standards Code, that it will be there to protect them and their wages when needed.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I certainly support Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act. At some point perhaps the government will surprise me. I look for further amendments to the Employment Standards Code in relation to the chronic, repeat violators of the Employment Standards Code in Alberta workplaces.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an

opportunity to make a few closing comments on Bill 11, the Employment Standards Amendment Act. We've heard through all stages of this bill the government soundly congratulating themselves on a job well done, and it is a job well done, six months later than the rest of the world but still a job well done. It's true. That's exactly what happened here. We're playing follow the leader, from a province who likes to be the leader. Why? Because we're dealing with issues that have to do with children and women; that would be my position on this.

What we see are maternity leave and parental leave regulations, that were passed back in February, being put in force, so that's a good thing. We see an entitlement here for up to one year of unpaid, job-protected employment leave to care for a newborn baby or an adopted child. Interestingly enough, a few weeks ago I had an opportunity to talk to a young woman who was just having her first child. She was very, very happy to have the extension to the maternity leave put in place and was very much looking forward to being able to spend the first year at home with her child.

These days it's often an economic necessity for both parents to work, as we well know. We experience that with our own family members and through our constituencies and through the people we meet throughout the province, that many, many people do not have the luxury of being able to afford one person to stay home to be with the children at least during their preschool years. It is a step in the right direction that we give some flexibility, which provides less income than what they would have made had they stayed full-time employed but also less expenses, in essence, Mr. Speaker, when you don't have to talk about day care and travel expenses and whatnot. So people are quite happy to be able to live on a little less income and have a little more time to spend with their kids.

I certainly applaud, as well, the change in terms of including adopted children. I come from a family of eight, Mr. Speaker. Four of those kids were adopted, and they were equally as much work as babies: the same amount of diapering, the same sleepless nights, the same amount of feedings, and the same additional running around for them. So it's nice to see that they have now the same recognition as all babies have and as all young children have. That's a very good thing.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It's nice to see that the distinction is being made for fathers, who are entitled to 37 weeks. That's a step in the right direction. This is legislation that we could have used decades ago, Mr. Speaker, but it is nice to see that this province is finally getting with the program and bringing in some progressive legislation. We would like to see them being leaders in this area, particularly since we hear the talk about putting families first all the time and what our priorities are. Well, we need the government to walk the walk, not just talk the talk, and this is an example of where they're starting to take a step in the right direction.

It will be a great privilege for me to be able to support this legislation. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a third time]

Bill 12 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move third reading of Bill 12, Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001.

This act will harmonize our legislation with other provinces thereby facilitating interprovincial trade, an act long awaited. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to make concluding remarks to the bill on farm machinery. Basically what we're looking at here are some situations that the agricultural community has asked for, and in these two companion pieces of legislation what we're doing is bringing forward some of the recommendations and some of the requests that the agricultural community had to establish some control again at the community level in the farm implement industry.

The main thing that we have to look at here is how well we're dealing with putting together the aspects that those communities want in terms of dealing with the potential change in line or change in recall. So we get basically into the situation, a copy of which perspective we're looking at, in terms of how the industry reacts and deals with it in terms of the fairness that is coming from the top down as the big machinery dealers put unwarranted conditions on some of their local machinery dealers, in terms of how they're able to operate and survive within the community.

So I think what we're dealing with here is effectively putting in place legislation that concurs with the structural changes and making sure that the farm dealers are treated properly when there's a transfer of a piece of equipment back to the supplier and also with warranties, that the accountability is put in place for sellers of those kinds of pieces of equipment so that we end up with the idea that if there's a sale agreement, we have in place effectively an accounting of that record of the transaction. I think that as we go through looking at the process, what we'll have here is a true sense that the dealers will be able to keep track of the equipment and make sure that the warranties that are implied as to the strength of that equipment will be true to the dealer's advertisement or implied sales agreement. So, Mr. Speaker, on that basis, as we look at this act, I think that this is going to provide basically a little more security.

I guess the one issue that we raised before and deal with again is the actual reduction from 100 hours to 50 hours in the legislated warranty, but these are the kinds of things that I guess fall into the discussion with the industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that as we deal with this, we look at it and let it go out to where there's an industry waiting for it so that they can put it in place. On that, I would hope everybody would support it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I haven't had an opportunity to get on the record on this particular bill, the Farm Implement Amendment Act, and I would like to have that opportunity to do so before it goes for royal assent.

This is certainly a bill that we are happy to support. I think that it makes some modernization changes that are important for us to see in the legislation. From the information that we have had from the stakeholders that have been consulted, they see this as being more responsive to the distributors' business needs. What we see from looking at this as compared to legislation in other provinces is that this moves us towards harmonization with similar legislation across the prairie provinces.

Looking at it in a sectional analysis, section 6 is different from

other provinces. Here we're asking for 90 percent of the current price, where Manitoba has 100 percent. We see that on a large inventory 10 percent could cost a distributor as much as \$100,000 on a million dollar inventory.

5:00

With those comments, we are happy to support the legislation. We see that as in many other industries, agricultural implements have changed quite a bit since the time the act was first introduced, and we can see the real significance for updating it. What we've seen in this Legislative Assembly over this session is a modernization of a number of pieces of legislation, and we're happy to see this happen now as a companion piece to Bill 13, which we'll be discussing next.

I think it's important for us to highlight what we see as a couple of the most significant areas in this bill, Mr. Speaker. Those would be the buy-back clause in the legislation for equipment and parts should the dealer close down or sell the business. Given the shrinkage that has happened in terms of dealers in this industry, that's an important change, I think. The other highlight is manufacturers now being responsible for transportation costs when the distributor is returning parts. It isn't like those of us in the city walking down to the local Revy to pick up a part or make a change. It's quite a bit more significant when it comes to the agricultural community, and it's important that it be recognized.

So with those few comments I would like to add my support to this particular bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question has been called. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close debate.

MR. HORNER: No further discussion.

[Motion carried; Bill 12 read a third time]

Bill 13 Farm Implement Dealerships Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert on behalf.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to move for third reading Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, sponsored by my colleague the hon. Member for Dunvegan. This act has been put forward to encourage competition harmonization with other provinces and has long been awaited in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 13, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act, at third reading. I was going to start to say that I rise this afternoon, but I guess in the context of our legislative day it's still last night, and I can feel it. I haven't shaved yet today. So we'll have to deal with some of the issues that come up with that kind of long debate.

Mr. Speaker, the Farm Implement Dealerships Act I think is something that has been talked about in the agricultural community for the past four or five years. I think that's about when I first heard the concerns expressed about the top-down power brokering that was

going on by dealerships and the focus we were seeing when the major manufacturers or wholesalers were coming along and telling local dealers how they had to handle their line, how they had to display the line within the context of the showroom, and whether or not they could have a competing line and even not necessarily a directly competing line but a support service line available.

This basically cuts out most small manufacturers from entering into agreements with current distributors who have the infrastructure to deal with the maintenance, the repair, the parts, and all of that. It basically was an easy way for a small manufacturer, a new manufacturer bringing in a new piece of equipment, a new technology, to go out and deal with the current distribution network that was there and make sure that there was a process for good service to the customer through those existing dealerships.

What we wanted to make sure of and what this bill makes sure of is that effectively there is a possibility for the main supplier to a dealer not to become all inclusive. Also, then we end up with the situation where there's some control over how a distributor can either terminate or effectively cancel a local dealership and enter into some of the aspects that are there.

I guess the main thing that we want to watch in this bill, which again the industry and the producers in our province have been seeking, is that some of the indications I've had in talking to people out in the community in the last six or eight months, when they knew that this was coming through, are that they were saying that what we'll be seeing is, effectively, distributor-run dealerships starting to show up, where they in essence are part of the distribution network. Some of this has been occurring now in the U.S., where distributors effectively are buying out dealerships and incorporating them under their management structure. In that way, they don't have the contract agreement or the relationship between the distributor and the dealership that we see and that is implied in the conditions in this bill, where we're talking about effectively two different identities.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the things that we have to kind of watch. It all reflects on the transition that's going on in our agriculture community in terms of where we see the community both in the intermediate and the longer term future. As these businesses get bigger and bigger both in terms of the distributors and the dealerships, we're seeing a lot of the dealerships effectively amalgamating under single management so that they can enter into volume purchases and volume agreements.

The real issue that comes up is that when these growing dealerships enter into a position where there's going to be an intergenerational transfer, because most of these are in some ways family corporations, the size of them and the capital required to deal with them are such that the only buyout option for them would be to sell to a significant, large distributor or other agriculture dealer-type entity. This is kind of the transition that's going on. The focus that we're going to be looking at is in the context of how these relationships then allow for the new manufacturers or the smaller distributors, that are necessary to handle the new lines as they come out, are going to be much more difficult to build into the community and to provide the option for the specialized equipment and the new technology that's going to be necessary as we moved to specialized equipment and create the high-valued agriculture sector.

Just kind of as a conclusion, I was reading an article yesterday, while we still had time to deal with keeping up in our reading, that was talking about the trend in the foreseeable future for agriculture, the agriculture service sector and the agriculture output sector. There was a lot of reference made to the fact that agriculture is going through a transition. The author of this paper, which I don't have a copy of, was Dr. Boehlje from Indiana. He made reference to the

fact that in the measurable future he could see 90 percent of the farmers in the U.S. being amalgamated into effectively significantly sized major agriculture corporations to become the producers of food in the commercial entities.

5:10

What we need to do is look at these kinds of structural changes and the implications this bill in itself is dealing with. If we look at this bill and its implications, effectively what we're saying is that we're going to put in place limitations on how these industrial food production complexes are emerging. We're trying to put restrictions on how they operate here, and in effect what we're doing is ending up with a situation where maybe in the long run what we're trying to do with Bill 13 is just kind of buck the trend, deal with the issues that are inevitable, in a sense.

As we get more and more of this industrial agricultural food complex emerging, we're going to see the situation where what we've got is a whole change in the structure, and the small manufacturers, the small specialized equipment producers, or the special distribution networks that are necessary won't have an in. What we're going to see, then, is these industrial agriculture complexes become the focus of innovation and also in a degree of market control and market power as they take over and force the market control, market identification onto the agriculture community, like we've seen happen in a significant number of the other what used to be small-scale, intensive operations. What we're going to have, then, is basically a shift back to a few individuals left that will deal with very specialized niche markets, but they'll be very high valued markets as well.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I think what we'll see here in Canada is probably the same kind of transition but also a process where what we'll end up with is this agrifood industrial complex basically developing but developing a little slower than it has in the United States. It's the kind of thing that's inevitable. We'll probably have to focus on what implications this has for rural Alberta and the rural community, that in effect we're trying to protect or trying to maintain the flexibility for, as we see it in Bill 13.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at this, it's a bill that the industry wants. It's a bill that is going to satisfy the needs of the individuals that see themselves as being affected by this. Also, I think it's a bill that as we go through the next 10 to 15 years in the agriculture community we may see in some ways effectively is not operational because these machinery dealerships will be part of this agrifood industrial relationship complex that I talked about. What we'll see is in many ways a lot of the equipment that's necessary for developing, harvesting, planting, and preparing our food will be under the control of these integrated or complex businesses, so this will have to deal with it.

I'm getting a little bit beyond the scope of the bill, but it does tie in in the sense of the complexity we're seeing and the concentration we're starting to see occur. This bill is dealing with one of the issues that is relevant to the individuals right now that want to see a choice and want to see flexibility stay within the industry.

So on that basis, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage everybody to support it. I think it's a good bill, and I would thank the member for bringing it forward.

[Motion carried; Bill 13 read a third time]

Bill 19

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move for third reading Bill 19, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

As the House knows, miscellaneous statutes is a method by which we agree to do basic cleanup, to make small but insubstantial amendments to various acts in a manner in which is efficient and clean, and assists when we're doing the *Revised Statutes of Alberta*, which we're in the process of doing now. I would commend Bill 19 to the attention of the House.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're happy to support the government in Bill 19 in terms of the cleanup of a couple of minor issues on miscellaneous statutes. It's been the habit of the government to discuss proposals for additions to a miscellaneous statutes bill. It has also been their habit to accept any rejections or concerns we have with bills that have been put into that act and to withdraw them and bring them back in a more substantive standalone bill later on in the session. So we are happy to support Bill 19, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act at its final reading.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to, of course, express my support for the bill and agree with the Government House Leader to say that much of what is contained here is of insubstantial status and agreed upon prior to these things going into the bill.

But I just wanted to draw to the attention of the Assembly that although the contents might be insubstantial, one of these is very consequential, and I'm pleased that it's there. I'm referring here to the Legislative Assembly Act provisions that mean a very important transfer of power from the executive back to the Legislature. So I'm very, very pleased that this is happening. I want to certainly commend the Speaker's efforts to make sure that this matter is attended to and is brought forward to the House for approval. So I extend my support of this.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a third time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had a wonderful amount of progress and a lot of public business over the last few hours. There have been a few glitches along the way. I'd like to thank all hon. members for the manner in which we've conducted ourselves over the time. There have been some tense moments. There have been some opportunities and opportunities lost, but all in all we've done a lot of good business for Albertans, and I would ask that we adjourn the House until 1:30 p.m. on May 30.

[At 5:18 p.m. on Tuesday the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 30, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we thank You for hearing our prayers. We thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Svend Nielsen, ambassador for Denmark. This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta, and we're pleased to welcome him. He and I shared a delightful lunch together over at Government House. Accompanying him is Mr. Ole Jorgensen, honorary consul general of Denmark stationed here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Denmark have much in common. We both have northern climates, which is obvious. We both have strong oil and gas and agricultural and food industries, and we both have now eliminated our deficits and are now posting surpluses. Over 46,000 Albertans are of Danish descent, and our province is proud to be home to the prairies' oldest Danish settlement, at Dickson, Alberta, first established in 1903. The beautiful Danish/Canadian natural museum and gardens are located there.

This visit is an excellent opportunity to discuss ways to build and strengthen the Alberta/Denmark friendship and to explore potential areas of co-operation. I thoroughly enjoyed our time together. They're wonderful people, and I would ask that they rise in the gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Worship Mayor Issam Halabi. Mayor Halabi is the mayor of the town of Yanta in the Bekaa province in Lebanon. Mr. Halabi is visiting the Yanta community in Edmonton. The Yanta community, as we all know, is made up of about 2,500 people here in the city of Edmonton, and we certainly appreciate their contribution to the social, economic, and political structure of this province and this country. The mayor is also very busy working on a twinning project between his town, the town of Vienta, and the town of Drayton Valley, Alberta, and we wish him every success in his endeavours.

His Worship is accompanied today by two very well-known personalities, Mr. Joe Hak and Mr. Kamal Salame. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. [remarks in Lebanese]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Merci, M. le Président. J'aimerais commencer en présentant trois visiteurs importants qui sont ici dans votre galerie. Deux de ces personnes sont des membres de l'exécutif provincial de l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta. Il

s'agit de Mme Suzanne Dalziel, la présidente de l'association, et M. Denis Lord, le vice-président. La troisième personne est Mme Therese Conway, la présidente nouvellement réélue de la Fédération des Aînés Franco-Albertains.

L'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta célèbre sa 75^e anniversaire cette année. L'association a été fondée ici même à Edmonton, à l'Hotel MacDonald, en 1926 lors d'une réunion de plus de 400 délégués venus de tous les coins de la province. Depuis son établissement l'association a toujours respecté et suivi sa mission, qui était de favoriser le développement de la communauté Francophone sous tous ses aspects.

Le travail de l'association a contribué à la mise sur pied et au soutien de nombreuses institutions importantes qui ont œuvré au bénéfice de la communauté Francophone ainsi que de la population entière de notre province. Parmi ces institutions on peut mentionner *Le Franco*, le journal d'expression française, qui est publié sur une base hebdomadaire depuis sa fondation en 1928; CHFA, la radio de langue française, qui a été fondée en 1949; la Faculté Saint-Jean, la seule institution post-secondaire de langue française à l'ouest de Winnipeg.

De plus, l'association a toujours maintenu un membership imposant qui se chiffre aujourd'hui à plus de 6,000 membres. Aussi, l'association a toujours encouragé le développement d'un réseau de bénévoles d'un bout à l'autre de la province, comprenant 10 régionales, un regroupement jeunesse fort et actif, une fédération des aînés, une fédération de parents, et de nombreuses autres organismes et groupes.

En terminant, j'aimerais féliciter l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta pour avoir atteint ce point important dans son histoire et lui souhaiter une longue vie remplie de succès.

[Translation] I would like to begin by introducing three important persons that are seated in the gallery. Two are executive members of the French Canadian Association of Alberta. They are the president of the association, Mrs. Suzanne Dalziel, and the vice-president, M. Denis Lord. The third person is the newly re-elected president of the Franco-Albertan Seniors Federation, Mrs. Therese Conway. These three persons are my guests today as a follow-up to the special celebration that was held yesterday in the rotunda to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the French Canadian Association of Alberta.

The association was founded at a meeting of over 400 delegates right here in Edmonton at the Hotel MacDonald in 1926. Since its founding the association has been true to its original mission to foster the development of the Alberta Francophone community in all aspects of life. The work of this great association has created a number of important institutions for the benefit of the Francophone community and the population of our entire province. Among those institutions we can mention *Le Franco*, the French language weekly newspaper; CHFA, the French language television network; Faculté Saint-Jean; and many more.

The association has maintained over the years a strong personal membership that presently stands at 6,000 members. Also, it has encouraged the development of a full network of volunteer organizations throughout the province, including 10 regional offices, a strong and vibrant youth organization, a parents' federation, a seniors' federation, and many more organizations and groups.

To conclude, I would like to congratulate the French Canadian Association of Alberta upon reaching this important milestone and extend my best wishes for a long and prosperous future. [as submitted]

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask our visitors, who are accompanied by M. Denis Tardif, the director of the Francophone Secretariat, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to present a petition to the Legislature of Alberta which states:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to include the following question in the forthcoming provincial election: are you in favour of the Alberta Government using your tax dollars to pay for abortions?

Mr. Speaker, 5,115 people signed this petition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition signed by a number of Albertans, and this is in regard to sour gas flaring, Alberta's shame: toxic, noxious, deadly. They are urging the government to "legislate measures to curb pollution from sour gas stack flaring to protect public health and the environment of Alberta."

Thank you.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I submitted on Monday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to end the Policy permitting hazardous wastes to be transported into Alberta from outside Canada and delivered to Swan Hills Waste Treatment Plant.

head: **Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bills proceed: Bill Pr. 1, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001; Bill Pr. 2, Burns Memorial Trust Act; and Bill Pr. 4, Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, the committee recommends that the following proceed with an amendment: Bill Pr. 3, The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the amendment proposed for this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Would all hon. members in favour of the report please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Bill 211 Citizens' Initiative Act

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 211, being the Citizens' Initiative Act.

The purpose of Bill 211 is to allow eligible voters in Alberta an avenue by which to propose and vote on a request for legislation.

[Motion carried; Bill 211 read a first time]

1:40

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table five copies of answers to questions raised during Committee of Supply with respect to the estimates of the Department of Justice and Attorney General raised by the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table today with the Assembly responses to questions raised during main estimates for Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development, as well as those for the lottery fund pertaining to my portfolio. They are to the MLA for Edmonton-Highlands, to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. I understand they've received those in their offices.

I would also like to table the annual report of the Alberta Grain Commission for 2000-2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege today to provide the correct copies for five tablings: in the first instance and on behalf of the current chair, Calgary-Shaw, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee annual report for the period April 1, '99, to March 31, 2000, with a tribute from the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall; the response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods' question dated April 25, 2001; the Committee of Supply responses for Children's Services; the response to Children's Advocate annual report; and the Child and Family Services Authorities Act review.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In the true spirit of openness and democracy I'm pleased to table in response to Written Question 6 from Edmonton-Ellerslie five copies of section 4.2 of the 1996 agreement, as requested in the written question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table two reports in response to an oral question on May 10 from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. One was prepared by the department, and the second one is a pilot investigation of a fatigue management program for the commercial motor vehicle industry, prepared by the Canadian Sleep Institute in Calgary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is five copies of responses to questions posed

during the Gaming estimates in Committee of Supply on May 7, 2001.

The second is five copies of responses to questions posed in Committee of Supply during Alberta lottery fund estimates regarding the Ministry of Gaming on May 14, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a report, an interim update received from the hon. Member for Highwood, who is chairing the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act Review Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I beg leave to have two sets of tablings. The first is the requisite number of copies, being five, of the Alberta Dental Hygienists' Association annual report for the year 2000.

The second one is the requisite number of copies, being five, of the Alberta College of Social Workers annual report for the year 2000.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a document entitled Let's Talk Dialogue. It is the report of the Dialogue Task Force, set up by the Federation of the Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada. The report was published in February 2001 in a French/English bilingual format. It is of interest for two reasons: one, because our own French Canadian Association of Alberta was involved in the process and, secondly, because the National Federation examined the idea of promotion and development of the Francophone and Acadian communities in the context of an exchange and a dialogue with Anglophones, Quebec Francophones, native peoples, and ethnocultural groups.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Red Deer-North, would you kindly do us the satisfaction of removing your exhibit that's in front of your desk. It seems to me that hon. members from Red Deer have a wonderful fascination with exhibits.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Kristine Cassie, the human resources manager of the Lethbridge and District YWCA. She's expressing concerns about the funding formula for Sun Country and the fact that they're facing cutbacks in a lot of their programs that could affect individuals that they provide service to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Mr. David Budzinski. Mr. Budzinski is concerned about dogs being used to kill coyotes.

The second tabling I have today is an e-mail from Mr. Will Gadd. Mr. Gadd wants the government to consider "not allowing further logging, mineral exploration or other damaging uses of K country."

The third tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of an e-mail from Jeff Perron of Canmore. He is concerned about the exploitation of forests in Kananaskis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I table the required number of copies of a letter from Mr. David Parker of Edmonton. Mr. Parker is concerned about the lack of regulations for intensive livestock operations.

An additional tabling. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Ms Crilley. Ms Crilley is concerned about the air quality in the Bow Valley corridor.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Ms Laurie Farlinger. Ms Farlinger would like to see the government protect the Bighorn wildland area.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Ms Leanne Dalderis. Ms Dalderis is concerned about the proposed forest management agreement between the government and Spray Lake Sawmills.

The second tabling today is from Ms Rutland. It's a letter from Ms Kath Rutland of Millarville. Ms Rutland is concerned that "the minister responsible for protecting the environment is proposing to destroy a national Wildlife Area."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter to me from the room 15 class at John A. McDougall school. I met with them around Bill 209, and they have supplied me with their recommendations on that bill.

The second tabling is a letter from Alison Dinwoodie, president of the Stewards of Alberta's Protected Areas Association. She is concerned with the dismantling of the Department of Environment. In particular, her group does not believe that parks and protected places should be under the Minister of Community Development.

My third tabling is a copy of a letter from Dorene Rew of Red Deer. Ms Rew is concerned with the effects of industrial, commercial, and agricultural development on our water supplies.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With great enthusiasm I rise to table two documents. One is a letter from Mr. Dennis Fenske of Sherwood Park. Mr. Fenske is concerned about environmental issues in Beaver county.

The other is the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Bill Weisenburger, who is chairman of the Society of Concerned Citizens of Pine Lake. This group is concerned about how waste and debris are being handled in the Pine Lake area.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of a letter from the chairperson of the board of trustees of Northern Gateway public schools addressed to the Minister of Learning. Ms Judy Muir is requesting the minister to reconsider certain sections of Bill 16, which in its present form is opposed by this school division.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. I'm tabling five copies of a letter addressed to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. This letter is from Ms Darlene Zloklikovits, vice-president, Alberta Injured Workers Society, expressing their strong disappointment with the minister's failure to implement the recommendations of two recent WCB review committees.

Thank you.

1:50

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to the members of the Assembly I would like to introduce the most important person in our constituency office, and that is my assistant Rhonda LaFrance. Rhonda acquired her BA in sociology at the U of S and also achieved her master's in journalism from Carleton University in Ottawa. Again, it is my honour to work with Rhonda and to introduce you to her. I would ask her to please stand to receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

MR. VANDERMEER: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great honour to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Hilda Schenk. Hilda worked tirelessly on my campaign to see to it that I became a member. I'm also pleased to let you know that she is my constituency office manager, and she is working tirelessly there now. Would Hilda please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Amitabh Arora. Mr. Arora works for the consulate of Canada in Mumbai, India. He assists Canadian companies interested in doing business in India. His responsibilities include oil and gas, diamonds, and the agricultural sector. Mr. Arora brought the largest ever, 70 members, Indian oil and gas delegation to Alberta for the National Petroleum Show and the World petroleum show in June 2000. For his outstanding service the Canadian high commissioner in India awarded him with a certificate of merit for the year 2000-2001.

Currently Mr. Arora is on a unique exchange program between Alberta Economic Development and the consulate of Canada in India. This initiative is being tried for the first time. While in Alberta he is responsible to inform Alberta companies of opportunities in the Indian oil and gas sector and assist them in entering the Indian market.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Arora is seated in your gallery, and I request that he now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great privilege for me to introduce today a home schooler group from my constituency. They're called the Drayton Valley and district home educators. The group leaders, who are also the parents and the teachers, are Roxanne Lachance and Anita Basque. They're here today with their children Jesse, Timothy, Jordan, and Adam Lachance as well as Courtney and Kyle Basque. I'd ask them all to stand in the members' gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Kane Waselenchuk; his parents, Darren and Solitaire Waselenchuk; and his grandmother Joyce Waselenchuk.

Kane is a remarkable and talented 19 year old who has already won seven world titles in racquetball. At 16 he was the youngest player ever chosen to play for Team Canada. At 17 he was the youngest player ever to win the senior national title. He has won the Canadian national championship three times: 1999, 2000, and 2001. Last year Kane was a member of Team Canada when they won gold at the Tournament of Americas and the world championships, a first for Canada. In Vancouver this past weekend Kane became the first player ever to hold both the singles and doubles titles in the Canadian national championships. His doubles partner was Brian Istace of Calgary.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would now ask that the Waselenchuks rise – they are seated in the public gallery – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to make two introductions to you and through you to the members of the Assembly today. We all rely heavily on our constituency office managers, and they're all excellent, I'm sure. Mine is among the very most excellent, and she is in the public gallery. Her name is Jan Baker.

The other person I would like to introduce is a constituent of mine and a STEP student who is doing research with our caucus over the summer. He's a member of the Lemieux clan, a well-known family in Edmonton for their many great achievements.

I would like to ask John and Jan to both rise in the public gallery and receive our warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to introduce two people to the Assembly today. The first one is Carol Guenette. She's been my constituency assistant since 1989. That just proves I'm not very hard to get along with. The second individual is Jill Jespersen, who is a student in bible school, and she's planning on going into nursing at the University of Alberta and becoming a missionary. I would like them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and the Assembly Carolyn Laird, a former resident of Fort Saskatchewan, a former page in this Assembly, and also a political science grad from the U of A. Currently she's a staff assistant for the U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee. I'd ask her to please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not to be outdone, I would like to introduce to you and through you two people who are very important and key in my life. Terri Douglas is my Leg. assistant and has been with me since day one. The second person, David Hart, is my STEP student, who is on his first visit to the

Legislature. Both are the best in Alberta, and I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome from the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly somebody that many of you have met in the past. It's always refreshing to see a world champion sports figure, and within this building in the past and in Edmonton today we've had a world champion master weightlifter. I would ask Wendy Rogers, who's won a couple of world championships, to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Amy Zienkiewicz from Cardiff, Wales. Amy is visiting for a three-month period before she starts university to study history and politics. She's sitting in the members' gallery with my trusty and excellent executive assistant. He wrote this. I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am proud and pleased to introduce to you and every colleague in the Assembly today a very special guest, Mr. Anand Sharma, who is the co-chair of New Democrat Youth of Alberta and presently is a student at the University of Alberta, completing his BA in political science. Anand has shown himself to be a very hardworking and capable organizer, and presently Mr. Sharma is spending most of his spare time this month co-ordinating the New Democrat youth convention to be held June 22 to June 24 at Goldeye in Nordegg, Alberta. He is seated in the public gallery. I would ask Anand to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a dear friend of mine, Mrs. Lynne McArthur. Lynne worked here in the Legislative Assembly as an assistant for myself and my former colleague from Calgary-Currie, and we're really pleased she's here today because we do miss her. Lynne, I'd ask that you rise – she's seated in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

head: **Ministerial Statements**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

John Graham Grenville Richert

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with sadness that I inform my colleagues of a terrible accident that occurred last week.

On Friday, May 25, two firefighters for the province lost their lives in a bird-dog plane over Red Earth, Alberta. One of the two people involved in the tragedy was a very well-known and highly respected forest officer. In fact, he was a 35-year veteran of land and forest services. We know that the other person in the plane was

a pilot working for Air Spray Ltd., who was also in the flying business for many years.

These two men worked on the front lines, Mr. Speaker. Being from a northern community, I understand and appreciate the role that these unique professionals play in protecting the people of Alberta, the communities, and the province's resources. I have known many of them personally, and I hold a deep and long-standing respect for the members of these crews.

As a veteran of land and forest services our lost member, John Graham, was well known, well liked, and very highly respected. He was very experienced with bird-dog planes and was in the front lines of fires in and around communities like Fort Vermilion, Grande Prairie, and Robb, Alberta. He probably had more than one opportunity to move from the field to a role that would have certainly afforded him more personal safety. Being a firefighter was more than something he did to make a living. As a long-standing member of land and forest services, there were many who looked up to him. They lost a friend, a family man, a husband, a father, and a grandfather. To say that he will be deeply missed cannot possibly do justice to what his family is dealing with right now.

Our fire-fighting teams involve a rare breed of contract pilots who commit their efforts to suppressing fires in Alberta. This accident also marked the loss of a pilot, a young man in his 37th year. Grenville Richert's colleagues at Air Spray Ltd. are, to say the least, devastated by this accident and have lost a valuable member of their team. His loss is being mourned in his home community in Saskatchewan, where he leaves behind his wife and other family members. A seasoned pilot from an aviation family, it was his second year fighting fires for the province and the people of Alberta.

I had the opportunity to speak with some of the crewmates of these two men on the day after the accident. The people who work with bird-dog planes play a very important role in fighting fires. They lead the communications between the ground and air crews. They take the air tankers over the fire and determine where the extinguishing agents need to be dropped. In this way, they are the eyes and the ears of the operations. Year after year after year they return to the fires, to exhausting work and to long hours away from their loved ones. Year after year they return to the camaraderie of their teammates and to the satisfaction of knowing they are protecting the lives and the livelihoods of fellow Albertans.

This tragic accident resulted in a deep loss felt by all who knew these two men. We must never forget all the men and women who have fought fires in the past and those who are out in the lines right now protecting the lives of Albertans. On behalf of the men and women who work closely with these men, on behalf of the Department of Sustainable Resource Development, on behalf of the Alberta government, and on behalf of all Albertans I extend deepest sympathies and prayers to the families and friends of the two men who lost their lives in the service of fighting fires in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a province of great beauty. From the wide-open plains and rolling foothills to towering mountains and rugged northern forests, there are few places as diverse as Alberta. Canadians recognize and cherish this landscape. We have seen many times the destruction caused by forest fires, and we know that fighting these fires is never easy and never without risk. While fighting fires is about saving forests and property, our firefighters must never have to face unwarranted risk. Protecting the lives of those in the path of fire and of the firefighters must always be a priority. Fighting forest fires takes a strong and

dedicated team. Every member must be committed. Every member must have passion.

There is no doubt in the minds of Albertans that John Graham and Grenville Richert were committed and passionate about their work. John Graham was a long-serving employee of land and forest services. He had fought many fires. He was the veteran that people looked to for advice and guidance. Grenville Richert was a young pilot from a family of fliers. This was the second year he had come to protect Alberta's forests. These men were working for all Albertans to save our forests. They were working to save our natural heritage. When Albertans are outside enjoying the rugged beauty of our province, they should stop for a moment and think about what it takes to protect our forests and our communities residing within those forests.

We join all Albertans in extending our prayers and sympathies to the families, friends, and colleagues of John Graham and Grenville Richert.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Swan Hills Treatment Centre

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition has repeatedly made requests for information on the Swan Hills waste treatment centre through freedom of information requests and through this Assembly. The Official Opposition believes that Albertans have a right to know what has happened to almost 500 million tax dollars. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. What financial return have Albertans received for investing over \$500 million in the Swan Hills waste treatment plant?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province of Alberta has received a great deal from the operation of the plant. True enough, it hasn't been all monetary, but the Swan Hills waste treatment plant has rid Alberta of some very dangerous chemicals like PCBs. Another function that seems to be lost in this whole discussion is simple things like the destruction of drugs. It's amazing when you think of the drug roundup program: 36 tonnes of unused drugs that would go and have been going into the sewer systems in the province, in the cities, and discarded in many other ways. That has been cleaned up.

When you look at the petrochemical industry that is advancing in this province, what would happen to those by-products of the chemical industry if it weren't for the Swan Hills plant? Are you going to start finding them in landfills? Where are they going to be located? So I think to just simply zero in on the dollar number of the cost of having this plant in Alberta is a very, very misleading and misguided way to deal with this facility.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the government offering prospective buyers the same guaranteed profit it gave Bovar for operating the Swan Hills waste treatment facility?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned – I think it was the day before yesterday; actually it was yesterday according to *Hansard* – the fact is that we are now asking for proposals for qualifications. Basically what that means is that we're trying to scope out what it is

that the proposed operators might need. We also want to know their qualifications, what kind of expertise would they bring to the table. This will all play in the call for proposals to actually move the plant out from the provincial government and into the private sector. But we've got to make sure that whatever happens in the future with that plant, it's there to operate for the benefit of Albertans and that it is doing a job that cannot be done by any other mechanism.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question is to the same minister again. You talk about the benefits that we've received from it. Will there be payments made, or if the plant can't operate on a sustainable basis, will it be shut down and the other alternatives that are out there to deal with those wastes investigated?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, in conjunction with the Department of Environment there is always the investigation of other means of handling this very toxic material. The fact is that some of the companies that are showing a lot of interest in this plant have expertise. They've operated these kinds of plants all over the world. I find it very interesting that yesterday the opposition raised somewhat similar questions indicating that in fact there are technologies out there and plants out there that are mobile that could handle these wastes.

It's amazing, Mr. Speaker, when we're dealing with multinational companies coming to look at this plant, the comments we're hearing from them about this plant's ability to handle waste that no other technology can handle. These are companies that are dealing all over the world. So I'm having difficulty understanding how they happen to know of these other companies that have mobile equipment that can do it, yet the multinational companies that are interested in purchasing this plant don't know about them.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure as well. The Bovar annual report says that there is not sufficient hazardous waste flowing into the Swan Hills Treatment Centre to maintain its viable operation. The report also says that the plant was operating on a negative cash flow basis. Is the plant operating at full capacity right now?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the plant currently is not receiving tonnage equal to its capacity. Also, when you talk about the amount of material that's necessary to make that plant operate, one of the things that I learned in talking to some of these people that are interested in operating the plant is that there are many things you can do in the operation. For example, with the diet the plant takes to operate, if you balance the material that produces a lot of heat in the destruction process with the material that doesn't, you can in fact operate at a much lower cost, but you've got to balance that diet. From what we have heard, that has not been the type of operation that has been occurring in the past.

Another thing they always point out to us is that the fee schedule that has been in place does not encourage some material to come to the plant. If you change that fee schedule, in fact it may be economical to destroy some of that material in the plant instead of processing it and concentrating it and then just moving that portion to the plant.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure: in your negotiations with these multinational and international companies are you proposing or are they proposing the importation from the international market to Alberta of wastes that can be destroyed in that plant?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we are not proposing to change the policy that the Alberta government has currently.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As part of the negotiations are you also talking about changing the fee schedules, and are you going to be talking to the individuals who are affected by those fee schedule changes when you enter into these agreements with the multinationals?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, of course there is a limit to how far we get into the operation of the plant. When we call for proposals, the companies that will be answering certainly will be doing their due diligence. They will be talking to the producers of this material and talking about the fee schedule and how they may attract more material to the plant.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the Minister of Infrastructure said that they weren't going to get too involved in the business of the Swan Hills waste treatment centre, because in December of 2000 the government took over ownership of that particular centre. To keep the facility operating, the government entered into an agreement with Sensor Environmental Services Ltd. Few details of this arrangement have been made public. My questions are to the Minister of Infrastructure. Will the minister confirm that it has already cost taxpayers a minimum of \$2.5 million in management fees to Sensor to operate the plant in this year?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, to correct the impression that the hon. member was trying to leave with the Assembly and Albertans that we were heavily involved, the answer to the hon. member's question earlier – he was talking about in the future when a private operator is operating. We will not be heavily involved at that point. That would strictly be an operation by the private sector.

As far as the fee schedule, Mr. Speaker, there is always a cost of doing business, and this is one of those costs.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the same minister confirm that on top of the \$2.5 million in management fees, it will also cost taxpayers between \$4 million and \$5 million a year in subsidies to Sensor to keep the plant open, based on current cash-flow projections?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, you know, I really find it quite a contrast when the hon. member that is just now asking the questions is supposed to be the Environment critic, pretends that they want to protect the environment, pretends, I guess, that this material doesn't exist and that we don't need to somehow destroy that material. The fact is that we don't profess to be able to operate that plant as efficiently and to the full capacity of the plant, and that is one of the reasons that as government we are trying to get out of it.

MS CARLSON: To the same minister: will he give this Assembly a breakdown of the \$20 million in his ministry budget for the Swan

Hills waste treatment facility? What are those tax dollars going to be spent on?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, of course, we just went through the budget process, and I'm surprised that the hon. member didn't show more interest in the \$20 million that was in the budget for this year, but certainly once the money has been expended, that will be in the public accounts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Water Quality Standards

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier of Saskatchewan proposed that the Western Premiers' Conference push the federal government to establish a national infrastructure program that will deal with the need to update Canada's aging water infrastructure. Meeting last weekend in Banff, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, representing hundreds of towns and cities in this country, unanimously passed a resolution calling for national standards in water quality. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Will the minister acknowledge that Alberta like many other parts of Canada has a serious problem with ensuring safe drinking water for its citizens?

DR. TAYLOR: No, Mr. Speaker, I will not acknowledge that. We are one of two provinces that has adopted the national drinking water quality standards. One of two. In some cases our standards are even more stringent than that. I will acknowledge that there are some difficulties in smaller centres across the province that we are working on to improve.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister please tell the House about the situation in the hamlet of Walsh in his own constituency, which has had to boil its water for the last three years because it is unsafe?

DR. TAYLOR: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. I'm very familiar with that situation. I'm not sure how much time you'll give me, but I could give you quite an explanation of that, but I will try and be brief.

Essentially, Walsh is a very small hamlet just near the Saskatchewan border. It has had a drinking water problem for about three years. The problem is one of turbidity; that is, the particles that are in the water. Walsh basically gets its water from a dugout, which then feeds down to the community. The municipal district has recognized that this has been a problem. Two years ago the municipal district contacted engineers and brought in engineers and spent – I can't remember the exact figure – several hundreds of thousands of dollars putting in a solution to that problem that was recommended by the engineering firm that was consulted.

2:20

This solution has worked in many small communities around the province. For some reason it did not work in Walsh, and they are presently looking at it as we speak. The engineers are back there, and they are presently looking at that situation to see, one, why it hasn't worked when it's worked in other situations and, two, what they can do to make it better. The department has already committed to help fund any further things that need to happen in Walsh.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the minister how long he's been aware of the situation in Walsh in his constituency and what steps he has taken since becoming Minister of Environment to correct the situation.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I've been aware of the situation considerably longer than the member opposite whose researcher just contacted our director yesterday to find out about this situation. I will continue to represent my constituents, and we will continue to work on solving that problem. The problem will be solved in spite of what that member may say.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Forest Fires

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are seeing firsthand the damage that fires can bring to our communities and people in Alberta. Albertans are afraid, afraid for the safety of their communities and for themselves. Just this week a raging fire two and a half miles south of Redwater threatened the Juniper Hills subdivision. Some 30-plus families had to be evacuated, with an uncertainty if their homes would be there when they returned. All my questions today are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The first question is: can the minister give an update on the current provincial forest fire situation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question, and no doubt there's a lot of interest in that particular area. As you are aware, the extreme dry conditions we have in Alberta are something that are not that common. Even the experts that have been involved in forestry, even out of the province that are here helping us right now, have never seen situations as bad as they are right now. Thank God that it rained some the last couple of days and has watered down some of the extreme conditions that are out there.

Presently we do have about seven fires that are still out of control. We have four fires that are being held and 21 that are under control. To date, of course, we've had close to 400 fires already, and about 120,000 hectares have been burned. Fortunately, a lot of it is not in heavily forested areas.

The largest fire we had of course is the Chisholm fire, which is partly in my constituency and partly in the Member for Lesser Slave Lake's constituency. That one burned a total of 80,000 hectares and actually took some merchantable timber, which we have to reassess and try to accommodate the needs of the quota holders and the FMA holders that are involved in that area.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, to the minister: what resources do we have in place to assist in stopping these wildfires from creating any further damage?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much. In fact, the resources we have were put in place this year a month earlier than we normally do. Most of the initial attack crews and some of the standby crews and some of the equipment that was on standby were recruited on the 1st of March this year rather than the 1st of May or April, so we were ultraprepared, but at this time we have over 1,600 firefighters

out there working, and additionally we have another 500 field experts, dozer operators, medical people, and specialists helping to fight the fires. In fact, at Chisholm alone we have over 346 firefighters at that particular fire. In addition to that, we have over 100 helicopters, over 100 dozers working across the province. We have also over 300 employees that are helping us from out of the province, including people from Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, B.C., and Northwest Territories. We are doing everything we can to ensure that we do provide the most important thing out there, and that's human safety.

MR. BRODA: My final question to the minister: does the minister have an estimate on how much has been spent in fighting these forest fires to date?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, of course we are trying to always manage the amount of dollars spent in fire suppression, but in this particular area the first priority is human life and the losses individual families are faced with when a number of homes burn down and families lose all their belongings. So that would be a top priority.

As far as the actual cost, we've spent to date about \$25 million, and \$4 million of that was specifically targeted at the Chisholm fire, which is, of course, the largest fire.

Again, I'd just like to indicate to Albertans that the individual losses of families and, in fact, the loss of the two employees of the department are the biggest losses we can find. That is the most important part, not the dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Life Lease Properties

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In increasing numbers seniors and others in this province are investing in life lease properties to serve as their primary residence. Nevertheless, there is concern about security of investment in life lease properties. My questions are all to the Minister of Seniors. Does the government not consider it a legislative deficiency that there is no significant protection for owners of life lease properties?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, the member may or may not have a good point; I don't know. But we must remember to keep in mind that a life lease arrangement is similar to any other mortgage arrangement that you have. At this particular juncture I don't think it would be prudent for the minister or the Ministry of Seniors to enter into that field without first of all having a clause, which we do not; secondly, ensuring that these life leases are implemented as they should be; and thirdly, I think it's an issue that if it arises, we will certainly deal with it and deal with it prudently.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. What consideration is the government making to protect life lease investors not only during the construction phase of their property but for the entirety of their ownership?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, again I would indicate that this particular area is one of a contract when you're buying a home, and I would think that at this particular juncture there are likely sufficient protections in it when you enter into a contract. If there are not, then I would appreciate a note from the hon. member. I'll bring it

through the proper ministries within the government to ensure that if there is legislation required, we will in fact address it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll work on it over the summer.

The third question: given that advertising for new life lease housing in Edmonton notes that the development will provide security of tenure, to what extent does current residential tenancy legislation protect security of tenure?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, that particular sector does not come under my ministry.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Civil Service Retention

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. British Columbia is going through a major ideological realignment as a result of the overwhelming victory of Mr. Gordon Campbell's government. As B.C. begins putting together its new government, there is speculation that we may lose some of our best civil servants to lucrative offers from B.C. My question is to the minister responsible for the personnel administration office. Mr. Minister, what is your department doing to ensure that Alberta retains our excellent and valued public service employees?

2:30

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we really do have an excellent Alberta public service. I would indicate to you and to other Albertans that are looking in today that recently our Alberta public service received a national award. It was in recognition of the corporate human resource strategy that we put together sometime ago.

I think it should be viewed almost as a compliment that the media has speculated about potential raids on our service. Again, this is a free country. We pride ourselves in our democracy. Certainly as a representative of the public service today I want to indicate to all of our employees that we intend to remain competitive in a very hot marketplace, but as Albertans we need to be always vigilant about the tremendous, tremendous advantages we have in living in this province, raising our families in this province, and contributing as best we can as a public service to all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess having an excellent public service also requires an excellent minister to head it, so my compliments to him.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry; that's a preamble.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Cataract Surgery Contracts

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Cataract surgery in Calgary is controlled by five clinics. In March last year internal correspondence within the CRHA obtained under FOIP and apparently written by an ophthalmologist says: "We have unwittingly created an oligopoly that has greatly benefited the facility owners above the other stakeholders." To the Minister of Health and Wellness. Given that the same clinics and investors control eye surgery this year as last year, will the minister explain that an oligopoly still exists in cataract surgery in Calgary?

MR. MAR: Well, surely to goodness, Mr. Speaker, an oligopoly among a number of them is better than a monopoly under one system. The test is not whether or not it is an oligopoly or a monopoly providing the service. The test is: is this service being provided to Albertans in a cost-effective and effective and efficient manner?

We review these contracts. We review them scrupulously. I've said on a number of occasions and a number of times in this Assembly and outside of this Assembly in response to the hon. member's questions and in response to questions outside of this Assembly that there is a process by which we review these contracts. It is completely transparent; it is completely in the open. The rationale that is provided for the approval of each of these contracts is available on the department's web site. If he or any other Albertan wishes to evaluate for themselves the rationale that is given for the approval of a contract under the Health Care Protection Act, he and others can look for it themselves. They need not go into this matter by raising the question in the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the purpose of privatizing eye surgery was to bring in market forces and given that all reported prices for cataract surgery in the CRHA are identical among the five clinics, will the minister confirm that market forces are failing among the for-profit clinics in Calgary?

MR. MAR: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it may demonstrate that they are operating in a very efficient manner. They have reduced their costs as much as possible in order to ensure that the service can be delivered in an appropriate and a safe way, still allowing themselves some profit. I don't think that that's a dirty word at all; I should add that.

The cost of providing those cataract services under those contracts is very similar in cost to the cost under the public system. The great advantage, however, of having these services done outside of hospitals and in private surgical facilities is that it frees up surgical space in hospitals for much more significant types of surgery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that principal shareholders in two of the five clinics are also senior officials in the CRHA, how can the minister deny that conflicts of interest exist?

Thank you.

MR. MAR: I can say that because unlike my friend across the way, my feet are firmly rooted in reality. I am obsessed with reality, unlike him who is obsessed with this type of innuendo.

I have said, again, on a number of occasions – and I'll be happy to repeat it again, Mr. Speaker – that each regional health authority has very significant conflict bylaws. Those bylaws are the same conflict bylaws that apply to members of this Assembly, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and it is completely transparent. Those conflict rules, the contracts, the rationale for the approval of contracts are all available on the web site. Members of the regional health authority absent themselves from decisions that are being made when there is a potential conflict, just as we would expect the same type of behaviour on the part of the Member for Edmonton-Riverview should he find himself in a conflict of interest as it relates to the business of this Assembly. It is completely transparent and completely available for any member of the public to examine these for themselves.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Homeless Initiatives

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For many Alberta communities, including my home town of Calgary, homelessness is a growing concern. My question is to the Minister of Seniors. What is this government doing to help Alberta's homeless?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: The government recognizes that every community has different housing needs and different circumstances that are best resolved by local planning and decision-making. As a result, my ministry had asked seven major cities to develop community plans to properly address their individual needs. Those plans have now been completed as of December of last year and, as a result, have triggered some \$9 million of provincial money as well as federal money into the homeless initiatives.

I'm pleased to say, Mr. Speaker, that Calgary through the Calgary Homeless Foundation is being used as a role model by the federal government for assisting municipalities across the country in developing strategies to address the issue of homelessness. Also, I think it's very important to note that the city of Grande Prairie has been selected by the national Homelessness Secretariat to be used in the province of Quebec as a model for rural communities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Seniors. What is the government actually doing now to address the urgent and immediate needs of the homeless?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, the first year of funding identified through the homeless policy framework implementation strategy has been used by communities to ensure that the immediate needs of the homeless are met, such as emergency shelter space and so on, for the most people. There are also a number of other ministries within the government that provide a variety of supports for less fortunate members, and I'll just mention a couple of them. Human Resources and Employment has some very significant programs. Children's Services is involved in a whole other series of programs, especially for women's shelters. Health and Wellness, AADAC, and the Alberta Mental Health Board are also in the business of providing support.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Minister of Seniors. Although meeting the immediate needs of the homeless is essential, can the minister please tell this Assembly what his ministry is doing to develop more long-term solutions to homelessness?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, one of the major initiatives we've undertaken is to somehow partner with the federal government to ensure that we can end up getting some degree of co-operation with them, with the private and nonprivate housing sector, the municipalities, and in fact find these sought-after long-term solutions.

The communities that I mentioned, the seven cities, are going to be using some of the homeless funding in order to go the next step and provide some transitional housing and support services to these unfortunate individuals and families. Our priority has to be with those who are most in need and to ensure

that they have access to basic shelter and that the homeless in Alberta have the ability to get themselves off the street.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that in addition to dealing with the homeless through that particular strategy, we also have a very significant rent supplement program, which is a first step in the transition, and that one has been increased in the budget significantly this year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:40

Disabled Children's Services

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children with special needs must often depend upon several government departments for service. According to the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities many are being lost in the shuffle. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why are these children still being caught in the bureaucratic differences among children's services regions and health regions?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, possibly the minister of health would wish to supplement, but we do our very best through the Alberta children and youth initiative to ensure that the ministries liaise both at the provincial level and the departments at the local level through the health authority, through the children's authority, and through other providers like Human Resources and Employment, and we do our best to make sure that no child falls through the cracks.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me an ideal opportunity to advise that in the city of Edmonton with the Minister of Justice last year we partnered with the Zebra Foundation and with others for the launching of the planning process to make Pacific Plaza over here on 109th Street a one-intake process for children so that we don't have the fear of losing children through the cracks.

Mr. Speaker, one additional comment I should make. The Alberta Mental Health Board looks after a number of children who are receiving services, many of whom, no doubt, could have come to Children's Services because of similar problems, but sometimes people are reluctant for whatever reason to approach government for help. They go to other service agencies, nonprofit agencies. So sometimes where we really need the refinement is in our intake process, but we are available with those services for children.

DR. MASSEY: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Has the government considered introducing a benefits card to allow parents of handicapped children to access services from providers?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the member asks a very good question: what are the ways that we can help parents get the service? For example, in Ma'Mowe children's services, with the satellite communities that are a part of this authority, frequently there's difficulty in accessing that nonprofit organization that may receive government funding for certain specific types of service. I will be pleased to review with the department staff and also with Ma'Mowe whether or not such a card, such as the Gateway Association has, would enable families to make things more easily available.

Mr. Speaker, Gateway Association, who does in fact undertake the role of advocacy for many of these children, met with me in the last two months. We will co-sponsor a workshop looking at issues like this and hopefully will come up with some answers. The hon. member may have provided us with yet another idea for this type of approach.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is done to ensure that these children are not denied service due to funding shortfalls in a particular department?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, one might say that we are clearly not denying people today. If anybody ever provides me with a name of someone who's been denied service, I'd like to take a look at that name and follow up and do our due diligence. Never in the history of Alberta have so many children received care from the province. That is not a statistic that we can claim with pride but rather with a great deal of concern, that 15,000 children are part of the child welfare caseload, that we have an increased number of children in handicapped children's services, that we are working increasingly with children who require mental health services throughout the province.

So, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member identifies is I think a problem much more broadly centred than in Children's Services or in any government department. I would suggest that this is a problem for all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Health Services Utilization Commission

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year as part of the public relations blitz around Bill 11, the government set up the Premier's Advisory Council on Health to provide advice on the future sustainability of the health care system. Of course, no one has ever heard from that council since. Meanwhile, this morning the Minister of Health and Wellness announced a separate \$7 million study on the sustainability of the health care system. To the minister: given that the Premier's advisory council is already charged with studying the sustainability of the health care system and has at its disposal adequate funds to do the job, why does the Minister of Health and Wellness want a separate commission of his own to study the same problem?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find this to be a very constructive question, and I thank the hon. member for it. The Premier's council continues to do good work in that it continues to meet with many stakeholder groups from throughout the province. The individuals who are on the Premier's council indeed are recognized as being leaders in health care, and I think there will be good work that comes from the Premier's council as it relates to the big-picture strategic directions that our health care system should take.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is still important that while we have our eyes on a big-picture strategic plan, we should also look at the more day-to-day types of operations in terms of who provides what services and how we can provide a service better or at a lower cost than is currently done. So there is the potential for overlap. However, I'm satisfied that given the terms of reference that have been given to and discussed at some length with our chair of the Health Services Utilization Commission, the hon. Bonnie Laing, a former member of this Assembly, the former representative from Calgary-Bow, the potential for that overlap will in fact be eliminated and that both councils will continue to do good work in improving our health care system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It sounds like a wasteful example of overlap to me.

Why is the government reinventing the wheel by spending millions of taxpayers' dollars studying the utilization of health care services when the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which receives some funds from this government, already does much of the same thing?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is true that the Canadian Institute for Health Information does good work. However, much of that work is done at a national level. Not all solutions that are found at a national level will be applicable within the province of Alberta.

My expectation has been that just like the Premier's council works in collaboration with other groups doing similar types of examinations across the country, so too will Bonnie Laing's health utilization commission look at the information that is provided from other groups that are doing similar types of work. The ultimate objective is not simply to look at ways of spending more money in new areas. It is looking at ways of spending the existing money that we have in a more effective and efficient way. In doing that, Mr. Speaker, my expectation is that the Health Services Utilization Commission will look at existing work already done and will look at models that are done perhaps in other provinces or perhaps even in other jurisdictions throughout the world and ask the question: can those types of models be brought and successfully introduced and implemented in this province?

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, earlier in the question period I applied the preamble rule against the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall and denied him a subsequent question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has violated that preamble rule, so I'm going to apply consistency and deny you the next question.

2:50

Cloud Seeding

MR. OUELLETTE: Mr. Speaker, as we are all aware, Alberta has severe dry conditions in almost every part of the province. The rain we are currently experiencing is welcome but not yet provincewide or sustained enough to have much of an impact. These dry conditions, which have led to the devastating fires of the past few days, may herald the potential for a disastrous season for the province's agricultural industry. It has been brought to my attention that insurance companies are taking up the practice of seeding clouds to prevent hail damage to crops. Several constituents of mine are concerned that this practice could also be preventing much-needed rain from falling. My question to the Minister of Environment: is this the case?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. The member is correct that cloud seeding is happening by private insurance companies. However, Mr. Speaker, there's no evidence at all that it prevents rain. The studies quite clearly indicate that when clouds are seeded for hail, in fact they tend to provide more rain than if they are not seeded. We're not sure if it works for hail, but it certainly doesn't prevent rain.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. If my constituents wanted to stop

the practice of insurance companies seeding clouds for hail suppression, who would they turned to?

DR. TAYLOR: Environment Canada, Mr. Speaker, has a weather modification act, and if they're concerned about that, I would suggest that they talk to Environment Canada. It's not an area of provincial jurisdiction. Talk to Environment Canada, and perhaps they could do that through the present member plus through their local MP.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the minister of agriculture and rural development. Can the minister tell me whether the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, which offers hail and crop insurance as a provincial agency, is involved in the practice of cloud seeding for hail suppression?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation does not participate in cloud seeding. I could also say that some years ago there was a pilot project done on cloud seeding to see if we could reduce the amount of hail or if the intensity of hail storms could be reduced. That pilot ended some years ago.

However, Mr. Speaker, I can also say that from what we've learned and what we understand from others who are involved in this, it is a very expensive practice and the results are very inconclusive, particularly in the area of hail suppression. I can also say that we have no plans of being involved in this procedure as a provincial government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 22 I tabled a letter dated March 27, 2001, to Mr. Ralph Canham from Mary Cameron, president and CEO of the Workers' Compensation Board, indicating that Mr. Canham would be receiving a replacement wheelchair. On May 25 Mr. Canham received a call from his caseworker's supervisor indicating that the commitment for a replacement wheelchair had been rescinded. This call came after Mr. Canham had been fitted with a new battery-powered chair at the Foothills hospital and told that it needed a few modifications and it would be his. My questions today are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Why is the WCB going back on its commitment to help this injured worker?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge in front of me on this specific item. I assume that our department has probably been contacted about this particular issue, and if so, I'll certainly be glad to check on it, and perhaps then the answer is involved in some of the communication.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that Mr. Canham has been, in his words, a prisoner in his own home for two months, when will he get the wheelchair he needs, the chair promised by the president and CEO of the WCB?

MR. DUNFORD: Again, Mr. Speaker, we'll have a look at whatever documentation we have, and certainly if there's anything that the hon. member wishes to forward to my office that might help us in that search, we'd be very, very pleased to accept it. This is to my knowledge certainly our first contact with this situation, but I have to confess that I don't see all the mail that comes through our office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Given that it will take an additional four to six weeks after the approval of his chair, when can Mr. Canham expect to get a speedy resolution to his problem?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, we all know that question period appears on television right across the province, and it's very, very important that we as honourable members look competent and experienced with what we do, but I'd say to the hon. member: there's no reason that you have to stick to a script on your questions. You asked one question; you asked a supplementary. I tried to answer as honestly and as truthfully as I possibly can, yet it's as if you're not listening to what I'm saying. I don't mind questions at all. Question period should be a very open type of operation so that people can bring the government of Alberta to task.

I want to point out that what we're dealing with here today is the Workers' Compensation Board, that has the responsibility under a board of directors to provide its day-to-day operation. Now, if this particular gentleman has a real problem, then I think we should be discussing it, and I'm wondering why you didn't call me at 10 o'clock this morning, at 8 o'clock last night, or whenever you became aware of this if you were really honestly wanting to work with me to find a resolution to this. This is just bringing up a person's name – I hope you've cleared with him, because now you've put his name into the public record, and now we'll deal with it as best we can.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Myrna McCann

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to pay tribute to Myrna McCann, a very special Calgarian who passed away this spring. Myrna was a very exceptional woman who was an accomplished wife, mother, daughter, nurse, sister, aunt, and philanthropist who successfully lived her life as an example of one who gave selflessly to all who were fortunate to have been touched by her.

Thirty-eight years ago Myrna married Murray McCann, and together they nurtured a strong, old-fashioned marriage and raised five wonderful children. Grandy witnessed the miracle of 13 beautiful grandchildren, who became the centre of her universe. Myrna always took great pleasure in not only supporting but watching those around her enjoy life, whether children or adults. With the love of her immediate family surrounding her, she was fearless and strong right to the end.

Myrna McCann was truly one of God's special people, and though God has called her home, the precious love felt for her and the respect for her ideals will always live in the hearts of her family and many friends. Bon voyage, dear Myrna.

Thank you.

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

Darlene Johnson

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize one of my constituency's hardworking teachers. Mrs. Darlene Johnson, a grade 1 teacher at Bertha Kennedy school in St. Albert, was recently awarded a Prime Minister's award for teaching excellence. Mrs. Johnson was chosen from 215 nominations for her leadership, innovative teaching methods, and most importantly for her incredible commitment to children and to teaching. Mrs. Johnson's nomination was made by a group of St. Albert parents and is one of only 10 recipients in all of Alberta and one of only 65 in all of Canada.

The parents of the children of Bertha Kennedy have passed on to me that they are amazed at the enthusiasm and the learning achievements of their children in Mrs. Johnson's classroom, and they are constantly encouraged to become involved in their kids' education throughout the year.

3:00

Mrs. Johnson has been teaching for 20 years in Legal, Morinville, and now St. Albert. Mrs. Johnson is also the mother of three, and her husband, Laurent, is also an educator.

My constituents and I congratulate Darlene Johnson on her Prime Minister's award of teaching excellence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Augustana University College 90th Anniversary

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to recognize the 90th anniversary of Augustana University College in Camrose. Augustana University College, originally known as Camrose Lutheran College, was founded in 1910 by Norwegian pioneers who came to this country and settled in the Camrose area. Augustana is a liberal arts and sciences university whose mission is to prepare women and men intellectually, morally, and spiritually for leadership and service in church and society.

On Sunday, May 27, I was proud to bring greetings from the province to Augustana University College's 90th graduation ceremonies. In light of the Norwegian roots of the Augustana University College, the guest speaker for the 2001 graduation ceremony was His Excellency Ingvar Havnen, the Norwegian ambassador to Canada.

Augustana began offering university work in the fall of 1959 as an affiliated college of the University of Alberta and became a university college in 1985, when the first BA degree was granted. Augustana now grants baccalaureate degrees in the arts and the sciences and is expanding its facilities and programs to accommodate an enrollment of approximately 1,000 full-time students.

For dedicated service and educational leadership over 90 years Albertans say thank you and congratulations to Augustana University College.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Senior Citizens' Week

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week, June 3 to 9, is Senior Citizens' Week in Alberta. As the Official Opposition critic for Seniors I'd like to extend on behalf of my colleagues our deep gratitude and sincere thanks for the legacy seniors have given all Albertans.

In my many meetings with seniors across the province I've been told that what seniors want most today is that we recognize both past

and future contributions, that the government policy walk the talk. Enough reports and studies, they want to see these plans come to fruition, and they want to be at the table, included in policy-making before it's a done deal. They'd like that the myth of seniors being responsible for high health care costs be dispelled, that the programs for seniors cut in the early '90s be restored, and that home care and housekeeping services be expanded. My thanks to all the seniors I've met and for their advice. I will keep working for them.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Darcy Jones

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I'd like to give recognition to the brave and quick actions of a constituent and former student of mine, Darcy Jones of High River.

One evening some days ago Darcy discovered an intruder rummaging through the family van, which was located in the backyard of their family home. Because he'd been the victim of someone taking things from the van a few months before, Darcy demanded to know what the fellow was doing. The thief turned and fled down the alley with Darcy in hot pursuit. Darcy, who is a competitive mountain bike rider, caught up with the individual, who then pulled a knife. However, Darcy was able to subdue and control him until the RCMP arrived.

Thanks to Darcy Jones' quick action the thief has been charged with the murder of little Jessica Koopmans and is now safely behind bars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend the town of Banff hosted the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' 64th annual convention. By all accounts it was a tremendous success as over 1,600 elected municipal officials representing large and small, rural and urban municipalities from across Canada and several hundred other family members gathered in Banff to participate.

Under the theme A Municipal Odyssey the conference featured an impressive list of keynote speakers, and all who attended enjoyed warm Alberta hospitality among the spectacular beauty of our majestic Canadian Rockies.

Today I am proud to rise and recognize and congratulate the entire staff of the town of Banff, all 70 of them, who generously donated much time and energy in ensuring the success of the four-day convention. I would also like to recognize and thank entertainers Tom Jackson, Susan Aglukark, and Amanda Stott, who donated their time and put on a sensational concert raising money and awareness for affordable housing issues and suicide prevention. It truly was a weekend to be proud to be an Albertan and proud to be a Banff resident.

Please join me in congratulating all involved at the FCM for a job well done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Youth Options Program

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and recognize a wonderful program that operates in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. Youth Options aims to identify the needs of

youth at risk of becoming involved in gang activity and then designs alternative programs of value to them.

Youth Options has been operating in Edmonton-Highlands for four years. Two staff members, Colleen Fidler and Lorne Demchuk, who are with us this afternoon, run a variety of programs giving youth in the area alternatives for recreational activity. Two examples of such activities include a summer golf program with professional mentors and an art program.

My commendations to Ms Fidler and Mr. Demchuk for the fine work they are doing in Edmonton-Highlands with Youth Options.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as this is the last opportunity this week for recognitions, let me also add the following list of activities coming up. From May 28 to June 1 is Dutch Elm Disease Awareness Week. May 28 to June 3 is Safe Kids Week. May 31 is World No-Tobacco Day. June is Dairy Month. June is also Leukemia Awareness Month and Stroke Month. June 1 to 8 is Brain Injury Awareness Week. June 1 to 9 is National Transportation Week. June 3 to 10 is Environment Week. June 3 is also National Cancer Survivors Day. We've already heard that June 3 to 9 is Senior Citizens' Week. June 3 to 11 is Water Safety Week. Zeleni sviata, as observed in the Julian calendar, is also June 3. World Environment Day is June 5, and June 6 is Clean Air Day.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, you have a purported point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MS CARLSON: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), which states "makes allegations against another member," in reference to an exchange in question period between myself and the Minister of Infrastructure. The minister made comments to me stating that I only pretended to protect the environment. While I don't have the Blues in front of me, that is certainly, I think, an inaccurate statement and an accurate reflection of what he said. It also would be I think appropriate under 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another member."

Now, Mr. Speaker, had it been another member in this Assembly, particularly some of the newer members of this Assembly, they might not have paid that close attention this session, but certainly that particular rule doesn't apply to this member. He is the former Environment minister in this province and has been subject to many, many questions by myself, reviews in budget debates. I am on the record repeatedly since having taken the Environment critic portfolio in 1995, on questions in question period, on debates in the Legislature, on estimate debates, on motions that have to do with environmental protection, on points of order on that particular issue, on private members' statements, on recognitions. I think that certainly he stepped out of line today when he made those allegations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure on this point.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad you did not call it a point of order, because certainly this doesn't even come close to that qualification.

I always maintain that one needs to be judged more on their actions as opposed to what they say. While the hon. member is accurate in her summation inasmuch as she has on a number of occasions said things, that's true, but when you think about what she has said – for example, today there were nine questions basically around the cost of the facility at Swan Hills. The cost, Mr. Speaker.

Now, if in fact people are really concerned about the environment, really concerned, deeply concerned, want to protect the environment

from harmful chemicals, I find it very strange that you would put a dollar value on it. The fact is that what the waste treatment centre at Swan Hills has done is protect the environment, and you really cannot put a dollar value on it. So to continually bring this up in the context of dollars, I have to question the integrity of the statement that they are anxious to protect the environment. I just find that very strange.

3:10

I can go back to another instance. About four years ago I was trying very hard to protect some areas in this province and more specifically the forest land use zones. Currently it's a policy, and the way it stands, you can run a bulldozer in a forest land use zone, but you cannot come in with a quad. To me that seemed very strange. So under a miscellaneous statutes act I wanted to put in a law that would have some teeth through the Forests Act, but the hon. member and her party would not agree to put that in. That was an action on my behalf to protect the environment. With all the verbiage they still did not accept it. So I stand on my first point: action speaks much louder than words.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on this point of order.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the first point that I would make is that the minister's points dealt more with the argument between the members than with the point of order, but I would refer you to section 23 (i). Clearly, in my view, to suggest that the opposition or any member merely pretends to do what they are saying they are doing is imputing "false or unavowed motives to another member."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Do any additional hon. members want to participate in this point of order?

The Blues say the following. When the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie asks the question, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure responds in this way:

Mr. Speaker, you know, I really find it quite a contrast when the hon. member that is just now asking the questions and is supposed to be the Environment critic pretends that they want to protect the environment . . . pretends I guess that this material doesn't exist and that we don't need to somehow destroy that material. The fact is that we don't profess to be able to operate that plant as efficiently and to the full capacity of the plant, and that is one of the reasons that as government we are trying to get out of it.

Now, the hon. member, assisted by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, basically referred to Standing Orders 23(h) and (i).

I was hoping to get through the question period today and stand up at the end of the question period and congratulate all hon. members of the Assembly for the level of decorum and the civility, given the lengthy sittings of the past few days.

I would like to point out that the rules that we're talking about in Standing Orders are articulated in the book *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 525. "The use of offensive, provocative or threatening language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscene language or words are not in order."

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has certainly clarified her position on this question today, and I might point out that while not a model for the operation of question period, the minister's comments were part of the cut and thrust of the debate, and this is not a point of order.

head: **Orders of the Day**head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to move that the written question appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain its place.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 209
Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet)
Amendment Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin on Bill 209 today, I'd like to recognize and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly five health care practitioners from the Kidsafe Connection pediatric injury prevention team at the Stollery children's health centre here in Edmonton. They've come this afternoon to listen to the debate on Bill 209. They are Jackie Petruk, Kathy Nykolyshyn, Adele Dorey, Lori Balch, and Melody Cheung. We're pleased that they've joined us today for the debate, and I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to move Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001.

My intention in putting this bill before the Assembly today is twofold. First, it is to protect children and youth under the age of 18 from head and brain injury while operating or riding a bicycle as a passenger, which in turn saves individuals and their families from needless suffering. Second, it's to save our health care system substantial cost through the prevention of injury, disability, and death due to bike-related accidents involving children and youth under the age of 18 who are riding bicycles without the protection of a helmet.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to express a special thank you to the hon. Minister of Transportation, who, through a number of meetings, guided me with his wisdom and strong support throughout the formation of Bill 209. I am also grateful to the minister's departmental staff for their assistance with the bill's content. I must admit that it has changed considerably since the first draft was written.

I also wish to thank and acknowledge Mrs. Jackie Petruk and staff from Kidsafe Connection and also Dr. Louis Francescutti, who in his many roles is the director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research. I'd like to thank them for their influence and inspiration in assisting with the provision of statistics and research for this bill.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to a number of colleagues who

expressed an interest and either discussed their concerns, which you may hear about today, or voiced their support for the bill, which we'll hear about as well today. I would like to thank Kelly Nicholls from research and Shannon Dean from Parliamentary Counsel. I'd like to thank them both for their valuable assistance. I see that Kelly Nicholls is here as well to listen to the debate. I saw that she just walked into the Assembly, and I'd ask that she rise as well and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I'm speaking about a public concern for our children's safety. As summer approaches, their risk for injury dramatically increases. Outdoor activities are associated with significant risks because there are so many variables. As a responsible citizen or concerned parent we can take measures to decrease these risks and help prevent injuries. Bill 209 focuses on bicycle-related preventable injury to our children and our teens.

Bicycling is one of the most popular summer activities, and it's an enjoyable exercise for people of all ages. However, as with a number of fun outdoor activities, research has shown that there are risks associated with bicycling. In our province over the period of a year there are approximately 6,500 people who are admitted to emergency with bicycle-related injuries. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we can prevent some of the most serious injuries a cyclist can sustain, and that is those involving the head and the brain. It is commendable that we've worked hard to make our roads and our communities safe and prevent what accidents we can by enforcing measures which reduce preventable injury, but I think it's now time to take another step to assist with prevention.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are measures available to us that have proved to be effective against traumatic injury suffered from bicycle accidents. Although it can be difficult to heal bones broken by falling off a bicycle, these injuries do eventually heal. A more severe reality lies in accidents which cause damage to the head and brain. These accidents are the most serious because the brain does not set like a broken arm. Traumatic brain and head injury stays with a person for the rest of their life, Mr. Speaker, an injury which might have been prevented if the person were properly wearing a bicycle helmet.

3:20

It is for this reason that I've brought forth Bill 209. Studies have shown the results that bicycle safety helmets greatly reduce the risk of preventable head and brain injury in bicycle-related accidents. It is not only my belief but the belief of numerous support groups and the concerned public that legislation is necessary. Studies have shown that by coupling legislation mandating safety helmets with education about their proven effectiveness, we will greatly increase the number of our children who wear their helmets and thereby decrease their potential to suffer such life-threatening injury.

This past long weekend many Albertans were enjoying the outdoors. People put away their ice skates, their skis, their snowboards and took out their bikes. That is because bike riding is fun for everyone in the family. They've changed considerably since you and I had our first bikes. Specialization has led to everything from racing bikes to mountain bikes. Bicycles are now highly technical machines that have a number of gears and added features to enhance the speed and performance of the bicycle and make them far more enjoyable to ride. No longer are bicycles the heavy, slow inventions with just one gear that you and I were lucky if we could ride up a hill. I watch in awe as people race down the street or on bike paths, and they just seem to go faster and faster. Did you know, Mr. Speaker, that 90 percent of our young people ride bikes? It is the

single most popular recreational sport activity of our children and youth in Alberta.

Because children are the most frequent bike users, it's a fact that children under the age of 18 are hospitalized with the highest incidence of bicycle-related injury. Not only can this be attributed to greater numbers of young riders, but it is a proven fact that the common behaviour of youth is to be just a little bit less cautious. That's because they believe they're more resilient to injury, but we know that every year in Alberta around 6,500 visits are made to emergency departments for bike-related injuries. Approximately 4,500 of those visits were made by children and teens under the age of 20.

Mr. Speaker, 82 percent of children who suffered major trauma were not wearing a helmet. I think that this should concern all of us. Statistics show that 70 percent of our young people between the ages of 13 and 17 do not wear a helmet while riding a bike. It's really quite alarming, that 70 percent. Most of the accidents which occur happen close to home, and very few bicycle-related accidents involve motor vehicles. Most accidents are caused by falling from a bicycle. Statistics show that a fall from just two feet can cause permanent brain damage, and a fall from a bike traveling only 20 kilometres per hour can cause death.

Approximately 75 percent of bicycle-related deaths involve head injuries which might have been prevented if the cyclist were properly wearing a helmet. Bicycle helmets have proven to reduce the risk of brain injury by 88 percent, head injury by 85 percent, and upper- and mid-facial injury by 65 percent. It is not always common knowledge about how effective they are in decreasing head and brain injuries, which is why I believe mandatory helmets for bicycle riders under the age of 18 is so important. By legislating young riders to wear safety helmets, it would create a greater awareness about injury prevention and encourage the compliance of young bicycle riders.

As bicycles are no longer what they used to be, Mr. Speaker, neither are the safety helmets that riders wear to protect their heads. In order for the bike helmet to meet safety requirements, it must go through internationally recognized tests which are approved by the Canadian Standards Association. Helmets are now lightweight, cool, easy for the rider to wear, and they're not expensive. CSA-approved helmets can be bought for \$15 to \$20.

The brain is the most important organ for us to protect from physical trauma. It is important to note that you do not have to be riding your bike at a high speed or fall from a great height to have a head or brain injury. Traumatic brain injuries can and do occur with biking accidents that to some may have seemed quite minor, and that is because three separate processes work to injure the brain. There's bruising, tearing, and swelling. In an instant your life has been changed forever, and it will never be the same again, ever. This change is difficult, and you know, Mr. Speaker, the simple truth is that no one, absolutely no one, can predict accurately all of the outcomes. This leaves those who've been injured and their families between very high hopes and deep despair.

Every brain-injured case is different, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, you cannot repair injured brains like you can a fracture. The effect of each brain injury is very individualized. Sometimes young people with mild brain injuries suffer severe consequences in their daily lives, and more rarely some young people with a severe injury will have a relatively mild impairment, but either way the brain injury is forever. A child or teen with a minor impairment may be able to function at school, volunteer for community activities, have great friendships, and be very articulate. However, virtually every aspect of their life is affected, if even slightly, by the brain injury.

There is also some evidence that the natural aging process and impact on mental abilities are affected. In other words, even a mild

impairment gradually worsens over the child's lifetime, and as I said, a brain injury is forever. So riding bikes may be fun, but there's also a great deal of risk involved, especially if your child or teen rides without wearing a helmet. Bike helmets go a long, long way to protecting your head from injury.

Traumatic brain and head injury has gathered the attention of many groups who support legislating bicycle safety helmets to reduce the amount of injuries sustained by riders. There are other jurisdictions in Canada and around the world who have experienced positive effects in both helmet compliance and reduction of brain injury because of legislation. Ontario has had mandatory legislation for riders under the age of 18 since 1995. British Columbia has had universal bicycle helmet legislation since 1996. These provinces were followed with helmet legislation in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Manitoba.

Extensive research and study has also come from Australia, which has had universal mandatory bike helmets for over 10 years. Their experience has proven the positive results of bringing forward this type of legislation. The analysis of injury data from Victoria, Australia, showed a large reduction, up to 51 percent in some regions, in the number of bicyclists killed or admitted to hospital with head injuries within the first 12 months of enforcement. This is a substantial decrease in head injuries from bicycle-related accidents. Injuries also fell even further in the second year, by 70 percent, which was concluded to be due to greater experience and public awareness about how the helmet should fit and how the chin strap is properly worn to truly prevent injury.

Study after study shows that helmets of any type which meet international standards, to which the CSA complies, can prevent head injury from falls and crashes when properly worn. The main barrier, often stated by medical professionals, is the lack of awareness of the potential benefits from helmets. Studies have shown that legislation appears to be the most effective tool in a promotional and educational campaign on helmet awareness and compliance.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, in the Capital health region we have a renowned pediatric trauma centre at the Stollery children's health centre. Kidsafe Connection is a pediatric injury prevention program which is supported by the Children's Health Foundation and the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation. We also have the very distinguished Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research. Both centres have a wide network of community organizations and agencies who've worked collectively for a number of years on creating awareness about the seriousness of bike-related injuries for all age groups. They take pride and care in basing prevention strategies on clear evidence. The result has been that the efforts are focused on strategies which are known to be effective.

One injury prevention strategy with clear evidence for effectiveness is the use of bicycle helmets. Kidsafe sent an information package to all MLAs in this Legislature recently which showed that in a one-year period in Alberta, 6,430 people visited an emergency department for a biking injury and that 4,048 were children or teens, less than the age of 20. Of the overall visits, 442 were due to a brain or a head injury, and of those, 373 were intracranial injuries, 51 were fractures of the face, and 18 were fractures of the skull. Pretty serious, Mr. Speaker. Over the six-month summer season we have approximately 75 head injuries from biking per month.

There are over 40 groups in Alberta who've worked hard over the years on this important legislation. This legislation received an extraordinary response of 77 percent support through a scientific phone survey of Alberta parents. Mr. Speaker, this shows the public is concerned about child safety. They believe that a strong emphasis

should be placed on taking the steps necessary to increase risk prevention and decrease the number of injuries.

Only half of all Albertans wear their helmets when they ride a bicycle. Those who don't are suffering 80 percent of the traumatic brain and head-related injuries, and the majority of these injuries occur in our young people. I consider the principle of bike helmets preventing head and brain injury to be useful and practical information for our young people and their families. More and more scientifically documented, solid, up-to-date information to support this principle becomes available every single day.

We must educate our children about health-enhancing behaviour through injury prevention strategies. The challenge is to teach them that they can stay healthy through the very simple practice of wearing a helmet while riding a bike. We need to empower our young people to shift from what is a destructive behaviour to one that is constructive. Good judgment in all areas related to bike riding should be encouraged.

Mr. Speaker, we also learned from the Minister of Health and Wellness that costs are continuing to increase dramatically in health care – a budget of 3 and a half billion dollars in 1995 will increase to \$7 billion by 2002 – and it's imperative that we look at ways to increase the sustainability of the system. There's evidence that prevention of three severe head injuries would save the health care system a million dollars. Given that there are approximately 450 head/brain injuries mild to moderate to severe per year, the cost savings could well be in the range of \$150 million per year.

I'd like to close by saying that Bill 209 is about the health and wellness of our children. It is about the high value we place on their well-being. It is about a desire and need for the protection of those under the age of 18 from bike-related injury, disability, and death through the use of a properly fitting helmet. Mr. Speaker, I happen to believe this is a step in the right direction, and I would ask all of my colleagues for their support of Bill 209.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001, and I would like to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Cross for bringing this to the floor of the Legislature and for sponsoring this bill. It is a much-needed bill.

In this Assembly on March 31, 1999, the Minister of Transportation brought forward Bill 24 at that time. I am quoting from *Hansard*, where he said, "The act will also provide enabling legislation to deal by regulation with issues such as bicycle helmets and riding in the back of pickups." Now, on May 3, 1999, the then Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert brought in a couple of amendments to the bill, and certainly one of those was that people riding bicycles would have to wear helmets. Also, the second amendment was that people riding bicycles or as passengers on bicycles would also have to wear helmets. Unfortunately, both of those amendments, Mr. Speaker, were defeated that day. So here we are two years later still trying to get legislation passed to protect our children. This is a piece of legislation that I hope, in this particular instance, will be passed and we can move on.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, then, this is not precedent-setting legislation either, Mr. Speaker. For example, we legislated that people had to use seat belts

when they were operating a motor vehicle or as a passenger in a motor vehicle. We legislated that people riding motorcycles or passengers on motorcycles had to wear helmets. We also have had special needs; for example, children under a certain age have to be strapped into their car seats. These all have to be approved types of helmets, car seats, whatever. That type of legislation was passed, and we have moved on. It has all been for the safety of Albertans.

As the hon. member had stated earlier, cycling is the number one activity. It is a very popular activity, particularly when we get co-operation from the weather. Of course, cyclists are exposed to many different risks, and certainly the types of risks have increased with the specialization in the design of bicycles that we have today.

Now, then, I don't know how many people in the Assembly realize that in Canada we have more bicycles than cars and that the number of bike sales has flattened out in this country and in this province. We saw recently where George's Cycle, a longtime establishment in Edmonton that has sold bikes and serviced bikes for many, many years, closed because the business isn't there as it once was. Yet even though the number of sales of bikes in this country has flattened out, the miles traveled by bicycle have increased greatly. Not only that, but we look at the reasons why there is a huge increase in the number of miles traveled by bicycles. We have people that use this mode of transportation not only for transportation but for fitness and certainly a very good form of fitness. As well, we have had a great increase in bicycles being used for communication, particularly in the cores of our major metropolitan areas. It is much easier to get around and quicker than taking a car or walking.

When we look at the causes of bicycle-related injuries, Mr. Speaker, we have to realize that only 2 percent of motor vehicle related deaths are bicyclists. Among the majority of those, the most serious injuries were to the head, so it certainly is important that bicyclists wear helmets.

3:40

As well, we look at statistics, and I quote from the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute:

Young riders most often are responsible for their crashes, and then probable responsibility decreases with age. Older riders more often aren't responsible for their crashes.

When we look at this, certainly with the lack of experience by younger riders and the lack of ability, we would expect more accidents of their own doing in that particular age group.

Now, as well, when we look at bike accidents, Mr. Speaker, many of these include the operator of the bicycle losing control of that bicycle. When they lose control and fall off, they might strike a fixed object, and they can also collide with another cyclist, a pedestrian, a motor vehicle, whatever. So when we are looking at these types of injuries and, again, where people are being thrown off their bicycles, we have to realize that wearing a bike helmet can reduce the risk of head injuries by 85 percent. So it is certainly a major point in the argument for people riding bicycles to wear helmets.

As well, Mr. Speaker, bicycles are considered vehicles on the road, and bicyclists have all the rights and responsibilities that drivers have. When we are looking at bicycle helmets, we are looking at a piece of equipment that certainly is there to protect the head. As the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross mentioned, there are CSA approved bicycle helmets. We also have other bike helmets that are approved. These are by ANSI and Snell, and of course all of these would have a sticker indicating that these helmets are approved.

Now, then, bike helmets are different helmets from, say, a hockey helmet. They are designed to absorb a single blow from large

objects and usually at relatively high speeds. This can be a blow to the head from a car, from a collision with another person that's riding a bike, hitting their head on the pavement or striking their head against a curb. The bicycle helmet generally has an outer shell that is of a harder material, which will prevent the damage when scraping along pavement. All manufacturers of bike helmets certainly have the recommendation that if a cyclist is involved in a rather serious accident and the helmet does receive a heavy blow, that helmet should be discarded and a new one brought in.

It was also quite interesting in my research, Mr. Speaker, that in speaking with people that owned bicycle shops, one of the interesting points brought up was that bicycle helmets are mandatory when racing in the United States and are also mandatory in the Olympics. Those are very, very important instances where bike helmets are mandatory and certainly with some very top athletes. So if it's good enough for them, I think it's certainly good enough for our children.

When I look at this, I also would have liked to have seen Bill 209 be more extensive, that all people who ride bikes would have to wear helmets and that it wouldn't be an age issue at all. Now, then, the reason I say that, Mr. Speaker, is that as parents we have a tremendous responsibility. We have the role of mentor and model, and certainly if children see that we are not wearing helmets, then of course the first argument they're going to raise is: well, you don't wear one, so why should I?

As well, another statistic that I happened to dig out of the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute is that when we look at deaths with cyclists, deaths of older bicyclists are an increasing problem. Seventy-one percent of 1999 bicycle deaths were riders 16 years and older. This compares with [only] 32 percent of bicycle deaths in 1975.

So we are having certainly an increase in the number of deaths of older riders and, again, a statistic that I think should be taken into consideration and should at some point be made part of this bill.

When we look at the need for bicycle helmets, this has been recognized by many groups in the province. The owner of United Cycle here in Edmonton had indicated to me that there were over 10,000 helmets that have been made available in northern Alberta. These have been made available by the regional health authorities, by the Capital health authority, by the Royal Alexandra hospital Tour de la Sante, and free helmets in this program go out to inner-city children that do participate. As well, in Edmonton we do have Sport Central, an organization that is comprised of volunteers who supply free sporting equipment to underprivileged children here in the city, and this includes bicycles.

Now, as well as supplying bicycles free of charge to underprivileged children, one of the conditions that those children must make when they get a bike from Sport Central is that they will accept a helmet that goes with the bicycle. They go one step further and make the children promise that they will wear those helmets when they're operating their bicycles.

As well from the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute, they had tracked what happens with the helmet use rates when we do have legislation and when we don't. In 10 instances where people had instituted the mandatory use of helmets, they saw a jump in the usage of helmets in nine of those cases, and in only one of those cases did the use of bicycle helmets decrease.

Certainly, as well, Mr. Speaker, the bicycle industry recognizes the importance of safety equipment. They fully support mandatory use of bike helmets, and they feel it is only one step in the right direction. Again in my discussions with the owner of United Cycle here in Edmonton, he was involved with the Capital health authority and the Royal Alexandra Tour de la Sante, and as part of that program what they did was they went out and they addressed groups of children about the importance of wearing bike helmets. The

program had a doctor from the regional health authority talking about the number of instances where he has seen children come into the hospital with many injuries and how many of those injuries were to the head. When the owner of United Cycle got up to speak, they said: well, what are you doing here? He said: I'm here to put that doctor out of business. He said: if you wear the right type of equipment, certainly the incidence of injury is going to be drastically reduced. So I think that is a good model for this bill. We're here to put the doctors out of business when it comes to dealing with bike injuries. Certainly the mandatory use of bike helmets is a step in the right direction.

3:50

Now, as well, industry in realizing its role realizes that people are not wanting to go out and purchase one helmet for when they're cycling, one for when they're on their skateboards, or when people are on in-line skates or riding scooters. So, Mr. Speaker, the industry has gone to a great deal of expense to look at a helmet which will be able to be used in many different sporting disciplines. These helmets are now becoming available.

Now, the minimum cost of a helmet is in the range of \$10 to \$15. Of course, those helmets must be CSA approved in Canada, and there are many, many different brands out there. So access to helmets is certainly not an argument as to why people would not use bike helmets.

Now, then, as well, Mr. Speaker, when we look at research, certainly a lot of research has gone into injuries that have been as a result of bicycle accidents. We do have a far better understanding of head injuries, and especially with the game of hockey these days we have a much better understanding of the long-term effects of concussions. There just is so much more consumer awareness that is available to society today. When we look at this, we look at initiatives that are currently under way by Safety City, by United Cycle, by Sport Central, by the Grey Nuns hospital, by Tim Hortons, by our Capital health authority, and there are so many groups that are promoting and certainly wanting mandatory bike helmets to protect our children.

You know, there is such a growing body of scientific evidence. It has established patterns in injury, and the patterns are highly predictable. There are, Mr. Speaker, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 100 Canadian children who die each year as a result of bicycle accidents, and the majority of these are because of head injuries.

So what I would like to do in closing is once again congratulate the member for bringing Bill 209 forward, for sponsoring that bill here in the Legislature, and I would certainly urge all members of the Assembly to support this legislation. I think it is far overdue.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank you for this opportunity to speak in favour of Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act.

First of all, I'd like to thank my colleague from Calgary-Cross for caring about our children and for presenting this bill.

I believe that Bill 209 will be an important piece of legislation for Alberta. Laws regarding the use of bicycle helmets are being practised worldwide and in Canada, Mr. Speaker. There are many statistics which clearly show that bicycle helmets help to prevent head injuries and save lives. There is also equally clear evidence that legislation making helmets mandatory makes a difference. Bill 209 will make a difference in this province by preventing head and

brain injuries. In many surveys that I have conducted in my constituency of Red Deer-North, it was clear that although no one wants another law in their face, it is more important to protect the children of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, bicycling is a worldwide activity and an important means of transport for millions of people. Worldwide bicycle sales have grown far more rapidly than car sales over the last 20 years, so the number of new bicycles produced is now three times the number of new cars. The same can be said for our province: bicycle sales in Alberta have increased over the last decade, and this has led to an increase in cycling traffic on our provincial roads and highways. Every day people all across this province use their bicycles to get to work, to get in shape, or simply to relax. As the Member for Edmonton-Glenarry stated, we have more bicycles than cars.

Mr. Speaker, bicycle riding is not risk free any more than other modes of transport are risk free. Excellent evidence from all over the world consistently shows that bicycle riders who go without head protection are roughly three times more likely to suffer head injuries in a crash than those who wear a helmet. Also, a bicyclist who sustains a head injury is 20 times more likely to die than a rider who suffers other kinds of injuries. Many of my constituents have told me stories about how a helmet saved them from very serious injury.

Mr. Speaker, the notion that pedal cyclists should wear protective helmets was once seen as ridiculous. Helmet use for motorcycle riders was seen as the smart thing to do. Motorbikes were perceived as fast and dangerous machines, and crashing a motorbike carried a clear and undeniable risk of death or injury. Therefore, opposition to helmet use for motorcyclists has always been relatively muted and based on arguments for civil liberty rather than on the effectiveness of helmets.

On the other hand, pedal bikes have long been perceived as relatively slow. Falls and collisions are perceived as mere inconveniences mostly suffered by children. The freedom to have one's hair flying in the wind was seen as much more important than the small risk of head impact. Mr. Speaker, these perceptions have changed as people are recognizing the seriousness of head and brain injuries.

One of the first evaluations of the effectiveness of bicycle helmets was conducted in Adelaide, Australia, in 1984. This study showed a consistent and statistically significant relationship between helmet use and reduced severity of head injury. The authors of this study estimated that the risk of death from head injury was three times higher for an unhelmeted rider than for a rider wearing a helmet of poor protective quality and 10 times higher for an unhelmeted rider compared to one wearing a high-standard helmet. This study provides important support for the moves that were already under way at that time in Australia to increase the use of protective helmets by bicyclists.

Partly based on the findings of this study and others like it, a law requiring that approved safety helmets be worn by all bicyclists came into effect in the Australian state of Victoria in 1990. This was the first such regulation in the world, Mr. Speaker. Several studies were launched in the wake of this Australian legislation to see what kind of effect it had on reducing injuries to cyclists. The research highlighted the fact that two years after the introduction of the helmet-wearing law in Victoria, there were 70 percent fewer cyclist casualties with serious head injuries in collisions compared with 28 percent with other injuries.

Mr. Speaker, researchers concluded that the introduction of the law was accompanied by an immediate and large reduction in the number of bicyclists with head injuries. This appeared to have been achieved through a reduction in the number of bicyclists involved in crashes plus a reduction in the risk of head injuries of bicyclists involved in crashes. Clearly, this law worked for the state of

Victoria, and similar legislation can work for the people of Alberta.

In Canada several provinces have introduced bicycle helmet legislation over the last few years in an attempt to make cycling safer. There are many different types of regulations, Mr. Speaker. Some provinces have made the use of a helmet mandatory for all age groups, whereas other provinces have regulated helmet use based on the age of the cyclist. In '96 the province of B.C. became the first North American province or state to require bicycle helmet use by riders of all ages on public roads. B.C. had some serious statistics to contend with. In a 10-year period ending in '95, 137 cyclists died in B.C. In the province about 75 percent of all bicycling fatalities and two-thirds of hospital admissions for bicycling-related injuries involved head trauma. These statistics motivated the legislators in B.C. to take action. With several studies indicating the effect of helmets on lowering head injuries, the province put forward legislation to make them mandatory for all ages when riding on a public roadway. A study conducted three years after the legislation came into force showed that it had a dramatic impact on the number of British Columbians who used helmets when cycling. With more British Columbians wearing helmets, the province has seen a marked decrease in the number of head injuries related to cycling, and the legislation has been considered successful.

4:00

The provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have also followed the lead of B.C. and have mandatory helmet laws for all ages. Both of these maritime provinces responded with legislation after completing research similar to the kind done in B.C. that revealed that helmets could save lives and reduce head injuries in their provinces.

Ontario addressed mandatory legislation in a different way. Their government's bicycling helmet law of '97 does not apply to all age groups like in B.C., Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. In Ontario if you are under the age of 18, you are required by law to wear an approved bicycle helmet when traveling on any public road. Cyclists over 18 are encouraged to wear helmets for their own safety but are not required by law as in B.C., Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Ontario's research showed that helmets can be extremely effective in preventing head injuries.

The only other province that has a mandatory helmet law in Canada is Manitoba. Manitoba's law states that only children under the age of five must wear bicycle helmets when on public roads.

The World Health Organization has also entered into the debate surrounding the use of helmets for cycling. In 1991 the organization launched the World Health Organization helmet initiative. The goal of this organization is to promote the use of bicycling helmets worldwide by publicizing their proven effectiveness to prevent brain injuries when cycling. WHO, the World Health Organization, also works in co-operation with several jurisdictions and groups around the world to promote the use of cycling helmets through various program initiatives and legislation development.

Now, finally, Mr. Speaker, this debate has come to Alberta. Several groups have been key in bringing this debate forward. Health organizations, police services, and many others have been working to add Alberta to the list of provinces and jurisdictions around the world that have helmet legislation. Several of our physicians representing groups like the Sport Medicine Council of Alberta and the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research have also spoken in favour of this needed legislation. They all have noted the benefits of wearing a helmet and are looking to the Assembly for some sort of legislation regarding this issue.

I have made references to many statistics in my presentation so far, Mr. Speaker. I've mentioned various injury statistics and fatality

numbers from across Canada and overseas, but Alberta has its own dire statistics to consider. On average, over 6,000 Albertans visit our emergency rooms with cycling injuries every year. In 1999 it was recorded that 461 of these visits were specifically for head injuries. It is time for our province to address this reality and move to make cycling in this province safer. I believe Bill 209 would do this.

A mandatory bicycle helmet law in Alberta for people under 18 would also complement the findings of the health summit of 1999. One of the key recommendations of the various stakeholders of the summit was that our province should put more emphasis on prevention of injury through the promotion of healthy habits. As a wealth of evidence has clearly demonstrated, a healthy and safe choice when cycling is the use of a helmet. Bill 209 would work to advance the findings of the summit and also work to save lives and prevent injuries.

Mr. Speaker, legislation regarding the mandatory use of helmets for minors also happens to be the wish of the people of Alberta. The Alberta children's survey of 1997 showed that 77 percent of parents want this kind of legislation for their children and that 66 percent of all people in our province supported bicycle helmet legislation for all Albertans regardless of age. Undoubtedly you've heard these statistics in this debate already. I'm sure that you will hear them again. The point must be made that Albertans want this sort of legislation, and I believe it is the duty of this Assembly to provide it.

This government has made many laws to make traveling in our province safer. We have rules about how fast you can travel on our highways or how you can pass another vehicle on Alberta roads. We have laws that make it safer for our children to take the bus to school or for them to use crosswalks at intersections. There are regulations regarding baby seats and also seat belt laws. All of these laws and several others help to make getting around in Alberta as safely as possible a little easier to accomplish. Bill 209 is no different from these other laws.

I have one more statistic to offer this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. I think it will help to clarify the urgency of this bill. Albertans under the age of 18 have the highest rate of serious injury and death from bicycle accidents in this province. Making it law to wear a helmet when riding a bike will help to lower the number of deaths and injuries from cycling in this province. This bill will save lives and prevent injury.

Personally, Mr. Speaker, I believe we should be debating a mandatory cycling helmet law for all Albertans. Yes, it is important to ensure that our youth are wearing helmets to protect them, but we should also ensure that everyone in this province is provided with protection. With that said, I would like to say that I believe Bill 209 is a good start.

There are so many good reasons to support this bill. We certainly have enough statistical information to make an informed judgment on whether or not this bill should become law. The numbers tell it like it is. Helmets save lives and prevent serious injury. We can also point to how similar legislation has been successfully applied in other jurisdictions in Canada and overseas. As lawmakers we always try to be careful to put legislation in place that will work. This sort of legislation has been proven to effectively work. Bill 209 will work for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, there are many mothers and fathers who will appreciate this legislation that will enforce their constant nagging about wearing a helmet – Mom and Dad are not cool, and a helmet would ruin the hairdo. I wish I could have used the authority of the law to help me enforce this safety issue with my children when they were teenagers.

I urge all members of this Assembly to vote in favour of this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have to admit that in speaking in second reading of Bill 209, I take a certain perverse delight in seeing a government member bringing forward a bill that in fact reflects exactly an amendment that was brought forward by a Liberal member several years earlier, although I have to admit that when the previous Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert did bring forward that amendment, the government defeated it on a voice vote. But I notice from a standing vote taken later in the same afternoon that the proposing member was in fact in the House, so I'm hoping that at the time her colleagues were defeating our amendment, she in fact was supporting it, seeing as she now brought forward a bill that's exactly the same. As I said, a perverse delight.

Speaking to Bill 209, I've actually had a really interesting time with this bill. I went to visit one of my schools last Friday. We got into discussing how a law is created, and I brought forward the proposition that's contained in Bill 209. We had quite a rigorous discussion in the class. This is with room 15 in John A. McDougall school. This is a mixed 5 and 6 class. It turned into a great discussion, and we attracted other people from the school who came in to participate or at least to observe what we were doing as we worked our way through what we believed would be the best proposal to have in the legislation. In fact, earlier today I did table a follow-up letter that the class sent me in which they were detailing the decisions that we had come to last Friday.

When we first looked at the issue, it was a question of: is having a bicycle helmet for people 18 and under a good idea? Yes, indeed, there was very quick consent and support for that being a good idea, and the kids were more than willing to accept it. That was instantaneous. Well, why? They agreed that it wouldn't prevent accidents, but it would mean that people wouldn't get hurt as badly when they had an accident on their bicycle.

Almost immediately the class was questioning: well, if it's good for people under 18 to be wearing a bicycle helmet, then why wouldn't it be equally good for people over 18 to be wearing a bicycle helmet? Good point, said I. They came to the conclusion that there should be additional legislation or an amendment to this bill that bicycle helmets be mandatory for adults as well. Actually, they go further than that and say that everybody should have to wear a helmet, so that would be under 18 and over 18 and everybody else. Maybe that means politicians as another group.

4:10

Now, John A. McDougall school is a school that's in the centre of Edmonton, and we do face some financial challenges there. Certainly the issue came up very quickly about where the students could get helmets. Would it be possible that every time you bought a bike, a helmet came with it for free? This is an issue for students attending this school and certainly some of the other young people that are in Edmonton-Centre. We talked about it a bit, and there was an understanding that, well, no, it wasn't likely that there would be free helmets. Although there are different places that may assist with the purchase or make reasonably priced ones available, still, 20 to 40 bucks is a significant expenditure for many of the students in the class, and they were very aware of that. They were conscious that if in fact a law were passed that bike helmet usage was mandatory, they would then be in a position that they'd be breaking the law if they rode their bikes without a helmet, and they didn't want to be in that position and were actually a little concerned about supporting a law that would then turn them into lawbreakers, in effect.

I think that that is an area that needs to be looked into. It's not the

mandate of those of us sitting in the Assembly today to be addressing that issue, but I think it's something we certainly need to be doing as leaders in our community: to be looking for those connections, to be encouraging the private sector and other agencies that may be able to help in this area.

The kids are suggesting that if you can't afford a helmet, then a store could be set up where you could buy a used helmet or trade for one. The trading for one is kind of interesting, where you could sort of trade a skateboard for a bicycle helmet or something like that. So they had some really innovative ideas, and you can sense how exciting the discussion got as we really started to work with what was possible here. There are some good suggestions, I think.

Then we got into what would be reasonable punishment for someone who didn't obey a mandatory helmet law. In the beginning there were suggestions of some pretty stiff fines. These students took this very seriously. If there was to be a mandatory helmet law, then to not wear a helmet, you'd be breaking the law, and they felt there should be a significant punishment involved. We started out talking of fines that were in the \$500 to \$600 range. Given that earlier I had commented that a \$20 helmet could be difficult to secure, with a \$500 to \$600 fine, put in that context, you can see the importance that the students placed on following this law.

We tried a couple of different combinations of what was possible and what was truly a deterrent, and at one point one of the students suggested that their bike be taken away, that they wouldn't be able to use their bike for a period of time. Instantaneous response from the rest of the class. They were horrified that someone would not allow them to use their bikes for a period of time, and we recognized, all of us, that that was probably a pretty good deterrent if it had such a strong reaction from the students.

In fact, when the students wrote back to me, they said that if you don't wear a helmet, then you should have your bike taken away for seven days. So they would lose the use of their bikes for seven days if they weren't wearing their helmets. If there was a second time that there was a violation, you would have to pay a fine of \$20 to \$50, which is a pretty significant amount of money. The class asked me to bring this forward on their behalf, which I've been very pleased to do, and to support Bill 209, which I'm also very pleased to do.

So I'd like to thank the member who proposed the bill for giving me the opportunity to work a really interesting democracy lesson into the classroom. It was really a great experience for all of us. They've taken it very seriously, and I hope the member will take very seriously the suggestions the class has made.

We here in Alberta – you gotta love us – struggle with laws that try and put any kind of mandatory restraint on us. Certainly many of us are old enough to remember the battle around the seat belt laws, motorcycle helmet laws, a number of other times where there's been an attempt to say: for your own good you should do such-and-such. There's the countering argument that adults have a right to be stupid if they want to. Yes, they do. And, no, we don't want to mandate every single activity in human existence. But as the years have gone on, we have now amassed enough data that we can look and go: yeah, you have the right to be stupid on your own, but you don't have the right to be stupid on your own when it's going to cost everybody else a bunch of money, particularly when it's entirely preventable.

We have been collecting quite a bit of information and opinions that were sent in to us. I was pleased to have some response from my constituents coming through a question on my web site, I think. This is from Calvin and Erin Daling, who wrote to me asking that I support this private member's bill. The two of them, in fact, would "support a law requiring all Albertans to wear a bike helmet." They felt, particularly in the teen population, that due to peer pressure kids

don't wear helmets, and they felt that this was a very important safety issue and suggested that Alberta "follow B.C.'s example in enforcing helmet use."

They raised the issue that they didn't feel that their health care dollars should be going to pay to repair the injuries of people who didn't do anything to help themselves. They also raised the issue of insurance rates, which globally affect everybody when you've got a high insurance premium based on the actuarials because people are getting into accidents and costing the health care system a lot and costing the insurance industry a lot. Eventually that filters down to everyone, and everyone is paying higher insurance rates. So I appreciate the interest that my constituents took, and there's one example of the kind of e-mails that I was getting.

I think we also all received the Stollery children's health centre pediatric intensive care unit letter on bicycle injuries in children being preventable and signed by a number of doctors. The Member for Calgary-Cross had also mentioned the Kidsafe Connection and also a program through Capital health, the child health program. Again, I think we all received that. Lots of good information. We dug up some information through the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute; also lots of information there supportive of bicycle helmet usage and stacks of statistics on how it has reduced injury rates and lowered hospital visits, et cetera. The Member for Red Deer-North has already gone through a number of those statistics.

4:20

I also received some information from groups and individuals who are not in favour of mandatory helmet usage. Their argument with making helmet use mandatory is that people just can't be bothered, and therefore they don't ride their bikes at all and they miss out on the health benefits of cycling. One person in particular, Jeremy Clayton, is quite adamant and sent me a number of different web site downloads from other groups that were putting forward this same argument and other statistics that had been gathered.

We had the Victoria, Australia, example raised earlier showing a reduction in serious injuries with helmet usage. In fact, some of the information that Mr. Clayton brings forward was talking about the same studies exactly: yes, but there are fewer people now that use their bicycles down there because people won't wear a helmet. There were a number of examples: women wouldn't wear a helmet because it messed up their hair, some things like that. I appreciate that they are investigating people's actual reaction to this and saying that these were the reasons why people said they wouldn't wear helmets and therefore under a mandatory regime they wouldn't ride their bicycles.

I think the issue for us here is not so much that we won't have a mandatory helmet law because, gosh, people won't put a helmet over their hair, and therefore they won't ride bikes. I think the point for us to be working with here is about addressing those issues where people won't use their helmets. We should have a mandatory helmet usage law here. In fact, it should include those over 18, even politicians. Then we talked about working with the other issues that seem to cause people some hesitation in supporting such a law.

The other factor, as I stated earlier, around mandatory helmet usage is the cost and some people seeing the cost of the helmets as a barrier to them. We do have programs in Edmonton like Sport Central, which is a nonprofit organization which collects and repairs and spruces up used sporting equipment which is then given away to those that are in need of it. Actually, CBC Radio right now has been running about a two-week program to encourage people to bring used sporting goods in to them. I think it's possible to work with groups like that and to encourage them to be providing helmets along with the bikes.

There's also a group that does the Tour de la Sante out of the Royal Alex hospital, which was started by a doctor that, in fact, is no longer practising there. Some of the students that I met with at John A. McDougall school in fact participate in that Tour de la Sante, and they are given helmets when they go to participate in that, which is very helpful to those kids. So they do get access to a helmet that way.

The other group that I got information from that was not supportive of mandatory helmet laws was Le Monde a Bicyclette, Citizens on Cycles. They have essentially the same argument. They are lobbying for better bike paths and being able to put your bike on the metro or on the buses and transport it that way. They've got some very thorough suggestions on increasing bicycle usage. They have the same argument as Mr. Clayton had assembled from other sources, that helmets preclude people actually cycling. Their aim was to get more people cycling. Therefore, they didn't want to see mandatory helmet legislation. As I say, I think that with a bit of creativity and some will power and elbow grease, we can address those issues.

I have gone over the suggestions from my class, and I did send a copy of the letter over to the Member for Calgary-Cross. I have gone over much of the in-favour-of literature that I received, and some of the information that was not in favour of it, but I think those objections are surmountable.

I appreciate that the member did in fact provide a legacy for my colleague the previous Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert by following through on the amendment she had proposed that would have included mandatory helmet usage in the Traffic Safety Act, Bill 24 in 1999. I appreciate that, and I'll be sure to be sending her the *Hansard* so that she knows she's been immortalized that way.

I thank the member for following through on this issue. She feels very strongly on it. As well, I'd like to recognize the staff members who worked on this and others who assisted her. I think it's a worthy idea and one that we should all be supporting and following through on.

With that, I thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of Bill 209, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Mr. Speaker, on May 11 the Capital health authority and the Kidsafe Connection released a study that found that only half of Alberta bicyclists wear a helmet. It also found that adults wear helmets only 29 percent of the time when biking. This statistic is why I'm standing to speak in favour of Bill 209.

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you wear a helmet?

MR. AMERY: No, I don't have one on right now.

Bicycle riding is not a dangerous activity overall, but there are many dangers in areas where children ride bicycles. Mr. Speaker, we regulate a host of other things like seat belts, driving limits, motorcycle helmets, and many others. Why not bicycle helmets?

Mr. Speaker, children are the most vulnerable when it comes to head injuries. Even a simple tumble to the ground off a bicycle can critically injure a child when they knock their unprotected heads. Young children are especially at risk because of their stage of development not only skeletally but also cognitively. This limits their understanding and therefore influences how they behave in traffic situations. For instance, children may not understand

stopping distances, believing that a car can stop as fast as a person. They typically do not develop a sense of danger until the age of eight and may not understand the threats that cars pose.

Mr. Speaker, bicycle helmets are critical safety equipment. A child need only fall from a height of two feet and hit his head to suffer traumatic brain injury. A cyclist riding at only 20 miles per hour, an average speed for a young cyclist, can be killed by hitting his or her head on a hard surface. With this in mind, it is in the best interests of all Albertans to wear a helmet when biking, and Bill 209 is in the best interests of all Alberta children.

Mr. Speaker, here in Canada head injuries account for 75 percent of all deaths from bicycle injuries, and wearing a bicycle helmet reduces the risk of head injury by 85 percent and brain injury by 88 percent. Over 100 Canadians die each year from bicycle injuries, and children aged 5 to 14 account for one-third of these deaths. Cycling mishaps are the leading cause of hospital admissions for head injuries in children.

Whether children will voluntarily keep on wearing bicycle helmets has a lot to do with how insistent their parents are. Parents sometimes look the other way because they didn't have to wear helmets when they were kids, but there is more traffic and fewer sidewalks in many communities nowadays than when we were young. Today there are far more traffic dangers for children. Bill 209 is for those children whose parents need some backup in enforcing bicycle helmet usage.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, if adults choose not to wear helmets, so be it. When an adult suffers head injury because they did not wear a helmet, it is a tragedy, but it is one of their own making. When a child suffers a head injury because they did not wear a helmet, we can't say that they should have known better. They are children. The onus is always on the adults to ensure that children are protected.

Mr. Speaker, while it has been well documented that helmets save lives and prevent serious head injuries, what has not been emphasized as much is that bicycle helmet legislation helps prevent injuries by ensuring that helmets are worn. Information from a study in the United States concluded that from 1984 to 1988 more than 40 percent of all deaths from bicycle-related head injuries were among persons less than 15 years of age. During the same years more than 75 percent of persons treated in emergency departments for bicycle-related head injuries were less than 15 years of age. It has been shown that the majority of Albertans support mandatory helmet use, and many, many Albertans support Bill 209.

There are vigorous campaigns to educate Albertans to wear helmets when biking, but still, Mr. Speaker, it does not ensure that helmets are on the heads of every Alberta child. Bill 209 will ensure that the children have no choice but to protect their heads. Information from the United States study I cited previously found that legislation mandating the use of bicycle helmets effectively increased helmet use, particularly when combined with an educational campaign. Education often facilitates behavioural change. However, education alone is only so effective. Laws mandating helmet use supplement and reinforce the message of an educational campaign, requiring people to act on their knowledge.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, many members may be asking if legislation can really reduce the number of bicycle head injuries. I would answer an emphatic yes. Let us look at a simple example. When motorcycle helmets were universally enforced as law, the death rate from motorcycle accidents in Canada fell from 15 per 10,000 in the 1960s

to 6 per 10,000. We now look back at the debate with thoughts of: what were we arguing about? It is now considered common sense to wear a motorcycle helmet, and I am sure that in the future we will look back and remember so profoundly as to bike riding without a helmet and shudder at our recklessness.

Mr. Speaker, biking is a fun sport that children of all ages enjoy doing. Here in Canada our biking season is not as long as some would like and some would want, but we enjoy it while it lasts. As the traffic increases and the dangers multiply, it is time that we ensure and encourage that young Albertans always ride with protected heads.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all hon. members to support Bill 209. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a few comments on Bill 209 this afternoon. It's certainly a legislative initiative that is worth supporting. Bill 209, of course, would make it mandatory for all persons under 18, whether riding or a passenger on a bicycle, to wear an approved helmet.

This bill is certainly copycat legislation of the amendment that the Conservative government rejected from a previous member of this caucus. There was, of course, an amendment proposed, as was discussed earlier this afternoon, to the Traffic Safety Act, Bill 24, going back two years to 1999. Now, I was driving down the road with my seat belt on, and I was listening to CHED radio. The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross was discussing the bill on the public affairs program on CHED radio. I was listening with a great deal of interest. The first question that came to my mind was: how did that hon. member vote on that amendment that was before the Assembly in regards to Bill 24? How did other hon. members of this Assembly vote?

It's sort of curious that this is before the Assembly again. It's certainly an issue of public safety. We look at the statistics that have been provided by Kidsafe Connection – it was mentioned by other speakers previously – and the Children's Health Foundation of Northern Alberta. I'm grateful for this information because it's certainly been useful for this member, Mr. Speaker. In the two years since this government saw fit to defeat that amendment, a lot has happened. These are one year's statistics, so we can think that for two years there would be at least 12,000, perhaps 13,000 people visiting an emergency department as a result of a biking injury. Now, in the same two-year period since this government saw fit to defeat the amendment, there would have been at least 4,500 people hospitalized for biking injuries.

I guess I'm pleased that this legislation has come forward at this time, but where the government has been, where the private members have been who are not directly involved in Executive Council in regards to this issue, that remains to be seen, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the hon. Member for Calgary-East referenced statistics, and the hon. member is absolutely correct. I certainly appreciate the comments of the hon. member. Now, Capital health, the Stollery children's health centre, has issued an opinion on this to all members of the Assembly. The Canadian chair of the International Playground Association has also expressed an opinion on this. There is even a letter to the editor from a couple from Sherwood Park, and they express their opinion on the whole issue of mandatory bike safety.

It's a bill that we have to pass. I encourage all hon. members of this Assembly to support the initiative as presented today by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. Now, also, I heard in the remarks that were expressed by Calgary-Cross to members of this Assembly earlier this afternoon the name Dr. Louis Francescutti, who is an

individual who sees the importance of this legislation and how it will reduce our incidence of injury. The same doctor was referred to in *Hansard* two years ago and had the same opinion, but it was for whatever reason ignored. Hopefully, this was inadvertent, because if the amendment to this bill that was proposed in 1999 and now is coming forward as private member's Bill 209 was done on partisan issues, then I say shame. I say shame, because there have been a lot of people, whether they're adults or children, injured in this province as a result of bike injuries, and some of them, there's no doubt, would have been prevented with the use of bicycle helmets.

Now, realizing that this is for citizens of Alberta who are 18 and younger, perhaps this is only one step, and at some time legislation will come forward for the rest of the population.

At this time, in summing up, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage all members of the Assembly to promote healthy, active lives for all Albertans by supporting this private member's bill as presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Thank you.

4:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and say a few words with respect to Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001.

I think this Bill that's before us today is a very sensitive Bill. There are a lot of varying views out in the public. I think it's a serious Bill when we bring forward legislation that legislates a person against himself. I can see legislation being brought into this House that legislates to protect the public or an individual against the action of an individual, but this Bill actually goes in an area that is personal responsibility, when you as a lawmaker decide that the government knows better than you yourself know. So it's a very, very serious move that we're considering here today and it shouldn't be taken lightly.

Those are not my words. Those are the words from a debate which occurred in this Assembly on April 13, 1987, and the matter that was before the Assembly at that time was mandatory seat belt legislation that was brought in pursuant to Bill 9, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1987.

The reason that I went back to this is that it seemed to me that the debate here with respect to Bill 209 sounded very similar to the debate that occurred at that time. In fact, I would encourage members to review *Hansard*, because the nature of the debate around this is indeed very, very similar, although I must say, in listening to hon. members here today, that the state of science has come a long way and that those who are proponents of Bill 209 have very good information indeed on which to base their support.

The other reason that I went back to 1987 to see what went on at that time was because I've had some personal experience with respect to seat belts and the mandatory use of seat belts. In my particular family over the last two years we've had three accidents, and in each case the vehicle involved was a total loss. In two of the accidents, in my estimation, either death or serious injury could have been the result and, in the other, serious injury. None of those particular consequences came to pass, and seat belts were the reason in each and every case.

One can ask the question whether or not seat belts are worn because it's the law or because occupants are educated. I think it's always a matter of education, but there are people in our society who are law-abiding and therefore do what the law asks them to do. I think it's very important that we as a Legislature recognize that fact, because ultimately the laws that we pass dictate whether or not we walk the talk.

I support this particular bill for three reasons, and those reasons are based on what I consider to be the sound criteria for a private member's bill. The first criterion is that the bill must propose something that is intended to improve public good without adversely imposing significant burden on individuals. Secondly, the bill must have the potential to fulfill its intent, and the bill must outline specific guidelines that will result in the intention of the bill being fulfilled. The third crucial characteristic is that it should, to a reasonable extent, reflect the values and beliefs of constituents and stakeholders. In my estimation, Mr. Speaker, this particular bill, Bill 209, matches and meets each of the three criteria.

Bill 209 will save lives and prevent injury. Specifically, it will protect Alberta's children, our most vulnerable group and our most valuable asset. It will help keep our kids safe and ensure that the lives of families across the province aren't needlessly touched by tragedy.

In addition, mandatory bicycle helmets for minors would reduce the 75 emergency room visits owing to head injuries that occur on average over the summer months in Alberta, representing a cost saving to Albertans at many levels. Implicit in the objective of saving lives is the goal of saving needlessly spent health care dollars. We are continually attempting to ensure that our dollars are spent wisely and that they go further, and in my estimation this particular bill will assist in that goal. Treating head injuries from bicycle accidents has a price tag, and it's a very large one. Head injuries demand the use of specialized medical technology and the specialized skills of doctors, nurses, and paramedics. It's estimated that the lifetime health care costs for a child with head injuries, including intensive care and long-term care, is somewhere between \$1 million and \$1.5 million. That is taxpayer money and is money that could be better spent, particularly if we can avoid those particular injuries occurring at all.

Others have gone into some detail on the statistics with respect to bicycle helmets in other jurisdictions and the benefits of them. I think it suffices to say that I share the statistical evidence that has been put forward, and I would encourage members to support this bill.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to enter the debate on Bill 209 as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Cross. I support this bill on the grounds that I believe it'll save the health and the lives of many of Alberta's children. Too many children go to the hospital with brain injuries sustained during a bicycle accident. Passing this bill I believe will reduce the number of children who go to our hospitals and will keep them out on their bicycles having fun, where they belong.

It's no secret that people should wear bicycle helmets if they are to be safest when riding a bicycle. Accidents happen to even the most experienced and controlled riders. The unexpected happens all the time, and in a split second a rider could find himself or herself flat on his back on the sidewalk with his head lying open. When such accidents occur, having a helmet on significantly reduces the chances of brain injury. The statistics are quite clear on this, Mr. Speaker. Wouldn't it therefore be better if all of us had a helmet on when accidents like that happen?

Let's look at some of the statistics for one moment. Bicyclists without bike helmets hospitalized with head injuries are 20 times more likely to die. In 1999, 461 people went to Alberta's hospitals with cycling-related brain injuries. In the United States, where now 15 states and many communities have enacted bike laws, 98 percent

of cyclists who were killed in bicycle accidents were not wearing helmets. The death rates of those in U.S. bicycle accidents are highest in the 13- to 16-year-old age bracket, Mr. Speaker. Children aged 14 and under are five times more likely to be injured in a bicycle-related crash than older riders. Among children 14 and under, more than 80 percent of bicycle-related fatalities are credited to the behaviour of the cyclist. The statistics show and are for the most part unequivocal that while kids like to ride bikes, they are by no means professionals and should be protected by the law. Most professional cyclists, by the way, wouldn't dream of hopping on their cycles without a helmet.

For those who think it is acceptable to let their children ride their bicycles without helmets on the neighbourhood streets in front of their house, consider this statistic: 59 percent of bicycle deaths among children under the age of 13 occur on minor roads.

Bicycle helmets reduce head and brain injuries by more than 85 percent, meaning that if an accident were to occur and the rider has a bike helmet on, he or she will be less likely to suffer an injury.

It is recorded that in the United States alone universal use of bicycle helmets by children aged four to 15 could prevent between 135 and 155 deaths as well as up to 45,000 head injuries and as many as 55,000 scalp and facial injuries.

The conclusion, Mr. Speaker, is obvious. Bicycle helmets prevent harm and save lives. Yet when we consider all of these statistics, it is saddening to note that more than 40 percent of all riders have never worn a helmet. When looking at these statistics, I have to respectfully disagree with those who argue that it should be the choice of the rider to wear or not wear a bicycle helmet. While there are many issues concerning the freedom of people to choose how they would like to act – and of course legislators have to always be cognizant of these arguments – in the name of good governance we have a duty to make legislation when an issue of significant public interest is at stake. A bicycle helmet law is justifiable, in my opinion, because it will prevent Alberta's children from accidental harm.

4:50

This is similar to the seat belt laws which the Minister of Gaming has just referred to. For example, consider that in Alberta we require drivers to obtain a licence before they can operate an automobile. We do this not only in the name of public interest but also in the personal interest of the individual driver. They would be endangering themselves by being on the road unprepared. Mr. Speaker, in my submission a bike helmet serves the same purpose. Just as we don't like to see people endangering themselves on the road, we shouldn't like to see it being done on bicycles either. Further, we've always had laws that oversee the actions of our children. These laws are designed not to control children but rather to teach them to become responsible citizens that are respectful of themselves, as they are of others.

Bill 209 should be seen in this light. As a comparison, again consider seat belt laws in Alberta and across Canada. Everyone in this House would agree that by and large seat belts save lives. Before the laws were enacted, it was not considered essential to wear seat belts. Now, after the implementation of the seat belt laws, people don't think twice about putting their seat belt on. It's become second nature, a part of the process of driving that most of us don't even think about; we just do it.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the same effect would happen with bicycle helmets. If you look at other jurisdictions, we see that once laws are brought in, compliance with the actions prescribed by the law shoots up in comparison to before the law was introduced. In the state of Maryland, for example, the use of bicycle helmets went

up a whopping 45 percent only eight months after their state government implemented a helmet law. Not only does this 45 percent represent a decrease in the likelihood of brain injuries to cyclists in that state, but it also lays the foundation for a lifelong adherence to safety while cycling. In the long run, this foundation will result in more saved lives, and if just one life is saved, then a helmet law will have done something great.

As well, we have to remember that this law is not intended to restrict the actions of adults. Only children will be affected. We have to remember that heads of small children are much more fragile, as they are still growing. By implementing a helmet law, Mr. Speaker, we're attempting to limit the amount of brain and head injuries that children will suffer. The statistics that I mentioned earlier only serve to reinforce the need for a helmet law. Also, it just doesn't seem to be the case that those fighting for cyclists' freedom are ultimately concerned with the freedom of their children to wear or not wear a bike helmet. In fact, most parents just want their kids to grow up smart, healthy, and safely.

Mr. Speaker, when we think about it, we know that many of these people concerned with cyclists' freedom have children, and I'm willing to bet that they don't let their own kids do whatever they like. Little Joe isn't allowed to have a beer whenever he'd like one, and little Sally isn't allowed to drop out of school just because she wants to. Part of parenting is teaching kids right from wrong and promoting their health, safety, and future well-being. Legislation aimed at promoting certain types of activities by children is no different.

For example, Mr. Speaker, consider smoking laws in Canada. The federal Tobacco Act states in section 8.(1) that "no person shall furnish a tobacco product to a young person in a public place or in a place to which the public reasonably has access." The purpose of this section is to protect young persons and others from inducements to the use of tobacco products and the consequential dependence on them. Right there we have a law designed to protect the health of children and to foster a healthy lifestyle. While some may argue that the Tobacco Act is an intrusion on a child's right to decide how he lives his or her life, I'm sure that most parents, many of whom are smokers, would disagree with those arguments. We should not view bike helmets any differently than the laws that prohibit children from purchasing cigarettes. Both promote a healthy lifestyle, and both will save children and parents a lot of needless worry and health problems down the road.

As a side point, Mr. Speaker, we all know that both the reduction of smoking and the reduction of brain injury free up substantial amounts of dollars in our health care system that could be better put elsewhere. Putting on a bicycle helmet has the dual effect of saving the rider's life and freeing up money in our health care budgets to help save the lives of others.

Now, those who are concerned with the personal liberty of children may disagree and may say that regardless of the potential personal and public costs, children should have the choice to decide whether or not to don a helmet. I have no problem standing here today to assert that we should not give into these arguments of a few dissenters. We're talking about laws that pertain to children, not adults. Personal choice arguments are fine among adults, but we should not stand behind them when creating legislation in the name of the safety of our children. We should also be mindful of the fact that 77 percent of Alberta parents agree that there should be bike helmet legislation for all children. The polls are on the side of Bill 209, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that we should follow what Albertans are telling us.

Finally, why don't we ask ourselves which is a greater freedom, the freedom to ride a bicycle without a helmet or the freedom to live after sustaining a bicycle-related head injury? Freedom is a tricky

thing, Mr. Speaker. It is in many ways the principal concern of all governments. However, the one thing that we are sure of is that after somebody dies in a bicycle accident, they do not have any more freedom. They are no longer around to enjoy freedom. As well, the parents of children who die while on their bikes do not have the freedom to enjoy watching their children grow up, make decisions, graduate from high school, and start an adult life. All of that could be taken away in the blink of an eye, or it could be saved by the minimal imposition of a bicycle helmet on the heads of our children. I would suggest that asking kids to wear a bike helmet is about as minimal an imposition on anybody's freedom that we can impose. I hope that I have shown even more strongly that putting bicycle helmets on the heads of our children actually enhances their freedom.

In light of all of these arguments, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members of this Assembly to pass Bill 209. The safety of many of our children will depend on it, and our children are counting on the members to support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very excited to join the debate on Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001. I know the importance of helmet safety for young people, and with no hesitation I can say that Bill 209 is a great idea. I think this bill and the discussion it has garnered justifies and legitimizes the importance of helmets for safety.

Bill 209 will not single-handedly place a helmet on every young rider in Alberta, and it doesn't have to, because this legislation doesn't act on its own. The magic of implementing this bill will come from combining education, public support, availability, and legitimacy of helmets. This bill will go a long way to convince young people to strap on a helmet, just like they buckle their seat belt or look both ways before crossing a street. I have amassed years of experience related to traffic safety through my previous career and as a member of the Calgary regional health authority. In my experience, there has always been a great deal of concern for bicycle safety initiatives, especially helmet safety.

I think one of the biggest reasons why helmet safety continues to be an issue is because the consequences of riding unprotected are so preventable. I remember the work done between the traffic section of the Calgary Police Service and the Calgary regional health authority to find ways to make Calgary streets safer through programs promoting the safety of drivers and pedestrians. I have found that most people underestimate the speed that bicycles can reach if they are not slowed down by other traffic. At one point the RHA and the traffic section wanted to implement a maximum speed limit to protect riders on Calgary's Bow Valley trail, which is approximately 200 kilometres in length throughout the city.

As simplistic as it should be, time and time again people underestimate the speed and overestimate the maneuverability of bicycles. The reasoning for the speed limit was to reduce the risk that riders cause to themselves and to others on the trail. My home constituency of Calgary-Buffalo has a significant piece of the city's Bow Valley trail running through it. The strip of trail is often very busy, with pedestrian traffic of all kinds including roller bladers, joggers, and parents walking with their children. Although this is often an ideal setting for recreation, it is also prime time for bicycle accidents. With so much traffic traveling at different levels of speed, the probability of accidents increases. However, the number of people on the trail could be an excellent opportunity to make Bill 209 more effective, because the high level of congestion is a great way to reach those riders that insist on riding without a helmet. Police can

easily spot these riders on the trail, stop them, and inform them that riding unprotected is against the law.

I can personally think of several bicycle-related accidents that were completely preventable if the rider had been wearing a helmet. It's difficult to describe the frustration of seeing many young people injured and sometimes seriously hurt from bicycle/vehicle collisions.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, after the collision the fact that these injuries are so preventable goes through everyone's mind. I remember numerous times when parents, witnesses, and sometimes even the victim would realize that they should have been wearing a helmet. Bill 209 reminds these riders of the consequences before the accident occurs. We think of grisly collisions occurring between a bike and a large truck, resulting in serious injury or a fatality, or we think fatal accidents happen because of blatant rider error. However, I can think of several accidents that were normal wipeouts, having nothing to do with a motor vehicle.

One accident occurred in Lake Bonavista a few years ago. Police were called to the scene where a bike rider was killed from falling off his bicycle and landing hard on the street. The important part of this accident is that no other vehicle was involved. The adult individual died from hitting his head on the curb. He wasn't traveling very fast, but because concrete has very little resilience, a simple wipeout resulted in tragedy. Although we are quick to call this a freak accident, it should not have been that surprising to us. If the individual had been wearing a helmet, he would have got up, brushed himself off, and rode home. Although this type of accident doesn't occur every day, it's more likely to happen to people riding without helmets. We must make helmet use mandatory to stop these preventable accidents from happening to our children.

I agree that the onus must be placed on the parents or legal guardians to ensure that young riders are as safe as possible. I also think that most riders realize the importance of helmet safety. It's just that many young people need more convincing, and that's where Bill 209 comes into effect.

The point of this bill is not to prosecute young riders but, rather, to add legitimacy and authority to existing bicycle safety initiatives. Everyone learns about helmet safety through different communication channels, from safety demonstrations in schools to parents insisting their children wear helmets. Bill 209 promotes more education by raising awareness for helmet safety and includes the police to add incentive for young people to wear helmets. I think it is crucial that Bill 209 focuses attention on young people and especially children, as they may not necessarily know the benefits of helmets, nor do they have a grasp of the consequences of riding without one. As a former police officer that has dealt with this issue directly I cannot stress the importance of adding the mere mention of the law as an influential tool.

Albertans are able to use several education programs that promote bicycle safety with a great deal of success. As a result of these programs, I believe that the messages promoting bicycle safety have been driven home. Parents know children need protection and that helmets are the most effective way to prevent injuries. Bill 209 will continue to convince more children to listen to safety messages from government, bicycle safety advocates, and parents. More young people will be convinced to wear a helmet because they are breaking the law by riding unprotected.

I don't think policing agencies across the province will have to write numerous tickets to effectively get a message across to young riders. I have learned through my experience that the police can be an extremely effective conduit for communicating safety to the public. Seat belt safety and jaywalking have been reduced by giving people a warning rather than a ticket. I found that the occasional warning could be effective as a friendly reminder about traffic

safety. People feel lucky to get away with a warning, and they still get the message.

Some bike riders adamantly believe that they are also a vehicle on the road and should receive a level of respect and enough room equal to other vehicles to ride safely, but they should consider the difference in power, size, and manoeuvrability between bicycles and motor vehicles. Unfortunately the people that know this the least or forget this point the most are young riders. Through my experience I have noticed that young riders tend to have an invincibility complex when it comes to riding on the street. Young riders do not know the consequences and nuances of traffic to the extent of adults. They lack the experience and education that would prepare them for riding on the street. I'd like to talk about this for a moment because it concerns the justification for this bill.

Cyclists do not have to take a mandatory course to be on the road like other vehicles nor do they have to complete formal training or an examination. I appreciate the fact that there are several classes available for riders that teach proper riding skills and rules of the road. These classes can be an effective tool to keep young riders out of dangerous situations thereby reducing the number of injuries and fatalities due to vehicle/bicycle collisions. The classes help, but we have to acknowledge that we put our children on the road on bicycles in traffic with much faster vehicles. We let our children ride in dangerous situations, situations which we cannot prevent. So we put children on busy streets not fully preparing them or educating them about the dangers of riding in traffic.

Bill 209 will help promote the importance of safety. We all know how safe helmets are. We always have. Furthermore, we all know as parents that children should wear helmets. A helmet may not protect children from a broken arm or a knee injury, but helmets dramatically reduce the chance of brain injuries, skull fractures, and other severe head trauma injuries that can lead to death. Broken bones, scrapes, and bruises do heal, but I have seen the severity of head injuries caused by bicycle accidents, and I know that head injuries cannot heal as easily as other wounds. The head is much too delicate to leave unprotected.

Some might say that Bill 209 attempts to legislate common sense and infringes on personal freedom, but this bill is not violating personal freedoms. It's putting our minds at rest. The helmet gives our children padding to help protect them from dangers on the road. The bill will also give parents another tool to help ensure that children wear their helmets. I believe that most young people recognize and respect authority. This bill will allow parents to say: wear your helmet, or you'll answer to the police. Bill 209 offers deterrents that will go a long way to reaffirm the importance of bike helmets.

I believe that bike riders that don't wear a helmet are not as safe as riders with a helmet. I think this happens for a number of reasons. First of all, courtesy and safety are not virtues of helmetless riders that dart in and out of traffic without signaling properly. In my experience those reckless cyclists are the ones that most often don't wear helmets. I think one of the biggest reasons for this is the basic disregard for the safety of themselves and others in traffic. If these people don't have enough sense to wear an inexpensive piece of plastic that will save their lives, then how will this attitude translate to other traffic laws? I've seen these riders neglect their own safety while I was a police officer, and as an RHA board member I've shared stories with my peers regarding these riders' disregard for their own well-being and the disastrous consequences that often resulted.

Mr. Speaker, think of the evolution of bicycle safety like traveling from Edmonton to Calgary. Realizing that bicycles are dangerous and that children need protection is the beginning of the journey that would take us from here to Leduc. Implementing education

programs and making helmets safer and more accessible takes us farther down the road to Red Deer. However, by passing Bill 209, the journey towards sound bicycle safety will continue past Airdrie and on to Calgary.

This bill does not have to be a be-all, fix-all piece of legislation. Rather, it is part of the bigger picture and will give concerned groups, including police, the opportunity to keep our young people safe on whatever road they choose to travel.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great privilege of speaking in support of Bill 209. Rather than reiterate a number of the points that have been made by colleagues on both sides of the House, I would like to recount personal experience.

Just over 30 years ago the brightest and most beautiful of my cousins was killed on a bicycle. He was exiting a highway from a place near to his home in Orillia, Ontario. No doubt there would be many things that could be analyzed to see whether or not he would have been saved had he worn a helmet. It was a double tragedy, because not only was he killed, but he was killed by a hit-and-run driver, and the young man who came to assist him from across the road was also killed. It was a tragic day for our family, and ever since it has been hard for me to speak on the helmet issue because I can't help but remember a young man who had so much to live for and who had so much to give that was wasted that day.

But I'd like to bring more in focus a recent letter that was referenced by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, which perhaps identifies better than I could why we should pass this bill today. The woman, Kathy Hall, and her husband, Craig, write an appreciative letter in the *This Week* Friday, May 11, newspaper. Predominantly they cite their feelings about coming home after work and finding a broken helmet at the back door and wondering what had happened to their son.

5:10

In the story and body of the letter it states that the outcome was very positive because, Devin, the son, was found at the hospital and had been well taken care of. For the record I'm going to conclude with a couple of the remarks that she made.

And for you, young invincible people who do not wear helmets, I would like to show you my son's broken helmet. The large crack in it would have been in my son's skull. The helmet was the only reason I was able to bring Devin home that day.

Thank you to a very caring community.

Mr. Speaker, we can look at statistics and we can talk about the opportunity to make things safer for young people. The bottom line is that we on all sides of the House should ask ourselves this question: if we could do one thing to save a child, to save our neighbour's child, our own child, or a grandchild in future, would it not be to provide them every opportunity to feel safe and in actual fact be safer? The very wearing of a helmet reminds the young person that they are not invincible, that they have to wear protection and have to obey certain rules in order to have the privilege of riding a bicycle. It would appear to me that it's important to do this for the safety of children.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Under Standing Order 8(5)(a) we have five minutes now for the sponsor of the private member's public bill to close the debate.

I now call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to close debate on Bill 209.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to close debate today on Bill 209. I'd like to begin by saying that I sincerely appreciate the supportive debate of my colleagues in the Legislature today, and that is because there is no question that the prevention strategy of Bill 209 will assist with decreasing head and brain injuries through the use of properly wearing a helmet and will thereby assist with the sustainability of our health care system.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that creating health through prevention requires making a paradigm shift to a new way of thinking. It is realizing that each of us, including our children and teens, has conscious input into our state of health through choosing safe practices when engaging in a high-risk activity. I believe our legislation and policies must reflect our vision as legislators and that our health and wellness goal of injury prevention can be achieved.

I ask all of my colleagues for their support of Bill 209, and I call for the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:14 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Hancock	Norris
Blakeman	Hlady	O'Neill
Bonner	Horner	Ouellette
Cao	Hutton	Pham
Carlson	Jablonski	Rathgeber
Cenaiko	Kryczka	Renner
DeLong	Lord	Stevens
Doerksen	Lougheed	Strang
Evans	MacDonald	Tannas
Forsyth	Magnus	Tarchuk
Fritz	Mar	VanderBurg
Gordon	Masyk	Zwozdesky
Graydon	Nicol	

Against the motion:

Danyluk	Jacobs	Melchin
Fischer	Marz	Snelgrove
Friedel	McFarland	Vandermeer
Haley		

Totals:	For – 38	Against – 10
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[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene tonight at 8 o'clock, we do so in Committee of the Whole.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, would all hon. members in favour please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 4 the Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 30, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/05/30

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order. For the benefit of those in the gallery, this is the informal part of the Legislative Assembly, and members are allowed to have a coffee or juice at their desks. They're in fact allowed to move, so if you're busy looking at your road map of where members are, catch them quickly because they are allowed to change and go around. We try and stick to the convention of only one hon. member standing and talking at a time, but this is, as I say, the informal part called committee, in this case Committee of the Whole.

Bill 14

Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to be able to address the Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001, Bill 14, at committee.

We've had some discussion about this bill in second, and I'll just recap for our audience. The main object of Bill 14 is to define eligibility requirements for the implementation of the Alberta energy tax refund program, which was announced by this government on September 6 of 2000. By establishing these requirements for the program, Mr. Chairman, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency was able to use their list of tax filers for the province of Alberta to send out a \$300 onetime rebate in two separate installments to some 2.3 million Albertans 16 years of age and older. If members recall, those who still have their memories from the 21-hour session that we completed yesterday, we passed Bill 1, which put into legislation the ability for the government to have those cheques made even though the cheques had already been sent and the regulations had already been made. So it was sort of shutting the barn door after the horses had left or dotting the i's after the sentence was already constructed, but that's what happened.

This Alberta energy tax refund program was announced in the fall. The rebate came in two installments to those who filed a 1999 income tax return even if they had no income. We heard some discussion last night about some of the problems that surrounded that processing and that are still in the process of being fixed. We've been told by Revenue Canada at this stage that all of the corrections to the cheques that were incorrectly issued or not issued at all or went to the wrong addresses will have been corrected, they expect, by the end of June. So quite a long wait for people who were expecting the money in order to actually reduce their costs at the time that they were high.

I would hope that the government would take note of those outstanding issues and the issues as we went along with this particular program and correct them for next year, because to truly be a rebate program, as they are suggesting, they need to match the money coming back to the people with the expenses that the people incur that are high or extraordinary at the time they occur, not six months hence or some other very inconvenient time. They need to get their act together on that, and if that means doing it independ-

ently of the federal government, you won't hear any complaints from this side of the House on that, Mr. Chairman. So we hope they'll address those issues.

There were a couple of things that we wanted to just remind people about. The \$300 refund was not taxable, so Albertans don't have to claim it when they're filing. That's important, I believe. The total cost of the refund package was \$690 million, with \$345 million being allocated from Alberta's economic surplus, and it's projected that the energy tax refund for natural gas and gasoline will cost taxpayers at least \$2.4 million to administer, based on the number of qualifying Albertans.

So there were some options here, Mr. Chairman. They could have just reduced the cost of natural gas in general and not had the administration costs. Therefore, there would have been another \$2.4 million available to distribute back to us. You know, it's our gas. It's our revenue that's being generated off the gas that's being pumped out of the province, yet we have to pay for administration fees to get any of it back. It doesn't seem completely logical, but that's the way they did it.

I was happy to hear when this first happened, and am still happy to support, that individuals who have debts in arrears with the provincial maintenance enforcement program were not receiving the refund. It gets paid to the director of maintenance enforcement and credited first to arrears and then next to the current periodic payment of the debtors in arrears and last to any other payable and outstanding of the debtor in arrears. So I think that was a good point.

We thought this program, this rebate was helpful to Alberta consumers as a temporary onetime measure, Mr. Chairman, but it was still crisis-based reaction by the government to the impact of higher energy prices. Albertans need really a realistic plan to shield them from the sustained impact of energy prices over the medium term. This is designed to shield people from what we say is the mismanagement of electricity deregulation in the very short instance, not that all those costs were applicable, but certainly some of them were. That's really the essence of the argument here.

Here what was happening was that the bill defined the eligibility requirements for the implementation of the tax refund program. You have to do that. The money is already spent, but still there have to be some rules and regulations on that, Mr. Chairman. We're happy to see that, with some glitches, it is traveling along in the way that it was supposed to. We had a problem with this, though, in that this government showed a real lack of respect for the legislative process when they introduced the bill to authorize a plan which they announced over eight months ago and have already finished implementing, and here we are, you know, starting this now.

So, Mr. Chairman, those are my comments with respect to this bill. I look forward to any participation by the government at this stage. Perhaps, depending on what they say, this being committee, I will be persuaded to re-engage in the debate, but at this point that's the end of my comments.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further comments on Bill 14, which is what we have in front of us?

[The clauses of Bill 14 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall this bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Would the committee agree to a brief introduction of guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my great pleasure this evening to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly some very special guests. We are blessed here with many very important and special guests, but these people are really important because they are newspaper publishers here in Alberta. I would like to introduce from the Alberta Weekly Newspapers Association – I would I ask them to stand; they're in the public gallery – Mary Jane Harper, editor of the *Olds Gazette*; Roger Holmes, publisher of the *Wainwright Star-Chronicle*; Steve Dills, publisher of the *Vegreville Observer*; and Rob Rondeau, publisher of *Hardisty World*. I would ask the Assembly to give them a very warm traditional greeting.

8:10

Mr. Chairman, it's also my great pleasure to introduce some more very important and special guests. I don't need to introduce them to you because they are from your constituency of Highwood, but through you to the members of this Assembly we have with us tonight very special guests who are also in the public gallery, a counselor from the town of Okotoks and his charming wife, Mr. and Mrs. Laurie Hodson. I would ask if they would rise and also receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Bill 15 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to participate in the debate at committee on Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act. This could be called a companion piece of legislation to Bill 14, the bill that we just debated. One of my colleagues said that Bill 14 was the how to win the election act. Well, this is how to win the election act, part 2; there's no doubt about it.

What this particular bill talks about, Mr. Chairman, is the implementation of the government's promise to reduce the flat tax rate from 10.5 to 10 percent. It also implements the reduction in the railway fuel tax from 3 cents per litre to 1.5 cents, and it exempts many of the tax statutes from the provisions of the Limitations Act. Also, we see it increasing the value of some of the tax credits.

The flat tax reduction, Mr. Chairman, is the second reduction in the rate since the flat tax was introduced. It was originally 11 percent, then 10.5 percent, and now changed to 10 percent in response to cuts in federal taxes. Part of the problem with this kind of a reduction and a race to the bottom is that you're always playing catch-up. That can be good if in fact we see all income levels fairly benefitting from a tax like this, but that's not the case here. All calculations that we've done and nothing that the government has been able to present to us in the interim has convinced us otherwise. All indications we have are that this particular flat tax is unfair to middle-income Albertans.

What we see happening here is that for every dollar the middle-income earner receives in savings from the Klein flat tax, a high-income earner, who is in the top 2 percent of tax filers, receives anywhere from \$1.80 to \$4.55 in savings, providing that the government's flat tax scheme merely shifts the tax burden onto the middle class. It's what happens. Middle-class tax filers earning between \$25,000 and \$75,000 represent nearly 38 percent of tax filers in Alberta. Those of us who aren't cabinet ministers fall into that particular bracket. We receive just 39 percent of the tax savings under the 10 percent flat tax, and meanwhile the top 2 percent of tax filers, which would include the Premier, earning \$100,000 and over, receive 26 percent of the tax savings under the 10 percent flat tax. [interjection]

Well, not everybody saves, as a member in the Assembly is saying. Certainly if you take a look at it on a proportional basis, middle-income tax earners pay more. So I think that that is unfair. [interjection] The comment is that they pay less than they paid before, but let's talk about this reasonably in terms of the total tax burden that tax filers are absorbing because of the directives of this government.

You have to add the increase in user fees into that scenario. You have to add the other costs like the additional fees that we pay for mismanagement of deregulation. There are a lot of hidden costs in this province, Mr. Chairman, that make our take-home pay less than it is in terms of any kind of disposable income. I don't think there's a person in this Assembly who can say that dollar for dollar they get the same value out of their money as they did five years ago, seven years ago, 10 years ago, 15 years ago. For the same dollar your after-tax disposable income buys less, even when you adjust for inflation.

So when you give the appearances of reducing taxes but for the bulk of the people who are taxpayers it doesn't really happen, there's something wrong with that picture. I would suggest that particularly some of the new members of the Assembly actually study it and just don't take cabinet ministers' word for the fact that it must be the greatest thing since sliced bread, because there've been a few things brought into this Assembly by them that they championed that were found out to be wrong after the fact. I would suggest that this is one of those instances.

We talk about railway diesel fuel tax. This was part of the proceedings of the recent Alberta Business Tax Review Committee during their deliberations. Representatives of the railway industry indicated that there was fierce competition in the railway industry and pointed to the fact that Canadian railways pay higher overall taxes than the U.S. railroads, other Canadian industries, and the north American trucking industry. Submissions to the committee suggested that Alberta's tax on railway fuel should be eliminated or reduced to the U.S. level of 1.7 cents a litre. However, the Business Tax Review Committee rejected the recommendation. They felt that Alberta's fuel tax for railways was competitive with other provinces and jurisdictions. So certainly I think that that's something up for discussion.

There's no doubt that I have heard the arguments on behalf of the railways over the years and have some degree of sympathy for them for the costs that they are carrying. We have vast lands and few people to support them, Mr. Chairman, so that certainly becomes a huge transportation issue when we try to accommodate and work with other jurisdictions.

The Limitations Act is referred to in here. Through Bill 15 the government has exempted the Alberta Corporate Tax Act, the Alberta Income Tax Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the Hotel Room Tax Act, the Fuel Tax Act, and the Tobacco Tax Act from the Limitations Act. What this act introduces is limitation periods on claims, and under the act all claims are governed by two

limitation periods. The discovery period would be two years from the date that the claimant either discovered or ought to have discovered specific knowledge about the claim, and the ultimate period in which a claim must be brought is 10 years. This bill endeavours to ensure that the Crown, when dealing with Alberta tax legislation, is not subject to these time limits. So one set of rules for the government and another set of rules for everybody else.

Mr. Chairman, our position is that we're always supportive of tax measures that will help reduce the tax burden on Alberta families. However, the reduction in the flat tax that is made possible through this act raises the issue again of whether or not a flat tax is truly fair to Albertans. I think we've had lots of discussion on this. We see this as a scheme that simply moves the tax burden onto the shoulders of middle-income earners while trying to make them feel good. It's not a fair tax system in our opinion. We have proposed what we believe is a fair tax system that would see greater savings for the majority of Albertans and for middle-income earners. We would like the government to consider that as a plan that would give tax relief to all Albertans, so that would be very interesting to see them move forward.

We also have a question that still hasn't been answered throughout the phases of this debate, Mr. Chairman, and that would be: why has the government introduced legislation that will cut the railway fuel tax in half when that was a recommendation that was rejected by the Business Tax Review Committee, and why weren't any of the good recommendations that were in that committee report acted on? This one that was rejected was. So here we have a government who talks ad nauseam about consultation with Albertans, yet when they do consult and they do get feedback and it is well-thought-out, well-rounded, and I would say well-researched feedback, the government rejects it. So I think that's an issue.

We're certainly pleased to see that many of the tax credit increases that this bill introduces are coming forward. They would be increases such as people providing home care for relatives, a very good thing; people providing care for children with physical and mental infirmity, also a very good thing; increases in the education credits, a big deal particularly when tuition fees seem to be spiraling higher and higher every year; and increases in the amounts deductible for people over 65 years old.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that essentially concludes my remarks in committee on this particular bill. We look forward to any comments that the government may have on this.

Thank you.

8:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time in committee I have a few brief comments about Bill 15. Certainly this flat tax reduction from 10.5 to 10 percent – I feel one must always be supportive of tax measures that will help reduce the tax burden on Alberta families. However, the reduction in the flat tax that is made possible through this act again raises the issue of whether or not the entire flat tax is truly fair to Albertans. The flat tax scheme simply moves, in my view, the tax burden again onto the shoulders of middle-income earners of this province. This, as a result, is not a fair tax system.

Now, the Alberta Liberals certainly have a proposed tax system that would see greater savings for the majority of Albertans, particularly for the middle-income earners. Should there be an increase in the basic personal exemption, the amount that individual Albertans can earn tax free, from a little over \$7,000 to in excess of \$13,500? Yes. Our plan, the so-called 0, 10, 12 plan, would provide

fair and sustained tax relief to all Albertans regardless of income.

I'm not going to go into this in a great deal of detail, but I do notice that the railway diesel fuel tax is cut in half, lowering it from 3 cents per litre to 1.5 cents per litre. I would certainly again take this opportunity to briefly remind all hon. members of this Assembly of the 6.5 cents a litre tax on propane fuel for motor vehicles, for trucks. Last year in the budget there was \$14 million, Mr. Chairman, realized in revenue. In this year's budget it is down to \$9 million. That tells this member that there is a reduced consumption of propane as a motor fuel in this province because of this tax.

Certainly the cost has gone up at the retail pump. In my view, it has not been justified; it cannot be justified. I feel very strongly that propane in Edmonton, in Calgary, in Spruce Grove, in Grande Prairie, in Sylvan Lake should be much cheaper than it is in Toronto, and it's not. I would urge the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to advocate that the 6.5 cents a litre propane fuel tax be eliminated in this province, be completely eliminated. We're going to get \$9 million again in revenue on this tax, and I think the tax should be removed. I'm quite confident that there would be an increase in the number of conversions, particularly with trucks.

For that reason I'm again speaking on this issue of elimination of the propane tax. We can do without the \$9 million. We can cut down on fancy cars for cabinet. We can cut down on payment of legal bills for the leader of the federal Canadian Alliance. Perhaps members of government can take buses and cars instead of taking airplanes. It would be very easy to realize savings of \$9 million in this budget.

So with those views expressed, Mr. Chairman, I shall take my seat and cede the floor to another member of the Assembly. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The New Democrat caucus is not going to be supporting Bill 15 this evening. We don't believe that this legislation is equitable. We don't believe that it distributes the tax burden in the way in which it ought to be distributed.

If approved by the Assembly, Bill 15 continues the massive shift of the tax load from high-income Albertans to middle-income Albertans. By maintaining a so-called single tax rate and reducing it from 10 and a half to 10 percent, Bill 15 continues the attack on middle-class Albertans begun last year with the implementation of the flat tax on personal incomes.

Now, this particular approach has brought criticism from every tax accountant and economist who has independently crunched the numbers on the Tory's flat tax, and they've all reached the same conclusion, Mr. Chairman. The main beneficiary of this flat tax will be those with incomes above \$100,000 per year. Middle-class Albertans with incomes from \$30,000 to \$100,000 are already paying a disproportionately higher share of the tax load, and Bill 15 will only make that situation worse. For instance, a University of Alberta economics professor, Mel McMillan, had this to say about the government's flat tax proposal:

This would really shift the tax burden to the middle class . . . Big winners . . . are those in brackets beyond \$150,000 and especially those in the \$250,000 plus income bracket.

We crunched a few numbers of our own, and this is based on the 10 percent, Mr. Chairman. We identified that the primary people who will realize the benefit from this approach are in fact some of the wealthiest people in this province. The president and CEO of Canadian Pacific, for example, will save approximately \$78,569 under the flat tax at the 10 and a half percent rate. The chairman and

CEO of ATCO will save \$71,340, the president and CEO of Talisman Energy could save approximately \$44,995, and Mr. Jim Dinning, the executive vice-president of TransAlta, would save over \$11,000. On the other hand, a bus driver is going to save about \$166. So we can see who this government is really working for.

The main reason, of course, that there are any savings whatsoever for middle- and lower-income people is because of the dramatic increase in the personal tax exemption, which is a measure we support, but it clearly masks the shift of the tax burden that's going on with this bill.

In addition to not passing the test of fairness, Bill 15 also fails the test of honesty. The provincial Conservatives know that reducing tax rates for high-income earners will result in a massive transfer of the tax load onto middle-income Albertans. That's why they have hidden that by combining it with an overall income tax of \$1.5 billion at 23 percent.

Despite the deep cut in personal income tax revenue, however, middle-income earners will end up paying only slightly less compared to the situation before the flat tax was introduced. New Democrats have calculated that an Albertan making \$30,000 a year saves only \$185 from the reduction in the flat tax from 10.5 to 10 percent compared to what they paid in 1999. That's less than 10 percent on their total tax bill compared to '99. Meanwhile, a person making \$500,000 a year saves almost \$20,000 more on their tax bill. That's a tax saving of 29 percent, almost three times as high a percentage than for lower income people. So, Mr. Chairman, it's clearly not an equitable bill and not an equitable approach.

8:30

The government's flat tax has failed to deliver the promised simplicity of their income tax system. Bill 15 is a good example of this. In addition to changing the underlying tax rates, Bill 15 makes numerous changes to exemptions, deductions, credits, and other loopholes encountered in calculating one's taxable income. The only way to simplify the tax system is to remove the complexities in calculating one's taxable income. Not only does Bill 15 fail to do this, through section (5) it codifies these complexities into provincial law. Bill 15 shows that the flat tax didn't get rid of a single loophole. All of the existing tax credits and deductions remain.

Your tax return hasn't shrunk a bit. In fact, the tax form could actually become more complicated. Instead of having to do calculations on one set of numbers, Alberta taxpayers are required now to do two. For example, taxpayers currently need to do only one calculation to determine their nonrefundable tax credits. Under the flat tax plan they would need to do two: one to calculate their federal tax credits and a second to calculate their provincial tax credits.

Now, there are those who argue that there are too many tax brackets. The Mulroney government tax reform of 1987 already significantly flattened the Canadian tax system. There are only three tax brackets. Before 1988 there were 10 different tax brackets, ranging from 6 percent to 34 percent. Going back even further, in 1970 there were 17 tax brackets.

The United States, believe it or not, has a more progressive income tax system than Canada does, especially for those with high incomes. At the federal level the U.S. has five tax brackets, ranging from a low of 15 percent to a high of 39.6 percent. By comparison, Canada has only three tax brackets, and the top federal tax rate is only 30.9 percent. Some American states have as many as 10 tax brackets. Only six states have implemented a flat tax.

Another argument made by those advocates such as our Provincial Treasurer for flat taxes is that marginal tax rates are too high and are a disincentive to work harder. Marginal tax rates refer to what is

paid on the last dollar of income earned by a taxpayer. Effective tax rates refer to the average rate paid on every dollar of income earned. Marginal tax rates will and should be higher than effective tax rates in a progressive income tax system. It is misleading to focus on marginal tax rates to measure the fairness of the income tax system. Effective tax rates are a much better indicator because they measure the rate of tax paid on every dollar of income earned, not just the last dollar. Effective tax rates tend to be significantly lower than marginal tax rates even for those with high income because they, like low-income people, are able to benefit from the lower rates applied to their first dollars of income.

Higher income earners are also able to reduce their tax liability by taking advantage of things like tax credits and deductions. Unlike middle-income earners, those with higher incomes are able to afford to maximize their RRSP contributions, to set up family trusts, and to take advantage of capital gains exemptions. Under the current system Alberta has by far the lowest marginal tax rate of any Canadian province. In 2001 Alberta's top marginal provincial tax rate is a flat 10 percent. The next lowest province, Saskatchewan, has a top marginal rate of 16 percent, which is 60 percent higher. The province of Ontario has a top marginal rate on provincial income tax of 17.41 percent. It's one thing for this government to make Alberta into some sort of tax haven for the wealthy. It's another thing to do this entirely at the expense of middle-class Albertans, and that is something which Bill 15 continues to do.

It's not even true that higher income earners have the highest marginal tax rates. When calculations of marginal tax rates include the impact of refundable tax credits, middle-income earners, not high-income earners, are already paying the highest marginal tax rates. The personal income tax system contains a number of refundable credits including the child tax benefit, the goods and services tax credit, the seniors' credit, as well as provincial credits like the seniors' benefit and the Alberta employment tax credit. These credits are recovered by being taxed back as income rises. If calculations of marginal tax rates include the impact of refundable tax credits, middle-income earners, not high-income earners, are already paying the highest marginal tax rates.

Robert D. Brown, the past chairman of PricewaterhouseCoopers, calculates that a single-earner family with three children making between \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year faces a top marginal tax rate of over 60 percent. By contrast, the marginal tax rate of a similar family making \$110,000 is just over 50 percent. The source of that, in case anyone wants to look it up, is the *Canadian Tax Journal*, 1999, issue number 2, and it's on page 192.

This is because a family making \$30,000 gets to keep less than 40 cents of every additional dollar earned as a result of the combined increase in tax payable and reduction in refundable tax credit payments. By contrast, a family making \$110,000 a year gets to keep almost 50 cents of every additional dollar earned. If anyone has a disincentive to work as a result of these arrangements, it's middle-income earners, not high-income earners. Imposition of a flat tax will make this inequity even worse by raising the marginal tax rate for middle-income earners while lowering it for high-income earners.

Proponents of a flat tax, like our former Treasurer, now the leader of the Alliance Party or at least the significant portion of it, says that a flat tax will end bracket creep. When the Mulroney government got itself into financial difficulty a decade ago, they stopped full indexation of tax brackets and exemptions to inflation. Now adjustments are only made for inflation above 3 percent. As a result, until this year's federal budget there has been no increase in the income thresholds for the three federal tax brackets for a number of years. The basic and spousal exemptions were increased starting in

the 1999 federal budget after a number of years of no increases. The Alberta government, as much as any government in Canada, has benefited from tax bracket creep. Surely the answer to this phenomenon is not to get rid of tax brackets altogether, thereby undermining equity, but to restore full indexation of both tax brackets and basic spousal exemptions.

If it wanted to, the government could cut taxes or user fees without bringing in a regressive flat tax. Moreover, with the size of the budget surplus in recent years, the Alberta government clearly has the fiscal capacity to cut taxes, increase spending in priority areas, and keep retiring debt. The question is not whether Albertans should have a tax cut but what kind of tax cut it should be. Tax cuts directed at low-income and middle-income earners will generate more economic activity than tax cuts directed at the wealthy. That's because the wealthy will likely invest their tax savings in investments – for example, in GICs, mutual funds, including ones with lots of foreign content – while low-income and middle-income earners are likely to spend their savings on things that more directly lead to local job creation, like buying goods and services from our local businesses.

Are there alternatives to the Tory flat tax plan that are fairer to low-income and middle-income Albertans? Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. The New Democrats advocate phasing out health care premiums as an alternative to the flat tax plan set out in Bill 18. While delivering a comparable amount of tax relief, the New Democrat approach could give each Alberta family an \$816 break and a single person a \$408 break regardless of their income. There are many sound reasons why the New Democrat approach is preferable.

AHC premiums are the worst kind of regressive tax. A family earning \$20,000 pays exactly the same, \$816 per year, as a family earning \$2 million a year. The income levels at which Albertans receive premium subsidies are ridiculously low. For example, to receive a full premium subsidy, families must earn less than \$7,500 a year and singles less than \$5,000 a year. Unlike premiums paid to private health insurers, AHC premiums paid by individuals are not tax deductible. Middle-income seniors and those working in jobs without benefits are particularly hurt by this. Those working in better jobs are also hurt because any proportion of Alberta health care premiums paid by employers is fully taxable at the employee's top marginal tax rate.

Alberta Health wastes enormous time and resources to collect premiums and track down those in arrears. In 1996-97 the department spent \$11 million on premiums collection, more than is spent on administering the health care insurance plan itself. About half of the \$11 million is paid to external collection agencies to track down those with premium arrears. Despite this, the government still wrote off \$29 million in uncollectible premiums in 1998-99 alone.

8:40

We believe that Alberta health care premiums are a drain on jobs and the economy. As a payroll tax, employers face substantial compliance costs in deducting and remitting health care premiums to the government. The New Democrats would ensure that the savings resulting from the phasing out of premiums are added to the remuneration of employees, not pocketed by employers.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Bill 15 does not deserve the support of this Assembly. It is regressive legislation that benefits only the wealthy at the expense of the middle class. It is the brainchild of a Treasurer who is no longer in this Assembly to defend it. We all know where he is and what he's doing. Instead of blindly moving forward with this legislation, that is fundamentally unfair and deeply flawed, I urge the government to withdraw Bill 15 and replace it

with legislation that provides progressivity for the personal income tax system.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've heard a great heap of statistics and figures this evening. However, there's one statistic that has not been put on the record – and I think we need to put it on the record – and that is that under this single rate of 10 percent 200,000 low-income Albertans will pay no tax at all.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 15 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 17 Insurance Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 17? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, at this time in committee on Bill 17, I've had an opportunity to speak on this already. I would like to note the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre – and I encourage all hon. members of the Assembly to read them in the previous edition of *Hansard* – her cautions and reservations about how equitable these amendments would be when you compare them to small insurance companies and larger insurance companies, particularly for mandatory continuing education.

Now, there is no provision in the Insurance Act for mandatory continuing education. Many of the stakeholders – and I believe they've been consulted, Mr. Chairman; I certainly hope they have – believe that the needs of consumers demand knowledgeable, dedicated, and competent financial advisers to provide a required and certainly a necessary level of service. Whenever one considers the increasing diversity and complexity of financial services, practitioners should be current in their knowledge and skills and I believe must continually upgrade their knowledge and skills to remain current. I don't know if that will happen. I certainly hope it will happen. This is exactly what's happening with this legislation. It removes the requirement that adjusters who are employees of insurance companies need to be licensed. Then how are consumers and members of the public to know that the adjusters have had a continuing education program by their employer?

All Canadian jurisdictions with Insurance Canada, I note, either mandate continuing education requirements or plan to implement them. B.C. requires continuing education. Saskatchewan required continuing education as of January 1, 1999. Manitoba introduced mandatory continuing education in mid-1999, as I understand it. That's already been done. Ontario now requires continuing education. Quebec has already accomplished that. Nova Scotia appears prepared to adopt that requirement. Some 48 U.S. states have continuing education programs.

Now, the Alberta Insurance Council is opposed to mandatory continuing education. The Alberta Insurance Council believes that suspension, revocation, or requalification can be used in cases where incompetence is demonstrated.

The cost of mandatory continuing education will be borne by consumers, again, and by agents, and access to courses would be difficult for rural agents. I would like the opinion of the hon. members of this Assembly who represent rural areas in this regard. I certainly would be eager to hear from them in the course of the debate this evening. The consumers get caught in this province quite often, and I would encourage the current government to take more of an active interest in consumer protection. I'm not going to go into that in detail at this time, Mr. Chairman, but history has a tendency to repeat itself, and consumers have been left holding the bag, so to speak, quite often.

I don't know if it's the intention of the government to force insurance agents to keep up to date with new products and practices. I question if that is acceptable, but certainly it is my view that they believe that insurance agents should be required to meet tougher preclicensing requirements.

When we think of the insurance industry, the first thing that comes to this member's mind is stability. I certainly hope that that continues, because these issues were raised before, Mr. Chairman. The majority of these issues were raised during the consultation process on Bill 25, the new Insurance Act in 1999. I did some work on that, but Bill 17 was introduced, as I understand it, because of concerns heard from government members, from industry stakeholders.

8:50

I've heard concerns, also, regarding the revamping of the Insurance Act, and I have yet to hear back from many of the individuals I contacted in regards to these amendments, Mr. Chairman. I hope that before this session recesses for the summer, I have that opportunity. I'm reluctant at this stage in committee to give my full support for this legislation until I hear from those stakeholders, but in saying that, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, who is bringing forward this legislation, had an extensive consultation process before with the original Bill 25, so I'm confident that as time progresses, the individuals that I have contacted will in turn respond with their opinions, if any, in regards to these amendments.

Now, we should consider certainly the changes that are going to occur. There are gradual changes, because the insurance industry under the new act will permit the minister to issue restricted insurance agents certificates of authority. These will go to businesses. The business, of course, will be a deposit-taking institution. It could be a transportation company, a travel agency, an automobile dealership, or another prescribed enterprise. This is where the concerns of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre come into play, naturally, because of the size of the businesses and the training budgets that would be available, particularly in this case for adjusters.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, certainly this bill makes clear that insurers are held responsible for the actions of the adjusters who are their employees. That's quite clear. It also gives the minister or an appeal body the power to call witnesses to give evidence at hearings and appeals under this act. Hopefully, that would never be needed, but it certainly will be there, as I say, if this bill becomes law, and I'm certain that that will eventually take place.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, at this time I shall take my seat and await the opinions or the comments of other hon. members. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 17 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: 14, 15, and 17.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Third Reading**

Bill 14 **Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance that I move third reading of Bill 14.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have one final kick at the cat to speak to this bill. It's tough to vote for a bill that is bringing in legislation after all of the decisions have been made and all of the money has been spent. However, many people in this province are very supportive of the rebate program that the government brought in, so that is a considering factor for us as well. So this is one of those bills where I guess I'm prepared to hold my nose and vote for the bill and support the government.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 14 read a third time]

Bill 15 **Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001**

MR. GRAYDON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 15, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a companion piece to Bill 14 this bill, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, that brings in the flat tax is a little worse piece of legislation than Bill 14, and I have a great deal more trouble supporting this one because I simply do not think that a flat tax is progressive.

MRS. FORSYTH: Hold your nose.

MS CARLSON: I can't hold my nose on this one; I'm sorry. It's not possible.

You get a no vote from me on this one because it isn't progressive in terms of lowering tax rates for people. You already wrecked it once and had to readjust because of changes made in federal legislation. Even though there's a little tiny window that I think is good – that's the exemptions of the tax statutes from the provisions of the Limitations Act and increasing the value of some of the tax credits, although they're minor in nature – Mr. Speaker, so sorry; I can't support this one.

[Motion carried; Bill 15 read a third time]

Bill 17 Insurance Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 17, the Insurance Amendment Act, on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, briefly, Bill 17 at third reading. The main purpose is to amend the new Insurance Act, which is set to take place in September of this year. This is removing the requirement that adjusters who are employees of insurance companies need to be licensed. In its place adjusters working for an insurer no longer need to be certified, but the insurer is held responsible for the actions of adjusters who are their employees.

9:00

As I said a few moments ago, certainly there have been reservations brought to the attention of the Member for Edmonton-Centre by a small business owner in central Edmonton, and there are certainly other cautions that I would like to express about this legislation. With respect to those cautions however – again, I said earlier to all hon. members of this Assembly that it's time that the work of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed is recognized. A strong consumer voice is instrumental for a strong and responsive insurance industry in this province.

Now, recognizing that the new insurance act takes important steps to deal with such issues as tied selling and the perception of lack of disclosure, the Consumers' Association, for one, has noted a number of other issues that are in need of attention: the claims process for credit and travel insurance products, extended warranties, the entire issue of the renewal process, limitations on claims, the respect for the privacy of information, and effective dispute resolution mechanisms. Everyone is hopeful that these consumer issues will be brought to the table as part of the phase 2 review of the Insurance Act.

I would at this time, in third reading, encourage the government

to ensure that the consumer or the public is at the table. With all respect to the Consumers' Association, I deal and I'm sure other hon. members of this Assembly deal on a regular basis – if not, they will in the future – with constituents who are frustrated with the increase in their insurance premiums from one six-month period to another. I'm sure constituents will at some point willingly visit constituency offices and express their frustration in regards to the high cost of insurance.

Now, earlier in this session the hon. Member for St. Albert brought a bill forward, and many members of this Assembly expressed an opinion on that specific legislation. It dealt in a great deal of detail with the insurance industry. But it must be acknowledged that the insurance industry has also taken positive steps to respond to some of the interests of consumers. There has been a production of policy handbooks, for example.

The Consumers' Association makes a number of other useful recommendations: more information on fault charts and their impact on premiums, renewals, and claims; inclusion of information that provides a step-by-step claims process and mechanisms for dispute resolution; insurance companies' interpretation of pre-existing conditions; statistics on claims refusals and justifications for claims refusals; statistics on renewal refusals and the reason why; establishment of an arm's-length board, one-half industry and regulators and one-half representatives from consumer groups, to conduct research on specific issues in the area of insurance.

The consultation process and consumer awareness in my view would be enhanced if all insurance policies and legislation concerning insurance were stated in plain language. There was certainly talk in this Assembly in the past regarding plain language legislation, and sometimes I wonder, as I review and read specific pieces of legislation, if that hasn't been forgotten. I'm sure it hasn't been and it is just myself. But this is an issue that Albertans in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar have expressed an opinion on, regarding this whole issue of plain language, Mr. Speaker. With respect to insurance policies I think consumers would be much more comfortable if policies were stated in plain language.

It has been suggested that the definition of plain language could be or should be extended to include clear, understandable insurance mathematics. I heard a definition of mathematics in this Assembly the other evening, but with insurance mathematics the public would be informed of the effects of various factors on current rates and the effects on future rates. In automobile insurance policies, for example, Mr. Speaker, the policy could state what effect the accumulation of driver demerit points on a driver's licence will have on renewals. That would be, I think, welcome. That, again, would be welcomed by the consumers of this province.

In regards to this legislation, this amendment act hopefully is the last piece in what has been an exhaustive and thorough consultation process dating back I think seven years. If this is the only amendment that is to come forward – and there are certainly indications that tough new insurance laws will be introduced later this year. Now, I hope they are tough.

I said earlier about consumers and how I feel that they are neglected, but this new act, when it comes into force in September, will see a dramatic increase in fines for wayward insurers. Insurance companies and agents will face a maximum fine of \$200,000, and that's a large, large increase from the existing legislation for violating the act. The old fine, I would like to remind hon. members of this Assembly, was \$200.

I'm assured that this new act will add further protection for consumers while offering the insurance industry a blueprint for the future. I certainly hope this is the case, but for the amendments here – and this is why I would express a caution at this time in third

reading, Mr. Speaker. The individuals or the groups that were consulted for Bill 17 were the Consumers' Association of Alberta, the Insurance Bureau of Canada, and the Independent Insurance Brokers Association: three parties. Two years ago with Bill 25, with all respect to the time, the Consumers' Association of Canada was consulted; the Canadian Bankers Association; the Canadian Institute of Actuaries; the Alberta Treasury Branches; the Canadian Independent Adjusters' Association; the Independent Insurance Brokers Association, the Alberta branch; the Insurance Bureau of Canada, the Alberta branch; the Canadian Life & Health Insurance Association; and the Canadian Association of Insurance & Financial Advisors. Now, that's not the entire list, but there was a more extensive consultation process, certainly, than for the amendment.

9:10

That is why I'm cautious about offering my wholehearted support or endorsement at this time for this bill. I'm still waiting to hear back from stakeholders that I have contacted in the insurance industry regarding this bill. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I am going to reserve my support on this legislation at this time. With respect to the work that has been done in the past, which has been significant, it is better to be cautious than sorry. I would be very disappointed to support this legislation at this time and then receive a fax or a phone call in the next couple of days from individuals who were making their living in the insurance industry saying: I wanted to bring this to your attention regarding the Insurance Amendment Act. It's unfortunate that this bill couldn't have been introduced earlier in the session. It would have given all hon. opposition members a chance to have a good, thorough consultation with affected parties in regards to this legislation.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I shall take my seat. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 17 read a third time]

Bill 7

Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure that I move third reading of Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001, on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 7 represents this government's effort at fulfilling its long-standing promise to hold elections for regional health authorities, that I think goes back, in fact, to the very first months of this government's mandate; the promise does. The RHAs were created, if my memory is correct, in 1994. Since that time there has been the hope held out of elections for regional health authorities, and they should be elected.

The principles behind electing the regional health authorities and the principles put forward by the government at the time were principles about democracy, local control, responsiveness to the local variations within the province and the differences between smaller centres, big cities, and rural areas and north and south. But I think beyond all of that, the commitment was to the principle of local control and local democracy.

When Bill 7 was brought forward, we looked at it with some

eagerness, and our initial intention was in fact to support Bill 7. I even went as far as to send a note to the minister on it when I first saw the idea in the press releases. As I studied Bill 7 and gave it even a brief bit of thought, I became increasingly concerned, and I think all the caucus became increasingly concerned that there were real problems in the way the RHA elections were being implemented. I know that I for one have heard directly from constituents expressing concerns. The more we thought about it, the more we listened, the more we read and studied, the more uneasy we became.

Our uneasiness stems from a handful of fundamental points. One of the concerns we have is that the bill provides for only two-thirds of the members of the authorities to be elected. We just feel strongly that a two-thirds commitment to democracy is inadequate. In some ways, in fact, it's better – it may well be better; it's certainly arguable – to have no elections or all elections rather than partial elections. Partial elections confuse the issues of accountability and responsibility. If all the board members are appointed by the minister, then it's clear that the minister is responsible. If all of them are elected, it's clear that the electorate is responsible. But when you have two-thirds who are elected and one-third who are appointed, including the chairman and the vice-chairman – they are appointed by the minister after the election – then it really confuses the lines of accountability and responsibility.

We also are concerned that the appointments are, well, presumably a reflection of a feeling from the minister and the government that they need to keep control as much as they reasonably can over the regional health authorities. They do this at the same time that they use the regional health authorities as a buffer when difficult decisions are being made. At the local level you can point the finger at the regional health authority. Yet in the long term, the regional health authorities are under the control of the minister and substantially will remain so with Bill 7.

This reflects, I think, an increasing centralization of power and authority in the cabinet, a trend that is of real concern not just in the health care system but throughout government. We have seen the power of school boards reduced substantially. They've lost their ability to tax. We've seen that even the appointments of superintendents of school boards are reviewed by the minister before they're approved. We're seeing that kind of centralization of control in the cabinet, and that worries us. When we see that continued through Bill 7, it's very difficult for us to support the bill.

Indeed, the former system before the RHAs were even established had in many ways more success at representing the diversity of Alberta. In those days many municipalities appointed members to local hospital boards. The provincial government appointed members. You would sometimes have church organizations appoint members. You had a diversity of accountability and a diversity of views on the boards at that time, that has been lost now in the last eight or nine years when all appointments have been made by the minister. Now Bill 7 will allow for a substantial increase of diversity, and it's almost got enough there in Bill 7 for us to support it in that regard but not quite enough.

9:20

Some of the remnants of the old system still survive, and it's worth reflecting on those. An example is the Lamont hospital. The Lamont hospital has existed since the early days of the previous century. It was built by the United Church and supported by the United Church. When regionalization was created, the United Church argued successfully that under that RHA the United Church should have its own board for the Lamont hospital, and the government allowed that to remain. One of the values of having that separate voice came out about 15 months ago during the debates on

Bill 11. The Lamont hospital board decided to calculate the cost of cataract surgery in the Lamont hospital. They folded in staff time, utilities and equipment, cleanup and preparation, and so on, and came up with a cost per eye of just over \$200. I don't have the figure right here.

AN HON. MEMBER: Including the surgeon?

DR. TAFT: Not including the surgeon. Surgeon fees are completely separate.

Those were reviewed, and they came up for some public debate. It was felt that maybe if absolutely everything were included, they might get up to \$300 per eye, not including the surgeon's fees. That information was made public by a board that still has a remnant of independence, and I think that contributed to the debate on cataract surgery. I think that we might see more of that sort of thing happen under the elections under Bill 7 even if they're only good for two-thirds of the members. So there is something to be said for Bill 7; it's a partial step forward.

A further concern under Bill 7 is the creation of a separate bureaucracy for the elections. As we understand it, rather than simply leaving the electoral process under the Local Authorities Election Act, it transfers authority for those elections to the Minister of Health and Wellness. It gives him control over creating the wards and control over appointing the electoral officials, and we have some concern that it's an unnecessary duplication of the electoral machinery. It would have been, I think, feasible to simply use the existing municipal election mechanisms to implement the elections for Bill 7. But that's not a fatal flaw for the bill.

I think, however, the next issue has failed to be sorted out in Bill 7 – and I think it is a fatal flaw – and that's the failure of Bill 7 to adequately address the potential for conflicts of interest in the elections. Among the first people to bring this aspect of this bill to my attention were some of my constituents, who raised the alarm over provisions in the bill that allow people to run for and sit on RHA boards who own up to 50 percent of businesses that get income from or contract with the RHAs. So we are faced with a situation in which people who are benefiting substantially from contracts with the regional health authorities may also end up sitting on the boards of those health authorities, and unless I am misunderstanding the situation, that's simply unacceptable.

The Minister of Health and Wellness and I have debated this in question period to some extent. As far as I can tell, the Minister of Health and Wellness doesn't have his facts correct when he says things such as that the same bylaws for conflict of interest that apply to MLAs apply to the RHAs. He said just a couple of days ago, and I quote from *Hansard*: "The regional health authorities do have the same conflict of interest bylaws that apply to MLAs that sit in this Assembly." That's from the afternoon of Monday, May 28. I'm prepared to admit that I'm mistaken if that can be demonstrated to me, but to my knowledge the Conflicts of Interest Act does not apply to members of the regional health authorities. So I am troubled by, shall we say, some of the debate that's occurred in this Assembly.

Let's imagine for a moment that the minister is right, that everything is hunky-dory. Would we want a system that allowed the kinds of situations that are common in the Calgary regional health authority to exist throughout the government? Would we want a system in which the spouse of the Minister of Transportation could also be a major shareholder in a road-building company that contracted with that same department? I think there would be a lot of concern. Would we want a system in which the Minister of Energy was simultaneously a principle shareholder in an electric utility that was getting windfall profits from electricity deregulation?

I think very serious questions would be raised, and I think they would be raised legitimately. I think the government would probably act fairly quickly to end those conflicts of interest.

If we compare what's going on and what will be allowed under Bill 7 to major corporations, we'll find quite a contrast. I've tabled in this Assembly the conflict of interest policies for TransAlta, and they are unequivocal. They are very clear. Real, potential, and perceived conflicts of interest are to be avoided, period. Those policies of TransAlta are consistent with policies at many other major corporations. They are in fact typical.

So I think we have a great potential under Bill 7 for very, very serious problems, and I have to wonder how long the public will tolerate these kinds of situations. The elections that will be occurring in October will be one vehicle through which these issues are given more attention, and I think we will find increasing concern in the public. I think these situations in fact are allowed to continue at the peril of the government in the long term.

Because of our concerns we've fought hard to amend this bill. We were here through the middle of the night the other day presenting and arguing for amendments. We fought hard not only because of Bill 7 and concerns with the health care system but because the concerns that we are seeing in Bill 7 go beyond the health care system. It seems to us that Bill 7 weakens two of the principles that are fundamental to democracy. The first of those is full and open elections to local authorities, not the kind of halfhearted effort at the local autonomy and local elections that this bill provides. As I said earlier, it might well be better and clearer to have no elections to RHAs than the partial ones that will occur under this bill.

The second fundamental principle of democracy that we are concerned about with Bill 7 concerns the commitment to a public service that unequivocally respects fiduciary responsibilities and is never in a situation where that respect may be cast in doubt and the commitment to a public service that is genuinely responsible and accountable for the public interest first and foremost, without question, above the private interest.

So because Bill 7 is a step back for both of these principles, because we feel it inadequately addresses the need for fully elected regional health authorities, we will be voting against it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

9:30

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was listening to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview speak in third reading on Bill 7 just moments ago, I was asking myself what has changed in the bill from the time that it was introduced in the House to today, when we are in the very final stages of completing third reading of it. The answer is: not much.

Many serious flaws in the bill were drawn to the attention of the Assembly very early in the debate in second reading. Several members of this House spoke seriously, eloquently about those flaws, and I did my part. Not seeing any heed paid to those serious comments and analyses and observations is a disappointment.

It has been pointed out again and again that while the Bill takes some halting steps toward restoring democracy at the local level by moving towards electing members of the RHA, it stops short of what was expected, what Albertans expected. That is that every member of every RHA should be an elected member.

We have been down this path over the last seven, eight years. We have had a long enough time to experiment with all kinds of things, and they discovered along the way that that system didn't work. The government acknowledged that much by having to dismiss its

handpicked RHA boards in at least two cases. Yet we find that this reluctant embracing of the democratic principle still allows the government to put democracy on a leash. That's the only way I can describe it. The government seems to be unable to trust . . .

MR. MacDONALD: Is it a short leash?

DR. PANNU: It's a very short leash, a very short leash.

MR. MASON: Two-thirds of the normal length.

DR. PANNU: That's right.

Democracy on a leash is really a vote of no confidence in democracy, Mr. Speaker. So I must put myself on record as opposing that attempt on the part of this government to continue to act as a jealous manager of the business of citizens in the way it has introduced this bill.

It's not right. It does not enjoy the support of my caucus, the New Democrat caucus, and I'm glad to acknowledge that the other opposition party is also opposed to it. Albertans need to know this, and I think that they appreciate that the opposition is doing its job in keeping the government's attention at least drawn to those issues where we think the government is failing in the form of the bills that it brings to the House. It fails in terms of respecting fully the principle of democracy, democratic elections and local autonomy, buttressed by full espousal and embracing of the principle of democratic elections.

The conflict of interest issue has also been spoken to, I think, at some length. I was looking at the eligibility criteria, Mr. Speaker, that will be used. I find that the eligibility criteria do not address the issue of conflict of interest as well as they should have. The eligibility criteria outlined here by the minister will allow many of the people who work in high administrative, management positions for the RHAs, while they at the same time hold major interests or own private surgical facilities which do business with the RHAs, to get elected, while employees, even if they are not leaders or officials of the unions representing them, are being disenfranchised.

So this enfranchisement, empowerment of those who in fact have serious potential for running into a conflict of interest problem with the RHAs is being allowed if they hold shares in a company or derive less than 50 percent of their total income from the RHAs. This set of criteria allows them to be candidates but doesn't allow ordinary employees, even when they hold no official position in their unions, to offer themselves for election unless there are two things. First, they have to seek a leave of absence to run, and secondly, if they get elected, then they will have to step down from their paid position within 30 days or remove, as it's called, the conditions of ineligibility in order to serve on RHAs.

This in effect is a test based on means. Ordinary employees who make \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000 a year working for the RHAs will have to give up their means of living in order to serve on RHAs. This is going back to the hoary days of early democratic experiment, when only people with wealth, people with property had the rights of voting or getting elected, and the rest were barred from that. This harks back to those not very good days of the democratic experiment.

So I'm unhappy that the eligibility criteria will disenfranchise a very large number of Albertans from getting elected to regional health authorities, which in turn will manage one of most important institutions and social programs that Albertans and Canadians give their highest priority to and hold extremely dear to their heart because it serves their interests. To disenfranchise a large number of Albertans from having the opportunity to be able to be elected and to serve on those authorities is a serious flaw in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other points perhaps. The appointment process for one-third of the members: the minister obviously keeps tightly in his control as to who will be appointed, who will be the one-third appointed to each RHA. People who get elected won't know beforehand and the electors won't know until after they have cast their votes who the minister chooses to put on the RHAs in order to perhaps cancel the intentions in many cases of the voters who may choose certain kinds of people to be on the boards. So their effort to elect a certain kind of people will be to some degree neutralized by the minister if the minister chooses to use that power.

Given the record of this government on the issue of health care, including its headlong rush to pass Bill 11 against the very, very powerful opposition to it from ordinary Albertans, gives me no confidence that this power will not be abused by a minister who has the opportunity to exercise it in the name of this government. So the cherry-picking of appointees after the minister knows who the elected members are is another serious problem with this bill.

9:40

This problem is compounded further, of course, by the fact that the minister will also be able to gerrymander the boundaries of RHA regions to suit his and his government's purposes and intentions with respect to who should be elected and who should represent Albertans in each of the RHAs and then have the responsibility for manning and running and making important decisions with respect to the operations of our health care system and its future.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those comments I want to conclude and simply say to you that I and my caucus will not be able to support this bill. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a third time]

Bill 9

Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in third reading of Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001. The legislation we're discussing here tonight is a good example of how we're going to approach challenges in the future. This bill, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001, will streamline award processes and focus resources on innocent victims of crime in Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity at third reading to support Bill 9, the Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001. Third reading is an opportunity to revisit the principles underlying the act, and I think that it's worth looking at those principles at this time and reminding us exactly what the act is based upon.

Of course, the most fundamental principle is that victims should promptly receive financial benefits for injuries that they may have suffered, and that's an important principle. I think that "promptly" is an important part of that principle, and that's in part what the act attempts to address.

Another principle is that victims should be treated with courtesy and compassion, their privacy should be respected, and they should suffer a minimum of inconvenience from their involvement with the criminal justice system as a result of crime. A third principle is that information must be available to victims about their participation in

criminal proceedings and the scheduling process and ultimately what happens to the case.

A fourth principle that . . . [interjection] The Member for Calgary-Montrose is calling question. That's the first thing I've heard him say all session.

Where appropriate the views and concerns of victims should be considered and appropriate assistance provided throughout the criminal process. So the victims have to be supported in a world that for many of them will be new and uncomfortable. That's a good principle, Mr. Speaker.

A further principle is that when the personal interests of victims are affected, the views or concerns of the victims should be brought to the attention of the court. This again is something that in many cases has been lacking in the past. We now have the interests of victims being given more and more weight, and it's a principle that is part of this bill. An important principle, too, is that measures have to be taken to ensure that victims and their families are protected from any sort of intimidation or retaliation. I think for victims it removes a source of fear that they may have.

I guess the last principle and part of the guiding base for this act is that they should be made aware of relevant services, again something that's badly needed for victims, many who will not be acquainted with the kinds of services and support that's available to them.

So it's a good bill. A number of housekeeping concerns have been cleaned up. It allows for the appointment of more board members, and it creates additional panels. The appointment process I think can be questioned, but that's true of many of the government boards. This one is no exception.

So with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to support Bill 9. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Bill 20
Appropriation Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to offer with respect to Bill 20? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm finding that the time available for debate is very short, and I have not received answers back from the Department of Community Development. In reviewing my notes, I had some other questions that I wanted to ask as part of this debate in Committee of the Whole on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2001.

Two areas I wanted to concentrate on. One was under the Community Development budget, the funding available for libraries, and thus under the Appropriations Act. I am looking under Community Development operating expense and capital investment of \$591,160,000, somewhere in there. I note in going back over the department's plans that it does mention under corporate initiatives: "Improve public access to information through a strong public library network and library systems by increasing funding." When I look at the highlights, it says, "Funding to the province's 245 library boards and seven regional library systems to \$14.9 million in recognition of the province's increasing population".

Given the way the budget is set up, in fact one cannot find a breakout that is specific to libraries. The only line item is under the Alberta library network, and that's when it had an injection of funds of \$2.4 million in '99-2000. There's nothing else mentioned in there, so it's rolled up inside of something else. I don't know what. So I appreciate that the amount has increased to \$14.9 million, but I don't know what it was before and can't find that from what's in the documents here. For all I know, this could have increased from \$14.8 million, which would not be a significant increase, considering what's happening with our libraries.

9:50

I am aware that the Alberta Library Trustees met with one of the standing policy committees in the last year to lobby for increased funding. Particularly at that time it was around population-based funding, and they were still being funded at the 1997 population numbers. Being as we're now four years past that, it just wasn't keeping up.

In particular what had sparked this coming to the forefront for a number of different areas was that the Banff public library board had voted to eliminate their user fees. As a result, their usage of the library had increased substantially. It was quite noticeable. Many other libraries were heard to be saying at the same time: yes, we would very much like to do that as well. So seeing as I don't have the answers back, I'd appreciate getting the answers from the Minister of Community Development as to exactly what the breakout is. At this point I'll ask for some specifics as well so that we know what the increase was for each library board.

I think it's important that I spend some time on this. As a province that wants to move into the future in a leadership position, certainly literacy is a primary component of doing that. Access to information in the library is a major pillar that upholds that. One of the basic missions of public libraries is to keep information available, affordable, and accessible to the entire public. I know that librarians have worked very hard and that libraries have worked very hard to provide information through the Internet and computer usage. Every library now has Internet access so that the public can get access to that immense cosmic world of information that is through the Internet.

Also, in my discussions with individual librarians there's a real consciousness in attempting to catalogue and make other kinds of information available by digitalizing and getting that into an electronic form, which can then be carried forward, and people can get access to even more kinds of information. So librarians move from being librarians of the books that are in their stacks and being helpful in a reference way, where you go to them and say: "I'm looking for information on such and such. Where would I find that?" or "Help me." Indeed, librarians can help you focus and narrow down that entire library full of volumes to the three or four that are going to help you.

They're doing the same thing with that cosmic world of information that's available out there in the Internet and again helping people to be able to focus down and sort through what is valuable information for them. I know that there's a philosophical stand that libraries take where they don't want to be charging user fees. They need to be getting enough funding and be valued enough by the government that their service is more accessible to people.

What we're finding is that – well, for example, when you charge for a service, you're suggesting that it's not necessary to all users. I think there's something to that. We do have people that are deprived of library services because they can't afford to pay. I know some would say: "Oh, pshaw. Come on; it's only 10 bucks or 15 bucks or 40 bucks. Anybody can afford that." Well, I suppose in a

different world, but when you're living in a world like we have where everything is 10 bucks or 15 bucks or 40 bucks, eventually you have no more money left. I think library usage is one of those areas that people just can't find the additional money for, and that's a problem, because those are the folks that most need to access the library.

But more than that, we have the numbers to show us that since 1994 the number of registered borrowers has decreased by 16 percent and overall circulation has decreased 4 percent even in Edmonton with the addition of three new branches since 1996, but visits to the library are steadily increasing by an average of 12 percent per year. So fewer people are becoming members and borrowing material, but more people are using the library. I think as a demonstration of our fundamental value for libraries, we need to be giving consistent, stable, predictable funding and not making libraries come to us and beg because they're pegged to an antiquated funding system.

Certainly in the Edmonton system elimination of membership fees will remove a major barrier that's currently limiting access to information for some segments of the population. In the documents I've looked at, the libraries are advocating for the removal of library card fees, and they have to look to the province to make up the \$3 million in lost revenues.

When Banff public library eliminated its membership fee in 2000, it saw membership rise by 40 percent. Forty percent.

MR. MacDONALD: That's a lot of readers.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, yeah. And circulation of library materials reached the highest level ever.

MS CARLSON: And the Minister of Community Development really supported that when he was a Liberal.

MS BLAKEMAN: That's true. The Minister of Community Development really did support that when he was a Liberal. So I'm sure that he will find his way to supporting it now that he's a minister. Certainly the pressure is on from over here.

You know, I keep repeating that it's a fundamental value, but it is, and we need to see the support there, the money where the mouth is. I think it's more than that. It's about a free flow of information to everyone who wants it regardless of income or any other factor. It's, I think, vital to the functioning of a free society.

So we had a per capita rate of \$4.29, which was reduced in 1994 cuts to \$4.03. [interjections] I have other members rooting along with me in this particular discussion, so a number of us feel passionately about it.

MS CARLSON: Would those be government members?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, they are government members.

It really hasn't increased. Population figures on which the per capita grants were based were frozen at 1991 population figures for six years, and they're now based on 1997 figures. That hurts. I mean, in those six years there was a lot of cost cutting, reduction in purchase of new materials, some maintenance that had to be set aside, some programs that weren't able to be expanded based on a population increase. There were a lot of sacrifices that were made to keep the doors open during those years. Then they had an increase bringing them up to '97, and they've been stuck at that '97 rate now for 5 years.

We have to remember that the cost of living for libraries continued to increase even if their grants didn't, which is an issue that I often

bring up in context with funding for the arts groups. They can't go out and buy material to build sets or paint sets or have costumes or mount a visual art display and say: "Well, I'm only being funded," in the case of the arts, "in 1988 dollars, so can I pay in 1988 dollars?" No. They have to be paid in 2001 dollars. It's exactly the same thing with libraries.

Now, this is a specific point brought forward around Edmonton. By not adjusting the per capita grant to yearly changes in population, the provincial government has shortchanged Edmonton Public Library by approximately \$323,000. That doesn't sound like a lot of money. It isn't a lot of money, but it sure makes a difference in a library system. There are over 32,000 Edmontonians for whom no provincial library dollars are made available. That starts to count when in a city the size of Edmonton, if we look at it that way, there are 32,000 people we can't service at all. You can use those figures for anywhere you want to pick out: Calgary, Grande Prairie, Stettler, Camrose, Banff, Vermilion, Lloydminster. Anywhere you want to look, that same thing is going to hold true.

10:00

The funding package currently before the provincial government for their consideration includes a per capita increase from \$4.03 to \$5. Now, it may well be that that's, in fact, what happened, but given the way the government sets up its estimates book, we are able to get less and less information. Things are rolled up so much as to what you see on the page here. Well, I'm assuming the libraries are under this, but it's under Alberta Foundation for the Arts' statement of operations: assisting arts promotion; film development; arts participation; arts support; artist development; collection, preservation, and display of provincial artworks; and administration.

Somewhere in there is libraries, but we don't know where, and we don't know what it was increased from to bring us to the \$14.9 million that was mentioned in the business plan. So I have great concern about that, but more than that, I'm looking for a commitment from the government that I won't have to be standing here every year begging for the money to be increased to libraries. It needs to be reliable, predictable, long-term, sustainable funding for libraries. [interjections] I hope not. I have some colleagues who are more cynical than I. I'm the angel of optimism here. I'm hoping that it's going to happen and that I won't have to keep getting up here and talking about this.

A special note needs to be made about funding for urban libraries. I will state that I am concerned about all libraries in the province, but obviously I'm an Edmonton MLA and use the Edmonton libraries and am most concerned about the libraries in my riding, which includes the central library. There has been a lot of support recently for creating a quality of access for Albertans living in rural areas, but urban libraries need to be able to address their unique demands as well. Mostly what's included in that is both a growing but also a very diverse population, where you have multilanguage, multibackground, multi-economic backgrounds. There's just such a diversity of people that we are trying to address. New branches have to be built, and certainly technology support increases many times over. As I said, the needs of cultural groups need to be addressed. I think there's a need to provide targeted funding to the larger urban centres to maintain a level playing field and to allow public libraries to address the needs of the large urban centres in the provincewide library partnership.

The Alberta public library electronic network: it goes by APLEN. We had put a fair amount of money into that to have a network capability be established that created an electronic model for Albertans to access libraries' resources across the province, and I'm delighted that that was of benefit to libraries outside of what they

would call the main corridor. As of March 31 the initial phase of this project ended, as I noted before. That line item is not turning up in the budget anymore. Ongoing support is needed to maintain this network. There's no point in us having created the money to get it up and then have no funding to maintain it and train the library staff or even pay for the basic Internet connections and continue to purchase the databases and the linkages with universities and colleges. This is an excellent project. We did put money into it to start with. I'd like to make sure that the money is there to sustain it.

We also have the Supernet, that was announced by the government in one of its many one-time-only funding announcements in the last year, whereby they would run high-speed Internet to the outside of every municipal building in every town. A nice idea, but that's bringing it to the outside of the building. Somehow libraries that are already stretched for resources, as I've now talked about for some 18 minutes, are expected to bring the Internet connection into the building, wire it up through the building, and make sure that they have the hardware systems to run this.

I mean, that makes me apoplectic. If I was a library manager in some town, where am I supposed to score the extra money to bring that Internet connection up through the walls? The construction costs alone to just physically get the wires up through the wall and to wherever my computer is – no matter how you cut that, you're into some money. You know, that's not part of what the library was planning to spend, so it's like being given a gift. It's a bit like, "You've won a free trip to Barbados if you can just pay the \$600 insurance fee for it to claim your prize." Well, trying to come up with the \$600 is beyond most people's means, so forget about that trip.

Well, we have exactly the same situation here. We have a wonderful opportunity brought to the outside of the building, but trying to come up with the money to get it into the building and have the hardware and the training for the staff and everything else that's needed I'm sure for some libraries is just simply beyond their means. So we have a great idea that just doesn't have follow-through here. I did ask a question about it, and I was told that no additional funding was going to be made available to any of those municipal buildings, and in particular the libraries, to actually make it usable.

So I have spent all of my time here talking about libraries. Just very quickly one other thing. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, which is an all-party legislative committee, I'm putting forward the notation that the budget for that committee needs to be increased. Now, it is approved by Members' Services, I think, but we're in a situation where we now have 24 ministries to scrutinize, and the government is in session for such a little time – we've been in about six weeks this time and maybe three weeks in the fall – we're looking at seven ministries out of 24. We need to be able to meet outside of session.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am going to stand and support what the hon. member has just said. I am very, very concerned about how we view libraries. I go back to 1993-94 when library funding was cut, and it hasn't been reinstated. Then along the way we're using 1997 census figures. The hon. member talked about the Edmonton situation, but the situation is the same everywhere, particularly in all of those communities that have grown. It concerns me a great deal. Over the last several months I have had a number of librarians, library staff, library trustees from many, many places talk to me.

I think that it is very important that we address this. I hope that it

is something that my colleagues that are responsible, the Minister of Revenue for instance – I hope that it is something that is on the agenda at the Future Summit. We talk about the financial side of things and having the lowest taxes in Canada and the best province for many, many things. We could excel and have the best library system in all of Canada, and it wouldn't take too much to do that, but we have to be committed to it.

10:10

For many, many years I served municipally. On a regular basis a number of groups, of course, come and approach you, and a number of those groups are sports groups. I have nothing against sports groups. I think it's important in communities that we have arenas and swimming pools and soccer fields and baseball and so forth, but it's also important to have a library that's funded, that's accessible to everyone in the community. It's important that these dollars are in today's dollars, not 1993 dollars. The price of a book has gone up 33 and a third percent since 1994.

AN HON. MEMBER: Go to Chapters.

MRS. GORDON: It doesn't matter whether it's Chapters or who it is. The price of a book has gone up. It's costing our libraries more money to access those books, regardless of whether they're involved with the regional library system. It is something that I have expressed often in question period in this Assembly, and I feel very, very strongly that we must take a hard look at this.

I know in the communities that I represent, the community I live in, our library is an important, important part of that community. Not only do we have the function of books. I mean, it is just wonderful that someone can go into a library today and with the technology, if your home library doesn't have that book, they can bring that book in for you, often within two or three days. I can access this library here and drop my book off in Lacombe, Alberta. Now, what better service than that? I don't want to lose that. I think it's taken us a long time to get this to where it's at, and we need to ensure that it stays, if not increases, and that we do have the best library system.

Our library in my hometown has a number of children's programs: not only the library itself and reading and the book end of it but a number of play things and toddler time. As well, they provide a wonderful service to seniors and shut-ins. They have volunteers, Friends of the Library, that will take and give of their own time to ensure that people that are in the hospital have access to books. For people that are in the nursing homes or senior citizens' lodges or those that are just in their own homes from inclement weather or have a cold or the flu, they will deliver books to them. So I think it is very, very important.

My challenge that I put out there: please, please, can this be part of the discussion at the Future Summit? I think we will find this is something that Albertans very much want.

Now, one thing I do have to say too, though I'm no longer involved, is that the community lottery board program in most communities was very, very receptive to helping libraries. In helping libraries, it wasn't helping them with books but often with shelving or other things that were needed in the library. I know that a lot of librarians, when I was involved with the community lottery board program, would write or phone me and thank me for that program because they were able to access dollars for things that were needed.

I hope that I have put the challenge out there. I'm very proud of what has happened in Alberta and for a number of things where we can stand up and say: yes, we are the best in Canada. But I would be very, very proud if I could stand up and say that we have the best

library system in all of Canada and that we are a province that recognizes the necessity for our young people to have access to a well-stocked library that's open and accessible when they can use it. I think it would be marvelous if we could say that we don't want our libraries to charge membership fees, that that service is available to anyone who comes through that door, that they can pick up a book anywhere and it can be dropped off anywhere, and any author or title can be accessed by them very, very quickly.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to address the government's Appropriation Act, Bill 20. I'm just going to go through very, very generally some of the concerns that we have with respect to the expenditures and revenues which the government has requested for this year. I've addressed a little bit already in my previous comments the flat tax, which we have a serious concern with, something which I'm not going to repeat.

We also have very serious reservations about the shifting of revenue sources for the government as a whole. There are a number of things that are occurring or not occurring that are moving around the burden on Albertans, and we have quite a concern about that.

The cut to corporate taxes is something that causes us quite a bit of concern. We do support reduction in the small business tax that the government has brought forward. We think that that's something that's sustainable, that's something that can be afforded, and we think that it's an area where if you do have adequate sources of revenue in other areas, it's appropriate. The results, quite frankly, of cutting taxes for small business on employment and on the business sector itself are much greater in our view if you put your emphasis on small business as opposed to big corporations.

Conversely, Mr. Chairman, we are very much opposed to the drastic reduction in corporate income tax that this government is proposing. I think another member in previous debate stated that it's far too simplistic to equate low corporate income tax with business growth or growth in the economy or employment or any of those factors. If it were the case that low corporate taxes were a guarantee of prosperity and full employment, you wouldn't see such poverty in places like Haiti, as I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview referred to, or many other very, very poor Third World countries that have extremely low corporate tax rates. So it's far too simplistic to believe that simply cutting corporate income tax is what is attracting investment to this province and will continue to do so in the future.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I think it's very, very dangerous, as we get into a more globalized economy, that different jurisdictions are competing with each other to cut taxes for corporations. In fact, I would say that it's quite clear that big transnational corporations are playing off political jurisdictions one against the other in order to drive down their tax rates around the world. They promise many, many things for that, but I think the evidence is far from conclusive that it is necessary in order to ensure prosperity. I liken it, rather, to a form of blackmail. I think that the resulting revenue position of many, many governments is going to result in further cuts to the standard of living of average people, low-income people, and the programs that they depend upon.

We do support the increase in the personal exemption. One of the hon. members on the government side from Grande Prairie made a point about how many, many low-income people are going to cease having to pay income tax, but he connected that with the flat tax. It

has nothing to do with the flat tax at all. They're two separate issues, two separate measures that are both being brought in at the same time. The increase in the personal exemption is entirely responsible for the elimination of the people with very low income from the tax rolls altogether. It has nothing to do with the flat tax. The reduction in the personal exemption simply masks the maldistributive effect of the flat tax on income classes in this province.

10:20

We think it's high time that the government eliminated the royalty tax credit, which I think has cost this province around \$200 million a year. I think it's totally without foundation. I don't know what the policy basis is for it. What does the province get as a result? Certainly it's a tax holiday for corporations, but I'm not sure what the policy benefit is. I would appreciate it if someone opposite would stand up and enlighten me on that point.

We continue, Mr. Chairman, to collect far less for our resources than we ought to, and we collect far less than many other jurisdictions do. The government is very proud of saying and even going down to Washington to say that the oil and gas in the ground in Alberta belongs to the people of Alberta, yet we sell it for a song. We let companies come in and take it out of the ground, make enormous profits out of it, and we don't have enough respect for our own ownership of those resources to insist on a fair price for those resources from the companies that come here, many of them not even from Canada, to extract our oil and gas. I think it's shameful that the government continues to take a fraction of the royalties that it ought to. Just because of the enormous amount and the current price of gas and oil that's being taken out of the ground, the government's revenue picture is very rich. So it may not be readily apparent to people that we could be getting even more, vastly more amounts of revenues from our oil and gas if we insisted on a fair price from the companies.

One of the aspects of this act that I find most troubling is the fact that from gambling revenue we're taking approximately a billion dollars of revenue. If members can just think how much that is and how much is being extracted from people who can ill afford to support government operations and the problems that are being caused by that, I think they will realize that it's an obscene amount of money to be taking from ordinary citizens through gambling. We don't take anywhere near that kind of money from people buying food or housing or other necessities of life, but for something as unnecessary as gambling it's an enormous amount of money. I think it's high time the government began treatment for its addiction to gambling revenue. I would recommend any number of 12-step programs.

We need to begin also dealing with the codependence that the government has created, and that is the community groups. The pushers have convinced them: "Just try a little bit. You'll like it." Now they need more and more and more. So instead of getting revenue from the people who should be providing it, the people that can afford it, they've involved themselves in a very, very addictive style of revenue, getting many community groups hooked on it as well. I think that's been a deliberate policy of the government. They've been very crafty about it, and I think that the whole situation is extremely dysfunctional and needs treatment.

I would like to talk a little bit about some of the things that the government could have done from a financial point of view, starting with health care premiums. I also spoke to that a little bit. My colleague, the leader of our party, addressed the question of health care premiums, which I think is a very contradictory position for the government to continue collecting health care premiums from every family, regardless of their ability to pay, when they're hell bent on

eliminating taxes of every description, of course mostly for the wealthy and the corporations. Their avowed aim is to cut taxes wherever they can. Here is a very, very regressive tax, that stands out like a sore thumb, yet they are blind to this tax.

The other point that I'd like to make, Mr. Chairman, is the question of tuition fees, which in Alberta are among the highest in the land. We have prided ourselves on our education system and our commitment to education, yet student debt has become a very significant barrier to many young people getting an education, particularly those from modest-income backgrounds. So why has the government cut taxes? Why has the government cut all sorts of charges to the citizens as they are awash in oil and gas revenue and awash in gambling revenue? They could afford to do that, but again they've turned a blind eye to the question of tuition fees. I think that it's high time that they acted to bring down tuition fees. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that they should be slashed. They should be returned to the level that they existed at just a few years ago, and that is a very, very much lower level than they're at now. That's for sure, Mr. Chairman.

Since the government is awash in cash at the moment, I have to ask why they haven't worked to extend the medicare system in our province and why they haven't considered bringing in coverage for prescription drugs for Albertans. I think that that would be an excellent program. It's a very, very high cost of health care. Of course, one of the uncompleted or unfulfilled aspects of the medicare system is in fact the drug component. Since medicare was brought into this country, first in Saskatchewan under the NDP government of Tommy Douglas and then adopted by the federal government as a national program, the proportion of drugs as a component of the entire health care cost has grown dramatically. So it's time that we work to evolve medicare and take it to the next stage.

I think a prescription drug plan that is universal would be a very good step in that regard to ensure that we do have universal health care for everyone who needs it. Also, I think we would be able to significantly lower medical costs as a whole, because we would be able to promote the use of generic drugs. There would be bulk buying of drugs and so on. All of those would work to bring down the cost of medication in our health care system. So I see this as also a way of controlling costs in our health care system.

I want to touch briefly on the need for more municipal grants in our province. I've talked a little bit in this Assembly about police grants, the need to support community policing among our police forces, the need for more funding for transportation and particularly a capital program to support LRT extension in both Edmonton and in Calgary.

Going back briefly to police grants, I want to reiterate a point that I also made earlier in the Assembly that an increase in police grants for RCMP for smaller communities is most welcome, but it needs to be matched with a provision of some grants for police in other centres that have their own police service.

10:30

I want to talk a little bit about libraries as well. Both the Member for Edmonton-Centre and the Member for Lacombe-Stettler have spoken eloquently about that, and I also would like to join my voice with theirs. I served for a number of years on the library board here in the public library system in Edmonton, and I can tell you firsthand what a fabulous job they do with very, very limited resources. In Edmonton, for example, we have the highest utilization rate of any place in Canada, and at the same time we have virtually the lowest per capita funding of any library in Canada.

Edmontonians and Albertans use their libraries and use them very, very extensively. The fact that we've been able to maintain virtually

a free borrowing policy and good quality in the collections and so on is due more to the hard work of our librarians, our public library boards, and municipalities that have compensated for reductions in provincial funding. I think this is something that the government ought to pay attention to.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I can assure them that support for libraries runs right across the economic spectrum in our society. It runs right across the political spectrum. It's not just Socialists or Liberals that read books and visit the libraries. I can assure members opposite that Tories do it just as much and benefit just as much. In fact, there is actually a book here in the House, so we have literacy in the House, and I'm very pleased to see that. I would like to support my two hon. colleagues in their call for more funding for libraries.

It's hard for us in our party sometimes to dig through the government budget and say that you should cut here or you should cut there and so on, but we do have some comments about waste in government. One of the things that is of great concern is the multiplication of government departments. This flies in the face of all of the rhetoric and campaigns of previous Conservative regimes about streamlining, simplifying government, reducing the number of departments, and so on. Now we have four new departments that weren't necessary one year ago, but now all of a sudden they are necessary. We've addressed during the debate on the estimates specific costs of duplication in terms of ministers' salaries, deputy ministers' salaries, assistant deputy ministers' salaries, and so on. We think that there are significant costs that are completely unnecessary.

Mr. Chairman, I want to qualify that. We certainly are supportive of the establishment of the Ministry of Seniors, and we think that that's a progressive step. Hopefully the government will again begin to address the needs of seniors, many of whose programs were dramatically slashed in the early and mid-1990s. I look forward to some good things from that department.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we think that the government's revenue sources are distorted and not placing the burden of government expenditures on those who can most afford to pay, taking advantage of the weak in our society, to a degree, through their dependence on gambling. They have not eliminated many of the costs to Albertans that would benefit everybody, particularly the low- and middle-income people, such as health care premiums, tuition, and so on. There are many areas of government expenditure that are still too low, and there are areas where the government is wasting money on unnecessary governing. We think that those things ought to be corrected.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will now take my seat. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My biggest comments relating to Bill 20 have to do with the long-term sustainability of the fiscal situation of the Alberta government and indeed the wealth of Albertans. I'm concerned that we need to be paying attention to benefiting all Albertans, not just all Albertans today but all Albertans into the future.

MS BLAKEMAN: You mean an Alberta advantage for all, not just the privileged few?

DR. TAFT: An Alberta advantage for all. And not just for all today but for, as I say, future generations.

I think that if we're to do that, the future has to be approached with an eye to the lessons of the past, especially the lessons of the past 30 years, which I think certainly mark the period in which the current party has been ruling. They also mark the time in which petroleum prices have jumped to unprecedented levels. We're all aware that Alberta has the most volatile economy in North America. We go through big booms, then we seem to go through rather dramatic busts, and then we're back into booms again. We've come to adapt to that, we live with that, and we can cope, but we do pay a heavy price for that. I think we need to work towards stability over the long term.

Alberta's is a petroleum-driven economy. The biggest thing by far that differentiates Alberta's economy from, let's say, Manitoba's is our petroleum. I think if we are to maintain the kind of advantage and benefits we have over other provinces, we have to become better stewards of our wealth than we have been in the past.

We can illustrate the kind of wealth we enjoy here by looking at a few numbers and comparing what happens in Alberta with what happens in other provinces. The government of Alberta receives in natural resource revenues about twice the amount that all other Canadian provinces receive combined. I think that's worth repeating for all of those who are listening to me. The government of Alberta receives in natural resource revenues about twice the amount that all other Canadian provinces combined receive. We have a level of wealth flowing through our treasury that is unparalleled in the rest of the country, and that wealth flows not from our own cleverness or our own factories or our own education, but it flows from the fact that we stand on huge petroleum reserves.

Now, when I went through and looked at the budget, the single most striking figure in all of that was the revenue figure for conventional oil, which was budgeted at \$881 million for this year. The actual the year before was \$1.4 billion, and I imagine the actual this year will be a bit higher than what has been budgeted. But \$881 million, while it's a lot of money, is probably a 75 to 80 percent drop in the revenue provided by conventional oil income 15 years ago in Alberta. In other words, although oil prices are good today, we are earning only a small fraction of what we once earned, because conventional oil production has dropped so dramatically. Our conventional oil reserves are well under 50 percent of what they were at their peak, and our conventional oil production has also dropped dramatically.

The oil age is over in Alberta, and the current boom is being driven largely by natural gas. The pattern is being repeated with natural gas that we experienced with conventional oil. Natural gas reserves are dropping in Alberta. The size of gas reserves found in Alberta in the past 15 years is less than one-quarter the size of pre-1980 discoveries. So just as we went through a 20-year boom and then declined in our conventional oil reserves, let's say from the 1970s to the 1990s, we are going through the same process with natural gas now.

10:40

Now, admittedly, heavy oil reserves are immense, but they do not provide the royalties that conventional petroleum does. We also have to remember the lessons of other Alberta towns and areas, the lessons of places like Drumheller and Nordegg and the Crowsnest. In many cases all those areas were boomtowns driven by coal at one time. Coal production from the 1920s until the 1950s was tremendous. I believe that in 1950 there were well over a hundred active coal mines in the Red Deer River Valley and the Drumheller area, yet a mere 10 years later 90 percent of those mines were closed, not because the coal was gone but because technology had made those coal mines obsolete. The railroads had replaced steam engines with

petroleum-driven engines, and the demand for coal simply vanished.

Certainly there are technologies under development today that are aimed specifically at making oil and gas obsolete, and in 10 or 20 or 30 years those technologies will probably come to fruition. It won't matter that we have hundreds of billions of barrels of oil in the oil sands, because people simply won't want it.

So I am looking in Bill 20 and in the budgets of today and the future from this government for an emphasis on sustainability. This has implications for things such as the heritage trust fund. The heritage trust fund, I think, needs to be attended to. It needs to be grown. We need to be looking at ways of increasing the income to the heritage trust fund or some similar vehicle so that when petroleum revenues decline, as they inevitably will, we have something to fall back on.

This also has implications for our tax policies. I am concerned that the fad of rushing toward the lowest level of taxes that are possible in the short term in Alberta will cost us very seriously in the long term. Those kinds of fads are simply not sustainable. We do need to face up to the fact that in a modern civilized society taxes are a price we pay. Whether we want schools or health care or roads or safe food or social justice, we need to pay taxes. I think we need to face up to that and accept that as a fact of life and not get caught up in the rush towards the lowest possible taxes, or in the long run we will also have the lowest possible quality of life for the most number of Albertans.

Other implications of the swings in Alberta have to do with the direct delivery of public services here. The swings that we've seen in health care funding, education funding, municipality funding, funding for roads and infrastructure, where during the boom times we pour money into those areas and during the slower times we pull money out, those patterns cause great disruptions. We find that we are laying off thousands of people and then struggling just a few years later to rehire them. We are closing facilities or even destroying them and then moving just a few years later to replace them. We are letting the infrastructure, both human and physical, run down and deteriorate, and then we are faced with higher costs than ever to bring it back up to standards.

So we need a long-term fiscal approach in this province led by this government that works toward stability and sustainability. Increasing government spending dramatically when the economy is hot and then cutting back on government spending when the economy has stalled is the opposite of good economic policy. We should be looking at ways to invest while the economy is slow and to dampen the booms when they are occurring. So one of the big general themes I'm concerned about with Bill 20 is the need for a sustainable and stable fiscal policy.

A second area and the only other area I will comment on this evening has to do with health care spending. Health care spending does consume a substantial portion of the provincial budget, and certainly there are indications that health care spending is rising. If it continues to rise in the way it has in this year, it's not going to be sustainable, but I don't think we need to be bankrupting ourselves to have an outstanding health care system that meets the needs of all Albertans.

I think some of the ideas that could keep the health care system sustainable are already floating about, are well regarded, well developed, and have been mentioned by some of my colleagues on this side of the Assembly. One of those is a pharmacare program. A public pharmacare program would counteract the wildly soaring costs of drugs in Canada. In fact, it's an indicator of how market forces fail in health care that one of the areas where market forces dominate and things have been left to the private-sector, pharmaceuticals, is where costs are rising most dramatically, yet

there is experience from other jurisdictions that a public pharmacare program can provide equal or better service while containing costs and in fact lowering costs. So I would encourage this government to look very seriously at a public pharmacare program.

The same thing applies to home care. When they are ill or as elderly Albertans become frail, most Albertans would much prefer to stay in their homes. We can look at developing a public home care program, funded, administered, staffed, and operated publicly, that becomes the backbone of our health care system in the same way that institutions have traditionally been the backbone of that health care system. By shifting resources more and more to home care and keeping institutional costs contained, I think we can go a long way to preserving the functioning of our medicare system and a long way to stabilizing the historically unstable patterns of public spending in Alberta.

We must also keep medicare public, and that includes the provision of many more active treatment services such as surgeries. As we move, as I'm afraid we are moving, towards private, for-profit delivery of these services, we are bringing into the system forces that will press costs up. We are seeing that played out once again in the United States, which has the largest private-sector health care system in the world. A recent article in the *New York Times* talks about the unprecedented surge in the last year in health care costs in the United States that's being driven by for-profit corporations trying to compensate for lower profit margins in other areas of the economy and trying to compete with returns on high-tech or high-profit investments in other areas of the economy.

Frankly, what's occurring in many parts of the United States now is the rise of private, for-profit monopolies in health care, and these monopolies are able to dictate to insurers and health care providers what prices will be paid. We must not go in that direction. We must keep medicare public in Alberta. Bringing private, for-profit corporations into the health care system, as I said, will simply increase the forces that drive up our costs.

As I review Bill 20 and as I look forward to future versions of Bill 20 and future budgets, I'm looking to a government that is intent on building a base for permanent prosperity in Alberta. I'm not convinced yet that we're at that point. I hope we get there soon.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a couple of comments that I didn't have an opportunity to ask the Minister of Environment about earlier, and I would like him to address these questions at some point in the near future.

Specifically what I want to ask him about, Mr. Chairman, in terms of planning for the next year and the years to come on electricity policy from the environmental side are ideas that came out of the Pembina institute paper A Smart Electricity Policy for Alberta. Could the minister tell us what he plans to do in terms of their policy proposal that talks about establishing and funding a new, nonprofit Alberta energy efficiency office that would help overcome various energy inefficiencies?

They could act as a central co-ordinating body for energy efficiency with an emphasis on education, information, and co-

ordination of zero-interest energy efficiency loans to consumers, targeted efficiency rebates, and the development of technical standards. The principal objective of this would be to work with retail electricity companies to help them implement their energy efficiency portfolio standards, and existing electrical retailers could be the main facilitative and delivery agents for this. If he could comment on that, I would appreciate it.

Also, their other policy proposal of establishing an Alberta energy efficiency revolving fund. This fund, which could be created through a onetime Alberta government contribution of \$100 million, would act as an endowment for energy efficiency for the province. The primary function would be to provide zero-interest loans to end-use consumers to implement energy efficiency measures, and these loans could be co-ordinated by the energy efficiency office. The fund would be replenished through loan payments.

One of the most significant barriers to cost-efficient, effective energy efficiency in Alberta is the lack of access to capital to implement appropriate measures. We think that this would be a really good idea. They could look to the city of Toronto, which has had something similar to this happen.

So if the Minister of Energy could answer those questions for me, Mr. Chairman, then I conclude my remarks on this bill.

[The clauses of Bill 20 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 20.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 10:56 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, May 31, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/05/31

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and honour to present this Assembly with a petition signed by some 1,800 constituents from Edmonton-Castle Downs and surrounding area petitioning this government to build a high school and/or high schools in Edmonton-Castle Downs or surrounding area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: May I have my petition read at this time, Mr. Speaker?

THE CLERK ASSISTANT:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to include the following question in the forthcoming provincial election: are you in favour of the Alberta Government using your tax dollars to pay for abortions?

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill 212

Matrimonial Property Amendment Act, 2001

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I request leave to introduce a bill being the Matrimonial Property Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, this act would amend the Matrimonial Property Act to ensure that the surviving spouse of a marriage terminated by death should have equivalent rights on the division of matrimonial property to a spouse in a marriage terminated by divorce.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to correct a statement I made in question period yesterday when asked about a Mr. Ralph Canham out of Calgary. I had indicated that I did not know the person. On checking of our records, we find, as a matter

of fact, that on February 20 of this year I had written to Mr. Canham regarding his situation with the Workers' Compensation Board, and I'd like to file the appropriate number of copies of that letter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of three letters which are being sent to my colleagues across the way with respect to my responses to their excellent questions that surfaced during Alberta Community Development's Committee of Supply debate a couple of weeks ago. The first is to the leader of the third official party, the second is to the Member for Edmonton-Centre, and the third is to the Member for Edmonton-Glengarry. This comprises 29 pages of answers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great pride on a beautiful Alberta day to table information about routine questions that have been asked of me in this House regarding electricity prices and certain jurisdictions that are certainly charging more than Alberta. It's a delight for me to present these to the House, and I have five copies.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to be able to table five copies of the annual reports from the Regulatory Review Secretariat. These are for the year 1999 as well as the year 2000, up until March 15.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd table five copies of proposed amendments to Bill 16, the School Amendment Act, 2001, put forward by the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. This puts on the public record their amendments, as was done with the amendments for the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association during debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Mr. Carson Trueman of Drayton Valley. He's concerned that there is too much development happening in the Bighorn wildland park and that this area should be protected and preserved.

The second tabling I have today is a copy of a petition signed by more than 1,000 people from throughout the province. The original went to the Minister of Environment. We're expecting him to table it. It petitions "to stop the transfer of the Kananaskis, Ghost/Waiparous and Burnt Timber Forests to an FMA."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter written by the Alberta Wilderness Association to the Minister of Environment requesting him to stop any further negotiations on the forest management agreement that's relative to the Kananaskis region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of a proposal for a prefeasibility study of the Meridian water management project in southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan. This UMA Engineering Ltd. proposal is dated June 1997.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to table with the Assembly today copies of the 14th Annual Mayor's Luncheon for Business & the Arts saluting all the excellent artwork that is done in Edmonton and area as co-ordinated by the Professional Arts Coalition of Edmonton Society.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker and Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very special individuals who are seated in your gallery. Visiting today from Winchester, England, are Brian and Delphine Wilson. I'm very proud to have had a long personal association with Brian and Delphine, and it may interest you to know that Brian served as my best man some 40 years ago when I married my bride. It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to host them during their first visit to Alberta in 40 years. I would ask Brian and Delphine Wilson to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a rare day in the Assembly today, and it's a real pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some folks from the fine community of Glenwood. It's always a pleasure to introduce folks that have come such a long way. These folks are from the home of the first irrigation system in Alberta and the famous Glenwood cheese. Representing the Glenwood school we have 11 students as well as four adults, Mr and Mrs. Doug and Vicki Smith and Mr. and Mrs. Kevin and Debra Johnson. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 28 bright and energetic students from the Parkdale elementary school in Wetaskiwin. They're visiting the Legislature here this morning and this afternoon. They're accompanied by teacher Mr. Richard Svreck and parents Leslie Cameron, Dorothy Tost, and Mike Waller. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is a great honour for me to introduce some students that come from a long way. In fact, they've been traveling seven and a half hours to get

here. That's only a third of the way of my constituency. They are from Cadotte Lake. They're joined by their teachers Sonya Clarke, Trudy Chambers, and Kelly Fuller as well as parent helpers Edna Auger, Mike Boucher, Stacy Laboucan, Marilyn Bates, George Merrier, Connie Sawan, Bella Cardinal, and Georgina Whitehead. Cadotte Lake is really a long way from here, and I'm so proud that they've made it here. I'd like to have all my colleagues welcome them, please.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two very special ladies. I actually lived with these ladies for about 18 years, and that's before I was married. The reason is because they are my sisters. I would ask Chris Leinweber and Robin Howley to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: How do you follow that one?

MR. DUNFORD: Follow that one, they say.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a real pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a very distinguished Lethbridge resident. I'm referring to Bill Cade. He is the president of the University of Lethbridge. I'd like to share this introduction with my colleague from Lethbridge-East. Dr. Cade actually lives in the constituency of Lethbridge-East but, of course, spends his working day – and believe me, it's a long working day that he puts in for us – at the University of Lethbridge, which is in my constituency, so I'll be the one that'll welcome him today. He's a fine, fine addition to our community, and we really have learned to respect him and just love the job that he's doing. So I would ask Bill Cade to rise, and let's extend a warm welcome to him.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see another person in the members' gallery that I should take the opportunity to introduce while we are here today, and he's visiting the Legislature for his first time. He's from the breathtaking community of the Crowsnest Pass. He works for the land and forest service and keeps that Blairmore office humming. I'd like to introduce Darryl Johnson from the Crowsnest Pass. Darryl, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This beautiful Alberta day is about to get more beautiful. A rare thing has happened. I have some friends from Edmonton-McClung visiting me here today. [interjections] Oh, yes. I have a few of them. There are a few.

Mr. Speaker, it's an absolute delight for me to introduce through you and to the House a group of students visiting us, 17 of the best and brightest Edmonton-McClung has to offer. They're here with their teachers Ms Marjorie Helder and Ms Mary Jane Helder. They're from Parkland Immanuel school. I'd like to thank them for

visiting and showing that I do have some friends. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Supports for Independence Review

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the start of this session I committed to using our time in this Legislature to deal with issues raised by Albertans. While we've lived up to that commitment to ask the questions, the government has left many questions unanswered. In the spirit of serving Albertans, I want to give the government a second chance to answer some of the questions that were an integral part of this process. My questions first are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Does the minister have any information on the timing and scope of his department's review of the SFI rates?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It provides me an opportunity to perhaps update, then, the hon. member but also the rest of the hon. members here today. We have put a committee together, and I'm proud to announce that the chair of that committee will be our good friend from Edmonton-Castle Downs, and he'll work with four other hon. members from the government side. We plan to be making the announcement within the next few days. We are just currently trying to get the final draft on a discussion paper that would be circulated. So, again, thank you for the question, and the SFI review should be under way early in June.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister commit to allowing the public to participate in this review, given that an internal review would only be attended by administrators and social workers bound by the current legislation?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, I can make that assurance. Certainly the chair of the committee will have a great deal of responsibility as to how the review is to be undertaken. I have asked them to make sure that we have input from community agencies and that he, in fact, along with his committee make sure they travel out from under the dome and make sure that they offer the opportunity, then, for Albertans to make representation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will this include recipients of SFI in the reviews that take place? After all, the Premier on April 26 said, "I'd be surprised if they weren't part of the review." Are they on the committee?

MR. DUNFORD: Not on the committee, but certainly there'll be an opportunity for them to provide input, I'm sure, because as the hon. member has pointed out, when my boss expresses an interest in something, I'm as excited as can be to make sure it happens.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Sustainable Management of Livestock Industry

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next set of questions is to the minister of agriculture. Will we soon have provincewide environmental standards consistent with the Klapstein report?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think all hon. members are aware that there has been an intensive amount of work done in this area and very important work. First was a study that was presented to the minister of agriculture last year, which talked about and recommended regulations and codes of practice which have already been put into place. Codes of practice, I believe, were sent out last fall.

The second part of this whole process is an important part, and that's the part we're reviewing right now. The study that deals with process has been presented to the minister. I've made a commitment to the industry that we would review that study very carefully, take it through the necessary steps that we have to ensure it has a good vetting, and at the conclusion of that release the study with the government's recommendations. Both the Premier and I have said publicly that we expect that that process will be concluded and the report and the government's recommendation to that report will be made public in June.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up, to the same minister: will this recommendation provide municipalities with an enhanced authority to control their land use planning if they give up part of the environmental control that they lose when we go to provincewide standards?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is clever in his question because, of course, in answering that question, I would have to state what the government's recommendations are in that area. I recognize that the hon. member has asked the question because of a genuine interest in this subject. I will only say this. The committee, which is comprised of five individuals, three from the Legislature and two from outside the Legislature, has reviewed this extensively. They held six public meetings across the province. They had input I believe from over 104 presentations made to that committee. Municipalities participated and talked about their role. The difficulty in concluding this discussion is that there is a role for policing, for appeals, for land use, and it will take a little bit more time to conclude our review of this and then make the municipalities and all interested Albertans aware of what that process and final decision will be.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can you tell us: will there be legislation this fall to put into law the recommendations of the report released in June?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, what I can tell the hon. member is that as we conclude the process and make recommendations, if there are legislative changes required to carry out the recommendations that this government will provide, then it will be done as expeditiously as possible, which could be this fall.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Underground Tank Remediation

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have asked several questions this session that have not been answered. To the minister of Municipal Affairs: will the minister make public a copy of the proposal and program designed for tank remediation that was submitted by the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, this question, of course, has been asked, and I want to say and to assure all Albertans: we have a program unlike any other program in Canada in dealing with tank remediation. Eighty million dollars have been committed by this government, and I suggest that the hon. member recognize the good work that is taking place in that remediation process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize the great work that you've done for this program, but will the minister please share the proposal and the program designed for tank remediation that was submitted by the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to say that approximately 357 municipal and retail sites were eligible for the assessments. Of that, 155 are in that remediation process as we speak. Ladies and gentlemen and members of this Assembly, there is good work being done on this remediation program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: where is the information on underground tank remediation that on May 9 you said that you would deliver to this House?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the member should fully elaborate on what was said in this House. What was said in this House was that the work that is being done – we have worked with many stakeholder groups. We have worked with the AUMA. We have worked with the AAMD and C. We have worked with Albertans from every corner of this province, and we're going to continue to do exactly that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Sex Education Curriculum

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week parents of some Calgary public high school students expressed deep concern about the fact that the Calgary Pregnancy Care Centre, a fundamentalist antiabortion group, is now allowed to go into classrooms to lecture students about sex education. According to the Calgary regional health authority, this group so bungled parts of Alberta's sexual education curriculum that the lessons had to be retaught. My questions are to the Deputy Premier. What criteria does the government require an outside group to meet before it can go into a school to teach a part of the official curriculum?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, on the specific curriculum that the hon. member is referring to, it is my understanding – and I

will ensure that this is correct – that it is the individual school jurisdictions that make the decision as to who or how or if that course is taught in their jurisdiction and in their school.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary: why isn't the government taking a more direct hand in ensuring that whoever teaches the subject matter covers a full range of choices?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this government perhaps has somewhat a different attitude to some of these things than some other parties. We believe that locally elected school board members have a role in their jurisdiction of their schools. We believe that parents have jurisdiction and have the opportunity for choice, and as I understand it, the way this program works now, a parent has the right or a student has the right to opt out of this course, if that's their desire, or participate. But again – I repeat – we elect school board members locally. The parents of the students, the taxpayers, elect these people to make good decisions. If there is a concern, that would be the first appropriate body to take that concern to. If they feel their concerns have not been addressed, I am sure that the Minister of Learning would want to hear from them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the Deputy Premier: will the government at least commit to taking another look at the policies of school boards to ensure that the Alberta sex education curriculum is being taught only by those organizations that describe a full range of choices and are directly accountable to elected school boards?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I have to reiterate that we do believe there are responsibilities for these types of courses locally. We do believe in and have a great deal of respect for the people that are elected to represent their school jurisdictions and, therefore, the students in those schools. I must say that we believe that when it's an option, the parents should have a voice, and the student has the option to opt out. So if there is a concern with the course material, the appropriate place to discuss this is with the locally elected school board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address these questions to the Minister of Revenue. During the past few years, before he was the minister, I had many discussions with him about tax reductions and similar paybacks to the citizens of this province once the debt is paid off. Now that he has the authority to do something about it, I wonder if the minister would advise us what is being planned for postdebt rewards to Alberta citizens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Peace River. One of the greatest rewards that we could ever contemplate in this province is that there will be no more debt. We will no longer have interest payments coming up to \$1.75 billion annually at its peak. We will no longer have principal payments that

accumulated as much as \$23 billion. But because of the leadership of our Premier and this government, we're the only jurisdiction in this country that can actually plan for a debt-free future. Albertans have said in the It's Your Money questionnaire that their priorities are to continue to see, once there are surplus revenues, that that money be returned to them, be it in tax reductions, in tax rebates, or maybe save some of that money. Furthermore, we will consult, as announced, with all Albertans, and they'll have that opportunity this fall in the Future Summit.

MR. FRIEDEL: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is there any initiative in place to encourage people to continue on in an attitude of frugal, responsible government rather than a spend-it-all attitude once the debt is paid off?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's critical that we don't forget the lessons of the past, that we don't get back into the era of high government spending and high government taxation. It is precisely that that led to the problems in the first place. We have fallen behind other jurisdictions. We must have the vigilance. One of the things is that the Ministry of Revenue, in taking over the revenue framework, has to see that there's a balance to bring commitment and priorities of the government to reduce taxation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Specifically on the issue of reduced taxes, I wonder if the minister is sufficiently committed to the idea of reduced taxes, that one day his title might be changed from Minister of Revenue to minister of significantly reduced revenue?

MR. MELCHIN: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The work is not yet complete.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:00

Electricity Pricing

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On three occasions now our new Minister of Economic Development has failed to provide answers to questions regarding a report from the chief economist of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters on electricity prices. The documentation he tabled today refers to residential rates, and we asked about small industrial rates. This is a very sad performance. Will the minister tell us and all Albertans why Nova Scotia business rates are 8.35 cents a kilowatt-hour, New Brunswick rates are 9.35 cents a kilowatt-hour on the first 5,000 and then reduce to 5.87 cents a kilowatt-hour, when small businesses in Alberta have to pay 11 cents a kilowatt-hour?

MR. NORRIS: Well, you know, since I've entered this new realm, I've been called many things including a rookie, weak link, cuddly, a bear, an upstart, particularly unspectacular, and now I'm being called a failure. That's only in two months. What do I get in the next four years? I would ask the hon. members opposite to respect the people of Edmonton-McClung who chose me over someone else, and please, Mr. Speaker, I'd ask them to stop calling me names.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this report that I

talked about in my preamble comes from the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, presumably an organization he will be very interested in, has the minister read the report or reviewed it or even looked at the cover yet?

MR. NORRIS: In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, I have. In my logics class at university there's a series of understandings that one must undertake to get to a conclusion, and when you draw a premise from a hypothetical question, there is no possible conclusion that can be accurate. This is a conclusion that's reached by an organization that we respect, but we may not agree with their findings.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, could this same minister then tell us specifically what he is going to do to address that report, and will he support further government intervention in the electricity marketplace to leverage the development of vigorous competition in electrical retailing? If he doesn't understand that, we can certainly talk about it.

MR. NORRIS: Well, once again on this beautiful Alberta day, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to say that electricity is one small part of the Alberta advantage. Let me take a moment to explain the other parts of the Alberta advantage.

In the year 2000 net international migration to Alberta was 8,170, up from 6,417 the previous year. Our interprovincial net migration to Alberta was 21,000. This is up 13,000 from the previous year, Mr. Speaker. And in the first quarter of 2001, new businesses, who are affected by electricity prices and have chosen to come to Alberta, are up by 542, or 11 percent. The evidence is overwhelming. Electricity is certainly a concern and we're building more supply, but Alberta continues to be the envy of the free world.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Crop Insurance Review

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The widespread drought conditions that exist throughout many parts of this province have caused great concern amongst rural residents . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member has the floor.

MR. MARZ: Thank you. This is on a more serious note, so I would appreciate the attention of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the widespread drought conditions that exist throughout many parts of this province have caused great concern amongst rural residents because of the economic impact not only on farmers but also on rural businesses. Farmers are particularly concerned with the current crop insurance program, which they feel is inadequate to meet the current crisis out there. My questions today are to the Deputy Premier and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Could the minister provide an update on the current crop insurance review which has been ongoing for some time?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, just a bit of background. The committee, which was led by a gentleman named Charlie Mayer, undertook an extensive consultation process over the last year and gathered input from all aspects, actually, to put together a report with recommendations which he presented to the minister

last fall. Some of those initial recommendations were implemented: changes to the index calculation, creation of insurance for different crops, reintroduction of harvesting allowance, and the introduction of a pilot program for pasture insurance.

Mr. Speaker, there were other areas that the committee felt needed further review, and that review has been ongoing over this past winter. In fact, the final report from that committee was just given to me very recently. I can tell the hon. member that we are now evaluating that report and determining the feasibility of those recommendations. With the recommendations that can be acted on, it would be our intention to try to include those in the crop insurance program for the next year. But I remind the hon. member that crop insurance is a tripartite program. It is a shared agreement between the producers, the provincial government, and the federal government, so we need to have those discussions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister assure us that pastureland will be included in any future crop insurance program?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we've had some discussions on the pasture insurance program in the past in this House. I believe I indicated to members at that time that we have a pilot program that is utilizing some new technology. The reason that it's a pilot project is that with the difficulties we had with the old program in the need for clipping, for measuring, for weighing, for measuring rainfall, and all of those things, we're hoping this new technology will eliminate the need for all of those. We would like to ensure that this program will work before we include it. But I will say to the hon. member that we will evaluate our information from the program this year, and if it shows and clearly demonstrates that it can be a program that will assist producers, is responsive to producers' needs, we'll make every effort to include it in the next year's crop insurance program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the hon. minister for that response. My last question to the same minister: when will the new crop insurance program come into effect?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the process for this is that any changes that we envision to the program must be negotiated over the next months. Those negotiations pretty much have to be included this fall or very, very early winter as, if there are changes to the program, new application forms have to be made available, new staff training for the new aspects of the program has to be carried out. Of course, we request producers to apply no later than April 10 for crop insurance and for pasture insurance. In fact, the date in the past has been earlier. So it will be our intention to have that concluded this fall.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like my colleagues I, too, will take this time to ask questions that were not clearly answered before. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. On April 11 the minister promised to resolve within four weeks the 32 cases of Albertans charged for private MRIs brought to him late last

summer. Six weeks have passed. When will these cases be resolved?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can say that all 32 cases and, in addition to that, a number of other cases have been brought forward to my attention, and each of those individuals has been contacted and was asked to fill out the requisite information and the appropriate releases of information from their files. All 32 cases have individuals who have been given that information, including a number of others. Some of them have not yet been returned, but all 32 cases have been dealt with appropriately and the individuals contacted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:10

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the repeated delays in this investigation and given that ordinary Albertans are out of pocket hundreds of dollars each since last summer because of government policy, why won't the minister commit to paying interest to Albertans who qualify for a refund?

MR. MAR: Well, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, he believes in second chances. I believe in second chances too, so I'll provide the same answer that I did before, Mr. Speaker. That is that policy changes occur from time to time. The amount of interest on this would be fairly minimal, but it has taken some time to go through the particular issue of our policy on MRIs. It has been a very challenging issue.

I have said in this House that I have been sorry that it has taken so long. However, Mr. Speaker, like an onion, in peeling back the layers of the onion there was a great deal more to it than it would superficially suggest. So it has taken a while to get through the completion of this issue, but I have assured this Assembly and the hon. member that all appropriate actions have been taken in a reasonably speedy manner, and the individuals have been contacted and we are proceeding with the process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain whether this investigation may set a policy precedent leading to refunds on other medically necessary services for which patients were charged, such as cataract surgery?

MR. MAR: No suggestion to that effect has been made, Mr. Speaker, at all.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Service Dogs

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are all familiar with seeing-eye dogs that accompany those who are blind. These dogs, due to the essential service that they provide for the blind or visually impaired, are recognized and permitted in restaurants, public institutions, on buses, and in other places where ordinarily dogs are not permitted. There are many other people who are chronically ill or disabled who also benefit from the assistance of highly trained service dogs. My question is for the Minister of Community Development. Will the government introduce legislation that recognizes the importance of all service dogs to allow them to have the same access to public places as seeing-eye guide dogs now have?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's an excellent question from the member, and I should say that protection is already in place. It's enshrined in the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, wherein it states that individuals with a physical disability who have a reliance on an assistive animal cannot be prevented from receiving public services or entry into public facilities.

MRS. JABLONSKI: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how soon can people with service dogs expect to be able to take them out to public places without being refused entry?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Section 3 of the act that I just cited certainly elaborates on what the exact protection is that would prevent the denial of services which are normally available to the public or which would prevent access to facilities that are available to the public. That is in section 3, as I recall. There is also a further description, Mr. Speaker, of what is meant by a physical disability, and that includes reliance on an assistive animal. So I think that while the legislation in place already covers this, it may well be the case that we could do more to be more assertive in that regard, and I'm certainly prepared to look at that in the coming months.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is there other legislation to protect the rights of people requiring service animals for their health and safety?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes, Mr. Speaker. There is the Blind Persons' Rights Act, and that is something which the member and all members of the House, I'm sure, would be happy to know is currently under review by myself and my department. I would sincerely hope that we'll be able to make the necessary progress to further enshrine the types of protections that people with disabilities are looking for. That particular act will come up for review I hope in the fall session, and we'll be taking a look at things, for example, like the different category types. We know that seeing-eye dogs, as they are frequently referred to, are not the only type of assistance that individuals with disabilities require. There are individuals who require other assistive animal services such as protection from episodes of epilepsy or, in some cases, even diabetic seizures. So we're doing our very best to review that as quickly as possible, and I hope to come forward with some good changes to solidify that as early as this fall.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Golf Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Hub Oil Company Ltd.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are many unanswered questions regarding the explosion at Hub Oil. An object originally designed and fabricated as a pressure vessel which Alberta Boilers Safety Association records show as not in pressure service was apparently being used by Hub Oil in a nonpressure service. Unfortunately, this vessel appears to have exploded at a point in time immediately before or during the fire. My first question is to the minister in charge of the Safety Codes Act. Have safety codes officers verified that its installation was such that it did not operate as a pressure vessel?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way has asked similar questions earlier in this session. As we all are aware today, Hub Oil has been charged under the Occupational Health and Safety Act with failure to maintain equipment. Of course, this is in front of the court today, but I can say that our officials are working very closely with the stakeholders and all involved in protecting the interests of all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: at what pressure are vessels and associated piping and pumps not considered pressure equipment under the Safety Codes Act and therefore not subject to an Alberta Boilers Safety Association inspection regime?

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity of meeting with the Safety Council and the member in charge, the chairman, just last week. Volunteers in fact make up that council. I have been assured, in asking the exact questions the hon. member has asked, that the inspection that takes place is for the protection of all Albertans. I want to assure this House and all Albertans that that protection will continue in the best interests of protecting every single citizen of this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the pressure, for the information of all members of this Assembly, is 15 pounds per square inch, how does the minister explain this drawing that I received through freedom of information? This drawing, submitted by Hub Oil to Alberta Environment, indicates a discharge pressure of up to 50 pounds per square inch from the hot oil pump over to the furnace. Is that what caused the explosion?

Thank you.

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the hon. member extend the courtesy and perhaps send that drawing to our office for review.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Meridian Dam

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I tabled a copy of a June 1997 proposal to conduct a prefeasibility study into the Meridian dam prepared by UMA Engineering Ltd. The proposal was prepared at the behest of a group of Meridian dam components calling themselves the Meridian Water Management Association. The document I tabled indicates that in April 1997 the dam proponents met with local MLAs and the then environment minister to discuss their study. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Why did the government decide four years ago not to proceed with the prefeasibility study of the Meridian dam, and why has the present minister revived it within two months of being appointed to his position?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all we have to look at water management as the issue. We have one specific example that the hon. member is talking about of a specific water management issue, but I want to assure this House that water management is a much broader issue than simply one specific instance. We are going to be over a period of time in Alberta short of water for not only the agriculture industry but drinking water as well. So any water management strategy has to include both agriculture, drinking, industrial use, and recreational uses of water and other uses such as power generation. We need to develop a long-term plan for water management strategy. That's one of the things we're going forward with. The example the member is talking about is one specific instance that may be part of a larger strategy.

2:20

Now, the question was: why did the government at that time in 1998, I believe, or 1997 not begin the feasibility study? Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue was one of when we were asking Saskatchewan "Was Saskatchewan interested in participating in this study?" because this study would benefit Saskatchewan as well, at that time Saskatchewan said, for whatever reason, that they were not interested in participating in the study. At the present day Saskatchewan is interested in being part of the present study because of potential benefits to Saskatchewan. We have to look at the whole, total picture, not just Alberta but Saskatchewan as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the findings of the prefeasibility study may have a dramatic impact on whether or not we proceed to the next stage with this project and given that UMA Engineering has in the past been closely associated with the dam proponents, should UMA Engineering Ltd. be allowed to bid on the prefeasibility study?

DR. TAYLOR: Quite frankly it's an open process, Mr. Speaker. We've put out an RFP, or request for proposal, for any company, any individual to can come back and say to us: we would like to do that study. We've put out a very detailed outline of what we expect in that study. Any company that is prepared to make a proposal to us, whether it's UMA or UGA or whoever it is, is certainly welcome in an open bidding process to present a proposal.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that UMA Engineering has a past association with the citizens' group who are promoting the dam, could this not give rise to a reasonable apprehension of bias on the part of the company, and will the minister exclude them from bidding on the RFP?

DR. TAYLOR: No, I will not, Mr. Speaker. Once again, we've put out very clearly what we expect in the study. In fact, if you look at the prefeasibility study that UMA proposed to the Meridian dam association, it was going to look at things like environmental impact. It was going to look at things like ecological impacts on the Suffield range, which is part of the federal government ecological area there. It was going to look at economic benefits. It was going to look at power generation. It was going to look at a whole range of issues surrounding the Meridian dam, not just those which would favour the proponents of the Meridian dam. It was a broad study that would look at every aspect. What we've requested is even broader in terms of our expectations, and I think for any company that does this study, there will be no chance of bias in the process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Municipal Funding

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. This past weekend at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities conference hosted in Alberta many of the municipalities raised concerns about funding, suggesting they were teetering on the brink of a crisis. My question is: what is this province doing to support our municipalities?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, funding is a concern to municipalities not only within Alberta but of course across this nation. Let me give you some specific examples. Just in the last year we've announced about \$1.5 billion in the electricity auction to rebate Alberta municipalities and help over the next 12 months. I could ask the Minister of Energy to supplement, but he has far too much detail at this time for the Assembly. As well, though, I think it's important to recognize that this province has assumed responsibility for primary and secondary highways. Let me be specific. When I talk about assumed responsibility: 100 percent responsibility.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that the FCM conference came on the heels of the federal government announcing a Task Force on Urban Issues to address federal funding for municipalities, what is the province doing to improve and maintain the quality of life in urban regions, and what about rural regions?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, if I could for a moment. Let me first of all restate the fact that it is for secondary highways, and as the hon. member in his constituency is aware, this is very important in the rural communities. We have assumed 100 percent responsibility for those secondary highways. As well, we've been able to provide funding in terms of trade corridors in the bigger cities. This is very important. As well, I should say that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties indicated that those kind of partnerships they value, and they want to see more of them within this province, which I'm committed to work with in this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for those comments. Again to the same minister. Given that the federal government was very active at the FCM conference and there was even talk of amending the constitution, will the provincial government examine this constitutional reform?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, as I look around this Assembly, I see so many members of this Assembly that have been involved in local government as councillors, as mayors, as reeves, as school trustees. I believe that our government's action reflects the awareness that municipalities face each and every day. I also draw to the attention of the member the Premier's infrastructure working committee, that was established in association with the AUMA and AAMD and C. That was an important initiative that I believe is working well. Let me just say this: it's a very positive model that we're working on because we don't believe things as this, we believe them as this; we are all orders of government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Day Care Workers

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the greatest responsibilities the government undertakes is to ensure that care-givers provide nurturing and safe environments for our children. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Are Alberta day care workers still the lowest paid in Canada?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I was wondering when my turn would come today. The suspense was killing me.

I think that the very reason the hon. member has cited, that the nurturing environment is important and that the day care workers themselves and the staff retention are important, has been exactly the constraint that I have faced in becoming a quick-fix expert on the services we provide for children in day cares and in family day homes. We've done extensive reviews and consultations with parents, with the KPMG study that has been referenced and that has yet to be completed. We have done more than that. We have taken a look at some of the other options in other jurisdictions to see how they are wrestling with the problem. One of the circumstances we're looking at is the variance between rural and urban settings: just exactly what our circumstances are where we have had some rural settings with day cares closed because there haven't been the numbers to keep the day cares viable and in urban circumstances, where the costs of developing a framework, a program, and the rental and infrastructure costs are so formidable that they have quite a different set of circumstances.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I respond to the hon. member, I would just say simply that this has been a very complex issue. We are working our way through this issue. I would expect that as soon as I have more to report, it would behoove me to not only share it with the hon. member but with all hon. members because I know many here have raised similar concerns.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Are Alberta day care workers still the lowest paid in Canada?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly we have to be very careful to compare day care workers in the proper circumstances. We're very well aware that in the Maritimes there are day care workers that are earning considerably less on average than they are in Alberta, but that's not the important criterion. The most important thing is this: are we getting the right person in front of the child and working in the best interests of the child? Many of the regulations that have been passed by this ministry assure a certain level of qualification, consider very carefully the best interests of children who need additional programming for their developmental needs, and look very carefully at assessments for children who may be experiencing difficulty.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very shining light in the work that's being done in Beaumont, where they're not only looking at the socioeconomic range of the families and the amount of money that's available for the day care worker, but they are doing consultations and parenting support by the municipality, with some funding from family and community support services, with the overall supervision of the Ma'Möwe day care. I believe that partnership is netting a very positive result.

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. My question is to the same minister. Are Alberta day care workers still the lowest paid in Canada?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, no. Quite simply, no.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Nurses

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Some nurses I have spoken to recently tell me that the cause of our nurses shortage is lack of training facilities, saying that the crisis would indeed end if nursing schools connected to our hospitals were reopened. Has the minister given any consideration to reopening nursing schools connected to some of our hospitals?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it's true that in this province certain hospitals had nursing schools. These were changed over in the mid-1990s as they became part of collaborative nursing programs with the colleges and universities of Alberta. So these hospital-based nursing schools closed in the 1990s. The seats were transferred over to the colleges and universities, and the number of seats were increased in the postsecondary system.

It was strongly viewed by many, Mr. Speaker, that the level and complexity of training required for nursing had gone up dramatically, and it's clear to any observer that what nurses did in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s is dramatically different from what's done by nurses today. It was felt very strongly that university and college education and training was a requirement, a necessity, for the effective training of nurses, so now the colleges and universities have the infrastructure in place to provide the appropriate programs. It does not seem to me to make sense that we would go back to hospital training of nurses.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nurses have also brought to my attention the supposedly large numbers of nurses who graduate here in Alberta and then leave to work in the United States. What is the government doing to address the number of nurses leaving our province to go and work in the United States?

MR. MAR: The most important fact to know on this point, Mr. Speaker, is that the province of Alberta is a net importer of nurses and that for every nurse that leaves the province, there are four that enter the province and begin. It's correct that nurses at one time used to leave for jobs in the United States because of the fact that there were no vacant full-time positions available here in the province. However, more regional health authorities are ensuring that there are full-time positions that are available for our graduates. Certainly the new agreement with the United Nurses of Alberta, which gives RNs at least a 17 percent raise over the next two years, will make Alberta a province of choice for nurses to come. That, in combination with the increases of nursing seats in our postsecondaries, will dramatically improve the situation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Overtime for our nurses is becoming a very serious issue. In fact, some are saying that they don't answer their telephones any longer. What is the government doing to address the working conditions of Alberta nurses?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should at the outset acknowledge that the issue of working conditions certainly is a legitimate concern raised by nurses and that we are listening very carefully to those concerns being expressed. I should say also, though, that there is a great deal of good news on the radar screen. Since nurses ratified their agreement, health authorities are getting more and more calls from nurses wanting to return to work or to take a refresher course that will allow them to update their skills and return. In the short term this should help alleviate the need for regular staff to work overtime.

In the longer term, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my response to the hon. member's first supplementary question, we are increasing the training spaces for nurses. In 1999 there were some 750 training spaces in Alberta's nursing programs. By the year 2001-02 that number will go from 750 to over 1,100. So we are increasing the number of nurses. We are improving work conditions. Employers and the union are working together to improve working conditions and workloads for Alberta's nurses.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling on the first of four hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, I would like to receive your approval to make a statement to you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Legislative Assembly Pages

THE SPEAKER: Ten of our pages will be leaving us. The 10 that will be leaving us are Myles Chykerda, Laura Gill, Ryan Zupan, James Hamilton, Baldip Sihota, in addition to five that are with us this afternoon on duty: Grace Do, Tim Jolly, Jeremy Glick, Cheryl Pereira, and Sarah Hobbs. Now, they sent me a letter dated May 30, 2001, and although the letter is addressed to me, I know it is addressed to all Members of this Legislative Assembly. In my humble opinion it's one of the most articulate pieces of correspondence that I've ever received. I want to read it to you. This is a message to you.

It is said that no one is taller than when he or she stoops to help a child. There may be many people who do not believe this to be true. But there are at least ten men and women who know it to be so. It is we ten, the pages who are leaving the Assembly this session, who write to you now.

Even as we write this, we know there are no words we can choose to convey the gratitude we feel to you and to all the members of the Assembly. In giving us the opportunity to be pages, you have given us much more than you know, far more than a simple, part-time job. Look around yourself the next time you are in the Assembly. Try to see things through our eyes. We see people on all sides of the House trying the best they know how to make the world a better place, one province at a time. These men and women are people of integrity. They have strong values and ideas by which they stand. They are not afraid to voice their beliefs, or to fight for what they know to be true. In a world of constant change, where the backyard is getting bigger and it feels like we are getting smaller, our time as pages at the Legislature has reminded us that we too can make a difference. Day by day, we have learned new skills, faced new challenges, and confronted new opportunities to grow. We have become a little more confident in ourselves, and a little more secure in what we believe. We have seen cooperation between people of different ideologies as we watched the democratic process

in action. For a time, we became part of something greater than ourselves, and in so doing, we realized our value as individuals.

This all may be difficult to believe. We know it too often goes unsaid. Most of you are probably unaware of the way that you have inspired us. Whether we later go into politics or not, the lessons we have learned here have shaped who we are, and will always be a part of us. We came to you as young, unsure people, and we will not be leaving with any more assurance of the specific challenges that the future holds for us. But now, we will leave with the certainty that no matter what does lie in store for us, we are more than capable of handling it. We are more ready than ever to tackle our lives, maybe even the world, and all this is because of our time with you. We are better people for having been here, and for that we thank you. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you. The opportunity you have given us to be pages is one for which we will always be grateful, and one any young person would be lucky to share. Thank you again. Wherever we go, and whatever we do, we will remember you, and this place where we learned so very much.

We remain forever in your debt.

It's signed by the 10 who are leaving. [applause]

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the pages. On behalf of all the members of the Assembly I have a parting gift that I'd like to give to each and every one of you that are here today, and we have the same gifts for those who are unable to be with us today. I'd like to start off with the longest serving page if I could – Tim Jolly has been with us longer than any of the others in the group – then Grace, Jeremy, Sarah, and Cheryl.

THE SPEAKER: The five who are not present today – Myles Chykerda, Laura Gill, James Hamilton, Baldip Sihota, and Ryan Zupan – will receive their presentations from the Deputy Speaker on behalf of all of us as well.

These are marvelous young people, ladies and gentlemen.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Happy birthday to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed as I recognize you for your member's statement. You now may proceed with your statement, hon. member.

Alberta Research Council

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the newly appointed chair of the Alberta Research Council, I rise this afternoon to speak about the important role and the excellent work of the ARC, which officially celebrated its 80th anniversary on January 6, 2001.

The ARC has made many contributions to Alberta's economy and quality of life. The ARC was instrumental in the discovery of the hot water extraction process on which our current \$5 billion oil sands industry was built. It also contributed the first geological map of Alberta, which promoted the resource development of the province, and it has helped to develop a thriving oriented strand-board industry, which takes advantage of Alberta's abundant aspen forests.

Established in 1921, the ARC has evolved to be a truly unique organization in North America. No other province has an organization of its size and scope dedicated to performing applied research and development to meet provincial science and technology strategies and goals. ARC, combined with our universities of Alberta and Calgary, two of Canada's best research-intensive institutions, provide Alberta with a real competitive research advantage.

The ARC's foray into technology commercialization has proved to be a very successful initiative. Over the past five years the ARC has increased its commercialization revenues sevenfold, from \$500,000 to an amazing \$3.6 million to date. Over the years, Mr. Speaker, there have been many changes in the focus of the Research Council, but throughout the changes, the ARC still remains true to its original mandate and still counts research for the public good as a priority for those longer term, higher risk projects which are critical to provincial science and technology advancement. A growing emphasis has been placed, however, on operating as a performance-driven technology development and commercialization business which puts technology into the marketplace sooner rather than later.

I'm honoured to be a part of the Alberta Research Council, and I'd like to congratulate all associated with it for the past successful 80 years. Thank you.

Parliamentary Privilege

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about parliamentary privilege. The most widely held definition of the concept is stated in *Erskine May*.

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions, and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals.

I'm speaking about parliamentary privilege because each one of us in this House is charged with protecting these peculiar rights from encroachment, especially encroachment from the executive branch of government. Imagine if the executive branch could become directly involved in setting the salaries and benefits of the judiciary. If such a situation arose, the judicial system would lack credibility because the executive would be able to selectively reward good judges while punishing unfriendly judges.

By logical extension, then, the executive branch must refrain from setting the funds and the benefits of members of this hon. House. If the executive were able to interfere in the internal affairs of this Assembly, democracy would be undermined because members friendly to the government would receive benefits while those unfriendly to it would be punished. By preserving our rights and immunities, this House maintains the concept of good government as intended under the Canadian parliamentary model.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you as well as all other hon. members of this House on both sides to zealously guard parliamentary privilege.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Wayne Hampton

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand before the Assembly today to recognize a gentleman who has long been on the cutting edge of educational leadership. I would like to congratulate sincerely Mr. Wayne Hampton, longtime principal of the Lacombe upper elementary school, in Lacombe, Alberta, on being selected as the Council on School Administration's choice as the winner of the regional and provincial principal of the year award for 2001.

For the past 14 years Wayne's contributions to the Lacombe upper elementary school have been uniquely generous and effective, and it's good to see him acknowledged with such a high honour. Wayne has demonstrated time and time again in so many, many ways his commitment to his students, their parents, and his staff, fostering

always a learning environment that encourages all to achieve to the maximum of their potential.

One of Wayne's adages is that he practises fearlessness. He is never afraid to question how things are done, but in doing so, he will always provide a suggestion. Such was the case when in 1995 he questioned the then minister of education, Halvar Jonson, regarding the need for changes to the teacher evaluation process. Submitting his ideas as suggested revisions, he was pleased when in fact his strategy was subsequently incorporated by the province into the new Alberta teaching standards.

Mr. Hampton will now be the Alberta nominee for the Canadian Association of Principals' principal/vice-principal of the year award in 2002.

Thank you, Wayne, for the difference you have made to education, for education. I look forward in future to congratulating you as the national winner. For today, please join me in congratulating this year's winner, an outstanding Albertan, an educator, Mr. Wayne Hampton.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Ralph Canham

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I received a call from Mr. Ralph Canham. The excitement and enthusiasm in his voice was immediately noticeable compared to the voice I heard in numerous conversations before. Ralph was elated over a phone call he'd received from the WCB this morning informing him that he would be receiving a new electric wheelchair.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Canham and I both realize this swift reaction to his situation would not have been possible without the intervention of the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. I'd like to thank him for his immediate response after this issue was raised in question period yesterday.

Ralph's problems began on February 16, 1999, when he was involved in an accident with his old electric wheelchair. The visible damage to the chair was repaired at that time, and Mr. Canham continued to use it. Closer inspection on October 6, 2000, revealed that the chair had sustained severe structural damage in the accident and was no longer fit for use. Since that time Mr. Canham has been forced to rely on a manual chair. He feels that his rapidly deteriorating back and right hip problems can be attributed to not having a properly fitted chair since that accident in February of '99.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Canham has taught me a lesson in determination and perseverance. When he could not get satisfactory resolution to his claim from the WCB, he did not quit. In a letter to Mr. Canham dated February 20, 2001, tabled by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, the minister refers to e-mail sent to the Premier from Mr. Canham on February 4 and February 13, 2001. He was not prepared to let this issue rest. He went to the top.

Mr. Canham informed me this morning how he looks forward to receiving his new chair. It will give him back his freedom. One of the activities he has missed greatly is grocery shopping. His persistence and determination is a great example for us all. Ralph, I wish you many enjoyable years with your new chair.

Thank you.

2:50

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Deputy Government House Leader share the projected government business for the week of June 4.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, ordinarily we would project some government business at this stage. However, since no government business is expected to be conducted next week, there is none to project because we are anticipating concluding the spring session this afternoon.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour for me to introduce to you and through you to our Assembly a group of young people that for the most part just all joined us following the election on March 12. There are two people up there who are senior members, who have been there for maybe eight months or 10 months, but under the incredible leadership of my caucus director, Dave Michalchuk, and Carla White, our acting head of research, we have managed to do all of the things that have been asked of us by our incredibly diverse caucus. It's a great honour for me to be able to introduce to you these people. I would like them to stand as I call their names and then receive the warm welcome of the Assembly at the end of my introduction: Carla White, Darcy Dupas, Glenn Shepherd, Matt Steppan, Kelly Nicholls, Ryan Hoskins, Greg McFarlane, Mike Simpson, Jeff Haley, and Jeremy Herbert.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very competent young women who work in our cafeteria. They are Dana McDermott and Corissa Hogan. They are currently seated in the public gallery. They are the two young women who assist in preparing the delicious meals provided to us and who give us such excellent service. So I would ask the two women to stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Speaker's Ruling Exhibits

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, I'll just make a comment as a follow-up to the introduction of the hon. Member for St. Albert and in light, as I suggest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, that he violated *Beauchesne* 501 with his exhibit today when I called out of order an exhibit from the hon. Member for Red Deer-North yesterday with respect to it.

There was an occasion once in this House when an hon. minister set up during tablings and tabled a hamburger because he thought that the food in the Legislature cafeteria was so terrible. The purpose of the tabling of the hamburger was to bring it to everybody's attention. Now, where this hamburger has been filed is unknown to me, but I just make that off-the-cuff statement because there has been a dramatic improvement in the quality of food in the Legislature cafeteria.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Private Bills**

Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1
Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer
Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to respond. The Official Opposition will be supporting bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, Pr. 3, and Pr. 4 at all stages in reading this afternoon. We appreciate the opportunity to have participated in the all-party committee that reviewed these bills.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I wish to close debate and to call the question, please.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2
Burns Memorial Trust Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Burns Memorial Trust Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate as well?

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For those members who are unfamiliar with this bill, the primary intent and purpose is merely to make a few amendments modernizing the current act and to allow for the introduction of prudent investor guidelines into the management of the fund.

With that I would ask for the support of members of this Assembly for second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3
The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company
and National Trust Company Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member to close the debate as well?

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the debate be closed.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 4
Western Union Insurance Company
Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HLADY: Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 4, Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: I'd invite the hon. member to close the debate as well.

MR. HLADY: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a second time]

head: **Private Bills**
Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: The Committee of the Whole has under consideration four bills.

Bill Pr. 1
Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer
Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Chairman, I move that the question be put.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 2
Burns Memorial Trust Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Seeing no debate, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that we call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

3:00

Bill Pr. 3
The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company
and National Trust Company Act

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Chairman, I move that The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act be amended as follows: section 7(2) is amended by striking out "may contain a recital" and substituting "shall contain a recital."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would note that this has been approved by Parliamentary Counsel and is known as amendment A1 to Bill Pr. 3. Any further comments?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill Pr. 4
Western Union Insurance Company
Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall this bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the House for their co-operation and move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills Pr. 1, Pr. 2, and Pr. 4. The committee reports Bill Pr. 3 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

head: **Private Bills**

Third Reading

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to allow for third reading on the same day as second reading for Bill Pr. 1.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill Pr. 1
Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer
Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to allow for third reading on the same day as second reading for Bill Pr. 2.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill Pr. 2
Burns Memorial Trust Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move third reading of Bill Pr. 2, the Burns Memorial Trust Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to allow for third reading on the same day as second reading for Bill Pr. 3.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Bill Pr. 3
The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company
and National Trust Company Act

MR. McCLELLAND: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I request unanimous consent of the Assembly to waive Standing Order 73(1) to allow for third reading on the same day as second reading of Bill Pr. 4.

[Unanimous consent granted]

3:10

Bill Pr. 4
Western Union Insurance Company
Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HLADY: Mr. Speaker, I move third reading of Bill Pr. 4, Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a third time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Third Reading

Bill 20
Appropriation Act, 2001

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move Bill 20, Appropriation Act, 2001, for third reading.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will only take a very few minutes. I am concerned about the impact on Bill 20 of electricity deregulation. I know it's been a subject of debate in the Assembly throughout this session, and unquestionably it's going to come up in the future.

Just to put things in perspective, I would like to table at this moment the appropriate number of copies of a power bill from a small manufacturing concern in Edmonton who exports finished products to the United States and faces an energy charge of 11 cents per kilowatt-hour for her business. Now, just so that it's clearly on the record, I'm comparing that rate to other provinces for a similar service in the most expensive parts of the country, in Atlantic Canada. The rates in Nova Scotia are 9 and a half cents, and then after 12,000 kilowatt-hours they drop to 8.3 cents. In New Brunswick they're just over 9 cents for the first 5,000 kilowatt-hours, and then they drop to 5.87 cents. In Newfoundland the maximum rate is 7 cents compared to 11 here, and in Prince Edward Island they range from a high of 10.75 cents to 6.75 cents.

To keep our power rates in Alberta under deregulation at 11 cents a kilowatt-hour, the provincial government has had to implement price caps. Otherwise the price would be higher. They have also expended some \$2.3 billion for electricity rebates, \$2.3 billion that was earned through the auctioning off of the rights to the power system. Virtually all of that money is now committed, and I am concerned that in the future, either later in this fiscal year or certainly in the next fiscal year, there will be direct pressure placed on the provincial government's fiscal resources to begin putting money from general revenues into rebates for electricity.

When we face that situation plus we face the end of the price caps on power, I think we could see a very serious impact not only on the budget and the financial resources of Alberta but on the industrial sector and the manufacturing sector of Alberta. That's why we have persistently raised this issue and will persistently raise the issue.

The Minister of Energy has talked about the system margin price declining over the last few months, and he's correct on that. It now

seems to be sitting more or less stably at \$95 a megawatt-hour, but we have to remember that that's the floor for electricity prices, not the ceiling. The ceiling is whatever the market will bear, and we won't know what that is until the price caps are lifted.

It's also worth commenting that probably two years ago or so the prices for electricity were in the range of \$20 to \$30, the actual prices charged. The cost of production for most power in Alberta probably remains today under \$15 a megawatt-hour. I make these comments for the record at this moment, Mr. Speaker, because I am profoundly concerned, we all are profoundly concerned that Bill 20 and future equivalents of Bill 20 are going to be, shall I say, significantly compromised by the problems we face now and will face in the future with electricity deregulation.

With those comments, I will cede the floor. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make some concluding comments on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act, 2001, to summarize the reasons why we won't be supporting it.

Throughout the debate in the House and the presentations, there have been at least three themes that have come through. The first theme is that the government has rendered the presentation of expenses – that is, operating expenses, capital investments, nonbudgetary disbursements, and lottery fund payments – under the Appropriation Act quite meaningless since they now have the ability to transfer money between programs and within ministries as well. They've also recently decided to combine the operating expenses and capital investment under a single vote so they can avoid getting the approval of the Legislative Assembly in supplementary estimates when they transfer money between those two accounts. This reduces the transparency, and it's not the kind of fiscal responsibility that Albertans expect of the government. So that's the first theme.

The second theme is that the government has an extremely dubious record when it comes to expenditure management. Over the past five years the government has made expenditure volatility a reality in Alberta by its inability to manage the level of program spending during the course of a fiscal year.

The third theme, Mr. Speaker, deals with the ministry business plans and the need to promote the effectiveness of program delivery. A government that is committed to measuring performance should be taking those business plans to heart rather than having them gather dust or be set aside as irrelevant. This government has missed 264 performance targets in their business plans over the past four years. As an opposition we've long advocated tying inputs to outcomes by including performance measures in the Appropriation Act. This is what's done elsewhere, particularly in the state of Texas, and it allows the citizens there to evaluate the success of programs and services and whether stated goals and objectives and targets are being met.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude my remarks on Bill 20, the Appropriation Act. As I indicated, we won't be supporting the bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The New Democrat caucus will not be able to support Bill 20. Rather than restating those

reasons and keeping Her Honour waiting, I'll just refer members to my comments at second reading last night.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 20 read a third time]

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:20 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.]

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

head: **Royal Assent**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[The Deputy Premier and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I've had the privilege of being in this Assembly and observing it going back to 1974. I've seen the class of 1971, the class of 1975, the class of 1979, the class of 1982, the class of 1986, the class of 1989, the class of 1993, the class of 1997, and the class of 2001. I want to say without any reservation or hesitation in my mind that the class that joined us in 2001 ranks up there with the highest quality group of MLAs ever.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois E. Hole, CM, and the Deputy Premier entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

THE CLERK: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 1 Natural Gas Price Protection Act
- 2 Cooperatives Act
- 3 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001
- 4 Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001
- 5 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001
- 6 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2001
- 7 Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001
- 8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001
- 9 Victims of Crime Amendment Act, 2001
- 10 Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2001

- 11 Employment Standards Amendment Act, 2001
- 12 Farm Implement Amendment Act, 2001
- 13 Farm Implement Dealerships Act
- 14 Alberta Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001
- 15 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001
- 17 Insurance Amendment Act, 2001
- 19 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001
- 20 Appropriation Act, 2001
- Pr. 1 Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001
- Pr. 2 Burns Memorial Trust Act
- Pr. 3 The Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act
- Pr. 4 Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001

[Her Honour indicated Her assent]

THE CLERK: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and the Deputy Premier left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Hon. members, while we await the return of the Deputy Premier and before I call on the Deputy Government House Leader, might I just say a couple of comments with respect to one activity that all hon. members in this Assembly are part of. We all come here as elected politicians, but once we are here, we're also parliamentarians. One of the associations that the Legislative Assembly of Alberta belongs to is the international body known as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We belong to more than just simply the international body known as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. We've also had exchanges in organizations with other bodies throughout the world that encourage the development of the whole concept of being a parliamentarian and a legislator.

Throughout the year members are invited to participate in these exchanges from a professional development point of view. All of these matters are discussed and determined by the Members' Services Committee, and when the Members' Services Committee, prior to April 1, 2001, met and allocated the budget for this year, dollars were set aside for a number of activities that will occur, not only in the province of Alberta but nationally or outside of Alberta. This is all public information, and I'd just like to advise hon. members in terms of some of the activities that members will be attending.

In Quebec City, from July 8 to July 15, representatives of this Assembly will attend and participate in the international Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie and the regional Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie.

In July here in Edmonton, Alberta, this Legislative Assembly will host the 40th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Canadian Regional Conference, which will be held in this Assembly from July 17 to July 22. The opening ceremonies will occur late in the afternoon of Tuesday, July 17. All members will be invited to participate, but we will have an official delegation. Hon. members will recall that about a month ago I conveyed a message to all hon. members pointing all of this out and inviting hon. members to

indicate their interest to me. A number of you have, and within a matter of days we'll be providing a formal invitation to those members to participate. Our hope would be that we would have here in Edmonton approximately 150 parliamentarians from throughout Canada and a number of international representatives. Again, we will begin on Tuesday afternoon, July 17. All sessions will be in this Legislative Assembly. Each of the delegations will have a minimum of six representatives, and I'll be inviting between eight and 10 members of this Assembly to participate with us in our official delegation.

3:40

I've also asked members to advise me of their interest in attending probably the world's largest parliamentary conference, the National Conference of State Legislatures, which is held in the United States. Upwards of 5,000 parliamentarians from around the world gather at that event. This year it's being held in San Antonio, Texas, from August 11 to 15. Some of you have indicated an interest with respect to that.

In September the Parliamentarianism of the 21st century will be held in Quebec City from September 11 to 14. Several individuals have indicated their interest in that as well.

The Canadian Parliamentary Association regional seminar for Canada will be held in Regina, Saskatchewan, from October 18 to 21. I would invite members to indicate an interest with respect to that as well.

Also in September will be the international conference, the CPA general conference, which will be held in Australia. No individual members have indicated their interest in attending that one yet.

The presiding officers conference will be held in January of 2002 in Newfoundland, and that will be for the presiding officers.

Now, from time to time there are other events that members will attend as designated, organized by the Legislative Offices Committee or other committees of the Legislative Assembly. These are professional development opportunities provided to all Members of the Legislative Assembly by the Legislative Assembly. These are not government participatory activities. These are Legislative Assembly participatory professional development activities. As an example, we will host the CPA here in Edmonton in the year 2001. Next year, in 2002, the 41st Canadian Regional Conference will be held in New Brunswick. The 42nd, in the summer of 2003, will be held in British Columbia, and in the summer of 2004 the 43rd Canadian Regional Conference will be held in Newfoundland.

These are opportunities – and it's again all determined by the Members' Services Committee, which is an all-party committee that will determine these things.

There was one other event, one other conference that we will not be proceeding with that we did set aside dollars for: participation in a Partnership of Parliaments activity. That's an organization that was developed after 1945 between the 17 provinces in Germany and the 50 American states to create a better relationship between Germany and the United States. Four years ago Alberta was asked to participate in that, and we've participated on three occasions. This year Alberta was to lead the mission to Germany on behalf of five other provinces in Canada, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Newfoundland. But recently I declined leadership of that mission, and I've decided not to have Alberta representatives go in light of the current situation and the concerns that we have in the province of Alberta with respect to foot-and-mouth disease.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a momentous day, a momentous week, and a momentous couple of months since the election of March 12. In recent weeks we've given members of our respective teams an opportunity to perform their representative duties, many of them for the first time and some of us for many times. We passed significant legislation of concern and interest to all Albertans. We also set an admirable standard of poise and decorum for the honoured tradition of this fine House.

This opening session of the 25th Legislature is now a matter of permanent record in and for the province of Alberta. It commenced on a high note, and so it will remain.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move that we call it 5:30 p.m. and that pursuant to the spring adjournment motion, Government Motion 16, agreed to on April 24, the Assembly now stand adjourned.

THE SPEAKER: To all of you a very safe, relaxing, yet intensive and hardworking number of months before we meet again.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 16 the Assembly adjourned at 3:45 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 13, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back. Would all hon. members please remain standing after the prayer and after the singing of our national anthem for the tribute to former members.

On this day, as our work in this Legislature resumes, let each of us pray for those who have been taken and those who have suffered as innocent victims of violent tragedy. We resolve to comfort the families, friends, and communities who have keenly felt the loss of loved ones through acts of violence and the disregard for the sanctity of that which is most precious: life itself. Amen.

I would now invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem. Please join us in the language of your choice.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: As is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day of the continuation of session to former members of this Assembly who have passed on since the House last met. On this day we remember Galen Norris, who passed away on August 10, 2001; Donald Fleming, who passed away on September 12, 2001; and Elizabeth Jane "Bettie" Hewes, who passed away on November 6, 2001.

Mr. Galen Norris
November 7, 1915, to August 10, 2001

THE SPEAKER: Mr. Norris was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of November 15, 1956, and served until August 20, 1971. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Stettler for the governing Social Credit Party.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Norris served on the following committees: the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; the Select Standing Committee on Municipal Law; the Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs; the Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; and the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Mr. Donald Fleming
March 23, 1913, to September 12, 2001

THE SPEAKER: Mr. Donald Fleming was first elected to the Alberta Legislature in the general election of June 18, 1959, and served until May 23, 1967. During his years of service he represented the constituency of Calgary-West for the governing Social Credit Party.

During his years in the Legislature Mr. Fleming served on the following committees: the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture, Colonization, Immigration and Education; the Select Standing

Committee on Railways, Telephones and Irrigation; the Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs; the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills; the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Mrs. Bettie Hewes
March 12, 1924, to November 6, 2001

THE SPEAKER: Mrs. Bettie Hewes was first elected in the general election held on May 8, 1986, and served as MLA until March 11, 1997. During her years of service she represented the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar for the Liberal Party and also served as interim Liberal leader, Deputy House Leader, and party whip.

During her years in the Legislature Mrs. Hewes served on the following committees: the Select Standing Committee on Law and Regulations; the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills; the Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing; the Select Standing Committee on Public Affairs. She also served on the Select Special Committee on Parliamentary Reform.

We are honoured by the presence of Bettie Hewes' family in the Speaker's gallery today.

With our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of their families who shared the burdens of public office. Our prayers are with them.

In a moment of silent prayer I ask you to remember Galen Norris, Don Fleming, and Bettie Hewes as you have known them.

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them. Amen.

Please be seated.

The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I seek the unanimous consent of the Assembly for each of the three leaders to make a brief statement regarding September 11, 2001.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Statements by the Leaders
September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 11 horrific acts of violence in the United States changed the world. Today we take pause from our normal business to remember the thousands of victims who died in those violent acts and to reflect on the challenge facing humanity in the wake of September 11.

Those who died in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania were innocent people. They were accountants, secretaries, public servants, firefighters, police officers, businesspeople, tradespeople, couriers, and retail clerks. Some of them were visitors from other countries, and some were from Canada. Each of those victims, I suspect, had plans for September 11. Maybe it was lunch with friends. Maybe it was taking the kids to a movie that evening. They also had plans for the rest of their lives, plans that perhaps included a new house or a new baby or a new grandchild.

Those plans, those lives were extinguished suddenly and violently in one of the most catastrophic acts of pointless terror ever witnessed on this planet. It will perhaps take years for civilized people to truly absorb the magnitude of this tragedy. We will search for its meaning, we will strive to understand the motives of its perpetrators, and we will endeavour to help those family members left behind to patch together new and dramatically changed lives. But as we

search and strive and help, we will above all remember the faces of innocents that were murdered on September 11, and we will forever mourn their loss.

Since September 11 countries around the world have joined with the United States in the grim task of eradicating terrorism from the Earth. As American President George Bush said so eloquently: this is a war we did not seek, but it is a war we will win. As this war is waged and with the stakes so high, I urge all Albertans to remember that the attacks of September 11 were not perpetrated by a culture or a faith. They were perpetrated by individuals of murderous intent. As the world comes together to eliminate terrorism, let's work together at home to ensure that no culture, no faith in this province is singled out for discrimination or reprisal.

I have been very proud of Albertans in the way they have responded to the events arising from September 11. The province's reputation for tolerance and harmony was challenged, and it responded to that challenge with great, great dignity.

1:40

Mr. Speaker, all members of the government caucus and I are also very proud of the Canadian men and women of the armed forces who are serving in support of this noble cause. Canada's troops are respected worldwide because of their courage and their dedication to achieving peace. Nowhere is this respect more widespread and evident than it is right here in Alberta, and not since the great conflicts of the 20th century has that respect been so deserved. Two days ago Albertans remembered the lost and fallen of earlier conflicts. Today I know that all Albertans join with me in wishing Canadian troops well as they serve abroad. Our prayers are with them, and we wish them a speedy and safe return to their loved ones at home.

September 11 was a sad and tragic day in human history. History shows us, however, that the resilience of the human spirit and the creativity of the human mind can overcome the greatest of tragedies. The people of the United States and their friends around the world will overcome this tragedy in just the same manner. But overcoming does not mean forgetting. I know that I for one will never forget the horror of September 11 and the thousands of bright, radiant lights that were extinguished by the darkness of hatred. I will remember and I will mourn, as I'm sure all of us will.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just over two months ago everyone throughout the world was reminded of the fragility of life, of plans, and of the freedoms that we have. In the period of a single morning the security that we have taken for granted was shattered by vengeful acts of terrorism. In the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center, the attack on the Pentagon, and the crash of an airliner in Pennsylvania, many of us struggled to come to terms with what had happened, just how far the threat would spread, and the implications for our community and our freedoms and our friends.

As we contemplate the shape of a very different world, the families and friends of those killed mourn the loss of their loved ones. For these people their lives have been indelibly scarred. The tragedy we now know as September 11 has had a very real impact on the thousands of families that have lost a son, a daughter, a mother, a father, an aunt, an uncle, or even for those that have lost friends. Their loss is profound, and I join with my caucus in extending our deepest sympathy to all affected by this senseless act of terrorism.

As most of the world watched in horror as the events of September 11 unfolded, thousands of men and women sprang into action to lend whatever assistance they could to the victims of this disaster. They are the true heroes of September 11. Many, in fact, lost their lives while trying to render help to the victims and to their fellow workers. This good citizenship and concern for fellow citizens is the foundation of a free society that will overcome any terrorist plot.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to live under a veil of uncertainty because of September 11 and the subsequent actions. It is ever more important in this circumstance to be vigilant in protecting the freedoms and values that are our way of life. Unjustified acts of terrorism will not destroy the spirit of people. Albertans and Canadians will stand strong in defense of our values and of our way of life. We will continue to support our multicultural activities, and we will not allow anyone to be singled out.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would again like to express my condolences and those of my caucus to the families and friends of the people killed in that unjustified act of terrorism on September 11, and to the people who so willingly have worked to dampen the pain and assist in the recovery of the victims, I commend your service to your neighbours.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank this House and the Premier for this opportunity to reflect on the horrific events of September 11. On behalf of the Alberta New Democrat opposition and along with the other leaders, who have just spoken, I offer my sincere condolences to the families and friends of the thousands of innocent people who perished in New York, in Washington, and in Pennsylvania. We salute the dedication and courage of those engaged in the ongoing rescue efforts at the World Trade Center.

I also want to take this opportunity to pass along my sincere condolences to those affected by yesterday's tragic crash of the American Airlines flight in Brooklyn. It has indeed been a few rough and difficult months for the residents of New York City, and our hearts go out to them.

No cause or grievance can justify the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, Mr. Speaker. These attacks must be condemned in the strongest possible terms, yet we must ensure that a response to these tragic events is rooted in the need for justice and the respect for the rule of law, not the lust for vengeance. In order to avert future similar tragedies, our response must be in keeping with international law and serve to strengthen the role of multilateral bodies like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court.

These events test many aspects of our shared humanity. They are a test of our tolerance and respect for fellow Albertans of Arab descent and for those who follow the Islamic faith. Because Albertans of Arab descent look visibly different, since September 11 they have been subjected by some to increased ridicule and abuse. As elected politicians we must set a positive example of tolerance and respect, especially for Albertans who are from minority communities. The media, as well, has a responsibility for equitable reporting, recognizing that no one is exempt from getting caught up in racial stereotyping in the rush to judgment.

Before September 11 it was fashionable in some circles to belittle the role of governments and their ability to act for the public good. The events of September 11 remind us of the important role governments play in ensuring our common well-being and safeguarding our public security. They remind us of the contributions of emergency response personnel like firefighters, police officers, and paramedics. September 11 reminds us of the important obligations that governments have in fully respecting and safeguarding our civil

liberties, including the rights of freedom of association, freedom of expression, and peaceful dissent. Our response to terrorism must not be allowed to undermine these civil liberties. Bill C-36 as currently proposed in my judgment does just that.

September 11 reminds us of the pressing need to build strong bonds of citizenship among us all. These events raise profound questions about how to build a more tolerant and inclusive society within our own province. They remind us of the value of an inclusive public school system, reflecting the religious, ethnic, and racial diversity of Alberta society. The inclusive and integrating function of Alberta's education system is gradually being eroded ostensibly in response to demands from parents and some community groups. I submit that we must re-examine the policy allowing this, especially its potential for unintended consequences, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that the lessons we draw from September 11 include how to build a more inclusive Alberta. This should be an Alberta where children are taught to value each other's beliefs and backgrounds, not taught to believe that only one world view is the right one. This should be an Alberta where differences are celebrated and respected and not used to promote social division.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I ask Albertans to mourn with those who suffered such a catastrophic loss on September 11. The events of September 11 challenge us in many ways. May the lessons we learn from this tragedy strengthen our resolve to build a more secure, peaceful, and just world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce six very special young women, who are seated in the members' gallery today as special visitors. These girls, like so many other people across Alberta, were deeply touched by the events of September 11 in the U.S. and decided to reach out to their neighbours south of the border. These young ladies came up with a simple and heartfelt idea to make red, white, and blue ribbons, which are being worn by all members in the House today. The girls intended to sell those ribbons at the St. Albert farmers' market in the hopes of raising \$50 for the relief efforts in the U.S.

Well, Mr. Speaker, these young ladies' ribbons and their cause were so popular, they ended up making 5,000 ribbons and raising an astounding \$21,000. That project earned them a lot of local media coverage and even a congratulations call from President George Bush's White House secretary.

I know that these young Albertans didn't undertake this project for praise or publicity. They took on this job out of a sense of duty and a sense of caring. In this regard they represent the very best of the human spirit, and we are all very proud of them.

1:50

They were not alone in their work. They received tremendous help and encouragement from their parents, their families, their teachers, and their neighbours, and I thank those people as well. Across Alberta others have done similar work in order to help our American neighbours. We are fortunate to have these six St. Albert teens with us today, but we acknowledge with thanks the efforts of the many Albertans who have contributed to the relief effort.

Earlier today I had the pleasure of joining Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor, the Member for St. Albert, and the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert in presenting certificates of

accomplishment to these girls. Now I have the honour of introducing them to you and through you to all members of this Assembly. The St. Albert girls are here today with their parents; with Mr. Buccini, the vice-principal of the school they attend, which is William D. Cuts junior high school; and one of their teachers, Melissa Brown. I would ask Nicole Attwell, Allison Edwards, Kayla Fyffe, Holly Gray, Danelle Hancock, and Tara Joshi to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon it gives me great pleasure to introduce the family of Bettie Hewes. I would like to extend sincere condolences to the family on behalf of everyone in the Legislature. Members of Bettie Hewes' family are with us today, and I would like to introduce to you her husband, Henk VanDroffelaar, from Brockville, Ontario; her children, Larry Hewes from Hawaii, Jane Hewes and her husband, Michael Henry, and their children, Ella, Jamie, and Micah Henry; Rob Hewes, his wife, Lorraine, and their children, Erin Mooney and Robin Hewes and his wife, Amanda; Sally Nikolaj and her husband, Wilf, and their children, Elise and Evan; and three members of Bettie's extended family, including June Birch, Fabian Henry, and Karen Henry. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by over 400 individuals from Edmonton and area who are very concerned and looking for the government to condemn the Chinese government's crackdown on Falun Gong and Alberta's sister province, Heilongjiang, government's dealings with the Falun Gong practitioners.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do also stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand now to give notice that after Oral Question Period I will be introducing a motion under Standing Order 40.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 22

Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 22, Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001.

The proposed legislation will extend the time for the filing of liens from 45 days to 90 days for sectors specifically relating to oil and gas drilling and services.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that Bill 22, the Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001, be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 27 Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 27, the Provincial Court Amendment Act.

The bill provides a mechanism through which judges in the Provincial Court who are of retirement age and with long-term and proven track records may be eligible for reappointment for one-year terms up to the age of 75. The act also makes other minor amendments to clarify existing wording as it relates to civil proceedings in our Provincial Court.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

Bill 28 Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill establishes science-based technical standards and procedures to approve, monitor, enforce, and site all new and expanding confined feeding operations through amendments to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act. The legislation will also establish standards for the management of manure.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd move that Bill 28 be placed on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table with the Clerk the appropriate number of copies in response to questions asked in this House on May 9 and in keeping with the principles of open, honest, transparent government. This is dealing with underground petroleum storage tank remediation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon as chair of the Alberta Research Council I'm very pleased to table five copies of the document entitled Accelerating Innovation. This is the annual report for 2001 of the Alberta Research Council, which is this year celebrating its 80th anniversary, and I believe all members have previously received this report. Of course, the report shows how the Alberta Research Council is advancing the economy and well-being of Alberta through technology and innovation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a document produced by Edmonton Working Women and released in September of 2001 entitled Women Working: A Survey of Edmonton Women's Experiences in the Workplace, Home and Community.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for all Members of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon the official program from the province of Saskatchewan on Monday, June 18, 2001, for the unveiling of the busts of the hon. Walter Scott, the first Premier of Saskatchewan; the hon. T.C. Douglas, the Premier of Saskatchewan between 1944 and 1961; and the restored bust of the Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker. They are located in the rotunda of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to make two tablings today. The first is to table five copies of an e-mail from Barry and Lana Love on behalf of the County of Flagstaff Family Farm Promotional Society. They would like the siting of intensive livestock operations left at the municipal level and urge the government to talk to more people other than ILO owners and operators.

For my second tabling, Mr. Speaker, I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter from Gail Horner, chair of the board of trustees, Sturgeon school division, in which they feel proposed government amendments to Bill 16 would substantially change that bill, and they urge the government to leave the amendments in the committee stage for at least 10 days before completing consideration of the bill.

Thank you.

2:00

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I have four different tablings. The first tabling is a letter, from hundreds of letters that my office has received over the summer, addressed to the Premier from an Edmonton teacher, Carolyn Benedik, urging the Premier to listen to Alberta teachers' concerns regarding their unsatisfactory working conditions and low wages. That's the first one.

Mr. Speaker, the other tablings that I have all deal with the position that the government took during the debate on Bill 11 with respect to its determination to respect the Canada Health Act. The second tabling is some press clippings again restating the government's commitment to the Canada Health Act during the election. The third one is quotes from the Premier with respect to his

determination to respect the spirit and letter of the Canada Health Act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today, a letter addressed to the Premier from a teacher, Mark Samuel, concerning the continuing devaluation of teachers' professional status and their contributions to society.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have a number of tablings today. First of all, I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort requesting that Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act, be given early consideration for debate in Committee of the Whole.

I also have the appropriate number of copies of a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross requesting that Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, be given early consideration for debate in Committee of the Whole.

Pursuant to section 36(1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly a list of the registered candidates of the general election of the 25th Legislative Assembly, March 12, 2001, together with their chief financial officers who failed to file a candidate's campaign financial statement with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer on or before July 12, 2001. This is required by section 35(1)(1.1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act.

As well, the following Members' Services Committee orders: 1/01, the constituency services amendment order (No. 8); 2/01, the transportation amendment order (No. 4). [interjection] Hon. Minister of Energy, I could recognize you if you want to participate.

MR. SMITH: No, thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Order 3/01, the members' allowances amendment order (No. 6); 4/01, the members' committee allowances amendment order (No. 3); 5/01, the members' allowances amendment order (No. 7); and 6/01 the members' allowances amendment order (No. 8).

Pursuant to section 44(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act, chapter C-22.1 of the 1991 Statutes of Alberta, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner. This report covers the period April 1, 2000, to March 31, 2001.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Premier.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very accomplished young lady who is with us today in the members' gallery. Shawna Wallace is an 18-year-old University of Lethbridge student and is this year's recipient of the 4-H Premier's award, the highest honour the 4-H program bestows. She received this honour in recognition of her outstanding efforts and achievements during her eight-year membership in the Byemoor 4-H beef club. She has proven abilities in leadership and effective communications as well as a strong record of accomplishment in school and her community.

During her year as the 4-H Premier's award recipient Shawna will travel the province extensively, serving as a 4-H ambassador and promoting the 4-H program. Mr. Speaker, the province of Alberta has the largest 4-H membership in Canada.

Accompanying Shawna today are her father, Lorne, her mother, Marlene, and her brother Jeff, all of Endiang. I now invite Shawna and her family to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a long list, so please be patient.

The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask Laurie Hawley, the president of Parkland local 10 of the Alberta Teachers' Association to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you to all members of the House it is my pleasure to introduce Patricia Clancy-Novosel, the president of the Edmonton local of the separate school teachers' association, a person very, very committed to our next generation and to teaching and education in general. I would ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions to make. First I'd like to introduce Aaron Roth. Aaron worked for two summers as my summer student at the Lethbridge-East constituency, and in the winter in between while he was attending the University of Lethbridge, he worked part-time in my office. He is now a political science master's student at the University of Alberta. Aaron, would you please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to introduce Bruna Genereux and Kieran Leblanc, who worked for us in our party office. Please stand and receive our welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 14 students, a teacher, and a parent from the Suzuki school, the charter school in Ottewell in the Gold Bar neighbourhood. Mr. Ian Gray has been teaching in this school for seven continuous years, and he's doing a very good job. Mrs. Carolyn Readman is volunteering her time this afternoon to accompany the group, and they're in the public gallery. I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome from all members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of the Assembly a great group of 52 students from the Bertha Kennedy Catholic community school of St. Albert. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Debra Kaplar, Ms. Fiona McManus, and volunteer parent helpers Mrs. Kathy Zubick, Mrs. Kelly Emmerton, and Mr. Irwin Forsythe. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you 35 students from H.A. Kostash school out of Smoky Lake. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Harris; parent teacher helpers Sharon Boychuk, Curtis Boychuk, Ed Zenko, and Leanna Schoepgens. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

For my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Kevin Hubick, who is a teacher at the Sturgeon composite high school and also the ATA rep for Sturgeon comp. He's seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Ronnie Miller, president and chief executive officer of Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd. Hoffmann-La Roche is one of Canada's leading research-based pharmaceutical companies, and the company has a vitamins and fine chemicals facility in High River. He is seated in the public gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two guests to introduce today. It gives me great pleasure to welcome Mrs. Karen Beaton, president of the Edmonton public teachers local, a longtime friend and constituent of the hon. Member for Sherwood Park and a longtime teacher, principal, and colleague of mine. By the way, this is her third term as president of the Edmonton local.

I'm also pleased to introduce 64 people from Aldergrove elementary school: 52 students and six adults including their principal, Mr. Duxbury; Mrs. Down, teacher; Mrs. Colquhoun, teacher; and three parents, Mrs. McCaskill, Ms Tweddle, and Mr. Weber. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly, along with Mrs. Beaton.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly six individuals studying at Grant MacEwan College, which is in my riding of Edmonton-Centre. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Celest Nygaard, and I would ask that they please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a special constituent and a proud mother. Mrs. Marie Gordon is the mother of Maya Gordon, who is one of the new pages that has started this session. She was also an enthusiastic member of your Youth Parliament this spring. I would ask Mrs. Marie Gordon to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two teachers from St. Albert. One is Mr. Patrick Collins, the president of the local ATA for St. Albert protestant schools, and Ms Viviane Pezer, who is the president of the local ATA for the greater St. Albert school division No. 29. They are seated, I believe, in both galleries, and I would ask them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you today two very special constituents of mine from Calgary-West seated in the members' gallery. He was first an educator, but he's now a speaker, filmmaker, and writer and for excellent reason: he is the only Canadian to summit Mount Everest twice, in May '99 and in May '01. She is his wife and strong supporter. I would ask Dave and Jennifer Rodney to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members here a constituent of mine, Mr. Harold Neth. He's a very effective advocate for teachers, for teacher- and student-related issues, and frequently provides me with very insightful and helpful information that I can share with members of my caucus. He teaches at Holy Trinity Catholic school and is an effective zone representative for that area. I would ask everyone to please welcome Mr. Neth as he rises to receive this applause.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly four of my constituents from Millet including Mayor Laurie Linaker; community services co-ordinator, Arlene Swedberg; and Communities in Bloom co-chairpersons, Carrie Jepsen and Carol Sadorosznay. Later I will be giving a members' statement on Millet's success in the Communities in Bloom program. The guests are seated in the visitors' gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three members of the Alberta Snowmobile Association. Today we have with us the president, Mr. Trent Law; the executive director, Louise Sherren; and member Jerry Bidulock, who's also the president of the Riverland Recreational Trail Society. If I could ask them to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to reintroduce to you and to members of the Assembly a former friend and colleague of ours from the only Calgary constituency that has an

elevator. His name is Mr. Jon Havelock, former minister, former MLA for Calgary-Shaw, and a good friend. Would you please rise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on this glorious Alberta day to introduce to you and through you a former page of ours and a constituent of mine, Mr. Tim Jolly. Tim is in the gallery today. Would everybody please join me in welcoming Tim. Thank you for returning to us, Tim, and for being in Edmonton-McClung. We appreciate it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the House two very hardworking young Albertans, Tracey Biehn and Tanya Woodruff, both of whom are seated in the public gallery. Tracey and Tanya are carrying out the practicum portion of their social work program at Grant MacEwan College by taking on casework in my constituency office of Edmonton-Strathcona. I take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work and wish them well in their studies. I will now ask Tanya and Tracey to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Legislature another ex-colleague of ours in the Legislature, Peter Sekulic, who sat in the Liberal benches here for many years. I'd ask him to stand and receive the warm applause of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very special young people who are seated in the public gallery. Ms Cynthia Tupper is a student with the social work program at Grant MacEwan Community College and as part of her practicum is working in my office assisting with the casework taken on by my constituency office of Edmonton-Highlands. I thank her for her hard work and ask that she rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second guest is my son Alex Mason. He's from Highlands junior high school, in grade 9, and we got a postponement of several days of the Take Our Kids to Work Day so that he could be with us today for the opening of the fall session. I'm very proud of him, and I'd ask him to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

2:20

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Health Care Innovation

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is constantly discussing major changes to the public health care system. They've talked about user fees, increased health care premiums, medical savings accounts, tax credits for health expenses, and also delisting of services. My question is to the Premier. Why are you not considering cost efficiency in health care delivery innovation to

save tax dollars rather than just working with the revenue side of the health care system?

MR. KLEIN: It goes without saying that certainly we want to challenge the various regional health authorities and all people connected with the delivery of health care services to bring about new and better ways of doing things to achieve efficiencies, to become effective. Mr. Speaker, that goes without saying. Publicly I've stated generally to the regional health authorities and all people involved in the delivery of health care: before we even look at frontline services, examine the administration of the system and see what we can achieve there.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that that goes without saying. Why isn't he talking to the regional health authorities, telling them about innovative systems like the Capital Health Link to make it available across the province, like the proposal for long-term care in the Chinook health region to make that available all over the province? Why is it that we never hear of those kinds of innovative things from this Premier?

MR. KLEIN: There are many innovative things going on throughout the province, and indeed, Mr. Speaker, many of those innovative measures are being undertaken by some of the so-called smaller regional health districts. The majority of the problem, I think, is commensurate with the population of this province. One-third of the population is in Calgary. One-third of the population is in Edmonton. The other third is scattered around the province. So two-thirds of the problem in this province can justifiably be related to the two major regional health authorities. We are and have been bringing and plan to continue to bring the CEOs and the chairs of those two major health authorities into Treasury Board to discuss precisely what the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition wants us to discuss. That discussion centres around achieving efficiencies, finding new and better and more effective ways of doing things.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier still didn't answer the question. Why isn't he in his public statements making those kinds of recommendations to the health authorities so that the other health authorities are aware of those innovative things? All he's talking about is: we've got to penalize the consumers; we've got to penalize Albertans.

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. Relative to the mechanism for sharing information – and basically the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness will respond to this – there is a mechanism set up, and indeed there is tremendous encouragement for all health districts, all health authorities to share information on better ways of delivering services.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. MAR: Well, I note that the Leader of the Opposition himself has cited as being innovative ideas programs like the Crowfoot centre in Calgary, the Northeast health clinic here in Edmonton. He's talked about the Health Link line. I should note that recently the Mistahia health region linked up with the Capital regional health authority. Mr. Speaker, those types of innovations, while new, are being shared in venues throughout this province. There is a sharing of best practices among and between regional health authorities. They do have, of course, a Council of Chairs of regional health authorities that meets on a regular basis. We recently had an orientation session for both newly appointed and newly elected and also reappointed regional health authority members.

Mr. Speaker, you know, these types of programs like Capital health's Health Link line have demonstrably reduced the demand upon the acute care system. In an appropriate way people are getting the right service at the right time by the right person, and I can assure you that there is no shortage of people with the Capital health authority here that are willing to brag about that. It's an excellent program, and it gets the accolades that it deserves, and the information is shared throughout the province.

Of course, we have to look at both aspects of it. There is no one fix to our health care system, Mr. Speaker. We have to look at ways of delivering our service better, cheaper, more effectively, more efficiently, and we also have to look at the financing side of it.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Health Care Delivery

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. When you talk about the health care sector and health care delivery, we basically have three systems in Alberta: the insurance system, the wallet system, and the public system. When you cut back on the public system, does this not just transfer the health care delivery costs of Albertans from the public system to the insurance system or their wallets? And some of them can't afford it.

MR. KLEIN: I really don't know what the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is talking about when he talks about cutbacks. There are no cutbacks. Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about a doubling of health care costs since 1994-1995. That can hardly be construed as a cutback. That is a doubling of the spending on health care, and if this hon. member thinks that's the way to go, then his values are a lot different than mine.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, as these cutbacks and changes in the delivery system are put in place, what will happen to Albertans who can't afford insurance or don't have the cash? Will they be left out of health care?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. Nobody will be left out of health care. What we are trying to do and what every Premier and what every minister of health, including the federal Minister of Health and the Prime Minister, is trying to do is to achieve sustainability in the health care system and find those new and effective and better ways of delivering services and, at the same time, to make sure that those who are truly sick or are injured in society get the medical help that they need and require without losing their livelihoods and without losing their dignity. That's what health care is all about.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. Mr. Premier, when you deal with changes to access to health care, if someone can no longer get a service through the public system, they have to get it somewhere else. Is that not effectively changing the delivery of the system or access to the system for those Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would strongly advise the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition to wait until Mr. Mazankowski and his group of experts, top physicians from around the world and health care economists, bring their report together. Certainly there is the preliminary report, which outlines some fundamental and basic recommendations without putting the flesh on the bones. The final report I think should be out around November 16, at which time it will be reviewed by government, and in the fullness of time, of

course, and when we're satisfied with the recommendations we can accept and/or reject, then we will make that public, and we'll get on with the job of leading this country in reforming health care.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

2:30

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. According to a workbook for delegates at the provincial Tory conference this past weekend, quote, the health care system could soon consume Alberta's entire budget. On the other hand, the TD Bank's report on Canadian government finances last month projected that Alberta's health care spending would be 33 to 35 percent of the provincial budget five years from now. Does the Premier take as a serious policy idea the notion that health care spending could soon consume Alberta's entire budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no one ever assumed that health care would consume the province's entire budget, but if spending continues the way it is, it could consume 50 percent of this budget to the detriment of other services. Here are the facts. According to an October study by the Canadian Institute of Health Information, health spending in Canada has risen by 40 percent over the last four years. When inflation is factored in, the net increase has been 28 percent over the last four years. Those are factual figures, unlike the figures quoted by the hon. member in the newspaper yesterday. Those figures clearly did come out of the sky. They couldn't have come out of his head, because he's purported to be an educated and intelligent person.

The same study, Mr. Speaker, shows that across Canada health spending has gone from being 29 percent of total government spending in 1981 to 37 percent of total government spending today. In constant 1992 dollars health spending in Canada has grown from about \$1,700 per person in 1992 to about \$2,200 per person today, and that's roughly a 30 percent increase in constant dollars.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Premier, we look forward to receiving a tabling of such a document.

The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting when we look at the information from the Canadian Institute of Health Information. Will the Premier acknowledge, using information from CIHI, that health care spending per person in Alberta, adjusting for inflation, is at about the same level today as it was eight, 10, 12, or even 15 years ago?

THE SPEAKER: Well, let's not have multiple questions. It's either one or the other. It's not eight, 10, 12, 14. Let's just specifically go to the question. This is not a point for debate.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, since the hon. member doesn't seem to or doesn't want to or doesn't have the ability to comprehend what I am saying, perhaps the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness can put it more succinctly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, to the point.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it appears to me that a person who reads nothing is better educated than a person who only reads Liberal policy documents. The fact of the matter is that health care costs have increased dramatically, and this is not an issue unique to the

province of Alberta. It is an issue that exists across Canada. Every minister of health across this country, every minister of finance across this country, and the Prime Minister himself is concerned about the issue of costs in health care.

We understand some of the drivers of health care costs, Mr. Speaker. It is matters relating to our aging population, technology, pharmaceuticals, and we are all looking at various efforts across this country and around the world as to how we can deal with ensuring that our health care system, which must be focused on patients, is sustainable. Sustainability is the ability for us to look after our needs today without impairing the ability of future generations of Albertans to do the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, it has been well acknowledged by the federal government and provinces across this country that, in the words of a federal Liberal Senator, tinkering is not enough. We do have to look at fundamental changes to how we deliver and finance our health care system.

DR. TAFT: While speaking of sustainability, would the Premier admit that his government's spending on health care last year as a percent of the province's GDP is almost exactly the average it has been for the past 15 years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I allude to the relevance of that question, to which, I suggest, there is no relevance.

The simple fact is that health care spending has doubled – he should understand that: doubled – from a little over \$3 billion to something over \$6 billion in five years. That is relevant. Mr. Speaker, the population of this province over that same period of time has not doubled, the number of sick and injured people in this province has not doubled, but health care costs have doubled. Even the hon. member should be able to understand that.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm on my feet, I would like to table the sufficient number of copies of the study to which I alluded earlier. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Health Care Reform

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before the last provincial election and even during it the Premier said nothing – absolutely nothing – about delisting services, challenging the Canada Health Act, or introducing user fees. Instead he said things like, and I quote: without hesitation we fully commit ourselves to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. The Premier has no mandate from the people to attack public health care now. My question to the Premier: why did the Premier conceal from the public his plans to deinsure health care services, increase health care premiums, and introduce user fees during the last Assembly, before the election?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did not have in hand even the essence of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, chaired by Mr. Mazankowski. We do have the preliminary recommendations, and they allude not to specifically the way the hon. leader of the third party makes out, but they allude to some fairly dramatic reforms, reforms that, if adopted by this government, could and probably will – I will make that more definite: will – represent a challenge not to the Canada Health Act itself but the interpretation. I alluded to this publicly, and I'll allude to it in this House: the interpretation of comprehensiveness. What does comprehensive mean? Now, to me it's very subjective. To the hon. leader it could mean – and maybe he'll answer this. Does it mean all things for all people at all times

and for all causes? If that is his interpretation of comprehensiveness, then let him stand up and say. It may not and it probably will not be the interpretation of this government.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please. There's a lot of speculation going on here in the question period today. The purpose of question period is to deal with government policy. There seems to be speculation leading to debate, and that's not the purpose of question period.

The hon. leader.

Health Care Reform

(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question to the Premier: did the government say nothing about introducing user fees or delisting services in its throne speech of February 12, 2001, the very day the election was called, because the government hadn't done its homework over the previous eight years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly as the election was called and as it unfolded, there was widespread knowledge that the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, headed by Mr. Mazankowski, was indeed at that time doing its work. It was only in the last few weeks that we received the preliminary recommendations. The final recommendations will come down later this month, and they will be given due and very careful and very sincere consideration by this government. But we alluded during the election many, many times that we are looking forward with great anticipation to the recommendations of the Mazankowski report so that indeed we could once again become leaders in effecting and bringing about health care reform.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the Premier: given that his government has no mandate whatsoever from the people of Alberta to introduce user fees or deinsure services, will the Premier do the honourable thing and call an election before proceeding with his agenda?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we just had an election, and you know what? They dwindled to two, we've got 74, and they've got seven. And he talks about a mandate? I would remind the hon. leader of the third party that throughout the election campaign it was well known to the hon. member, it was well known to the Liberals, certainly it was well known to every member of the Conservative caucus that a report was under way, a report from a committee that was commissioned by this government to study health care reform. Now they're coming across as if it's a big surprise, you know, as if it's new. Has he had his head in the sand all this time? Will he stand up now and admit – you know, is he saying that he didn't know that Mr. Mazankowski was reviewing health care reform? Is that what he's trying to say, that he didn't know? If he didn't know, then I would respectfully suggest that he is not a very good representative for his people.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister tell the House what the province is doing to protect Alberta's softwood lumber industry against the recent countervail and antidumping actions taken by the U.S. Department of Commerce?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as members of the Assembly may recall, this is not a new issue facing the lumber industry or the timber industry in this province and the provincial government. We have established an overall reputation of working with industry and with the federal government to defend against these allegations, and on previous occasions we've been successful in that defence. However, at this particular time there has been a preliminary determination by the United States Department of Commerce, and currently work is going on in conjunction with the federal government and the other provinces on providing every possible legal and other help that we can to the industry in defending their part of the case, which deals with dumping allegations that have been decided upon by the Department of Commerce. We are working as governments to defend against the countervail findings that have been made by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Those activities are going on currently. We are also communicating with and in touch with the industry with respect to developments in this whole area.

MR. GRAYDON: My supplementary is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister update the House on recent developments on this issue?

MR. JONSON: As I've indicated, Mr. Speaker, there has been the preliminary determination by the Department of Commerce, and currently we are working on putting our case before that particular body. I regret to indicate that it will probably be a matter that will continue on, perhaps into May of next year, before final determinations are made.

In the meantime we are working with industry in terms of their having to deal with the bonding requirements that they have to put in place because of this preliminary ruling. We are also working with the industry to look at the whole possibility of there being some mediated or negotiated settlement that would be of mutual benefit to all parties. As it has been shown in at least two previous incidents, we do feel that there is a strong case to be made on behalf of our industry, and we'll continue to pursue that line of representation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. GRAYDON: Thank you. To the same minister, my second supplementary: can the minister tell us how the government is keeping our industry involved in this process?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, along with the Department of Sustainable Resource Development we have worked with the industry and its various parts to form an Alberta forestry council. We have been meeting regularly with them through our officials. We're trying to advise them on developments on a regular basis so they know what is occurring with respect to these negotiations and these legal matters. In addition, we are discussing on an ongoing basis with them the possible measures that might be taken to resolve this overall matter on a long-term basis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Foster Children

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year at least 439 children in government care were abused or neglected. Recently one youth in care, a 16 year old, was charged with killing a man. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. What action did the minister take after being warned by memo that the boy exhibited unpredictable and aggressive behaviour?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in response to the question I would advise that there's an investigation going on. There are issues that cannot be discussed. Every time a child in care dies or a child in care moves to commit some violent and unfortunate act, we are concerned. We are sadly affected, but the hon. member is asking about a particular issue which I'm not at liberty to divulge any further.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the boy had been placed in 25 foster or group homes, how many more of the 400-plus abused children have similar unacceptable placement records?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am assuming that the hon. member is referring to some children that have been referenced in the advocate's report released August 30. If I may, we have asked for a complete investigation into all of the substantiated and suggested acts. In fact, we have gone so far as to ask which of those particular circumstances had been acts of violence or acts of indiscretion or acts of violation against children while they were in the care of our government, specifically by people who were assigned to do due diligence on behalf of the child. So we're doing a complete investigation on all of the issues that have been cited in that advocate's report. We take very seriously any allegation of lack of care or concern related to children that are in our jurisdiction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how will cutting counseling, limiting case conferences, failing to support foster parents, and placing families on wait lists due to government budget cuts not lead to more incidents like this with these fragile children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the discussion about budget cuts I'll take right on right now. There was a 1 percent cut that every minister at this table agreed would help us fit the cloth of our cost containment. Since that time, Treasury Board has agreed to add to our base budget a line of \$4 million, knowing that we get that money right back from the federal government as it relates to care of aboriginal children in those areas which have been served by our government.

2:50

We have added resources, Mr. Speaker, on the front lines. In this past year almost 475 staff or staff positions have been part of what is going on in Children's Services, and of those we have filled as many as we could up until the hiring freeze. We have worked very hard to make sure that the reductions do not happen on the level of dealing with the child. If there are changes in the administrative functions, they are happening administratively, not where the child in need actually sits.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned as well about those allegations of reductions that might occur where the child is, but our foster parents

as of May of this year had an increase in moneys across the board. I'm puzzled somewhat that there are allegations coming from the hon. member opposite that we have not done our due diligence to children's services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Coyote Hunting

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, following our Remembrance Day service in Champion this past Sunday, which celebrated our freedoms, I had three constituents convey to me their disappointment and disapproval with the new government regulation which they feel was created after negative feedback from one TV documentary and which they feel severely restricts their freedoms to protect their private land and their assets. My question today is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why did the minister's department come out with the regulation to prohibit coyote hunting with dogs in rural Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a good question. Of course, we are concerned when the use of dogs for recreational hunting is happening in Alberta. Albertans have told us that they do not support and do not accept the use of dogs for recreational hunting. Both my department, Sustainable Resource Development, and Agriculture, Food and Rural Development have amended regulations to strictly limit – it's not prevent but limit – the use of dogs to hunt coyotes. Livestock producers will be able to continue using dogs. All they have to do is prove to us that the coyotes are doing damage to their livestock, and what we will do is then assess the situation and provide them actually with a 30-day permit to be able to deal with that particular issue. I believe we are doing the right thing. We believe the new permit system will satisfy generally all Albertans out there.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, if I could, I'd like to ask my first supplemental question, then, to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Why should a farmer or a rancher have to demonstrate that they've tried all other means of coyote predation control before even getting a permit to have coyotes hunted on their own land?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that that in fact is not the case. Livestock producers do not have to prove that they have exhausted every means. In fact, Alberta Agriculture has given the responsibility for the giving out of permits to agricultural fieldmen to make it as convenient to the producer as possible, to make sure that the decisions are made in the region where the problem is so that those people in those regions are well aware of whether coyote predation is a serious issue, and if it is, the producer will go to the ag fieldman and request a temporary permit, which they will get, I am sure, if this is an issue.

I want to make it clear. I've heard the same thing, that this was going to be an onerous process, that we were going to cause livestock producers grave losses in sheep and calves and so on because they would have to go through some onerous process to get a permit. To protect their livestock from coyote predators, they can obtain a permit in their own region from an agricultural fieldman who will be well aware of the issue of coyote numbers causing

havoc with livestock. So along with other methods of prevention that we certainly encourage, this is there for the producer if they need to use it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you. It sounds to me like coyotes are worth more than livestock.

Mr. Speaker, my final question: because the animal rights activists seem to have had a great influence, I'd like to know if the farmers and ranchers who've lost livestock or family pets were consulted on this regulatory change.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, yes, we've had a lot of input from livestock producers, certainly from producers who have need to use this type of control to protect their livestock. In some cases it is just by using guard dogs, but in other cases where it is difficult to hunt coyotes, perhaps with a gun or other methods, and if using dogs is the only answer, we've talked to those folks. Actually discussing it with them was a key factor in us continuing to allow this practice.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure the hon. member heard my first answer, because it is not the case . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please. We've now spent five minutes on this question. If the hon. member has not heard the complete first answer, he will have the privilege of reading the answer in *Hansard*, which will be published shortly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rent Subsidy Program

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have been struggling over the past couple of years with 30 to 40 percent rent increases and vacancy rates that have dropped to 1 percent. For low-income households that pay 45 percent of their income for rent, this struggle has been very hard. My question is to the Minister of Seniors. Why did the government choose to put thousands of at-risk people onto the street by freezing the rent subsidy program available under the private landlord rent supplement program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, this government hasn't, nor will it, put people out on the street. I'd like to point out very clearly that our rent subsidy, social housing support, and senior housing support cover some 40,000 units – I repeat that, 40,000 units – 28,000 of which are owned by the province. When private landlords increase the rent, we are stuck into it. Nobody is put out on the street.

I'd like to also further state very clearly, Mr. Speaker, that one of the problems we're having with an active economy is that with what once was social housing in terms of units being made available by the private sector, many of these are being condominiumized, making it difficult for us to find new units.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Given that the units the minister speaks about are not available to these people who have been cut off this list, where exactly did the minister contemplate these people were going to go? Another MAP program?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, again I must emphasize that we are doing everything possible, everything reasonable to work with these folks. We've also embarked in co-operation with another level of government, so both levels, local and federal, in dealing with the whole area of affordable housing in Edmonton, Calgary, Fort McMurray, you name it. There are a lot of spots around this province where due to the strong economic activity, yes, we are facing housing problems, and we are dealing with them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the people on the waiting list for the housing subsidies have been blindsided by this announcement, can't the department do better than to delay until six weeks after the change to inform these Albertans affected and to give the workers administering these programs an opportunity to plan? Six weeks later they were told.

3:00

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know from where she gets her information, because we haven't announced any freezes on anything; we haven't frozen anything. I'd like to also point out that our housing support program works very, very well in that we have some 48 percent of clients who are people who are on other forms of government assistance. This is additional assistance to them. Also, fully 70 percent of the other half of the people are not on the program for more than three years, which means they're able to get off and find alternate forms of housing which are within their realm.

I'd also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that we've made some other changes recently, which are not being brought up by the hon. member, in that we don't immediately increase their rents with their income – that is frozen for a full year to give them the opportunity to better themselves and hopefully move off – and a lot of other improvements to the regulations which have come about through consultation with the very people who live in these units. I would suggest that the member get her facts a little bit more clear.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Travel Default Insurance

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week Albertans were shocked and surprised by the unfortunate news that yet another of Canada's international airlines, Canada 3000, had ceased operations. Now, this announcement has left many Albertans who had purchased tickets from Canada 3000 uncertain of whether or not they will be able to take the vacations they had purchased. Although airlines are a federally regulated industry, from a consumer protection standpoint can the Minister of Government Services update the House on Canada 3000's current situation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it is a very good question from the hon. member. The current situation is changing minute by minute. We found that Canada 3000 was in bankruptcy on Sunday, and they are in court today. I understand that one potential buyer for approximately one-third of the airline has come forward, and that's the former owner, Royal Airlines. I think the hon. member will have a comfort level that other carriers and other charter organizations have pitched in to get their travelers home here to Alberta, but the bottom line is that we'll know more about these events following the court case today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: what protection specifically is available for Alberta travelers who booked Canada 3000 flights through travel agencies such as the ones in my constituency?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, the government has worked with the travel industry to encourage travel agents to offer travel default insurance to all consumers. As a result, the Association of Canadian Travel Agents (Alberta) has made it mandatory for their members to offer this kind of insurance. For Albertans who have purchased tickets with a credit card, refunds should be made available through Visa, American Express, and MasterCard. Alberta legislation also protects consumers who may have purchased travel arrangements over the Internet, and that can be done through our new Internet sales regulations. Albertans can contact Government Services consumer information line for information on this and can access our tip sheet on that particular subject on the Internet.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you. My last supplemental to the same minister: has Alberta considered employing an assurance fund similar to those in other provinces?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that that possibility was considered, but there would be costs to taxpayers, to consumers, and to businesses to fund and administer such a plan. These costs have to be looked at seriously, especially given all the other compensation options offered in the marketplace.

In the three provinces that offer such funds, travelers must have booked through a travel agent to be covered under that fund, and individuals who book directly through the airlines are not protected. However, in light of the recent events we may need to take another look at travel compensation funds for the future, unlike what I'm hearing from the opposition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Intensive Livestock Operations

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What changes are being made to the Municipal Government Act in support of the government's decision to restrict municipal control over local land planning issues and intensive livestock operations, or confined feeding operations, as you now prefer to call them?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, the question being posed falls under our Deputy Premier and minister of agriculture, but I am prepared to say that we're working very closely with the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties and the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association. In fact, this week we'll be attending their convention. So I will say that I will supplement to the hon. minister responsible for the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister:

why is your department supporting the removal of an important local land use planning issue from municipal authorities, where it belongs?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the question being posed is to the minister of agriculture, but the short answer to the question is that we are not.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am a bit surprised at the hon. member's line of questioning because I know that we had a fairly extensive discussion with the leader of that party to talk about how we would handle this. This is a very important matter to both the livestock industry and the citizens of this province because it deals with the protection of soil, water, and air. But the thing that really surprised me – and I just want to mention to the hon. member that there was a news release released by their caucus in 1997. It said:

The Minister of Environmental Protection should work with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to ensure that the current Code of Practice for the operation of intensive livestock operations is administered by the province and is enforceable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we're talking about. To suggest that the municipalities have lost their opportunity to zone land or to designate its use is wrong, because the municipalities have been asked to voluntarily forward to the NRCB, which will be the body that looks after this, not Alberta Agriculture, the land use plans for their municipalities and to identify areas where intensive livestock operations, or confined feeding operations, a more appropriate term, will not be permitted and the reasons for that. The NRCB would have that information and would factor it into their deliberations. In fact, the first thing that the NRCB would do with an application is send it to the municipality for their input.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this gentleman has been, but it certainly hasn't been in the discussion of the report that came in to us that we accepted the recommendations of.

MR. BONNER: Back to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr. Speaker. When is your department going to establish a new partnership with municipal councils based on clear rules and responsibilities rather than the whim of that government?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you very much. In fact, to the hon. member, I was very pleased, Mr. Speaker, just two weeks ago to speak at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. In speaking with them, it was interesting how the province of Alberta under Alberta's Municipal Government Act is viewed as a leader in every province of this country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

3:10

Teachers' Salaries

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last April the Premier told this province's teachers that they could expect wage settlements that were on a par with those provided to doctors and nurses, yet here we are more than six months later and this promise has not been kept. My question is then to the minister. When will the minister step in and ensure that school boards are given the necessary financial resources to provide fair wage settlements to Alberta teachers?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Budget 2001 there was a 4 percent amount put in for teachers' salaries, a minimum of 4 percent, and 2 percent further in the year 2002. The rationale behind that 6 percent is that it made our teachers on average the best paid across the provinces in the country of Canada, and we felt that that was an important starting point for the negotiations. The school boards had their per student grant, which they have been negotiating teachers' salaries with for the last 50 or 60 years, and they now have the ability to sit down to negotiate an end to the discussion about salaries with teachers.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, if the minister says that the 4 percent and the 2 percent offered by the government was a starting point for negotiation, will he then commit the government to supplement the resources of school boards so that they can offer a fair deal to Alberta's teachers?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, there are actually a couple of questions there. First of all, when it comes to the 4 and 2 percent as being fair, what we said is that we wanted our teachers to be the highest paid in the country, which they will be. The 4 and 2 percent would assure them of that. It is then up to the school boards and the teachers, the ATA, to sit down and negotiate a settlement as to what they think is the fair amount.

There are dollars available. We increased the budget to the school boards this year – this year – 8.4 percent, Mr. Speaker. That's in addition to 9.8 percent last year. That's around 17 or 18 percent that it has increased in the last two years. We've increased funding to education close to 40 percent since 1995, so this government is making a huge commitment to education.

We presently spend about \$4.8 billion in the Department of Learning, Mr. Speaker. For every student who is in the province of Alberta, the government of Alberta spends \$7,500.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, is the minister and this government attempting to provoke job action by Alberta's teachers in order to take away their right to strike?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, this minister and this government want anything but. We want our teachers to be in the classroom. We want our students to be learning. We want our students to be in the classroom. I don't think anyone in this House, I don't think anyone in Alberta feels that paying teachers 15 percent higher than any other provincial rate is the right way to go. We do not want a strike. We want our teachers to be where they should be, which is in the classroom in front of students, teaching kids.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Helen Hart

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday, November 10, 2001, I was extremely privileged to attend the very wonderful memorial service held in honour of Helen Hart, a truly amazing woman who for 53 years was wife and constant companion to wrestler Stu Hart. Emotionally charged tributes were delivered by brother-in-law Jock Osler, children Bruce, Bret, Ross, and Georgia, and close friends Premier Ralph Klein, Ed Whalen, and Alderman Craig Burrows, all in loving memory of Helen, the remarkable matriarch of the legendary Hart wrestling family of Calgary, Alberta.

By now thousands of Calgarians, Albertans, and Canadians will have come to know of Helen Hart, who was indeed the rock at the centre of a large, exuberant family of 12 children. To know Helen's story, of the strikingly beautiful and intelligent young lady raised in Long Island, New York, who was the oldest of five daughters of an international track star and who chose to marry the handsome wrestler from rural Alberta, enables one to begin to understand the qualities and dynamics of the large family Helen and Stu Hart created. Son Bruce referred to the opposites attract theory and his mother's humorous quote: we got married in a blizzard, and I've been snowed under ever since.

Helen Hart represented many strengths and values throughout her life, which enabled her to endure the tragic deaths of sons Dean and Owen and grandson Matthew. Helen always held her head high, exercised unwavering integrity, was totally devoted to her family, and was so proud of their accomplishments. She was the voice of reason, tolerance, and compassion, and said Brett: she had the most perfect hug.

Our Premier quoted an old Jewish proverb: God cannot be everywhere, so he made mothers. Why is it that only upon death one receives full acknowledgment of one's specialness and worth? Helen Hart's very special memorial service told so well her story of a much loved, remarkable wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother and of her family's pain and devastation in their loss. My wish for Stu and their family is to honour Helen's memory by always remembering her strength of character, courage, dignity, acceptance, and love.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Bettie Hewes

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to pay tribute to our former interim leader and the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Edmonton-Gold Bar, Bettie Hewes. Bettie was an outstanding wife, mother, grandmother, sister, friend, community advocate, and colleague. As a politician she has no equal. Our Great White Granny took the task of educating Prime Ministers, Premiers, ministers, private members, and private citizens on issues close to her heart with a determination that was formidable. Her issues were people issues. How did decision-making impact people? How were we helping those who didn't have a voice? Most particularly, how did we help, protect, and best serve the needs of children.

As a result of her focus she was able to shift political debate and decision-making in this province and in this country to include a human focus that has often been missing. Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions many of us that came into the Legislature as new MLAs were seen to be consulting, seeking advice, and getting Bettie's opinion on how to make sure our legislation reflected the human aspect.

One of her great political regrets was that the province did not fully ratify the UN convention on the rights of the child. This was an issue she brought forward as a bill in 1993 and continued to ask for throughout her term as an MLA. We have no doubt that this government will wish to leave a legacy for Bettie Hewes as an outstanding contributor to the history of this province. Would it not be great if we could leave her the legacy she repeatedly asked for, if a full, unconditional ratification of the UN convention on the rights of the child could happen?

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Communities in Bloom Town of Millet

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1995 a nonprofit Canadian organization, Communities in Bloom, began a program committed to fostering civic pride, environmental responsibility and beautification through community participation and friendly national competition. Communities are challenged to improve the appearance of their streets, neighbourhoods, and parks through their imaginative use of flowers, plants, and trees with emphasis upon environmental awareness and preservation of heritage and culture.

Interest in this program has been growing, particularly in Alberta, which has more municipalities involved than any other province. Communities in Bloom has had particular appeal in the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency, where almost all communities have entered the competition at one level or another with noticeable results in appearance, community involvement, tourist attraction, and a heightened sense of civic pride and quality of life.

One community in my constituency, the town of Millet, has especially embraced the Communities in Bloom challenge under the leadership of Bernice Knight, who is locally known as Millet's flower lady. Millet first entered this competition in 1996, when it was judged best in Alberta in its population category of 1,000 to 3,000. Since then, Millet's dedicated Communities in Bloom committees have guided the town to numerous awards. In 1997 Millet was again judged best in Alberta. In 1998 it won the award in the best floral category in all of Canada. In 1999 it was judged to have the best landscaped areas in all of Canada, and in international competition in 2000 it was judged to have the best landscaping with historical artifacts. This year Millet was awarded the best in the area of heritage conservation and overall best in Canada in its population category. It's no wonder Millet is known by many as the prettiest little town in Alberta.

To all of the communities in Alberta that have beautified our province this summer through the Communities in Bloom program, I say thanks and congratulations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Bettie Hewes

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Bettie Hewes, former MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar, served in this legislative Chamber for 11 years. While I did not know Bettie well, I admired her for many reasons. Mrs. Hewes and I shared the same birth province, Ontario, and the same alma mater, the University of Toronto.

3:20

I wish now to share my admiration for the life of Bettie Hewes, a woman who was tirelessly involved in activities that improved life in the communities of Edmonton and the province. Over the years, Mrs. Hewes was recognized with many honours. Today I wish to highlight a few. Among them, in 1980 Bettie Hewes received the province of Alberta's achievement award for community service. In 1987 she was deservedly honoured with the YWCA's tribute to women award for public affairs and communication. In 1990 the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation recognized Mrs. Hewes' effective efforts to improve the quality of life in Edmonton with their outstanding service award.

Bettie Hewes was an intelligent and compassionate woman who through her numerous contributions to public life and with the strength of her personality has contributed significantly to the richly textured and strongly woven social fabric of our province.

head: **Motions under Standing Order 40**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition on a Standing Order 40 application.

Health Care Reform

Dr. Nicol: Be it resolved that this Assembly adjourn the ordinary business of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the need for public debate and consultation to counteract the speculation that surrounds reform of the health care system in Alberta.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the urgency of the motion, I think it's obvious that this is our first day of the session, so we couldn't bring it forward before. So we'll start with that as the premise of creating the urgency.

One of the things that has been brought to my attention very much in the last week or 10 days is the fact that there are a lot of, quote, suggestions being made about the direction our health care may take in the future. These suggestions are leading people to basically question what is happening, how much weight they should put on those musings, and whether or not those musings are really preambles or buildups to new legislation. So they're basically asking for clarification. Given that this is, again as I said, our first day, it's a good time for us to clarify that, especially in the context that possibly over the next month, two months, three months we may see a series of public reports being completed and distributed in the public domain, those being the report by the Premier's Advisory Council on Health from Mr. Mazankowski and the report being done federally by Mr. Romanow, and also as we lead up to next spring's budget, dealing with the province's interpretation and application of the public health care system.

So it's my sense today that what we need to do is talk about how all of these things fit together so that as we go into the next few weeks, few months and people start to hear about those reports, start to hear about potential budget changes, they'll be able to interpret them in the context of how those kinds of reports and budgeting activities fit together. So if we don't have that kind of overarching view today, then we won't be able to fully communicate to the constituents the kinds of priorities that are being put on it, the kinds of boundaries that were being put on these kinds of committees that have to deal with providing us with input.

The other issue I'd like to address, Mr. Speaker, is that we have opportunity to question the government in the context of question period, but it doesn't give us the chance to encourage the interactive debate that's necessary for Albertans to fully understand the potential and the impact of the kind of changes that are being rumoured in connection with the health care system. During question period today you constantly reminded us that question period is a time when we question the government on government policy; we don't get into interactive debate.

Mr. Speaker, I'd ask now that you find that this is a time when we should set aside a period for some urgent debate on how Albertans can expect to fall together and to bring into perspective all of the things they'll be hearing about in the coming weeks in connection with possible changes in the public health care system and the overall health care system of Alberta in terms of how they relate to each other, how the public system fits with the insured system and the cash system as well.

So those are the reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I truly believe, that I would hope you'd find right now that this is a time when urgency does prevail and a debate on the whole aspect of the future of our health care system would fit in.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: This is a Standing Order 40 application. It has nothing to do with the Speaker. It requires unanimous consent of the Assembly to proceed, so I'll now address the question.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 210

**Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and
Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour for me to rise and begin debate on Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001. This bill will help thousands of Albertans continue to maintain their independence, make decisions about their own lives, and have choices in where and how they live. Bill 210 will amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to allow for a greater tax exemption for individuals who are caring for dependent adults or relatives in their homes.

Specifically, the bill would allow for nonrefundable tax credits equal to the spousal credit of \$12,900 for individuals that have dependent adults or relatives living with them. This is a substantial jump in tax credits but necessary to reward and encourage home care. Bill 210's tax credit rewards people who currently care for dependent adults and adds incentive for more people to consider home care as an option in the future.

This bill is another proactive step forward for the short- and long-term benefit of all Albertans. Before the spring 2000 session of this Legislature the maximum level of tax credits was \$2,386. However, Bill 18 raised both the caregiver and the dependent tax credit to \$3,500. Bill 210 proposes to prepare for the future and offer an even bigger tax credit level for taxpayers considering or already caring for dependent adults. This bill involves not only the Department of Finance, by amending the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, but also the Department of Health and Wellness' goals and visions for Alberta's larger aging population.

There are two excellent reports that touch on the reasons why we need to encourage and reward home care. The reports, Strategic Directions and Future Actions and Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care, share many of the same objectives as Bill 210. This government must ensure that aging Albertans are treated with respect and dignity and create a setting where dependent adults can achieve quality living supported by relatives, friends, and community networks. Bill 210 will lift the pressure off Health and Wellness' initiatives while at the same time keeping communities strong and dynamic. Our constituents will appreciate Bill 210 as the increased tax credits will have a direct, positive effect on home care providers.

Thankfully the fact that our province is rapidly aging is not lost on this government. We have been thinking ahead, analyzing the aging trend, and developing plans to smother the smoldering fires that could be caused from this emerging problem. According to the report Alberta for All Ages: Directions for the Future, by the year 2016 the number of seniors in Alberta will equal half of the population of Calgary. The tricky part of this aging trend is that although these people will not be fully independent, they will continue to be community leaders, volunteers, and essential to the family unit.

One large example of seniors' importance to society is their accomplishments as dedicated volunteers. In 1997 23 percent of

seniors were formal volunteers and 64 percent were involved in informal volunteer work. This vital group will grow as the number of seniors increases. I know that everyone in this Assembly can think of several times during the election when seniors worked diligently to help us all get there.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the speaking time allocated for this particular order of business today has now left us.

3:30

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

507. Mr. Cao moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to ensure that assured income for the severely handicapped recipients transferring to a nonexempt income such as the Canadian pension plan disability program retain medical benefits until similar income limits are reached that disqualify medical benefits to partially exempt income earners under the assured income for the severely handicapped program.

[Debate adjourned May 22: Mr. Cao speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this motion means is that such an action would generally improve the care of the disabled in Alberta. AISH clients will not seek alternate income streams that would cause them to lose medical benefits. Annual costs for equivalent medical benefits through Alberta Blue Cross and Alberta health care are about \$1,170. Individuals earning more than the current AISH nonexempt income threshold of \$10,800 receive no subsidy for their health care costs. Given this, individuals would have to be compensated by at least \$100 per month to leave the AISH program for other income streams. However, if this motion is passed, the government can expect some AISH clients to leave the AISH income stream for other nonexempt income alternatives outside the provincial government. Additionally, there would be cost savings on the administration and billing by Alberta health care and Alberta Blue Cross, not to mention the probable savings through avoiding the forfeiture of the Alberta health care premium.

The AISH recipients are typically low-income individuals. As this Assembly is aware, many low-income Albertans find it difficult to cover the cost of their health care premiums and must forfeit them anyway. The amount of the premiums forfeited by the government is around \$408 per year for every person who does not receive medical benefits and cannot pay for them on their own.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that this change would be costless, but there are many very real possibilities of recouping at least a portion of the expenses. Ultimately, this is a matter of priorities. Are we willing to allow those afflicted with severe disabilities to go without essential medical services? It is important to recognize that for some Albertans extended medical coverage is an urgent concern. For example, individuals who are brittle diabetics or severe epileptics could very well not survive without emergency ambulance service. Although these services would not be deprived based upon the inability to pay, is it fair that we ask them to? Can we honestly expect disadvantaged individuals to be able to pay for those ambulance services from their own pockets, considering the frequency that the service would be required by them?

The target income amount, just over \$20,900, for individuals to cover their own medical costs is far more reasonable than the current \$10,800 for the nonexempt income earners. By passing Motion 507,

we would provide severely disabled Albertans with peace of mind and the recognition that they have a right to extended medical services, for their very survival depends on it.

I strongly urge the members of this Assembly to put the health of severely handicapped Albertans first in supporting Motion 507. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to this motion that's been brought forward. Certainly I believe that this is the kind of motion that we can support in this Assembly. All of us who have done constituency work, a short period for those newly elected and the many years that some of us have been around, understand the problems that occur with people on limited incomes trying to access medical services if their plans that they're on change or if they try to integrate into other available plans such as this member talked about, being the Canada pension plan. A small amount of increase in revenue puts them over the limit for the AISH limits for receiving medical treatment, and clearly they can't access medical treatment.

Now, anyone who thinks reasonably that someone who's living on \$855 a month has got the resources to be able to access a private medical insurance plan is dreaming in technicolour, because they don't have the cash flow. They also don't have the cash flow to pay up front for the prescription drugs or the services that they need and get reimbursed later on. The money is just not there. By the time they cover their basic costs of housing and food, lots of months there isn't even enough money left over for bus passes, never mind medical care. So what happens is that they end up going without needed medical care or medicine.

I believe that depriving those people of that ability to access proper medical care truly is a human rights issue and is something that this government needs to be aware of. We have asked repeatedly for this to happen, so we're happy to see this motion come forward. We would hope that at some point the government will take the advice from this private member and incorporate this into a bill that will come forward in the Legislature so that we can see this particular issue addressed.

Particularly, this is going to become increasingly important as we see a tightening up of the fiscal regime in the province. There's going to be less money available for all the people who would want to access such kinds of programs. We may eventually see more delisting of services. We may see user fees come in a health care model in this province in the future. If that's the case, then these people on limited incomes are going to be even more significantly affected, and this government needs to think proactively and in the long term in terms of the kind of impact their decisions are going to have on people on limited incomes. So we would hope that they would consider this.

As the government turns to what we hope will be a wellness model in the future, where people are encouraged to take good care of their health now rather than waiting for problems to occur, and we talk about prevention models being put in place, it's going to be even more important for people on AISH to have access to medical care and to other kinds of services that will help move them into a wellness mode. So, again, now is the time for the government to be considering this kind of a motion.

While they're considering it for AISH, we would like them to consider it for other kinds of models in this province, Mr. Speaker. Repeatedly we have seen problems occur for families or individuals who are on social assistance and who are trying to move back into

the workforce. There's a transition period there where they have absolutely zero dollars and resources as they're moving back into the workforce, yet immediately when they get a job, their health care services are cut off. So if the kids get sick or they get sick or they need prescriptions, ambulance services, whatever, suddenly they have no resources to pay for this. It makes the transition back into the workforce even harder for these people, and it is very discouraging for them to do so.

So while the government takes a look at this kind of a proposal from a private member, we would hope that they would expand the view that they're taking here and take a look at some of the other problems that we see occurring on a regular basis, and that would be transition time for those on social assistance moving back into the workforce.

I think that some of the points that this member has made during his debates, now and previously, before we recessed for the summer, are good points, not perhaps entirely the way that we would like to see the model brought forward. One thing that he didn't talk about that we would have wanted to see addressed in debate and perhaps it will be by other members is the exact amount or costs of medical benefits. Is it going to be on a sliding scale? Are we just going to look at 100 percent transition? What kind of a model are they looking at there? So the details haven't really been fleshed out, but being that this is a motion, where we just bring the idea forward for discussion hoping that the government will take advantage of it and will help take care of these vulnerable citizens, we're happy to support it and certainly hope that we see some of the ministers from the government standing up and supporting this, particularly the minister of health. I believe that this is where a great deal of discussion would have to happen around the cabinet table to see this particular idea brought forward and put into legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat, leaving lots of room for members of the government to address this particular motion.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege, and I'm very happy to speak in favour of Motion 507, put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. It's a great and very timely motion. It speaks to the kinds of motions that we should be considering here in the House. It deals directly with one of the most vital duties of this elected Legislature, and that is to find equitable and compassionate solutions for the challenges facing our most vulnerable citizens. You know, I've often heard it said that you measure the worth of a society not by how the most favourite among us are treated but by how the most disfavoured among us are treated. Really, that's how we should be measuring the worth of our society, in which by any world standard we are all quite privileged.

Mr. Speaker, current policies regarding the assured income for the severely handicapped place unnecessary financial and emotional stress on AISH clients. This stress is being felt by a group of people who already confront extraordinarily difficult challenges on a daily basis relative to other Albertans.

Before I go into detail about why this motion should be supported, it is appropriate to explain exactly what this motion would do. I know that the Member for Calgary-Fort explained it, but because this particular presentation of mine I think will be read by people in my constituency independent of what other people may have said, I'd like to reiterate it just once again.

Now, to be considered severely handicapped in Alberta, a person must be in a physical state that permanently – and that's the key word: permanently – prohibits that person from being able to earn

enough to cover even minimal living expenses. Eligible persons apply for funding from both provincial and federal sources. The main source of funding from the federal government is the Canadian pension plan disability section. The main source of funding from the provincial government is the assured income for the severely handicapped, or AISH. So that means that eligible persons are able to apply to the federal government through the Canada pension plan disability provision and to the provincial government through AISH.

Both of the programs have similar standards, but there is a very, very important difference between the two programs. The federal CPP program does not have medical disability, the medical payment component. One big difference in addition to the level of financial assistance provided by the two programs: AISH provides \$850 per month for a person with no spouse or dependants who receive no other form of income; the Canada pension plan has a maximum financial assistance level of \$932.12 per month. So the Canada pension plan pays \$85 or so more per month. So there's an incentive for people to go to the Canada pension plan for their disability benefits, but if they get the Canada pension plan disability benefits, they're not eligible for the medical benefits from Alberta, a catch-22 position if ever there was one.

The support level from the Canada pension plan depends on a variety of factors, including how much one contributed over their working life to the Canada pension plan, if anything. Now, an applicant to AISH must apply for Canada pension plan disability benefits before they can apply for AISH financial benefits and receive nothing at all or receive less than the maximum \$850 per month AISH benefit payment. To be clear, if you apply to the Canada pension plan and get less than \$850, you would be eligible to get the Alberta medical benefits, but if you applied to the Canada pension plan and got more than \$850, if you got \$851, you would not be eligible to get the Alberta medical benefits for dental care, for ambulance, the extended medical package.

Another crucial difference is that for people who receive any level of AISH financial benefits, they are also eligible for AISH medical benefits. So that means that if you get AISH benefits at all, if you get one dollar of AISH benefits, you're also eligible for the complete Alberta medical benefit, and that's a very important consideration. These benefits, the Alberta medical benefits, provide payment for medical expenses not already covered by Alberta health care such as prescription drugs, eyeglasses, dental work, and ambulance services. The average AISH benefit recipient uses about \$240 per month of these additional benefits. For terminally ill patients, such as some clients with HIV/AIDS, these medical benefits can far exceed the AISH financial benefit, to an amount perhaps as much as \$3,000 a month.

The AISH medical benefits are an incredibly important item to those eligible recipients. AISH has been designed with some flexibility so that former AISH recipients may continue to receive medical benefits even if they earn too much money to be eligible for AISH financial benefits. If an AISH recipient receives up to \$21,000, they are still eligible for the very important medical coverage. However, if the income is from Canada pension plan disability, they don't get it, and this just doesn't make sense.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, to be clear, for every dollar received from the Canada pension plan disability benefits, an AISH client receives \$1 less in AISH financial benefits. If a person on AISH receives \$849 a month in Canada pension plan payments or if they receive \$1 of AISH financial benefits, they are eligible to receive all of the AISH medical benefits. However, if the same person receives just \$2

more, or \$851, from Canada pension plan, they get zero, none, nada benefits of the medical coverage, which is prescription health, prescription eyeglasses, ambulance, and dental. It just doesn't make sense. So what this motion seeks to do, Mr. Speaker, is to treat all income the same for AISH medical benefit eligibility. Therefore, an eligible AISH recipient will still be eligible to receive medical benefits even though they are not receiving AISH financial benefits.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie alluded to this question: how much is all this going to cost? How many people are involved? As the member said, this being a motion, this is not part of this particular debate at this time. Today there are about 27,000 Albertans who are disabled to the degree that they cannot earn a living wage and are eligible for AISH and Canada pension plan disability benefits. So, Mr. Speaker, imagine how these people feel when they have to deal with the current complications with AISH and CPP benefits. Those that have qualified for either of these programs clearly need the financial support it provides, especially the medical benefits of AISH. Now, imagine those who by some government policy quirk received \$851 in Canada pension disability payments and all of a sudden their AISH medical benefits are gone. They're on their own to cover whatever prescription drug costs or ambulance services or dental or anything else that's covered that may arise.

Supporting this motion will cost substantially less than it may first seem. Yes, there will be increased costs because this government would be providing extended medical coverage for many hundreds of severely handicapped people that previously did not receive it. For some clients these will be considerable expenses, especially those terminally ill patients needing large amounts of prescription medications. But consider this: currently there is an incentive for people to stop receiving Canada pension plan disability payments and instead replace them with AISH financial benefits. So, you know, think about it. If the first source of payment is the Canada pension plan payments, but when you hit \$851, you're cut off your medical benefits, doesn't it make more sense to go to AISH, the Alberta plan, and get it all and then get the medical payments as well? That way they will continue to receive a similar amount of financial benefit, but they'll also receive the AISH medical benefit.

3:50

CPP disability payments are funded by the federal government while AISH financial payments are funded by the Alberta government. People are encouraged to accept money from the Alberta government when they just as easily qualify for income support from the federal government and should get it from the federal government because that is the order of government whose prime and first responsibility is to make those payments. You can see that the province would have an opportunity to save an immense amount of money if clients received more in CPP disability payments, which everyone who has paid into Canada pension plan disability over the years has paid into and should receive, and less AISH financial assistance, and clients would be encouraged to stay with the Canada pension plan disability payment plan if this motion were passed.

Surely the AISH program was not designed to punish those who happen to receive Canada pension plan disability payments. Surely our government and this province can be flexible enough to correct this imbalance, to make the small adjustment necessary so that Alberta's severely handicapped receive the dignity and respect they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister of human resources.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Motion 507 as it relates to some of the benefits that we provide for some of our Albertans that have experienced difficulties that many of us here in the House today have no experience with, and of course we thank God that we don't have to, but at the same time we have to understand that here in Alberta and as the government of Alberta we do have a responsibility that we will certainly meet in terms of assistance to those Albertans who truly need our assistance.

Now, the earlier speakers have discussed at some length, I think, the issue that we find ourselves in as it relates to any kind of a program when a line is drawn, and of course if people are below that particular line, in this case in terms of income, there are benefits, then, that apply. Of course, whether it's \$1, \$5, or even 5 cents over that line, then there are some consequences to that. So I think that it's important that motions like this come forward so that they can be discussed in the House and thus, then, provide information to the government as we move forward.

The motion, of course, being debated this afternoon is very timely, Mr. Speaker, because as all Albertans know, we have recently had a group of government MLAs that have gone throughout the province of Alberta listening to the concerns of Albertans as it relates to assistance to Albertans who receive low income. I think that it's only proper that I go on record as the minister responsible that certainly with an AISH payment of \$855 a month these AISH people would be classed in the low-income area. So part of the review, then, was to determine what, if anything, should be done in these particular areas.

Now, the motion of course has singled out a particular group, and we have been doing that in Alberta for quite a period of time. We might want to discuss at some point – but it would have to be under other topics, I would guess – this constant pattern that we have of labeling people. So we have assured income for the severely handicapped. I understand and I realize that the so-called AISH program is a program that's supported very well not only around this province but is seen as a leader across Canada. Again, just for the purposes of the discussion this afternoon, you know, we label some people as severely handicapped, and because of that particular label we don't worry, then, so much about the need, but as soon as we apply that particular label, then we start moving benefits into place that provide, then, for that particular grouping.

There are other labels that we use. We have, you know, people who are expected to work, people who are not expected to work. We have assured support for people, and we continue throughout our mandate, as we look at legislation that we're responsible for, and keep coming up with these groups that are labeled. Why can't we just, for at least a second, start to think in terms of Albertans, that we all are citizens of this great province, that we all have needs and we all have wants, and that there's really only a difference in magnitude of those needs and wants, depending, then, on our particular position, whether we've gained a particular position through education that we have in our background, whether we've been very fortunate in terms of our birth, or whether we're just lucky and got dealt a hand by whoever it is that deals out these hands in life that was easier to manage than what some other people have had to deal with? Wouldn't it be nice to be able to just think in terms of all of us as Albertans and recognize that, yes, there are Albertans that will have a specific need and then start to move toward trying to develop a response to that particular need and have them recognized by their name rather than as severely handicapped?

I don't want to take away from the motivation of the Member for Calgary-Fort, who has brought forward this motion. He has shown to me and other ministers his concern for his constituents, his

concern for Albertans that are in need. So he is here today with a motion urging the government to ensure, to consider, and to evaluate as to how we might deal with this line in the sand that we've talked about and, when a person goes beyond it, how their medical benefits can be impacted. I encourage that kind of motivation and I encourage that kind of debate, because I think that as we have entered into this new century, maybe it's just time for some new thinking.

Now, I've seen preliminary reports from the low-income review task force, and of course we are waiting for the final submissions from that group both in terms of what it was that they heard and then, coming from that of course, the recommendations that would follow from that. Then it'll be our responsibility as a government to then make a determination as to our response.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, the motion is a worthy motion. I would encourage all members in the House to support this motion, as I will be. Again, I want to just add the caveat, if I can, that in supporting it and in urging the government to ensure this kind of a relationship, we take this as one more suggestion that we're receiving inside all of those huge suggestions that Albertans have presented to us in the low-income review and that when it is time to respond, we respond in a cohesive and a coherent manner based on the need of an individual Albertan instead of a collective need of some labeled group.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to speak to Motion 507, which urges our government to continue to extend medical benefits to clients of assured income for the severely handicapped if they have transferred to Canadian pension plan disability or other nonexempt income programs. I firmly believe that assured income for the severely handicapped recipients in our province who choose to transfer to other income support programs should still receive extended medical benefits. I feel it should be considered that these people receive medical benefits until they reach the limit that would disqualify medical benefits under guidelines set out for partially exempt income recipients of AISH, which is what Motion 507 is proposing.

4:00

I believe that the AISH program has helped many Albertans continue to be vibrant participants in our families and communities in our province. The program was designed to protect and support the people who need it most, those who are unable to work to support themselves due to a severe disability.

I support Motion 507 because I believe it would make an already great program better. AISH benefits many vulnerable Albertans. The level of benefits a recipient receives is dependent on his or her income. The support program allows these people to gain greater independence in our communities and provides medical coverage for recipients and their families. The benefits that are covered are for prescription drugs, glasses, eye exams, dental work, ambulance services, and diabetic supplies.

Currently there are about 27,000 Albertans who receive AISH support, and of these recipients about 27 percent have a mental illness, 18 percent have developmental disabilities, 7 percent have arthritis, and 2 percent have sensory deprivation. The remainder have severe conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory ailments, and traumatic brain injury.

For people to qualify for the AISH program, they must match their situation to every necessary requirement. The list is very detailed

and requires the recipient to have a disability that is so severe that it substantially limits their ability to earn a living. This disability must be permanent and impossible to remedy through any kind of treatment.

There are several work-related criteria that must be fulfilled in order to qualify for AISH. The disability of the recipient must be the main reason he is out of work, not age, lack of education, or even the lack of available jobs. In order to ensure their unemployability, the recipient must not have refused to take or look for reasonable employment for a reasonable wage.

There are qualifications to ensure that AISH is not given to those who have quit work they were capable of doing, refused or neglected help through training, or would not take rehabilitation and medical treatment to help them attain work.

The present situation also doesn't allow the income of their spouse to exceed the limits defined within the program. To ensure that they are utilizing all the opportunities available to their situations, they must have applied for other income benefits they qualified for, including CPP for disabilities benefits.

By outlining the different requirements of AISH in order to qualify under its targeted program, it was my intention to show that the program is not merely unemployment insurance. The people who are being supported by this program are unable to work because they are permanently and severely disabled. AISH provides income and extended medical benefits to these people. It is for this reason I support Motion 507. I feel it is important to continue to provide medical benefits to these people, regardless of the source of their incomes, because I believe these medical benefits could very well be saving their lives.

AISH recipients must have a condition so severe they are unable to provide for themselves or their families. AISH is not a temporary support system, as programs like workers' compensation and employment insurance are. Mr. Speaker, the people who receive these benefits will have their conditions for the rest of their lives. I feel that it is for this reason they are the ones who need medical assistance the most to overcome discomfort and in many cases to continue to live. Alberta developed the AISH program to assist these people and help them create lives that are more self-sufficient and to provide medical care for their needs. The vast majority of nonexempt income programs, like Canada pension plan disability, do not provide medical benefits.

Mr. Speaker, there are Albertans who no longer receive medical benefits for no reason other than a transfer from one income support program to another. If a person transfers to the CPP disability program, as an example, they will lose not only their AISH income support but the vital medical support they rely on. The current situation leaves this small percentage of transferred clients without medical coverage.

It is my concern there are people who live in our province who are not getting the care they need. Mr. Speaker, I believe we must strive to protect these people because they will be forever dependent upon varying degrees of medical attention in order to continue with their daily lives. Those who leave AISH and are utilizing the options that are available to them and required of them under the AISH program end up being unfairly penalized. Motion 507 would allow previous recipients of AISH who have transferred to CPP disability or employment insurance or workers' compensation or some such program to continue to receive medical benefits from the AISH program.

The AISH program is one of the best and most generous programs of its kind in Canada. I am proud to be a resident of a province who cares for its people and finds it important to improve the lives of all of its residents. I support the AISH program in our province because

of how imperative it is to over 25,000 vulnerable Albertans. I am aware that the budget for AISH is projected to increase 18 percent over the next three years, growing from \$303.5 million to an estimated \$357.1 million. The number of Albertans receiving AISH is expected to increase over 30,000 in the same period. I believe support given by AISH is providing the eligible recipients with fundamental assistance so they can continue to live as part of our communities, not outside or left behind. This income provides people with a tool to remain viable parts of our families. The medical benefits allow some of these people to remain capable of dignified and comfortable lives.

We are fortunate as a province to be able to provide a system of support which truly helps our residents. We have many programs which assist those who need help, and what Motion 507 is suggesting is that we look at adding one further measure to the AISH program. The maximum amount of money a recipient would receive under CPP disability is not substantially different from the maximum received under AISH, though once disqualified dollar for dollar by a nonexempt income program, the recipient no longer qualifies for their medical benefits. Motion 507 suggests that these people should still qualify for medical benefits, regardless of their source of income, until they reach given maximums.

Mr. Speaker, I believe what Motion 507 is urging the government to do is very reasonable. It would continue to provide medical benefits to those who need them the most. No matter who pays their rent, these people still have the same medical conditions and still need to have access to medical treatment which is not provided under nonexempt income programs. I support this motion and urge all my colleagues to do the same because it would allow us to capture those who are disqualified from medical benefits because they have transferred to programs like workers' compensation. I feel it is important to continue to give them the care they need so they can remain vibrant members of our families and communities.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar in the one minute remaining.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in the minute that's remaining, I would also like to rise and speak in favour of this motion. I think it's an excellent motion, and I was very glad to hear our hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment also speaking in favour of it. I think it's one of these examples of where we have an excellent program in place, but a program can always be fine-tuned and improved, so this is a motion that's certainly urging the government to do that. I've been very pleased with some of the debate that's been going on today, and I would just like to throw my support behind this motion as well.

One of the things that I like about this motion is that it really levels the playing field. Also, it encourages people to look for other sources of extra income. I know that's a big issue right now in my constituency, where we have a lot of small businesses looking for people who can work maybe part-time, and certainly some people who are on AISH have that ability. I just see this as an excellent way to help those who are handicapped to maybe earn a little bit of extra income or perhaps in some way to enhance their quality of life without losing their medical benefits.

So this is a great motion. I was glad to hear my colleague speak in favour of it, and hopefully when the time comes for us to vote on this very shortly, we will be able to pass this motion.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ready for the question? We might have a few seconds left.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried unanimously]
4:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I respectfully request unanimous consent of the House to deal with Motion 505 at this time.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont has moved that Motion 505 be debated at this time. May we have unanimous consent for this motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Okay. Just a minute; I haven't said my little piece. Anyway, we only need one person to say no and it's not unanimous, and I think I distinctly heard that.

Delivery of Provincewide Health Services

508. Mrs. Gordon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to prioritize restructuring of the parameters for delivering provincewide services such as renal dialysis and multiple sclerosis special therapy programs to focus more on patient need and outcome with emphasis given to service delivery closer to the patient's principal residence.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, fellow members of the Legislature. On this our first afternoon of resumed sitting, it is indeed an honour for me to be here on this very fine fall day and to stand humbly before you to speak passionately to you on an issue that is near and dear to my own heart and of great importance to several of my constituents, constituents who have, unfortunately, severe health problems that require very specialized medical treatment, treatment that is not available in their own respective communities and must be accessed by what I consider unreasonable distances. Please allow me to explain.

As stated, I have cited two examples of services currently administered under what is known as the provincewide services program through the auspices of the Capital regional health authority for northern Alberta and the Calgary regional health authority for southern Alberta. As you can see, these two health authorities have been given broader mandates than their counterparts in the other 15 regional health authorities. Why, you ask. Me too. However, these are the reasons given: to maintain consistency, effectiveness, and cost efficiency. I'm sorry, but I have many users in my constituency who would disagree and want us to reconsider our mandates, the mandates we gave these two regional health authorities, and the criteria their decisions are based upon.

One of my objectives today, if you will join me by voting yes, is to urge the government to redo and rethink this delivery model, to focus the needed changes on patient care and patient wellness outcome to ensure that treatment can be accessed without undue hardship on the patient or his family. Further, as is the case with renal dialysis, the present criteria through the northern Alberta renal program of allowing up to one or one and a half hours traveling time one way should be scrapped, allowing delivery much closer to the patient's principal residence or home community.

This doesn't necessarily mean the need for more dollars. Instead, it could be a reallocation of dollars. It could be as simple as being innovative, doing something differently, thinking outside the box, allowing all our RHAs who need to address these treatments to do so.

Needs will vary from area to area. The Stettler area in east-central Alberta has a high incidence of diabetes, kidney failure, and those that need renal dialysis. Please allow me to tell you about my constituents from the Stettler area, clients of East Central regional health authority. These individuals require on a continual, ongoing basis renal dialysis, or hemodialysis, and are forced by medical need to sometimes travel great distances to where space is available for treatment. Often because needs change, outreach rural satellite units operate at full capacity and have lengthy wait lists. These wait lists often mean years of long-distance commutes for others that can't access them, and due consideration is often given by them and their families to relocating to residences outside of their region so these services can be accessed easier. It's sad, very sad, often sick elderly people having to spend so much of their time, so much of their energy accessing a much-needed medical treatment.

These individuals need our help. I do not want them to have to leave the region, having to move to an unfamiliar, larger urban centre for this lifesaving treatment. I do not think that in today's world we need to ask elderly people to drive up to three hours a day three times a week. Worth mentioning, often these individuals are hooked up to dialysis for up to four hours at a time.

Please allow me to read portions of two letters, one from a concerned dialysis patient and the other from a son of one. Now, unfortunately, this man is deceased. This letter is from Mr. Raymond Schissler, and I've been working with Mr. Schissler for a long time.

You cannot make the politicians or Capital Health believe these treatments don't wipe you out. What is worse is when you have to get into a vehicle afterwards and drive another one to one and a half hours to get home. Traveling is a patient's worst enemy. By the time you get home, you are completely wiped out. Sometimes it takes 24 hours just to get straightened up, and then it is time to get ready for another go-round. I was told that when the cutbacks occurred, no one had to travel over 60 kilometres. Since then, this has changed continuously. Now it's up to one and a half hours one way. Another thing is the number of patients needed to bring a unit to the Stettler area. It started out at four, and now it's five or more.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

From Mr. Wayne Heronemus's letter.

I have had discussions with numerous people in Stettler and the surrounding area that need renal dialysis and would very much prefer to have dialysis in Stettler rather than continue to endure one to one and a half hours travel time one way to Hanna and Red Deer. Those currently traveling three times a week to Red Deer and Hanna for dialysis find the drive extremely exhausting and are already compromised due to their medical condition. The day following dialysis these people report they rest in preparation for the next day of marathon travel and dialysis again. There is very little quality of life for these people in what is considered an innovative and progressive health care system.

After lengthy discussions and research I have discovered that the Stettler health centre had a dialysis unit in place until it was closed in 1997. The plumbing required for this unit still remains in place. Over the last little while I have had several discussions with the involvement of physicians and East Central health representatives. I have discovered that there are a number of people in this area who either have to travel to Red Deer or Hanna for dialysis or

have completely chosen not to be treated at all because of the inconvenience, which bothers me greatly.

In addition, my father's specialist, Dr. Jim Kym of Red Deer, reports that the need for renal dialysis is increasing by 8 to 9 percent annually because of an aging population and increased episodes of diabetes.

4:20

So there are portions of just two of several, several letters I have received from constituents. I have spent considerable time and energy working on this problem, and I have promised many that I would bring their concerns forward in some such manner.

There is a solution for the Stettler area, one that is endorsed and supported by the East Central regional health authority. However, they do not have the mandate to address it. This is what needs to change. Those closest to the problem should be the ones working through the solutions, not a group of individuals from Edmonton, people who do not know the individuals involved nor the severity of their medical conditions. However, I will not find fault with the Capital health region. I have spent considerable time on the telephone and sitting down discussing this with them, and I thank them for their co-operation. We do, though, need to address this for many areas outside of Edmonton and Calgary.

According to the East Central regional health authority, re-establishment of the dialysis unit as a satellite unit is possible at the Stettler health centre. It would be a relatively simple process since the space is already dedicated and the appropriate water system is easily accessed. They have all of the requirements for a unit, such as space, emergency backup, lab services on site, and could provide for basics such as food and parking. They tell me that all the other services required for such a unit would be available as well. There is the nursing care that is needed. The registered night nurse, the licensed practical nurse, would be available, and at this time there are definitely a number of patients from the Stettler area, some from Coronation, Castor, Donalda, and Kelsey that would utilize the treatment.

It is my understanding that one of the requirements for a satellite unit, besides the need for funding, is a minimum number of four patients. I do know that of course this varies from time to time, but it certainly is my understanding that the need is there in Stettler and surrounding areas.

Something that has come to my attention recently – and this is when I talk about being innovative and thinking outside the box. The community of Stettler has a health foundation, and a great deal of money has been bequeathed or donated over time to this health foundation. The community has said that if in fact they can have a renal dialysis unit in Stettler, they will ensure that several, several thousand dollars from that health foundation would go to the full-time operation of this unit. So this is what I'm saying, Members of the Legislative Assembly. It is now time to think beyond the box, to look at some of these problems and come to terms with some innovative solutions. The community wants this to happen, and as their MLA I'm asking you by means of this motion to support me as I support them.

Another thing that I'm pleased to report is that Dr. Jim Kym, who is a specialist currently practising in Red Deer, has agreed to offer full consulting services to all the patients that would access such a unit. He would travel to Stettler on a regular basis to oversee the function of this dialysis program.

If Stettler is not chosen as a site, possibly a location that would be more central to this region could be considered, and as such I'm

saying that I believe that the decision for this should rest with the health authority that is closest to the area and not under the auspices of the Capital regional health authority. East Central regional health authority, as other health authorities in the province, knows the local needs of the local people. Because a renal dialysis unit might be needed in this part of Alberta doesn't necessarily mean it would be needed in other areas.

So I'm asking that we consider this. Region 7, the people of region 7, the members on the East Central regional health board are asking us to rethink this, to look at what is needed within their region. They want to be reasonable about it. They will look for innovative ways to fund this unit. They will ask the community for help. The community has said that they will give it.

In speaking to the multiple sclerosis special therapy program, right now in Alberta, several things. If you have MS, you must access, again, the services through the provincewide services program. Part of the province must go to Edmonton, the other part to Calgary. This can be very hard to access in a timely manner. As we are all aware, in Alberta MS is more prevalent in some areas than others, and I do think this is something that I would like to see and others would like to see: where MS programs can be looked at by the various regional health authorities to do with their clientele and the need in their area.

Right now when you go to a neurologist and he decides that he will put you on one of these new interferon drugs, you must make an appointment with an MS nurse. This has to be done either through Edmonton, at the University of Alberta under Dr. Warren's office, or Calgary, at the Foothills hospital. When you start these drugs, they are in needle form, and often for someone that isn't used to this type of medication or administering it, there are a number of questions, and certainly some help is usually welcomed. It is too far a distance for someone from central Alberta to make the trek to Edmonton or to walk and get information in a timely manner. My neurologist in Red Deer, Dr. Scott Wilson, who is a tremendous doctor, is advocating very strongly for a multiple sclerosis special therapy program to be part of the David Thompson regional health authority. I'm with him on this, and again I ask for your indulgence and your support.

Certainly I recognize that the bigger centres, Calgary and Edmonton through the Capital regional health authority, do have a mandate to provide many, many things that the rest of Alberta could not supply and could not look after with the dollars in a cost-effective manner. However, some of these other programs, with the help of community, with the help of individuals who need these programs delivered closer to them, I think can be done efficiently and certainly with cost-effectiveness. I have talked to many of these individuals from the Stettler area after they have spent a week traveling back and forth and spent the time on the dialysis machine, and I think: are we really helping these people, or are we hindering them?

They tell me that the incidence of diabetes . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

4:30

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 21 **Electronic Transactions Act**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to move second reading and to begin debate on Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act.

Mr. Speaker, years ago when Alberta's laws were developed, the idea of communicating electronically had never really crossed our minds. Consequently, we have hundreds of statutes in Alberta that make no allowance for electronic communications. New opportunities for communication are rapidly increasing throughout the world, and our legislation must adapt to reflect these changes. As a government we recognize these opportunities. Therefore, over the last few years we have focused on creating an environment where the information and communications technology industry can thrive in our province. The Electronic Transactions Act is one more step in that direction.

In today's world of high-speed access to the Internet and electronic business, allowing only paper-based transactions is no longer practical. As a result, the objective of the Electronic Transactions Act is to give electronic communications the same legal status as their paper counterparts with one key principle, and that is, both parties must consent to handling their business transactions electronically.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, for us to understand that this legislation does not force people to use electronic communications nor does it eliminate paper transactions. It simply provides businesses, the government, and Albertans with the opportunity to communicate electronically, and it will still allow for current methods of interaction with government, public organizations, or the business sector.

The evolution of electronic commerce legislation dates back to 1996, when the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law developed a model law on electronic commerce. Based on this model law, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada then approved the Uniform Electronic Commerce Act. Mr. Speaker, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada is an organization that encourages harmonization of Canadian laws through preparation of uniform statutes. Once the statutes have been approved, they are then recommended to provinces, territories, and in some cases to the federal government for enactment. In Alberta we have based the legislation before this House on the Uniform Electronic Commerce Act. While Bill 21 was being developed, we also reviewed similar legislation passed by other jurisdictions. In Canada all jurisdictions – with the exception of Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Alberta – have passed legislation based on this model law.

At the federal level, Mr. Speaker, the government of Canada passed the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act in April 2000. Part 2 of the federal statute deals with electronic transactions at the federal level. It sets out requirements to allow the use of electronic technology where under federal law the use of paper has been required in the past to ensure legal status. The difference between the federal legislation and Alberta's Bill 21 is that Bill 21 affects provincial laws that require information to be signed or in writing to be legally valid, and the federal legislation applies specifically to federal laws with the same requirements.

Mr. Speaker, there is one other issue that I would like to address before I begin talking about some of the more specific aspects of Bill 21, and that is the matter of consumer protection. The Electronic Transactions Act does not deal directly with issues surrounding consumer protection. In Alberta these matters are addressed in the Fair Trading Act, which is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Government Services. Under the Fair Trading Act a regulation has been developed by Government Services called the Internet sales

contract regulation, which came into force just this past October. Bill 21 and the Internet sales contract regulation complement each other. The Electronic Transactions Act will provide the legal validity for electronic transactions, and the new regulation deals with protecting consumers when they make transactions over the Internet.

I've talked about the objectives of Bill 21 and some important principles such as the consent provision and the legal validity that would be applied to electronic transactions with the passing of Bill 21. I would now like to talk about a number of particular features of Bill 21. The first feature is that the legislation will apply to both the public and private sectors. There are, however, specific provisions that apply only to the public sector. The reason for these specific provisions is that permission to use electronic communications may expose government to an overwhelming number of requests from the public to use a variety of formats. Therefore, the consent provision allows the government to expressly agree to interact electronically only when prepared to do so. The public sector will also be able to retain and use information in electronic form provided that consent is obtained from the parties involved. However, the public sector will be required by law to follow specific requirements regarding the retention of such records. The same applies to the private sector with the exception being that their records retention requirements are and will continue to be based on the guidelines established by the industry. In either case, Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to reiterate that a person's consent is required before information can be exchanged electronically.

Another feature of Bill 21 worth noting, Mr. Speaker, is that it requires the Minister of Finance to specify the electronic form of both incoming and outgoing payments for departments and branches or offices of the government of Alberta. The usual rules about authority and record-keeping will continue to apply to such payments.

Bill 21 also specifies that the public sector will determine the information technology standards that they will accept for electronic communications. Toward that end, Mr. Speaker, the office of the chief information officer is leading a cross-government initiative to implement corporate IT standards for government departments.

Given these steps, one can see that the legislation before us today reflects a corporate approach to government IT standard setting rather than individual departments setting their own standards. It is recognized that government agencies, boards, and commissions have close relationships with government departments. Therefore, the chief information officer for the government of Alberta, at the request of the minister responsible for this act, will set the IT standards for these organizations. Local public bodies such as municipalities, learning and health jurisdictions will have the ability to designate their own IT standards based on the fact that they operate at an arm's-length relationship from government. However, we expect all standards to complement one another and ensure that both public- and private-sector organizations can interact effectively in the electronic environment.

Another feature of Bill 21, Mr. Speaker, is a section that deals with exceptions to the act. The reason for this is that some records and transactions will require more detailed rules than this legislation will provide. If at some time in the future it is feasible and acceptable to handle transactions such as wills and personal directives in an electronic form, specific legislative requirements can be developed and implemented at that time, but as it currently stands, these types of transactions cannot be done electronically.

Mr. Speaker, another important provision of this bill is that it does not supercede the operation of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Health Information Act, or any other

law that is intended to protect the confidentiality of information or the privacy of individuals.

Bill 21 also allows contracts to be formed electronically, giving them the same legal status as paper contracts. In addition, the Electronic Transactions Act states that where there is a legal requirement for a record to be signed, that requirement is satisfied by an electronic signature. The bill does not attempt to determine what a signature is and is neutral on that point. It does, however, allow the chief information officer to designate the electronic signature standards to be used by government departments, agencies, boards, and commissions.

Part of the process in determining the standards for signatures will be recognizing that certain types of transactions may require higher degrees of reliability. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this requirement for different levels of security and reliability exists in our paper world too. As an example, in some cases we may simply send a letter through the mail, but there may be other occasions where we must send a letter by registered mail because we require the recipient to sign for the letter, acknowledging receipt of the correspondence. As a result, security and reliability requirements will also be considered when dealing with the setting of standards for electronic signatures.

Mr. Speaker, carriage of goods is another area that is addressed in this legislation. Goods frequently cross international boundaries; thus harmonization of the law across borders is encouraged. As a result, Bill 21 provides for an electronic equivalent to paper for certain shipping documents, such as a bill of lading.

Mr. Speaker, one of the last sections of the bill includes companion amendments to the Alberta Evidence Act. These amendments are included within this legislation to allow for acceptance of electronic evidence in a court of law.

There's one more subject that I'd like to touch on before I conclude my remarks. Members of this House may recall that when Bill 21 was introduced in May of this year, I indicated that a discussion paper was being circulated to Albertans to obtain their feedback on this legislation. The discussion paper was sent out to approximately 800 individuals and organizations by regular mail and, of course, electronic mail. It was also made available on the Alberta Innovation and Science web site. Stakeholders who received a copy of the paper ranged from the construction, banking, agricultural, and coal industries to municipalities and aboriginal organizations. The comments were supportive of the principles of Bill 21, and they encouraged us to proceed with passage of this legislation. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we received no negative feedback.

I do want to recognize in this House today that the consultation process was beneficial to us in developing the legislation. It gave us an opportunity to hear from Albertans and to answer questions they had about the legislation. Mr. Speaker, I believe we have recognized that electronic commerce is changing the way we do our business and the way we get our work done. We are recognizing that our laws need to evolve to reflect the growing use of electronic transactions in many aspects of both public- and private-sector businesses. In fact, over the course of the past year we have received numerous letters from organizations from around this province and from various industries encouraging the Alberta government to enact legislation such as the bill before us today. Many of the responses to the discussion paper echoed these sentiments.

4:40

The government of Alberta is committed to enhancing electronic transactions and the growth of Alberta's information and communications technology industry. The Electronic Transactions Act will help promote people's confidence in e-business. People need to have confidence in the validity of their electronic transactions. If

passed, Mr. Speaker, the Electronic Transactions Act will make it clear that electronic contracts, records, and signatures can have the same legal force and effect as contracts, records, and signatures on paper. I think it is important to recognize that when some people think about doing business on-line, they may have a concern about the security of the information they are sharing. Because of this concern it is very important for the public and private sectors to always ensure that the appropriate security measures are in place before proceeding into the realm of electronic communication.

I do think that at this relatively early stage of electronic communication, regardless of the security measures taken, there will be people who may still be uncomfortable conducting their business electronically, and that is why I want to stress again, Mr. Speaker, that this bill does not force people to communicate electronically. It simply offers those using electronic transactions the assurance that the transactions are legally binding.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is really about ensuring that Alberta can continue to conduct electronic business on a level playing field with the rest of Canada. It is not intended to take away services that people are comfortable with. Instead, it will provide an alternative to receiving information and doing business. It is one of the components that will help us build the foundation to provide electronic services to Albertans. There are many more steps for us to take, but with this legislation we are making a very good start.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I encourage members of this Assembly to provide their support for Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to speak to Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act. This is a bill that we can support. We would expect to see speedy passage through the Legislature, and the gallery is very happy with that. Certainly this is a bill that's probably overdue in terms of seeing it come through the Legislature. [interjections] It's true. It is overdue. How many people in this Assembly and throughout the province have renewed their insurance or their mortgages through an electronic signature either by fax or by e-mail? How many things have we bought by clicking on the button on the computer? So it's good that the government brings in the legislation that will bring them up to date with what happens to be current business practices for many organizations.

I think this is also an example of where the government's consultation process really did work. They listened – they actually listened – and adjusted and rephrased some of the information that they had put forward given the kind of feedback they had from the people they talked to. If they could take that model and apply it to all of the other consultation processes they have, I think that would be excellent. So good work to the sponsor of this bill in terms of that.

We hope to see the model working a little more effectively in some other areas. Maybe education and health care would be great places to start. [interjection] It's true. You have the consultations. You bring in all the information, and what comes out the other end often doesn't look like what went in at the beginning. Am I wrong? But in this case, it did, and it worked very effectively. I think there's something to be learned from these new guys, Mr. Minister. So I'm happy to see that this process went so smoothly and that we saw it in the Legislature and that it's moving forward.

I think the member who sponsored the bill made very good arguments in terms of the reasons why this legislation is needed. I

certainly agree with what he said. I would like to point out a couple of areas that I have some questions on, and I hope that when we get to committee, we can see them being addressed.

The first one is in section 8, where it talks about how consent must be given by a person to provide or accept information in electronic form. No problem with that. It's the next part that I have a problem with. Consent "may be inferred from a person's conduct if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the consent is genuine." That leaves a lot open to interpretation. Not only am I faxing off my signature apparently, but there may be other ways that consent is implied. So if we could just get some further definitions on that as we get further in the debate on this bill, I think that would make me and many other people happy. I'm sure there's got to be a broader definition of exactly what that means and entails that we're going to hear about, and I certainly look forward to that.

My other area of concern is on section 29, where it talks about an electronic transaction having no legal effect if a material error is made and the electronic agent gives no opportunity for correction. Two potential problems there. One is the material error: exactly what does that mean, and how open to interpretation is it going to be? Are we going to have to make use of lawyers if we believe there is a material error? So some parameters, some kind of a framework that we're working within there would be helpful. If the member could explain just what the intent was there. The electronic agent gives no opportunity for correction: once again we need a more detailed definition of exactly what that entails. I didn't hear one in his opening comments, so I would expect that we can see that at some time in the near future as this bill moves through the Legislature.

I'm happy to see the exceptions, Mr. Speaker, that they have outlined in this bill. I think it is very reasonable to expect that there are some original legal documents that won't be subject to this kind of an electronic transfer, because there's such a great potential for misunderstanding or misinformation when you talk about wills or trusts or powers of attorney or documents that transfer interests in lands and registrations, even original mortgages. I think if you're renewing, there's reasonable expectation that an electronic transfer could adequately meet the needs of all parties, but an original document, I still believe, should be a face-to-face kind of transaction.

So with those few questions I think that essentially limits all we have to say on this particular bill at this time. If someone from the government could get up in the next stage of the reading, Mr. Speaker, and address this, then I think we'll be happy to pass this through the readings quite quickly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close debate.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have nothing further.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a second time]

Bill 18 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move second reading of the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001, which is before us today for second reading. This act amends the Health Professions Act, which received royal assent in 1999.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, it does seem unusual to amend an act that has not yet been proclaimed, but the Health Professions Act is an unusual piece of legislation in that it comes into force for each of the 30 professions it covers as we put regulations in place. While we worked on developing regulations, the professional colleges identified areas for further clarification. We discussed the solutions with the professions involved, circulated the proposed amendments for their review, and the result of that consultation is the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001.

As a result of some questions from professions over the summer, I've chosen to bring House amendments to this bill to the Legislature. This legislation will further protect the confidentiality of competency information. It clarifies options the director can use to deal with complaints and provides detail on what costs may be recovered from disciplinary hearings. It clarifies how professional colleges approve education programs for the purposes of registration and further defines the process for canceling registration and practice permits, and it clarifies wording on how students may identify themselves. This act also grants the Alberta Dental Association and college the authority to accredit dental surgical facilities. Alberta's dentists welcome this support of their profession's autonomy. Currently the College of Physicians and Surgeons accredits dental surgery facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the Health Professions Act gives Alberta's health professions the tools that they need to respond to changing needs in a transparent way. The amendment act clarifies some of the details to support the intention of that legislation, and I ask members of the Assembly for their support in second reading.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

4:50

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments, as always, brief. Our position on this is that we will also support this bill. We did take the time – and we appreciated the time that was

allowed by holding up this bill – to consult with a number of stakeholders including the AARN, the Health Sciences Association, the United Nurses, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, and the federation of health professions. We did hear some concern that there may not be enough resources in the system available for all disciplinary hearings, but in the end, in my judgment, it wasn't a vociferous enough concern to stand in the way of this legislation, so we will be supporting it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to close the debate.

MR. MAR: I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview for his constructive comments and thank him for his support as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In light of the manner in which we've conducted business this afternoon and given that we had indicated earlier that we'd be moving to committee on Bill 16 this evening and there may be people who want to hold to that, I would ask that we call it 5:30.

THE SPEAKER: Would I take it as well, Mr. Government House Leader, that you're including in the motion that when the Assembly reconvenes at 8 o'clock, it is in committee?

MR. HANCOCK: Yes.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:53 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 13, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/11/13

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

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 16 **School Amendment Act, 2001**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments or questions to be offered? The last time we dealt with this issue, we were dealing with amendment A1. The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We've had extensive discussion on amendment A1. As a matter of fact, we've had 84 minutes on second reading and 255 minutes in committee on amendment A1. I would like to suggest to the Assembly that we go ahead and vote on this amendment as there will be another amendment that will come forward immediately afterwards. It will be circulated to the respective members, and I can comment on that amendment as soon as the first one is voted on. I understand that we cannot put another amendment on the floor until this one is voted on.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would propose government amendment 2, which I understand is being circulated to everyone now.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall refer to this as amendment A2. The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to move amendment A2, that is before you, and if I may go through it section by section here now, the first section is something that has been agreed to by all of the bishops as well as the Francophone school boards as well as the Catholic school boards. Quite briefly, it adds section 2 to the preamble, which says that "such that the principles of Francophone educational governance are distinct from, not transferable to nor a precedent for, the English educational system," adding that after "in the Region" in the preamble. This is something that has been agreed to by the aforementioned parties over the summer.

The section B that you have here is what has been labeled the so-called choice amendments, and these have been struck out. Mr. Chairman, it was questionable, in all fairness, as to whether or not these were constitutionally correct. The Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, pending the nonpassing of this bill in the spring, has stated that they would not agree to it, and given the questionable constitutionality of these, they have been struck out.

Mr. Chairman, the next section is section C, which adds, "In this Division, 'Region' means a Separate School Region," and a separate school region will be an area of land that has been agreed to by the Catholic school boards in a way that they can expand their boundaries.

Mr. Chairman, section C(b) adds: "provide for services by a separate school board in a Separate School Region." What this

means is that when a separate school region is so proclaimed, the separate school board that is within that separate school region shall provide the services.

The next one, which is section 208.03, basically states that the minister may make regulations regarding "the consultation process that must be followed in respect of the establishment of a new separate school district."

The following one is section 208.03(b), which allows for a dispute resolution mechanism.

Mr. Chairman, the changes that have been made on the 4 by 4s that were added to this act have been quite literally put down to a regulation-making power on the consultation process, and I will mention that very briefly. I know that we cannot have any regulations until the bill is passed, but the draft regulations that we have proposed state that a consultation process must occur if a 4 by 4 process is going forward. The other thing that the consultation process must show is that there is consultation with both the public electorate as well as the Catholic electorate, and this is something completely new. I feel that it will solve a lot of the issues that have occurred with 4 by 4 formations in the past.

Also included in the regulations, which have been circulated to the opposition as well as to the numerous parties that have been involved, is the idea that if a public school board and a separate school board agree on the extension of the boundaries – and I will repeat that: if they agree on the extension of the boundaries – then under section 210 of the act the minister has the ability to expand the Catholic separate school boundaries. If the public school board does not agree, then it will fall back to the 4 by 4 process that is existing already. What I have also given the indication of is that we can roll up the 4 by 4s, which is within the existing act, to ensure that there is one vote, in essence, all at once. So there are two ways that the Catholic boards can be expanded.

Section D is section 30, which has been struck out.

Section E basically states that "a separate school elector who has a child enrolled in a public school in the Greater Southern Francophone Region No. 4 may vote for a candidate who is standing for election as a public school member," basically giving the ability to an elector who has a child enrolled in the Francophone school system to vote for that candidate.

Section F is simply that 38(2) is struck out.

Mr. Chairman, from what I understand in talking to the various players that are involved in this, the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association is strongly behind this. As late as today I have heard that the Public School Boards' Association is behind this as well, seeing that it has been explained to them. I have not received that in a formal written way from the public school board, but in our conversations that were held this morning and subsequent conversations that were held with the Government House Leader later on this afternoon, I understand that they are in favour.

Although this is a change from the original bill, I believe that it potentially gives a solution to the 4 by 4 issue. Many members here who have had 4 by 4s occur in their constituencies know the vast amount of problems that can involve, and many of you have come to me and asked for a solution. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, in my own constituency Brooks and Strathmore have both had 4 by 4 votes, and they have been very difficult to handle from a community point of view. I truly believe that this will lead to a better resolution of these issues and will lead to a resolution of these issues that will not result in the devastating rifts that are occurring in our communities.

Mr. Chairman, there is one other thing that really must be said here, and that is: what happens if nothing is done tonight? Quite frankly, what will happen is that the existing 4 by 4 process will continue. We can put our heads in the sand and say that the

community down the road will not have a 4 by 4 process put on, but as many of you have seen in the letters that I've sent you, we are now up to roughly 170 4 by 4 processes, 4 by 4 formation votes that have occurred in the last three years. These formation votes are hugely disruptive to communities, and anything that we can do to solve this will certainly be seen as advantageous to our communities.

8:10

We have the choice tonight. We can put our heads in the sand and hope that these things don't occur, hope that there will not be any 4 by 4 votes in the Forestburgs of the world, in the Heislars of the world, and in the Dayslands of the world, but that could happen tomorrow. Those that are public school supporters, those that are public members and non-Catholics within these small communities will have absolutely no choice. They will have absolutely no consultation. Indeed they may wake up the next morning and find that there has been a Catholic school district formed in their small community. Is this a reality? The answer is yes; this is a distinct reality. As I said, there have been close to 170 of these occur in the last three years. Many of these are by votes of 4 to 0, 5 to 0, 10 to 0, 11 to 0, and it causes a great amount of rift within the communities.

Is this the absolute perfect way to solve a potentially bad issue? The answer is probably not, but this is a way that we have negotiated, that we have talked about over the last three or four months, and I feel that it is a successful way to solve this issue. The one thing that we absolutely cannot do is put our heads in the sand and say that this issue will go away, because it will not go away. It will come back to haunt us. It will come back to cause divisive problems in our communities, and the answer will not be there. This does give an answer.

Is it the answer we want? Potentially we could get a better answer, but I do feel that this is the best way to go, and with the agreement of the boards involved, it is a very viable option to put forward and will indeed help those formation votes, help the communities that otherwise would have huge rifts in them, as we have seen in the community of Brooks, as we have seen in the community of Innisfail, as we have seen in the communities of Strathmore and Canmore as well.

So, Mr. Chairman, I've said my piece on this. I feel that this amendment is extremely important and must go ahead. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly visitors in the public gallery: M. Pierre Desroches and his daughter, I believe – M. Desroches is the chairperson of the north-central Francophone board – and also trustee Irene Harvey and her husband, Ron Harvey. Mrs. Harvey is a trustee in the St. Albert Protestant school division. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you three individuals that are in the

public gallery. One is Gail Horner. She is the chair of Sturgeon school division. Terese Gervais, a board member and also past chair of the Sturgeon school division, is with her husband, Dave Gervais. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Bill 16

School Amendment Act, 2001

(continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm delighted with what I heard from the minister, and I would seek some clarification from him and from the Government House Leader, who, I understand from what the minister said, have been in consultation with the Public School Boards' Association over the amendments. Are the objections to these amendments that the public school board members have put forward no longer considered valid by that group, and do they in fact concur with the amendments that we see in front of us? Could I have that reconfirmed and ask the Government House Leader if that's his understanding too, that those objections have been withdrawn?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. What has happened today is that my deputy minister had a discussion with the Public School Boards' Association, and subsequently the Government House Leader had a conversation with the executive director of the Public School Boards' Association. I would seek the assurance from the hon. member across the way that with these new events, and I do say these are new events – I would be more than willing to discuss this tomorrow after the hon. member has had a chance to confirm this, and we could talk about the bill again tomorrow.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member has asked for my concurrence with what the minister has said. I have to say that it might be a little strong to suggest that the Public School Boards' Association has endorsed the amendments. What I had referenced to the minister was that I had a very positive telephone conversation with the executive director and that he'd indicated to me that the meeting he'd had with the deputy minister this morning was very positive and that he felt there were two further amendments that might be useful to have and was talking to members of his association with respect to that but that generally he believed that this was going in the right direction and would solve the problem. So it might be a little strong to say that he was endorsing the amendments. I couldn't put that in his mouth.

What I'd related to the minister was a very positive conversation about the direction that was happening and an agreement that with perhaps one more amendment, which he was discussing and hoped to raise with the ACSTA, he thought we were perhaps going in the right direction. I hope that clarifies.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the minister and to the Government House Leader. Nothing would make the opposition happier than having an agreement that the

amendments before the House are fully endorsed by all of the interest groups, in particular the ACSTA and the Public School Boards' Association, who make up the vast majority of boards in the province. It has been something that the ASBA has struggled with and has been unable to do. If it is indeed true that we are very close to the agreement of both of those groups, then I think there's no doubt that the government will have the enthusiastic support of the opposition.

I would take the minister up on his offer then. As I understand the offer, the amendments would not be passed this evening. They would be brought back again tomorrow. That would give us an opportunity to discuss them this evening and to hear further in terms of any projected amendments tomorrow. Could I have that confirmed?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's exactly what I will confirm tonight. I understand that both the opposition leader and the hon. critic for Learning will be meeting with the ACSTA tomorrow, so I believe it would be advisable to continue this discussion tomorrow after these meetings have taken place, and I look forward to hopefully the passing of this bill tomorrow.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Chairman, I'm very pleased to hear what I've heard from the minister and from the Government House Leader. I am indeed meeting with the ACSTA representatives tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock. I have also received a request to meet with some representatives of the Public School Boards' Association. That meeting is scheduled for the day after tomorrow. What I'll do is look into the possibility of following up my meeting with the ACSTA with a meeting with the public school board people tomorrow, if I can, to make sure that there's no unnecessary delay in getting this House to conclude the debate on the issues under discussion. So I'm pleased, Mr. Chairman, that the minister has taken this initiative and that he has sought to bridge the gap between various parties, that had lots at stake, I understand, with the proposed amendments. So I'll look forward to the meeting tomorrow, and then we'll come back to it.

8:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the minister's willingness to wait until we've had a chance to consult with those groups. It's a courtesy that I really do appreciate.

I do have some questions about the consultation process and how it proceeded. The fact that one of the groups seems to have been deeply involved in the forming of the amendments, or privy to the amendments, and other groups were left out: I'm not quite sure that I understand why that happened. I know that there has been some animosity and some objections to the amendments from the Public School Boards' Association, but I think the kinds of concerns that were being raised were not raised exclusively by that association.

One of the very difficult things that the government faced in trying to come up with amendments was balancing the Catholic boards' desire, an understandable desire, to promote and to expand and to make available to separate school supporters a Catholic education, to expand that across the province. That had to be balanced against a concern particularly in rural communities that many of their schools would no longer be viable if those schools were split, and it's not clear to me how the amendments are going to do anything to

relieve that. In some rural settings, if the very small schools that already exist there are further split, then the school is no longer going to be viable. Some of those communities have argued very strongly that if they lose the school, they lose their community. So I'm not sure how the amendments will deal with those objections and prevent that from happening. Of course, it was one of the difficulties with Bill 16. I think that's a really important point and one that we would like to have clarified before we proceed.

The whole business of choice seems to have been such a strongly endorsed principle by the government. I think that they have rightly backed the number of school districts who have made available wide choices for parents and students and have encouraged that. They've encouraged choice by the open boundary policies that they've endorsed. I think that that's a good, sound way for the government to proceed, and I endorse that. What it seems that the amendments are going to do is that they are going to strike out at least for Catholic residents that whole notion of choice. I understand from the minister that the Catholic trustees association endorses the amendments, so obviously they've come to grips with that problem, but I would for my own part like some further explanation. What does it mean in terms of the government's endorsement of the principle of choice?

I would like to make a couple of other comments, if I might, Mr. Chairman, about the legislation. One of the difficulties that we've run into in terms of trying to get feedback about the legislation is the way it's been drafted and proposed. We originally started with the School Act. Following the School Act, we had Bill 16 introduced, which amended the School Act. Then in May we had amendments to Bill 16. Now in November we again have amendments to the bill that affect the act. What's happening, it seems to me, is that we are making the legislation very, very obscure to the general public and interested ratepayers. It's getting very, very difficult, I think, for someone who is generally interested in the changes to the School Act to follow the changes and what those changes mean to them and to the interests that they represent. I guess if I have any concern about haste, it's that this is becoming very complex in terms of reading and understanding.

It takes me back to one of the promises made by this government. I'm not sure if it was the Premier, but I know that the government, campaigning in the 1992-1993 time period, made strong arguments at that time for plain-language legislation. I think it might be a good time for the government to come back and look at that principle and the notion of making sure that an act, an important act like the School Act, and amendments to it are accessible to everyone without a legal background.

I was looking at some of the advocates for plain-language legislation. One of the authors described a legal writing as four centuries of inflation and obscurity. I think this may be reflected in what we have before us. It's often overblown, it's often swaddled in obscurity I think were the words used to describe a legal writing. The author was even more critical and went on to say that it was the largest body of poorly written literature ever created by the human race. I would hate to think that in our province we're making a contribution to that body of poorly written literature through this kind of legislation.

I know it's not going to be possible with these amendments, given where we are, but I would make a plea in future changes for the notion of trying to make it more public, more easily understood to individuals. I think of the newly elected trustees in the province who are just taking their places on school boards picking up the act, Bill 16, and the amendments and the further amendments to the act and trying to work their way through it. Some of them must wonder exactly what they got themselves elected to do, because I don't think

it's an easy task. But that, Mr. Chairman, is an aside.

I think that's all I'll say for now. I have some further comments about waiting for the regulations. I know that the minister is caught. You have to have the legislation before you can put out the regulations that are going to flow from that legislation, but in this case the regulations are going to be so very, very, important to the interested parties that I think there can be some argument made that if you can't put out the regulations, you might at least put out a draft copy of the regulations so the people can understand really what's going to happen.

8:30

I think it's particularly important how disputes between school jurisdictions are going to be mediated and the kind of process that the minister and the department will follow when such disputes arise. I think that without a pretty firm indication of how those disputes are going to be resolved, it's going to be hard to fully endorse the legislation. That may be a premature judgment, Mr. Chairman. If there's going to be another amendment introduced tomorrow, that may cover some of it, but right at this particular point I'm nervous about the promise that the regulations will cover a lot of what the legislation has in mind. It's not that I don't have great faith in the current minister of education to do as he's said, but as we know, there will be subsequent ministers of education and there will be subsequent school boards and subsequent people involved in the associations who have been privy to the negotiations on these amendments, and their understanding may not always be what we have today. So I would really strongly urge some form of the regulations being offered by the government for those of us that are involved in the amendments, that those regulations be made public.

I have a few other things to say, Mr. Chairman, but I'll reserve them for later. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will respond to some of the questions that just have been raised.

First of all, I will echo what the hon. member has said about plain language legislation, but I will add that when you're involved with legal counsel and the legalities of some of the legislation, it is extremely difficult to put it in plain language. I will certainly take that criticism and agree with it when it comes to plain language legislation.

The second thing I wanted to comment on was the regulations. Mr. Chairman, as the hon. member knows, I cannot put forward regulations until the bill has been passed. I will, however, make available tomorrow morning to both the hon. leader of the third party and the hon. member the draft regulations that will go with this legislation. They will be sent to your office tomorrow morning.

The next thing was about the various amendments to Bill 16. Mr. Chairman, anytime you attempt to change something that has been in the Constitution for very close to a hundred years – I believe it was the Alberta Act, so it may have even been before the Constitution – there can be certain things that have problems. What we found is that over the summer some positions of some of the affected parties had changed. Subsequently we had to change the legislation, and that is the reason why we have brought forward something that I do not like bringing forward. I do not like bringing amendments to amendments, but unfortunately that has occurred, and it is there before you.

The next thing I just wanted to mention was the issue of choice, and I believe the hon. member has missed a little bit, the comment that I made about choice. What choice has to do with is whether or

not a Catholic elects to stay a Catholic or whether or not they can become a public school supporter. The initial issue that was in Bill 16 was that on the taxation form a person could say that they were either a separate school supporter or they were not. It did not ask anyone to deny their religion. Subsequently that was taken out of there as the ACSTA did not agree with that.

That brings me to probably the most important point of the evening, and that is about the small communities. One of the main issues we have when we have small communities is that, as we all know, in a community of 700 or a community of a thousand you cannot have two school systems. You cannot have two schools. It is just not economically viable to have 10 students in this school and 20 students in this school or 50 and 50. It just does not make a lot of common sense to you and I.

Mr. Chairman, what happens today, what happens at this moment is that if the Catholic minority within that small 4 by 4 or that small community says they want to have a Catholic school district come in and give them Catholic education, they then take a census to determine that they are a minority religion. They subsequently follow up with a vote, and as I stated before, many of these votes are 5 to nothing, 10 to nothing. The interesting point, though, is there is absolutely no need for the Catholic electorate to comment or even talk to the public school electorate that would be affected by this. Under these regulations what we have is a mandatory consultation.

So we are not changing, we are not taking away the ability for that Catholic electorate to form a Catholic school district within that 4 by 4. What we are saying is that everyone – everyone – has to be told. If you take the critical mass of a school of 150 and split it, say, to 80-70, it does affect everyone. In this democratic society if people are knowledgeable about the issues, then I respect that they will make the right decision. Because this is constitutionally valid, it is important that that ability continue, but by making the consultation mandatory, by ensuring that people must talk about what is happening, I feel and I have utter confidence that in these small communities the right decision will be made.

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

I also have utter confidence in the ACSTA and the Catholic school boards that they will make the right decision, that they will not go in when there is a situation where there are 30 or 40 students and it is not economically viable. I fully respect that they, too, will find a way to deliver Catholic education to these students, whether it's by distance education, whether it's by various other ways. I believe that by the Catholic school boards and the public school boards sitting down together and actually talking about solutions, we will find the right solutions to these problems.

Mr. Chairman, what I have just said is what is included in the amendments to Bill 16. I believe these are good amendments. I believe they should go forward. I believe they will answer a lot of the questions that have been put forward.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just have a few comments here in regards to the amendments this evening.

As previous speakers have said, it is difficult to follow the changes. Certainly one of those changes was outlined in a letter that I tabled today from the Sturgeon school division. This letter was dated November 12. As of yesterday they received from a third party information about draft amendments to Bill 16 that the government intends to introduce in the Legislature next week. Now,

I am not certain if they are the only public school board that did not see these amendments or did see them, but one of their suggestions in this letter I tabled today, Mr. Chairman – and I quote from the letter – was that

if our information about Government House amendments is reliable, we call on the Government [to] leave the amendments in committee stage for at least ten days before completing consideration of the Bill.

I think that until such time as we have assurances from all public school boards that they have had the advantage of reviewing these amendments and to see how they are impacted and, as well, to have the necessary consultation, that suggestion is an excellent suggestion. I would urge the minister that before we proceed any further with the amendments to Bill 16, we do have the assurances from each individual public school board that they indeed have seen the amendments and have had an opportunity to see how those amendments would impact their school boards.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To respond to that, what I will say is that in the legislation there is but one thing that is added, and that one thing is that there is mandatory consultation, that there's regulation-making power on the consultation process leading up to a formation of new or expanded Catholic school boundaries. So I would put it to you, hon. member, that in this legislation everything else has been removed and that it should not take 10 days for them to take a look at it. I will say – and again I apologize, but this is thirdhand – that my deputy minister did meet with the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta today. Tentatively – again, I apologize; this is thirdhand – it was a good meeting.

The other thing I will say – and I believe that this is very important to say – is that if the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association did nothing, if they did nothing on this, then the 4 by 4 votes would continue, and over the next three years I would have another 170 of them. So this very much affects the Catholic School Trustees' Association. They have felt that there is a problem, and I commend them for doing that. They have stated that they support the idea of mandatory consultation, talking to everyone in the community, talking to their public school boards about the formation within a community. That is something that the public school boards do not have the authority to change. This is something that is constitutionally a right of the Alberta Catholic school boards in Alberta, and the public school boards constitutionally do not have this right.

I will say one thing, and I apologize for this for the member sitting in the gallery. It is a separate school right, and the reason I say that is because we do have a public separate school board. We have one public separate school board in my province. I do apologize for that.

Mr. Chairman, it is something that they have the ability to expand today. It is something that these school boards have the right to do. I commend the separate school boards for realizing that there's a problem, for proposing a solution, and again I'll reiterate that if nothing is done today, if nothing is done on this legislation, the 4 by 4 process will continue. There will continue to be expansion of the Catholic school boundaries. There will continue to be rifts within the communities, which all the separate boards and the public boards recognize do no one any good. All of this will continue for the next hundred years or until the province of Alberta is covered. What we have here today is a solution to this issue that will allow for cooler heads to prevail, for people to sit down and have a logical discussion

about what is going to happen to the education of the students in both the separate schools and the public schools of this province.

I do believe that this is the right way to go. I commend everyone who has been involved in this. I commend the separate school boards for putting these positions forward even though they did not have to. They did not have to say that they will talk to anyone, because it's their constitutional right not to, but they have said that we do not want to have these continual rifts in the communities over formation. I commend everyone involved, but I would remind the hon. member that that is the issue.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the minister for the back and forth, the debate we've had this evening. It's important.

I guess I would leave with just one question to the minister. Given all that we have before us and the changes in terms of choice, how does he see the amendments impacting a Catholic parent who is right now sending their child to a public school system? What will be the impact?

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much. The Catholic parent will still have the ability as to where they send their child. One of the issues will be on taxes, as to where they send their taxes, but I must remind the hon. member that probably five or six years ago taxes were all essentially pooled. Albeit you can direct your taxes as to where you want them to go, the ultimate effect is that they all come up to the central location and then are divvied out. That ability will still continue.

There still will be the ability for a Catholic parent to send their child to whatever school they see fit. As the hon. member knows, being a former school trustee, many students within the public school system are Catholic and many students within the Catholic school system are non-Catholic. That is something that will not change as a result of this legislation.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I move that we adjourn debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that's an interesting motion that should have with it additional thought. Anyway, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has moved that we adjourn debate at committee stage on Bill 16.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, we could move on, then, to Bill 21. I assume, as part of the previous one, that I'll move that when we rise and report from committee, we report progress on Bill 16.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that when the committee rises and reports, we report progress on Bill 16.

Now, if I heard the hon. gentleman correctly, we would be moving to Bill 21.

Bill 21 **Electronic Transactions Act**

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for the opportunity to speak briefly to Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act. I just want to commend my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, who has carried this legislation on behalf of the Ministry of Innovation and Science, for doing such an outstanding job and for working through the consultation process this summer to make sure we had the proper outline, the proper approach to this particular act.

I would just refer the members of the Assembly to kind of where this fits into the whole Innovation and Science business plan, which under our goal 5 says that "the Government of Alberta will be a model user in the application of information, knowledge and technology." Mr. Chairman, that just underscores the importance we see in today's world of high-speed access to the Internet in electronic business in allowing that only paper-based transactions are no longer practical. As a result, the objective of the Electronic Transactions Act is to give electronic communications the same legal status as their paper counterparts with one key principle, and that is that both parties must consent to handling their business transactions electronically.

Mr. Chairman, as was referenced this afternoon by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, we based the legislation before the House on the Uniform Electronic Commerce Act and reviewed that while we were developing our own legislation. He also noted that in Canada all jurisdictions with the exception of Newfoundland, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Alberta have passed legislation based on this model law.

Mr. Chairman, there are no amendments that we propose to bring forward on the bill at committee. I think, with the support we heard earlier from the members of the opposition, that they are in fact in agreement with the bill as presented, and we look forward to the early passage of this bill.

Thank you.

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

MR. HANCOCK: No, Mr. Chairman. We're not ready for the question yet.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay.

MR. HANCOCK: So I might spend just a moment to indicate to the House that the critic for the opposition is just having a review of some final comments that he might want to make, and I'm sure he'll want to come and make them.

In the meantime, if there's an indication that someone else might want to speak to the act . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: I'll speak.

MR. HANCOCK: You have to be in your own chair.

I would commend to the House the act because it does help us to regularize what is in practice in business today in this province and in our country in the fact that we use electronic transactions on a daily basis. Many of us believe that they're quite legal in effect now because of the fact that you really don't need to actually have an ink

signature on a document in order to make it a legal document. However, it does make it easier to prove that the document was actually signed by the parties that intended it to be a legal document. So the Electronic Transactions Act just takes that one step further and makes it clearer in the public mind that those documents that are done through electronic means and where they have the consent of both parties are in fact legal documents in this province. I think that's a very important step forward in this electronic age.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I think. The opposition I think has been in support of the Electronic Transactions Act, and for good reason. I think many of us who use the Internet and who would like to use it even more in terms of purchases and business dealings are still somewhat nervous over the whole process. I know that I'm still very, very reluctant to give out credit information over the Internet, and I'm sure I'm not alone. Anything that can help consumers feel more confident that those transactions are valid and that they won't be party to transactions that can be questioned I think is a move in the right direction, so I'm supportive of the legislation.

I think, as previous speakers have indicated, there's probably a lot more that could be done in terms of protecting consumers and making sure the transactions they undertake don't lead them into any difficulties. But it's all a very new area for all of us, and it's one that's evolving. The legislation and the kinds of regulations that govern it are gradually evolving, hopefully to make sure that consumers and the providers of goods and services can use this very powerful medium to carry on their transactions and to do it safely and with confidence that the transactions will be the ones they think they're undertaking.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 21 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Bill 18 **Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001**

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to rise and move an amendment to Bill 18 on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness. I believe that you have the appropriate copies of the amendment, and I would wait for them to be circulated to members.

THE CHAIRMAN: These amendments will be passed around, and in a moment we will deal further with them. They will be called amendment A1. We'll just wait a moment.

I believe everyone has a copy now of amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Government House Leader. The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Essentially the amendments that are being brought forward, as I understand it, are as a result of the opportunity that members of the professions have

had over the course of time in which we were in recess to look at the bill and to bring forward some questions and concerns they had.

In essence, section A, with respect to section 12, is being proposed to the House to be inserted into the bill in order to assure persons who are participating in the continuing competence program that results of that would not be used to their detriment in inappropriate circumstances. Obviously it's important to ensure in professions regulated by the bill that members of those professions are encouraged to engage in continuing competence programs, and it would be very discouraging if one were to participate in such a program and then as a result of not having been as successful as they had wished to be perhaps in passing a test or in dealing with some evaluation of that program, having to have that on their record, so to speak, for future employers' reference or other people's reference, where it may be inappropriate to do so. In order to be clear and clarify the concept of the continuing competence programs and to ensure that voluntary participation is not discouraged, the amendment makes it clear that information coming out of that program would not be able to be used to that individual's detriment. So that's section A.

Section B relates to matters with respect to the Ombudsman Act. Again, it deals with the question of utilization of information obtained in the continuing competence programs against an individual member. Again, the same comments would prevail with respect to that particular section, that the intention is to encourage people to participate in such a program, not to use that process against them.

Section C essentially inserts, as I understand it, the word "liquid" into the section: "under pressure, liquid, air or gas." Here we're talking about insertions into the ear. There were concerns by professionals practising in that area that the insertion of a liquid into the ear should also be covered by that particular section of the act, and thus it's been inserted there.

9:00

Sections D and E and the remaining sections of the proposed amendment I believe deal particularly with the concept of students in various professions and making it clear that registering of a student does not register them under this particular act. So it just clarifies that the students are not registered members under the act. All of those sections deal with the various professions and the issue of students as relating to those professions.

With those comments, Mr. Chairman, I would ask the House to consider the amendments being proposed. I understand that members of the opposition have only seen them tonight and therefore may not wish to deal completely with these amendments and the bill in committee tonight, but they may wish to have some comments. It would appear that they don't, and therefore I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 18.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: I would move that the committee rise and report and, in doing so, that it report progress on bills 18 and 16 and that it report Bill 21.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports Bill 21. The committee reports progress on the following: bills 16 and 18. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:04 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 14, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. NORRIS: [remarks in German]

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Mr. Christian Pauls, ambassador of Germany. Accompanying him is Mr. Fritz Koenig, honorary consul general stationed in Edmonton. Would they please rise. I would like to welcome His Excellency to Alberta on his first official visit since his appointment this year.

More than half a million Albertans are of German descent, Mr. Speaker, and there are about 60 active German-Canadian organizations across Alberta. From junior high schools to universities, German is taught in over 54 schools. Early next year Alberta expects to open a new international office in Munich to enhance our already outstanding trade opportunities with Germany. Trade with Germany is an important part of Alberta's economy, with two-way trade totaling over \$358 million, and there is great potential to expand. We trust that this will serve to enhance our already existing excellent relations between Alberta and Germany.

I would ask that our honoured guests please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here from 3,814 individuals that would like to encourage the Minister of Learning and this government to support libraries and librarians in this great province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday regarding discrimination against Falun Gong be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to make recommendation to the Federal government to condemn the Chinese government's crackdown on Falun Gong and the Heilongjiang Government's mass killing of Falun Gong practitioners.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 25

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act for first reading. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act is a bill which will establish a process through which property and profits gained from unlawful acts will be used to repair the harm caused to the victims of those crimes. It will also make it easier for Albertans to regain their property or obtain court-ordered restitution for losses suffered as a result of illegal activities.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Bill 26

Trustee Amendment Act, 2001

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also beg leave to introduce Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill will legislate the prudent investor rule that will allow trustees to diversify investments, control risk, and improve financial returns to a trust fund.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of tablings. I'm pleased to table today with the Assembly the following annual reports for the year 2000-2001: the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation; the Alberta Opportunity Company; the Livestock Identification Services Ltd. manager's report, which includes the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, and the Stray Animals Act. I am also filing the Farmers' Advocate annual report for the year 2000. Copies of all these reports are available in my office.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to file copies of the program from the October 18, 2001, investiture ceremony for this year's recipients of the Alberta Order of Excellence; namely, Louis Armand Desrochers of Edmonton and Colonel (Retired) Donald Stewart Ethell of Calgary. Worthy gentlemen both.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to table five copies of a letter addressed to Mr. Ashok Sharma, president, Council of India Societies, extending sincere best wishes on behalf of all of us to those tens of thousands of members of our East Indian community in our province who today begin the very special celebration of Diwali, which, as we all know, is the festival of light.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Though from time to time we seem to dwell on negative news in this Assembly, I would like to table today the Ervin & Associates gas price survey for all of Canada, which shows the capital city of Alberta, Edmonton, having the lowest gas prices in all of Canada.

Continuing on the side of good news, I am also tabling today a

press release from Suncor Energy that talks about its Voyageur project, Mr. Speaker, that is part of the \$32 billion U.S. investment in oil sands in this great province, which moves production up to 550,000 barrels per day over the next 10 years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table a letter from Grande Yellowhead regional division No. 35 on the aspects of Bill 16.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the outline of the Good Neighbour fund. They held their Poor Boy luncheon today at noon. This is a fund that generates moneys to help individuals who are without other sources of support in the community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I have two tablings: one, notes on cost containment strategies and, the second, expenditure forecasts for the second quarter of 2001-2002.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I at this time would like to table for all members of the Assembly a letter that I received from Lee and Maria Kruszewski from Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are concerned about the large number of students in kindergarten through grade 3 classes at St. Gabriel school.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from a constituent, Margaret Hislop. The letter is addressed to the Premier and is CCed to me. She was very concerned in outlining her concerns with the difference in government promises before the election compared to the tighten your belts scenarios that are being heard after the election.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a letter written by Ms Audrey Mancini of Red Deer addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness in which she is asking why important drugs like Remicide and others are not covered under the Alberta drug plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a report by the Alberta Wilderness Association, Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Edmonton chapter, and the Federation of Alberta Naturalists entitled Structural Impediments to FSC Certification in Alberta: Overcoming Barriers to Well-Managed Forests.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 61(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. It covers his activities to the period to March 31, 2001.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week commemorates the anniversary of the death of Louis Riel, and it is a time when Metis people honour his memory and celebrate their heritage. Today we have a very special guest with us, and it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Ms Audrey Poitras, who is president of the Metis Nation of Alberta Association. Audrey is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask that she please rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce some special guests who are also here with us as part of Metis Week in Alberta. In your gallery today are Rick Blyan, the president of the Metis Settlements General Council, executive members Gerald Cunningham, vice-president; Donna Lakey, secretary; Marcel Desjarlais, treasurer; and Dale LeClair, executive director. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly a friend, a colleague, and a columnist with the *Calgary Herald*, her first appearance in the Chamber of the Alberta Legislature. I'd ask that Danielle Smith rise and receive the warm applause of this congregation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have two introductions. First of all, I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly seven people who do an incredible job on a daily basis working in victims' assistance programs throughout the capital region and who are representative of the many people who work throughout our province assisting victims on a daily basis. They are joining us today to see the introduction of Bill 25, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, which was just approved for first reading in the Assembly. With us today are Sergeant Bob Pagee and Shelley Juchli of the Edmonton Police victim services unit, Terry Krahn of the Edmonton John Howard victims assistance program, Kim Goodwin of the Leduc and District Victim Assistance Society, Shirley DenBraber of the Fort Saskatchewan victim service unit, and Marlene Morris and Lynne Fowler of the victim service unit that serves Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, and district. They're seated in the public gallery, and I'd like them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly and our thanks as representatives of the victims services people all over the province.

Mr. Speaker, I indicated that I had two introductions. It's also my

pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly an enthusiastic and fantastic group of 105 grade 6 students from St. Mary's school in my constituency. Teachers and student teachers accompanying the students are Miss Liz Esposito, Mr. Brad Ostopowich, Mrs. Lillian Turner, Mrs. Denise D'Agostini, Miss Krista Murray, Miss Dayna Heuver, Mr. Don Henderson, Mrs. Michelle Armstrong and parent volunteers Mrs. Judy Brotto, Mrs. Mary Sikora, Mr. Sam Amelio, Mrs. Teresa Stewart, Mrs. Mary Healy, Mrs. Virginia Harris, Mrs. Christina Harrison, Mrs. Janet Clanachan, Mrs. Cathy Jabusch, Mrs. Flavia Anger, Mrs. Virginia Tracy-Roth, Mrs. Colleen Smith, Mrs. Eva Powers, Mr. Dwain May, Ms Diane Dagleish, Ms Silva McCann, Ms Jeannie Vaage. As I indicated, 105 wonderful students from the Edmonton-Whitemud constituency. I hope that they will be able to watch question period and see the questions and answers that go on today, because with so many of them I wasn't able to answer all their questions at the time we had pictures taken. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you the members of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, a group of hardworking individuals who help to protect one of our most valuable resources in this province, the children. I'd like to welcome recently appointed and reappointed members to the committee: Jean Wilkinson, vice-chair; Lori Brooks; Nancy Donnelly; Dawne Fowler; Del James; Mickey McMaster; Yvonne Slemko; and Edith Zawadiuk. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Miss Shannon Knack. Shannon volunteers and also does the janitorial work at my constituency office. Shannon is seated in the members' gallery, and I would like her to rise at this time and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce members from Fort McMurray who belong to local municipal government. Let me just say that many members of this Assembly have belonged to local municipal government. It is an important fraternity. In fact, today commences the 98th annual convention of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, which they are attending. So it's my pleasure today to introduce His Worship Mayor Doug Faulkner from the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo as well as Councillor Mickey Madden and Councillor Tom Weber. I would ask them all to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this House in keeping with the spirit that nous aons l'energie.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Gary Mize, president and chief executive officer of ConAgra Malt, as well as Mr. Don Grambsch, senior vice-president, global risk management and procurement for ConAgra Malt, and Mr. Andrew Raphael, ConAgra Malt's Canadian government relations representative.

ConAgra is an international company which owns Canada Malting in Calgary. They're the largest grain processor in Alberta, processing high-quality Alberta barley into malt. The Calgary facility is their largest and most modern and produces about 250,000 metric tonnes of malt per year. Our guests are in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you today to the members of this Assembly a very special person to Red Deer-North and indeed to all of Canada. She's well known to the members of this Assembly, and we're very glad to have her here today. Oh, another special person has just arrived. We're all quite familiar with him, and we're very pleased to have them both here: Mr. and Mrs. Stockwell Day. Will you please stand.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: I really don't know what to say because the hon. Member for Red Deer-North stole my thunder. For such an eloquent guest I think that we should have a slightly longer introduction.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce through you to all members of the Legislature a very familiar face to most of us, Stockwell Day. As you know, Stockwell is the leader of the Canadian Alliance and Leader of the Official Opposition in Ottawa, and before going federal, Stockwell was a longtime member of this Assembly, representing the constituency of Red Deer-North. He also served in several cabinet portfolios, most notably as Provincial Treasurer. Above all, Stockwell is a true friend of Alberta, and I'm delighted that he is here with us today. I get to do an additional introduction because Stockwell is joined by his delightful and amazing wife, Valorie; Valorie's sister, Jude Hanson; and Stockwell's executive assistant, Shane Bourke. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Legislature.

1:50

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Metis Week

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Metis I rise proudly in the House today to acknowledge that this is Metis Week in the province of Alberta. In fact, I'm pleased to have our special guests from the Metis Nation of Alberta and the Metis Settlements General Council with us today, who have donated the lapel pins on your desks.

Metis Week began on November 12 with the proclamation of Metis Week and the flag-raising ceremony by the Metis Nation of Alberta. My colleague from Edmonton-Calder represented the government extremely well at this important event, and I thank him for that. Commencing with the flag-raising ceremony, Metis Week will be honoured with a presentation of many important events through the entire week. I urge my colleagues to consider attending one of the many of these events.

On November 16 the Metis Nation of Alberta will hold its annual commemoration in honour of Louis Riel here at the Legislature at 11 a.m. The Metis Nation of Alberta has played and continues to play an important and integral role in our society, working hard on behalf

of the Metis people of this great province. I commend their remembrance of a great symbol of independence and struggle for equality and recognition. Louis Riel has been denounced as a traitor and extolled as a hero, someone who helped shape the destiny of the west as a place built on fresh ideas and strong convictions. One hundred and sixteen years have passed since his death, and much of what he wanted for Metis people flourishes.

Metis leaders have a history of working with the Alberta government to make life better. Together we are moving Alberta Metis closer to self-reliance, self-determination, and self-management. The land base of our eight Metis settlements and its uniqueness in Canada is something to be proud of. Off-settlement Metis have a strong partnership with the Alberta government through the Metis Nation of Alberta Association.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government is committed to its partnership with Metis people in this province. We share a mutual goal, to improve socioeconomic opportunities, and we are continuing to move forward in our efforts with the Metis Nation of Alberta and the Metis Settlements General Council. Through our aboriginal policy framework and aboriginal policy initiative Alberta is also continuing to work with other governments, the private sector, and stakeholders to make sure that social and economic issues are properly addressed.

Today, for example, I had the pleasure of attending the grand opening of the Infinity Business Training Centre, a centre of excellence for entrepreneurship. The centre is a new initiative of the Metis Business Development Corporation, a relatively new division of the Metis Nation of Alberta Association. The Infinity Business Training Centre was established to provide training to Metis people who have a business idea, develop a business plan, and provide support to those individuals as they start their businesses. The timing of the grand opening of this important facility is ideal as we celebrate Metis Week.

Metis Albertans are leaders in business, government, and the nonprofit sector and contribute as wonderful performers, entertainers, people with a variety of artistic abilities. On behalf of this Assembly I offer my best wishes to all Metis people living in Alberta. May they always stand proud of their heritage and the important role that their ancestors and our ancestors played in the making of the west.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My compliments to the minister for a very moving statement. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Official Opposition to the minister's statement.

Metis Week is an opportunity to reflect upon the many contributions of the Metis people to Alberta. It is vitally important to continue to work to ensure more growth in Metis independence, equality, and self-sufficiency. I'm glad to hear the minister speak of government partnership with Metis people because I was concerned that recent government cuts forced the Ma'Mōwe child and family services authority to layoff four aboriginal managers. As the aboriginal pillar was the fourth pillar upon which our current children's authorities were based, I find this a surprising move, especially considering that Metis youth are overrepresented in the case files of children's authorities.

So while we honour this week the Metis culture, it is important not to forget that the government has vital responsibilities to the next generation of Metis youth. Strengthening the next generation of Metis is an undertaking that I think Louis Riel would himself most surely have championed.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Health Care Reform

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the weekend the Premier speculated in the media about changes to Alberta's health care system. However, yesterday he refused to answer questions, and he strongly advised everyone to wait for Mr. Mazankowski and his group of experts to bring their report together. My question is to the Premier. Why is it okay for the Premier to speculate about changes to the health care system and it's not for us to ask you questions in the House?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, he can ask all the questions he wants, and I will answer them to the best of my ability. The word "speculation" is a misuse of that particular word. There's no speculation whatsoever. I was alluding quite specifically to the interim report that was tabled with me by Mr. Mazankowski, the very preliminary report. I explained to the media yesterday – and I'm sure that either the hon. member was in attendance or one of his representatives was; they usually are at the daily scrum – and I indicated the procedure from here, that on November 16 Mr. Mazankowski will sit down with me to give me an overview of the report, and on or about the 26th of November the final report will be tabled. It will be introduced to the government caucus. It will go through the normal process of cabinet, the standing policy committee, and caucus. Government members will have an opportunity to examine it, and shortly thereafter it will be released publicly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following up on all of that process, will you commit to having an open debate on the results of that report here in this Legislature?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, that question was asked. We don't know what components of that report, if any, will require legislative changes or regulation changes or what can be adopted simply as policy. So it is too early to say, but certainly if there are any components that require legislative changes, it will naturally be debated in this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier also commit to making sure that average Albertans, the citizens who receive health care from this province, will be included in that debate process?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the extent to which a lengthy public debate will take place is something that certainly will have to be considered by this caucus. I can inform the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that Mr. Mazankowski and his committee went through a public process. As a matter of fact, there were opportunities for people to fax their input. I believe there was a 1-800 number. They solicited openly and very aggressively, to my knowledge, input from the public.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the findings of the Mazankowski report, some of which might be adopted, probably will be adopted by this government, will also be fed to the Romanow commission. Mr. Romanow has made it quite public that he will hold across this

country a very aggressive round of public hearings relative to health care reform, and that's needed.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

2:00

Delisting of Health Services

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that the Premier has speculated about has been delisting of services. How will this improve the public health care system if you delist and take away from Albertans some of the health care they now receive?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the Mazankowski report alludes – alludes – to the delisting of some services. He talks in his report, in the preliminary report, about the whole issue of comprehensiveness and how the expectations of Canadians and of Albertans in particular, because this relates specifically to Alberta, must be tempered somewhat, that the health care system is not there for all people for all time, for all causes. In other words, the expectation that it's there to cover absolutely everything is one, just one, of the factors that are driving up costs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier says that that's just alluded to in that report, then why is it that you have singled out delisting as the item that you are talking about on a regular basis?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is not true. That is simply not true, and I wish the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition would quit telling fibs. That is not true. I have not been talking about delisting. As a matter of fact, the point that I've been stressing is the whole point of perhaps a challenge to the interpretation of the Canada Health Act as it affects the whole issue of comprehensiveness.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: Mr. Premier, when you talk about delisting, taking away from Albertans services that are included in the public health care system, isn't this moving from the public health care system to an insurance health care system or to a wallet health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the only one talking about delisting anything is the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition. Will this hon. member stand up in this Legislative Assembly today and tell this House, this Legislative Assembly, specifically what I have mentioned in terms of delisting? He can't, because I haven't mentioned anything.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Care Spending

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said that spending on health care had risen, in his words, roughly 30 percent over 10 years. He has also spoken about health care spending being out of control. Is it this government's policy that a spending increase of 30 percent over 10 years is out of control?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I did allude to the fact that health care

spending over the past five years has doubled – and even this member should be able to understand that – from just over \$3 billion to just over \$6 billion. Figure the math. Do the math. You're a professor. You're an educated person. Can you figure that out? Doubled.

DR. TAFT: I was just quoting his own figures.

Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: if the Alberta government's spending on health care is out of control, is that not the fault of the Alberta government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have never said that it is out of control. I have alluded to the fact that if spending remains at the same level or increases year after year after year, we will be facing a crisis in health care, and I'm not the only one saying that. His Liberal counterparts in various provincial jurisdictions are saying the same thing. His Liberal cousins in Ottawa are saying the same thing. That's why the Prime Minister appointed Mr. Romanow, a member of the NDs, so we can come to grips as a nation with the spiraling costs of health care and arrive at a solution that will make health care spending sustainable and make sure that we have for future generations of Canadians a sustainable and quality health care system. That's what it's all about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given his great interest in saving money, will the Premier make the commitment that no contracting out of clinical services will be done in Alberta unless it can be publicly shown to save money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have in place an act in this province; it's called the Health Care Protection Act, formerly Bill 11. You know, I'm sure that the Liberals went out and they thought that they were going to make political hay on Bill 11. Well, guess what happened? Their numbers dwindled to seven, and our numbers increased to 74.

Mr. Speaker, the Health Care Protection Act lays out very strict and very definite guidelines relative to the ability of regional health authorities to contract out certain minor surgery procedures.

MR. MAR: By way of supplement, Mr. Speaker, I should add that in reviewing the 36-some contracts that have been approved under the Health Care Protection Act, the total budget amount in aggregate is roughly \$10 million out of a \$6 billion-plus budget. It is some one-fifth of 1 percent of the total budget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

Delisting of Health Services

(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is a politician who used to pride himself on keeping his promises. Not anymore. Before the election he said that "no one . . . will be denied needed health care in this province because of an inability to pay." You'll recall he waved his health care card and he said: "If you have your health care card, it will be there for you." If the Premier succeeds in delisting services or introducing user fees, Albertans will need their credit cards, not their health care cards, to pay for their basic health care. My question is to the Premier. Why is the Premier threatening to delist health care services and introduce user fees when he said on April 10 last year right here in this House that sick and injured

Albertans will only need their Alberta health care card to access public health care?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm bewildered. First of all, no one in this Legislative Assembly – no one – has introduced user fees. User fees violate one of the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. It's enshrined in our law, the Health Care Protection Act, that we will abide by the fundamental principles. That doesn't preclude us from challenging the interpretation of certain components of the act. The only persons who've talked about deinsuring or user fees are the members of the Liberals and the NDs. No one has talked about that.

Mr. Speaker, there will be a process that will be followed relative to the release of the Mazankowski report. At that time there will be some certainty as to where we are headed as a government to bring about meaningful health care reform and still provide a service for those who are sick and injured in society under a publicly funded health care system.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is the Premier and his government putting the comprehensiveness principle in question by threatening to delist health care services when the then minister of health said on April 6 last year that "we have absolutely no plans to delist coverage for necessary medical services"?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that goes to the essence of what we will probably have to consider relative to comprehensiveness. What is "comprehensive"? Perhaps the hon. leader of the third party could stand up and give us his definition. I was asked yesterday for my definition of comprehensive. My definition might be different than the definition of any member of this Legislature. I would like to know what the hon. member means by comprehensive. Does he mean to say that health care is there for all people at all times for every single cause no matter how minor? Is that what he is saying?

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not the definition.

MR. KLEIN: Well, is that what he is saying? I would like to hear from the leader of the third party what his definition of comprehensiveness is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

2:10

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What Albertans would really like to know is: why did the Premier mislead Albertans over and over again about the government's true health care agenda? Was it to win the election?

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE SPEAKER: Well, you know, words are used in context, and the word "mislead" has a connotation that may not really be appropriate. I would suspect that the hon. member has used the word in such a way that it is not in the context that the majority of people would understand it to be.

The hon. the Premier.

Delisting of Health Services (continued)

MR. KLEIN: I'm not sure what the question was. I know what the allegation was, that I misled Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I've never misled Albertans.

You know, the Minister of Health and Wellness and myself and

other members of this caucus have always said that we have to bring about meaningful reform to health care to make it sustainable for future generations, and I believe with all my heart that the leader of the third party believes that as well, that we have to find a way to ensure that health care is sustainable for future generations. That's what the national exercise is all about; that's what the Romanow commission is all about. That's what Don Mazankowski's advisory council on health is all about. That's why other Premiers and other ministers of health in virtually every other jurisdiction in this country are trying to find meaningful and significant ways of bringing about health care reforms, to make sure it is sustainable and at the same time to ensure that those who are truly sick and injured and hurting in society are looked after. That's what it's all about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

North/South Trade Corridor

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's public revenue is down due to the downturn of our world economy and that our responsive government reduces our public spending accordingly, reflecting my constituents' concern about our Calgary transportation infrastructure, my questions are to the Minister of Transportation. What highway links through Calgary are under the responsibility of the provincial government, and how will they be affected by the corrective measure to keep the budget balanced this year?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department and the government have assumed full responsibility for all major trade corridors through cities in the province. In the city of Calgary it's the Deerfoot, which is part of highway 2 and which is the north/south trade corridor. By assuming full responsibility, we're committed to maintaining that road that goes through the city of Calgary. By that, I mean snow removal, line painting, illumination of the road, and also crack sealing and all of the other things that come with maintenance. We also assumed full responsibility for the construction of a number of interchanges along that trade route as well. Due to some of the corrective actions that we've had to take, we've deferred the interchange development. But with respect to the maintenance portion, that relieved the city of about \$4 million to \$5 million a year in costs which we've assumed responsibility for, that and also the full cost of the construction. Now, the corrective action was a 15 percent reduction in municipal grants, which is a bit of a reduction in the 70 percent increase that they've received over the last three years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. In the October 18 announcement the Department of Transportation indicated that it is still planning to open the Deerfoot extension by 2002. Is this still achievable?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the plan has hit a bit of a glitch, only because the city of Calgary has been unable to obtain the land that's necessary to complete the extension north of the Bow. We probably will be missing the construction season, you know, to grade the road and then pave in conjunction with part of the north/south trade corridor grading that has been completed from the Bow River south. So we probably will lose one construction season not because

of a fiscal issue but because of the fact that we can't obtain the land in time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary to the same minister: what can the minister commit to that will ensure that the Deerfoot Trail will be able to handle the demands of traffic growth in our city of Calgary?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, that portion of the north/south trade corridor, highway 2, the Deerfoot, is a very important link of the Canamex highway. Given that our trade with the Americans is about a billion and a half a day and trade with Mexico is increasing on a daily basis, all sorts of manufacturing sectors, especially agriculture as well, we are committed to completing the north/south trade corridor and making all of the necessary improvements so that we can gain efficiencies in moving goods and services north and south.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Intensive Livestock Operations

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the minister of agriculture. While the NRCB will be responsible for approving individual applications for confined feeding operations, who will monitor the cumulative impact of all of the CFOs on the soil, air, and water quality across this province?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the Natural Resources Conservation Board will be responsible, as the member indicated, for the siting, the auditing, the monitoring, and the compliance of confined feeding operations in this province. Those will be the functions of the NRCB.

I should mention to the hon. member that because this government recognized some dozen years ago that there could be a problem in a cumulative manner of the effects of intensive agriculture, not just livestock, on groundwater and the soil, we instituted a groundwater study in southern Alberta, where a great deal of intensive farming operations, including confined feeding operations, occur, and over that 10-year period monitored the effects on groundwater and did some soil monitoring as well. That information was very valuable to us, and we continue to monitor today 23 sites to ensure that, in fact, we are not impacting negatively groundwater and soil in those intensive areas.

The NRCB will have that authority. There will of course be the interaction with Environment if there is a breach and a necessity for environmental protection to come in and assist with remediation of the problem.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this addresses the issues of groundwater and soil, but what about air?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, when we announced that the Natural Resources Conservation Board would be responsible for this legislation, we made it very clear that their authority would be to monitor the quality of the air, soil, and water in this province, and that will be a major part of their mandate.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: why does she not support the Official Opposition position that there should be

consistent and enforceable provincial regulations to protect soil, water, air quality, and municipal autonomy in deciding the final siting for CFOs?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I mentioned yesterday and I find it interesting yet – in fact, I believe it was this very member who was the critic for environmental protection when a news release was put out. There are a couple of things that are in it. I'll paraphrase what I quoted yesterday, and I'd be happy to table this, Mr. Speaker, as is the practice: it was important that this government ensure that there is consistency. A couple of things I want to just point out, and these are statements from that: "Most municipalities not only lack the expertise to determine or regulate the impacts of intensive hog operations or feedlots, they lack the specialist staff to ensure compliance." Speaking of the minister of agriculture, "He should ensure that the siting and operation of intensive livestock operations prevents any environmental contamination." It goes on to say that one municipality may be more lenient than the other.

2:20

If the hon. member reads the bill that was introduced in this House yesterday, she will see very clearly that that legislation is enabling legislation that will ensure that the codes of practice that are set out are indeed complied with. I'm sure her comeback would be, and rightfully so: well, most of this is in the regulations. Well, let me assure the hon. member that the regulations in draft form, because of course that's the only way they could be – you can't have regulations until you have legislation passed – to show and demonstrate to all, not just to this Legislature but to the people who will operate under this act, will be in place for their review and people's review before this act is passed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Corrections Facilities Riots

MR. CENAICO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were shocked this week about news of riots at the Edmonton Institution and the prison in Drumheller. These riots, that resulted in injuries to several inmates and one death, raise a number of concerns. My questions are to the Solicitor General. I understand that the prisons in Edmonton and Drumheller, where these incidents took place, are federal institutions, but can the Solicitor General advise what role, if any, her department has in investigating these riots?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. Where the riots took place are both federal institutions. My department has no direct involvement in the investigation into these incidents. However, under the provincial Police Act the RCMP and the Edmonton Police Service will investigate the incidents within their jurisdiction and will recommend charges if they deem them appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CENAICO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary question is also to the Solicitor General. What plans are in place in Alberta correctional centres to prevent or deal with incidents such as those at the Edmonton and Drumheller federal institutions?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta correctional officers in this province are very well trained, and they're all very professional. I've had the opportunity to travel the province in the last couple of months and meet these officers in the institutions and have been very, very impressed. In addition, we have specially trained tactical teams to deal with a riot in our Alberta correctional centres. I'd like to say that due to security reasons I can't elaborate, but I can tell you that we have professional, well-trained correctional officers in our facilities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Foster Children

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Children's Services told the House, "We have worked very hard to make sure that the reductions do not happen on the level of dealing with the child." My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that the West Yellowhead must cut \$147,000 to support and train foster parents, does the minister still stand by her claim that children won't be affected?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do say that we are making cuts furthest away from the child. I don't know the specific reference from West Yellowhead, but let me assure the members here that beyond the cuts, let's talk about what we're doing that's positive, and let's remember that in Alberta we spend . . . [interjections] Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. We spend \$647 million on children in this province through Children's Services, one of the largest budgets in Canada. This year and over the next year we will have a 15 percent increase in basic maintenance fees for foster families. This will look after the needs for foster families. I met with representatives of 3,500 foster families just last week, and they are very pleased that since April this year we have been putting in additional supports, including supports for respite and additional training for foster families.

I'd like to go one step further. Mr. Speaker, with foster families requiring training and respite, we are working to reconfigure the way that contracts administer services through foster families. We've had authority foster families and agency foster families, and much of the work that the CEOs are doing is trying to make sure that the contracts themselves don't have built in layers of administration and valuation that could be better spent up front with the child.

So, Mr. Speaker, I stand by my claim that the administrative cuts and the teamwork that we're bringing in to work with foster families will do a lot to improve the system and that we are not directly taking away from those services that interface directly with the child.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that West Yellowhead projects a \$1 million deficit in child welfare services alone, how will the reduction in administration be enough to avoid direct services to children being cut?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, every single authority is working on their plan. Since we had the business plans approved earlier this year, they are going back and looking at cost containment strategies, but more than that they are working on some very specific new initiatives.

I'll give you an example from the hon. Member for Red Deer-

North. She visited Neegan Awas'sak up in Slave Lake. They are working to have their social workers become permanency planners, working with the family, working with the child, and working with the extended family to make sure that children aren't necessarily taken into the child welfare system and become so-called statistics in child welfare but working right in the home to ensure that we can do better things to enable that family to overcome their problems and the child to grow up in a loving family.

One more thing, Mr. Speaker. Some of the initiatives for home visitation and early childhood development that are in place in this province will net and yield very strong dividends in the future as we bring in prevention strategies in the early years that will avoid some of the problems that we have with children who have extensive history in child welfare.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of the close to 500 frontline staff the minister promised to hire at budget time, how many are actually on the job today helping children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today child welfare services has 2,655 employees. Of the 475 that were in the budget at the first of this year, 75, as I indicated at one time previously in this House, were transfers to accommodate the Children's Advocate and some of the other departmental transfers. We have about 300 new social workers in the system. We are still missing some outreach workers in some of the remote areas, but the teams themselves are working to overcome that.

If I might just add one more point, not all child welfare is delivered by staff that are members of our government department. It is delivered by agency supports through at least 10,000 people and several agencies throughout Alberta: Boys and Girls Clubs, Catholic Social Services. Our configuration and mix of child delivery services extends far beyond the staff in the department.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had questions pertaining to funding for foster children and foster parents and also with respect to direct funding for children's services, and the questions have been asked and answered appropriately by the minister.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Drivers' Licences

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The only thing slower than the motor vehicles registry system in this province is the government's response to fixing it. My first question this afternoon is for the Solicitor General. Which law enforcement agencies have approached the hon. minister's department requesting better security features in the card stock to reduce the cases of counterfeiting and fraud with the Alberta drivers' licence?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member, and I am going to give it to the Minister of Government Services.

2:30

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, let me reassure the hon. member and all Albertans that even though there are people out there who have the technology today to counterfeit money, to do forgery on any document or any piece of paper – let me advise this House that our driver's licence process is constantly being looked at and constantly being upgraded. Yes, we do have to do some individual improvements on our equipment to keep up with the technology that's available today, but let me reassure you that drivers' licences are safe in Alberta today.

Thank you.

MR. MacDONALD: To the Minister of Government Services: can the hon. minister please explain the memo dated July 17 of this year from the deputy minister's office that was found fluttering on the lawn of the Legislative Assembly? Talk about a security issue. This memo states that law enforcement agencies have also requested better security features on the card stock to reduce the incidence of counterfeit or fraudulent licences. Who was right here, the law enforcement agencies or the minister?

Thank you.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, that particular document has made its way from the *Edmonton Journal* into the hands of the hon. member opposite. That particular document is the very first draft of some consultations that we have had with the stakeholders that we have responsibility to work with in registries and in the Department of Government Services. That is a first draft, and we will continue to work with our stakeholders to get their input into upgrading our present equipment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Government Services: given that this year's Government Services annual report states that capital initiatives were deferred to fund operational costs, how does the minister plan to fund the \$5 cost per driver's licence to provide all Alberta drivers with a new, safe, tamperproof, fraudulent-proof licence? Where's the \$5 going to come from?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a first draft of a document that was going to be used for our business planning process that we were going through this fall and this winter. Make no mistake; I will constantly be working with this government and with our department to make sure that we have the dollars available when needed.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Industrial Disturbance in Forests

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today a report was released by four respected environmental organizations. The report concluded that the biggest threat to Alberta's forests is surprisingly not from the forest industry but from the province's oil and gas industry. The report says that the oil and gas industry cuts down almost as many trees in Alberta each year as the forest industry does. More than 57,000 kilometres of seismic lines are cut through Alberta's forests every year, greater than the circumference of the entire globe. To the Minister of Energy: how can the minister justify

not addressing a situation where the oil and gas industry is responsible for cutting and destroying almost as much Alberta forest each year as the entire forest industry?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it's a real delight to be able to rise in this House and bring the member out of the dark ages, out of the years of 50 to 100 years ago, and talk about some of the dramatic new impacts that are happening in the oil and gas industry today. Those events of zero impact seismic were through the use of global positioning systems. You can go in, take a seismic shot, cut down one tree. Today industry works with the forest industry to have a minimal industrial disturbance footprint in these areas. This industry, through the use of horizontal drilling techniques, where you put a pad and you drill sideways in many different directions, allows again a minimal disturbance, a minimal imprint. There are many technologies that Alberta service companies have taken the lead in and, in fact, are world-best practitioners at.

I can remember being in a meeting with the hon. Member for West Yellowhead. It was in the Dominion Forest cabin, a cabin secluded in the wilds. It was built by a robust forestry department in the early '30s, and there, Mr. Speaker, the oil patch came together with the logging industry and said: "How do we find better solutions? How do we minimize the industrial impact? How do we maximize the benefit of this resource for all Albertans?" The oil patch is doing it today. They're doing it competently, and they'll continue to do it competently in the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why has the government failed to put measures in place requiring the energy industry to do a proper job of reforesting the tens of thousands of hectares that are clear-cut each year, including on an ongoing basis, despite what the minister has to say to us, for seismic lines, well sites, pipelines, and access roads?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleagues and the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development are waiting to leap to their feet to talk about the work that has been done with the government and the private sector, the ability to have the Energy and Utilities Board work diligently in the broad public interest for us to be able to continue to develop this important, important resource for all Albertans and, at the same time, recognizing we have an extremely valuable forestry resource as well. It's the ability of Albertans to work in partnership with government, the private sector, and different industrial sectors in order to develop this resource and to employ people and in fact to employ unionized people in the forestry industry. I don't know if he wants to damage the job opportunities that unions have in Alberta, but if he does, he's doing a good job of it.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, aside from the charming story about the meeting in the quaint log cabin, can the minister demonstrate with documentation actual agreements between the forestry industry and the oil and gas industry that protect Alberta's forests?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the member is asking for access to private commercial agreements that exist in industry today. In fact, I know that through his union connections he can probably go to any party that he wishes to talk to and say: show me these agreements; show me these industrial private-sector agreements. I'm sure the private sector would be pleased to respond to his request.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Personal Identification

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A question of the same genre as that of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar – which stands on the testament that sometimes, but only sometimes, they can identify questions of relevance – is to the hon. Minister of Government Services. Following the tragic events of September 11 there have been some discussions relevant to the adequacy of the security of Alberta drivers' licences and perhaps the need for universal ID. Is this government at this time considering a universal ID?

MR. COUTTS: Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, and this House that there is no plan for mandatory identification of any type. There is no proposal on the table for mandatory identification. What we are looking at doing is upgrading our present driver's licence as well as our voluntary identification card so that it is secure for Albertans. With rapidly advancing technology today it's important that as Minister of Government Services in charge of registries we do take a look at the possibilities of how we can make our cards more secure. It has always been our job to make sure that we investigate and look at all the options that are available. It's very prevalent at this particular time, given the recent tragedies in the United States, that we do remind ourselves of the need to be vigilant in terms of making sure that we do upgrade our identification cards.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.
2:40

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the department currently investigating such options as DNA security or perhaps even face recognition?

MR. COUTTS: We're not looking at DNA. The reason we're not looking at DNA is because DNA is at the very high end of the technological scale, and there's a broad spectrum of possibilities out there between what DNA is and what we presently have in place. So DNA may be the best technology to use, but it may not be the right thing for Albertans today. What we need is an answer that is not only secure and affordable for Albertans but, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, an answer that is acceptable also to the privacy needs of Albertans.

MR. LUKASZUK: My last supplemental, Mr. Speaker: when does the minister expect to have recommendations tabled, and when can Albertans expect some of those new innovations to take place?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very early in the process of dealing with the security task force that is being led by the Hon. Halvar Jonson, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs. What I've been asked to do is to simply take a look, to assist with an overall strategy regarding the security of Alberta's drivers' licences to ensure that when Albertans go and cross that border or when they get on an airline, the identification that they are using and that they produce is viewed as being trustworthy and authentic. I strongly believe, not to mention our neighbours, that Albertans deserve no less.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Library Funding

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. October 14 to 20 was Library Week here in Alberta, and the minister talked about funding to reflect population growth, despite the fact that the per capita grant continues to be based on 1997 population figures. If the Minister of Community Development is going to talk about access, new technologies, and services available at libraries for all Albertans, could the minister please share with Albertans the funding plan he has in place to provide these services in a sustainable manner?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the question from the hon. member, because libraries are, indeed, a very important and a very integral aspect of all of our communities where they exist right across this province. It is true that this year, in the budget released in April, we did increase overall library funding, which I'm sure the member is aware of. As I recall, that increase was over \$700,000, which took us up over the \$14 million mark, somewhere close to \$15 million. We also indicated that we would be spending just under \$2 million hooking up with the APLEN project. So those are a couple of the positive things.

I do acknowledge, however, that the per capita rate that was reduced several years ago does need some serious review, and as soon as those budget dollars come available, I have indicated I will take a look at that as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. To the same minister: could the minister please tell us, then, how many libraries in Alberta have the funding base to take the APLEN wiring from the outside of their buildings inside and provide the hardware and trained personnel to use it? How many?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I don't have a figure just off the top of my head, but I'd be happy to have a look and see how those accommodations are going along.

What I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that as we have the APLEN project traveling down this highway and we have the Supernet traveling down that highway, at some point we're going to need to try and merge the two, and there will be an expense that many of the libraries will be hard pressed to meet. So we're going to have to work out a strategy when the dollars come available to help those libraries become better equipped in order to facilitate that process, which I think is ultimately where the member may be going with her question.

In short, if there is a number out there that accommodates her specific question, I'll be happy to try and find it for her.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks. Given that the minister is going ahead with these two different streams around libraries yet doesn't have the government funding to back it up, what does he have in mind so that libraries can provide these services to Albertans, given that there's an absence of additional government support, without the libraries raising fees? Is this magic money?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. We have probably the most wired province anywhere in all of Canada. We've invested a great deal of money in that infrastructure; we will continue to invest. What we have in the library community is one type of need. What we have in the business community may well be a different type of need and so on in the medical areas and in our public buildings and so on. At some point we would like to have those mergers occur, but first we have to make sure that we've got our own particular projects well in hand, and that's what we're attempting to do with the APLEN hookup. It's gone over very well, as the member knows. When I had the great pleasure of attending the librarians' meeting in Jasper, we spent a lot of time discussing this issue, and I expect we'll discuss it more.

As soon as the dollars become available, Mr. Speaker, we will take a look at how we can help improve services to our libraries so that they have the necessary funds to make those particular mergers more affordable to them.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Wilfred and Ann Vandermeer

MR. VANDERMEER: Thank you. Today, Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of publicly recognizing two very special people: my parents, Wilfred and Ann Vandermeer. They left their native land, Leeuwarden in the Netherlands, in 1952 and settled in a faraway place, Edmonton. They sought a better life, and they found it here. As time went by, the family grew to include six children, of which I am the fourth. A week ago today, on November 7, they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, no small feat in these times. To me they are an example of what true love is all about: commitment, respect, affection. They have certainly set an example for my brother, my sisters, and myself to follow. Mom and Dad, congratulations. May God bless you with many more years in health and happiness.

Harry Buddle

MRS. O'NEILL: This evening Mr. Harry Buddle, the CEO of Capital City Savings & Credit Union, will be presented with the University of Alberta-based 2001 Canadian Institute of Retailing and Services Henry Singer award in broad recognition of his leadership, vision, and commitment to the community and in specific recognition of his successful merging of eight struggling credit union outlets into a single organization, that is now the fourth largest credit union in Canada. Harry and his business team tell the amazing story of survival and success behind Capital City Savings. Harry and his family tell the edifying story of involvement and enrichment behind many community initiatives and programs. Congratulations, Mr. Harry Buddle.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Jasper Municipal Council

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to offer congratulations to all Albertans who were elected to local office in the recent municipal elections, and it is with hometown pride that I recognize and congratulate Mayor Richard Ireland and councillors Joe Couture, Mike Day, Gloria Konsrud, Ross Pugh, Andy Walker, and Brenda Zinck, the first council for Alberta's newest municipality, Jasper. I grew up in Jasper and am very familiar with the many years of discussions regarding self-gover-

nance for this great mountain resort. The move from improvement district to specialized municipality recognizes the importance of local autonomy in community decisions. The residents of Jasper worked long and hard to obtain their new status, and I wish the council all the best over the next three years.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

2:50

Canadian Finals Rodeo

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and invite recognition from this Assembly of two constituents from the Grande Prairie-Smoky region, recent successful participants in the Canadian Finals Rodeo. A young gentleman, Rod Warren of Valleyview, won the Canadian saddle bronc title with a score of 155.5. He was also declared repeatedly the all-round champion cowboy in Canada. Another young gentleman, Dusty LaValley of Bezanson, was a winner of the novice bareback championship with 280 points.

I recognize their achievements, Mr. Speaker, and invite the House to do so as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Canadian Diabetes Association

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to recognize the Canadian Diabetes Association on World Diabetes Day. The Canadian Diabetes Association is a charitable organization that was established almost 50 years ago, and it's grown to include more than 150 locations across the country. It's the largest nongovernmental supporter of diabetes research, education, service, and advocacy. Together with its sections and councils, its employees and volunteers, the Canadian Diabetes Association plays an invaluable role in the everyday lives of over 2 million Canadians. The Canadian Diabetes Association provides a vital service in terms of education, especially to individuals when they are first diagnosed, when they often require help and support to adjust to the new reality of their lives.

I'd like to commend the employees and volunteers of the Canadian Diabetes Association for the very meaningful and important work that is accomplished on a daily basis to improve the lives of all persons with diabetes.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Kiwanis Club of Red Deer

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I recognize the Kiwanis Club of Red Deer, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The Kiwanis Club of Red Deer was chartered in 1951 with Mr. Fred Horn as its first president. Mr. Horn along with Dr. Stu Fleming and Dr. Harold Spencer have been members for 50 years and still counsel present-day members in Red Deer.

The Kiwanis Club is an outstanding organization in our community. For the past 50 years they have raised funds and supported such worthwhile programs as Camp Sherbino, a Girl Guides camp; the Golden Circle, a seniors' organization; Safety City; the PARTY program; the elementary school breakfast programs; the Central Alberta Science Fair; and too many more projects to mention.

Congratulations to all members of the Kiwanis Club, their

president, Keith Walker, and their president-elect, Michael Donlevy, for a job well done. Red Deer is truly grateful for all that you have done over the past 50 years and all that you continue to do.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to move that the written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise again pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 210

Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001

[Debate adjourned November 13: Mr. Cenaiko speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the coming years families and, specifically, taxpayers will have to choose to travel down one of two roads to help decide the future of their loved ones: one leading to in-home care and one toward a provincial group home facility. Families will have to make the decision to either find new living arrangements in a group facility or change their own lifestyles to accommodate taking relatives into their homes.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I'm happy to acknowledge that Alberta's housing facilities continue to provide essential services to assist everyday living for their clients. Alberta offers many different programs and services that provide different levels of care for dependent adults. I'm confident that all of the government-funded facilities provide their clients with the highest level of care and safety possible, but sometimes people don't want to move into these facilities. They feel that some of their freedom is taken away, and they're right. Living in a facility often includes living by a common set of rules and guidelines for the whole group. Group facilities tend to not be as individual specific as other alternatives, including in-home care. I also appreciate the fact that some people may have no choice but to move into group facilities. But I wonder: if healthy, independent seniors were given the choice, would they want to live in a group facility, or would they prefer in-home care? I believe that most people wish to be with their family, in their community, under their own roof.

Mr. Speaker, seniors today are much different than they were in the last century. They're living longer and enjoying better physical and mental condition than previous generations. I have noticed that all signs point to the fact that seniors will enjoy a healthier economic situation. Some people will only require basic service, not justifying the cost of living in public facilities or the cost to our health care system. In light of these situations families choose to come together and agree that the best place for dependent adults is at home as part of the family unit. This is a big decision that will be made many more times in the future.

However, there are important advantages and drawbacks. One key advantage includes keeping families together so everyone can share the love and support that cannot be found in a group facility. Staying at home lets people enjoy the highest and safest level of independence possible. The dependent adults can set most of their own living standards, which would go a long way to help people keep their self-respect.

Let's also remember the importance of having more adults at home. Two-income households, for example, could benefit from someone else completing light duties. Most dependent adults would be more than willing and able to help out around the house as this will give them dignity, value, and inclusion with the family. The fact that our population is aging doesn't mean that they cannot be vital members of society, their community, and their family. They can still be role models and can be another caring adult for young people to listen to and to seek advice from.

Another advantage of bringing other members into the home is that it alleviates stress off the health care system. In 1998 there were approximately 7,000 people who utilized the in-home care and dependant tax credits for dependent adults. As our population ages, Alberta will need this number to grow. We need more people to take care of others to prevent the province from being collectively loaded down by this large aging demographic.

One of the major drawbacks of in-home care is burnout related to taking care of another dependant. More and more families are two-income homes, and adding care for another person adds pressure to an already stressful lifestyle, but I think that the combination of medical breakthroughs and better living habits mean that in the future dependent adults will require less care, which will make in-home care more of an option. I predict that as our population ages, the number of families extending their arm to dependent relatives will grow if we encourage them to do so.

By raising the level of the current tax credits, this bill will encourage and reward families for looking after their own. This bill will benefit the health care system by preventing an overload of dependent adults on the existing care facilities. According to Stats Canada, by the year 2016 14 and a half percent of Alberta's population will be over the age of 65. In the next couple of decades this province will experience a sharp spike in age as a large number of Albertans move into the senior demographic. Bill 210 encourages family members to share the responsibility of caring for aging and dependent adults and relatives.

Mr. Speaker, we must remember the number of services needed to take care of someone who can't take care of themselves. Each person will require different levels of care. However, if more families help out, they'll be able to provide more individual-specific care.

3:00

Right now there is an unprecedented level of family caregiving, and I don't believe that our health care system could endure the large number of dependent adults without it. Furthermore, their importance will increase as Alberta's population ages. We will need more

home care providers. The days of sending parents to a retirement home are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Home care is expensive but crucial to the future wealth of Alberta. We need to think of solutions to keep people in their community while providing them with a safe level of independence. This bill is an inexpensive alternative to provincial facilities.

Seniors are not the only group of dependent adults covered by these tax credits. According to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, a dependent adult is anyone over the age of 18 who "is dependent on the individual because of that . . . person's mental or physical infirmity." This opens the door for people to care for adults with physical afflictions including Down's syndrome and multiple sclerosis. The importance of the tax credit is to help with costs associated with taking care of these people. For example, if the dependent adult must use a wheelchair, then the caregiver may need to complete renovations to their home to make it more wheelchair accessible.

By alleviating pressure on the health care system, the promotion of in-home care will save affordable and subsidized housing for other people who need it. This bill supports families taking the initiative to keep their family together and assist dependent adults as their needs change. I believe that families would not trust strangers to offer the best care possible, but they would seize the opportunity to protect and provide the best level of safety and care for their loved ones. All of these points support the idea of keeping people out of the system and with their families. The risks of living with alternative care are not as dramatic as they used to be.

Mr. Speaker, think for a moment about the numerous costs involved in expanding the number of facilities to prepare for the stress on the health care system. It would cost this province millions just to construct more group care facilities, and then we should look at the additional costs of staffing and maintenance of the expansive system. Think of this bill like balancing a scale. One side of the scale includes the group home facilities, our aging population, and a longer life expectancy for seniors now and in the future. This side of the scale is quickly getting heavier and heavier with issues relating to our large aging population. However, the other side of the scale is the dependent adults who want to maintain a level of independence by living in their community in the home of a loved one. This side of the scale also includes people who currently care for dependent adults. The people on this side need more encouragement to continue their commitment to their family, because, as stated before, I don't think our health care system could survive without them. If we want to balance care for dependent adults in Alberta, then we must shift some of the weight off the health care system and slowly and safely place it on the family's desire to care for dependent adults.

Right now there's an unprecedented number of home care providers. This bill will encourage and reward more people to do the same and balance the scale for caring for dependent Albertans. This bill seeks to increase nonrefundable tax credits and not hand out money in return for caring for dependent adults or relatives. Every year a home care provider will be able to ease their financial burden from expenses associated with caring for another adult.

Some might say that Bill 210 is paying people for something they should be doing in the first place. Why should we entice people to care for loved ones? Why can't they do this on their own? It's important to remember that Bill 210 is not paying people to take care of dependent adults. Just as in-home care alleviates pressures on the health care system, these tax credits offset some of the costs of having to care for someone who cannot fully care for themselves. This tax credit increase will help encourage in-home care and increase the level of independence for vulnerable adults. We are not

paying Albertans for family obligations. Bill 210 simply sweetens the pot rather than shuffling loved ones onto the state.

These tax credits are in place right now and have been utilized by Albertans for years. If we didn't have in-home care or incentives encouraging alternatives to group care, there would be an unbearable stress on Alberta's health care system. However, Bill 210 will continue to help the health care system. Although there are many existing programs and services available to seniors and dependent adults, I believe that this government still needs to plan for an aging population. Let's acknowledge and encourage in-home care and prepare for the future. Boosting the level of the in-home and dependent tax credits proposed in Bill 210 will help us do that.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before I recognize the next speaker, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I notice that we have been joined by a good friend of mine, a good friend of our caucus and certainly our party. He and his family are proof that Red Deer and central Alberta is a thriving hotbed of Liberal support, and we appreciate all the good work he does there. I would ask my good friend David Pimm to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

Bill 210

**Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and
Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001**

(*continued*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to participate in the debate on Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001. Before I go any further with my remarks, I would like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing this bill forward and for his thoughtful remarks. This is, in my view, overdue legislation. There are many, many ways, I think, that this Assembly can provide better care for Alberta's seniors. This may be a pleasant start. There has been much discussion in the past about the whole idea of providing home care for seniors. An incentive such as this amendment to the Personal Income Tax Act is noteworthy. It certainly is a change of direction in this province and, I believe, in this country.

As we progress with the debate in the Assembly regarding this bill, I will be interested to note and keen to listen to see if there are any comparisons made between what is currently being done, as my research indicates, in Italy, where there is a similar program or tax incentives to look after family members who are in the category of being seniors. As far as I know, it is working well. I would be

interested to know from the hon. member if he has had a discussion, Mr. Speaker, with anyone regarding what the Japanese are doing. The nation of Japan has a very high number of seniors, and they're working through that in some innovative ways. I think – and I've said this before – that it would be prudent use of tax dollars in this province if there was to be a committee struck to study how the Japanese and their government are working to care properly for their senior population.

Now, the hon. member spoke and I believe he said, Mr. Speaker, that in the year 2016 14 percent of the population of this province would be over the age of 65, and that is absolutely true. Currently the population in this province that is over 65 is about 10 percent, and we are the youngest province in Canada. It amazes me the alarm that the current government uses whenever they say that the costs of health care are skyrocketing because we have an aging crisis. We do not have an aging crisis in this province.

Currently B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba all have populations of seniors. Those are people over age 65. Their current percentage is 14 percent, and they're managing very, very well. They're not talking about dismantling their public health care system because there are too many seniors: we can't cope; we don't have the dollars. There is no discussion of that. So we have to be very, very careful whenever we use the figure of 14 percent. Other jurisdictions – there was laughter over across the way – also have populations that are greater than 14 percent, and one would be the state of Florida.

3:10

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you have support programs such as this, as the hon. member has suggested, how is this credit to be administered? Obviously the hon. member has put a lot of thought into this. My question – and again, hopefully in the process of this debate my questions will be answered – would be: can I receive some form of home care at the same time as I receive this tax credit if this bill were to become the law? How many dependants or relatives can one household look after? Is there going to be a limit on that? These are questions that need to be answered.

When we look at home care, we need to look not only at tax incentives. With due respect to the hon. Member for Highwood, there has to be more than the persons in care act. In my view that's a good start, but we need stronger legislation. How could Bill 210 provide assurances that seniors who are living with relatives are being looked after? There is the potential here for abuse. Again, the question has to be addressed in this Assembly, and I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has a thoughtful response on this, because in the drafting of the legislation I'm sure that's one of the questions that they thought about.

Now, while I personally am supportive of tax credits for people taking care of relatives or other dependants over the age of 18 unable to care for themselves, there are issues, again, surrounding the care of seniors and people with disabilities that need to be addressed beyond just a tax credit for caregivers. There are many, many issues. We're going to amend two sections of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, which deals with a tax credit for in-home care of a relative. We're also going to deal with a tax credit for caring for someone over age 18 who is unable to care for themselves.

I have some questions – and I believe we'll deal with this at committee, Mr. Speaker – and that's on how this tax credit will affect income support programs. Whether it's the Alberta seniors' benefit or it's a support program that's administered by the federal government, we have to address this issue. But first I think we need to take some time. Certainly there are going to be people who are perhaps eligible for or clients of the AISH program. Now, when we are talking about taking care of people who are unable to take care

of themselves, generally everyone, I believe, would be supportive of greater tax credits for those people. However, there are issues there, again, that need to be addressed.

Now, the question comes to my mind: instead of an increase in the tax credit, what about an increase in the amount of support that dependent people receive from AISH? AISH benefits, as all hon. members know, are for people who are unable to support themselves because they have a physical or mental condition that is permanent and there is no remedial therapy that will change that condition. For those people who are living with relatives or perhaps with parents, then Bill 210 is going to have a significant impact on their lives.

The AISH benefit, depending upon who you talk to, is set at about \$850 per month, and this is by government regulation. Give or take – it depends on who you talk to, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre points out – there are 25,000 Albertans receiving AISH. [interjection] I can see that the hon. Member for St. Albert is very anxious to participate in this debate, and I will welcome her comments.

In the spring of 1999 – and the hon. Member for St. Albert surely remembers this – the disabled community heavily lobbied the government for changes to the AISH regulations. Now, I'm sure that this bill, Bill 210, is not a response to that lobby. There were significant changes as a result proposed in the fall of 1999, October to be exact. However, changes to the level of AISH funding are long overdue. People on AISH have been left behind as inflation has eroded their income over the years. In fact, in the last decade the consumer price index has increased by 20 percent, and certainly there has not been a corresponding increase in AISH benefits in that period of time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm curious, again to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, if groups such as the Alberta Association for Community Living have had any discussions with that member regarding his legislative proposal. I would also be curious to see if any of the Calgary group home care providers and the regional health authorities had any input into this legislation. Certainly there could be a reduction in costs. Again I think of the CHOICE program, which I'm certain is also being provided by the Calgary regional health authority. It's a successful program in the Capital region for the health authority. This program allows people who are living independently in their own homes to be transported by DATS up to five days a week under physician's care to a location where they receive therapy, they receive a noon meal, their medication is monitored, and they can have a nap in the afternoon. They can do this up to five days a week under physician's care. If one of my constituents was involved in that program and they were living with their son, hypothetically, and daughter-in-law and this bill was law, how would that affect the eligibility of citizens who were being provided with day programs, or in this case the family members, for this tax credit? That is another question that I have in regards to this bill.

Bill 210 overall, when we think of home care and what the author is attempting to do, I think is notable, and I think it is worthy of study and is also worthy of support.

Now, we all know what seniors have done in this province. They built this province, and many of them feel that their government has forgotten them. Our seniors raised families, they worked the land, they built our cities, and they expanded our economy and kept our communities strong. Alberta is strong and independent today because of their work, and we cannot forget them. This initiative, this legislative initiative as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I think is a recognition of their hard work and their commitment. It is not a recognition of the need to improve our legislation to ensure that there is a level playing field for all home

care providers in this province, but perhaps that will be the next step because certainly we need to ensure that if a senior enters any form of care, whether it's in the home, whether it's home and then going to a program such as CHOICE, or whether it is in a lodge, there have to be minimum standards. There have to be, and everyone must abide by those standards. It's up to the government to do that, to provide that and to regulate it, not only regulate it but be willing to regulate it, and if there are violations, let the courts deal with it.

This legislation as proposed by this hon. member is a recognition of the respect that our seniors deserve, and it is an alternative that has to be looked at closely. In closing, I would encourage all hon. members to have a good look at this legislation, and I believe that it is worthy of support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and speak in support of Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, sponsored by my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. At the outset I think we all need to be mindful of the fact that this is not a government bill. Bill 210 is a private member's public bill, not a government bill. Bill 210 will amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to allow for a greater tax exemption for individuals who are caring for dependent or adult relatives in their home. This bill will ensure that there is equality between the spousal dependent credit and the in-home care of relatives credit. This will allow families to more easily be able to become caregivers, as they are the ones who usually take the responsibility and bear the subsequent financial burden.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, there is a large disparity between two tax credits. The spousal credit is to a maximum of \$12,900, while the in-home care of a relative credit is to a maximum of only \$3,500. By raising the in-home care credit, the possible financial burdens of an adult who doesn't bring substantial resources into the household will thereby be alleviated.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's elderly population grows. An increasing number of elderly people will be looking to family and friends for care. It is traditional in our society that the caregivers for the elderly are primarily their children, but because the average family size has been decreasing since the baby boom years, elderly people will have fewer children on whom they can depend for care. This means that the children will have less choice and support in caregiving. The family size has declined over recent years because it is more common that a family needs two wage earners to make ends meet. This trend toward a dual wage earning family probably will not be reversed and now is about 70 percent.

A single provider can no longer seem to earn a wage sufficient to support the number of financial dependants as generations did before. It is said that seven out of 10 couples raising children today now rely on two wages to make ends meet. This being the case, it raises concerns about the ability of the family to support and care for an elderly dependant. It also raises concerns about the availability of family caregivers both now and in the future.

By raising the in-home care of a relative or dependent adult tax credit, it will alleviate somewhat the financial burden that is met by the informal caregivers, which in turn could alleviate the problem of availability of homes. The elderly we are referring to here today are not being cared for because they are unable to do it themselves. No. We are talking about an elderly parent who moves in with one of their children after the spouse has died or because they are lonely. The elderly relative is still somewhat independent and may choose

to live with a child or near relative for convenience, companionship, and comfort.

Bill 210 reduces the financial burden that a dependent adult might give or place on a caregiver. The current amount of \$3,500 that can be claimed does not seem to be nearly enough. Costs incurred are most likely much more than that in any given year, and the deduction should reflect this. It is natural for certain costs to be incurred, and by raising the maximum that can be claimed, we could allow for more people to bring in a loved one with less financial worry than they would have had under the current tax provisions; for instance, where the dependent adult is terminally ill and strongly desires to stay at home. Therefore, it must be recognized that the economic burden of caregiving is significant. This burden includes direct out-of-pocket expenses and sometimes lost wages when time is taken off work. Bill 210 will give some caregivers the chance to recoup some of these costs and thereby recognize their contribution to the individual and to our society.

Informal caregivers are vital to enable elderly parents or relatives who wish to remain at home to stay at home. The informal caregiver will be the primary person taking care of the elderly person. When it becomes too much of a financial burden for a family to take in an elderly relative, our hospitals, nursing homes, lodges may become overloaded with residents, patients before the seniors actually require acute care. Home care is increasingly needed as the overall population of Alberta ages. Statistics Canada predicts that by the end of 2025 18 percent of the population will be over the age of 65. That's nearly double what it is today. These numbers show that the percentage of elderly in Alberta will continue to rise. Most of the elderly will want to have a choice in whether or not they can have access to home care in their home or in the home of a relative.

The in-home care of a relative tax credit has been around for a number of years. Having the tax credit encourages people to care for an aging relative. As mentioned, caring for a relative can be very difficult. It depends on the status of the dependent adult. If it is too costly to take in family members, seniors will then be trying to get into places like seniors' homes, lodges, and long-term care facilities. This will put an extreme amount of pressure on these institutions, and the demand will be so great that society will have difficulty helping everyone in need.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that cannot be left to the last minute. In the next 10 to 15 years we will have a large increase in the number of elderly people as the baby boomers become seniors and demand that they have access to seniors' homes. We need to make it as attractive as possible for people to take these elderly relatives in. The Impact of Aging Albertans study that was completed in 1999 showed that seniors are in higher percentages in rural communities. As we age, this statistic will no doubt increase. So Camrose, Stettler, Hanna, to name but a few communities, boast senior populations of almost 20 percent, which is twice the provincial average. Calgary and Edmonton have 11 percent and 8.9 percent respectively. With the percentage of seniors rising and becoming more concentrated in the rural communities, home care must be strongly emphasized to the families in these regions. This is because there are not enough seniors' homes for the elderly to go to when the demand increases.

Bill 210 is important not only to the families who are the caregivers but also to the seniors who will want to stay out of places like nursing homes because they can feel personally more comfortable living with their family or a family. Seniors will not necessarily want to move out of their small communities to larger centres because in a sense there's no room at the inn in their community. They live in smaller communities because it's a slower pace for them and it's where they want to be. They want to stay because this

is where the family lives. By passing Bill 210, we give families more incentive to be able to care for a loved one in their own home, keeping them as close as possible to be part of the family. Having seniors remain with family and friends for as long as possible allows the seniors' homes to be left for the elderly who do not have any family or friends to be with or who require a level of care that cannot easily be provided in a home. The tax credit will indirectly allow for pressure to be relieved from these institutions that are built to accommodate seniors. It will then be more affordable for the family to care for a loved one.

3:30

A report such as the Broda report on the impact of aging makes recommendations to do things similar to what this private member's public bill, Bill 210, is proposing. To wit, recommendation 44 of the Broda report advises that there will be support for informal caregivers. Bill 210 is a step in that direction. Increasing the tax credit ensures that the caregiver has the monetary support to accommodate a senior adult. By passing Bill 210, we will be addressing the concerns of the informal caregivers who feel that the expenses are too great to take care of a loved one.

Mr. Speaker, there are countless stories about the nonmonetary benefits that may be gained by caring for a loved one. To start with, an elder being asked and deciding to live with one of their children or a near relative after a spouse has passed away: during this time, the elder can spend more time with the children of the family who, in turn, will learn much from the older family member about other family members, be it a grandparent or a great-grandparent. Bill 210 promotes this arrangement.

By increasing the tax credit, more people will be able to lessen their costs of caring for a loved one and gain advantages from having them live within the family. For the elderly the gain of having a loving family and familiar surroundings with the added benefits of being part of raising young children has untold rewards of the heart. Years ago it was commonplace for the elderly to live with their children when they were not comfortable living by themselves. The family was much closer, and I believe it can be fostered today. This proposed tax credit takes the steps to give families a chance to get back to the closeness that was once very common in our society.

I urge all hon. members to support Bill 210, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001. I think this is quite a reasonable proposal put forward, because as the previous speaker has outlined, we certainly are coming to better understand the needs and respect that are due to an aging population. But more than that, I think that when you are talking about dependants, you can be talking about anyone who is over 18 and is dependent on others for their care. So this is more than just an issue around care for aging parents. This could be, in fact, care for adult children.

My experience has been that those families who can through their circumstances look after family members at home will do so, but the break point for them is not so much resources, as the previous speaker said, but the amount of support that's available to them. That's including things like respite care and housekeeping services and counseling services, et cetera.

We also have to recognize that there are families in this day and age who can't care for dependent adults in their home. For example,

those of us who are in here have been elected by our constituencies to come here every day and do a certain job, and it would be very difficult for us to turn around and say: sorry; can't do this for the next couple of years; I have to take care of a dependent parent or a dependent child. So we have to recognize that we need both kinds of care in the home, both the home care offered by the government through the regional health authorities and the home care that's offered by family members themselves.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I think there certainly need to be more resources available to people if we are going to have family members caring for them. I have one constituent who is almost at their wit's end because they are looking after a dependent adult. A great deal of care and monitoring needs to be paid to this person, and therefore the caregiver, in this case the family member, hasn't been able to hold down a full-time job. This person was willing to do that, was willing to give up their employment to care for their family member, but at this point they're looking to the future and saying: well, I really need to retrain now into a different job market; I can't go back into the one I was in. They're trying to go to university and upgrade their skills and qualifications and are really struggling to get the support to do that.

So here is someone who's sacrificed a great deal, I think, certainly in my terms and I'm sure in many other people's terms, to offer home care to a dependent adult, but then when they reach out and ask for help and say, "Okay; I can't do it by myself anymore; I do need some assistance here," there seems to be a real struggle to get it. So while moving an income tax credit from a \$3,500 range to a \$12,900 range is certainly significant and I'm sure would be very helpful to many people, that doesn't cover the lack of other resources that are not there for people.

I think we need to expand upon the idea that's been put forward by the member sponsoring this bill. We certainly understand from all of the statistics that are available that caring for someone in their home in an aging-in-place scenario is much more cost-effective to society as a whole. It's less disruptive to the individual that's involved because as they feel less well, they're not being constantly moved to a different place.

Certainly I look at what happened to my grandmother. As she got older and frailer, she kept getting moved, upgraded or downgraded, depending on how you look at it, to a different facility. So as she was less able to cope with those changes around her, that's when she got moved more often. I think that in the end does a lot of people in. They just can't cope with the changes. Nothing is where they think it is. The people that they knew are not around them anymore. The staff are different. The hours and the decor and everything is different for them. It's very difficult.

So right now we have a system that is double sided, if you like. We have a system that's offering home care through the Capital health authority, and we have this system that we've been talking about under Bill 210, which is a family member caring for a dependent adult and as a result being eligible to receive an income tax credit.

Perhaps the member can answer a question. Is it automatic that they would receive the full amount of the credit, or is there a possibility that this is on some kind of sliding scale? Is there room for someone to have discretion in how much the credit is? If so, who is the person who has discretion? If those questions could be answered by one of the following speakers under the advisement of the sponsor of the bill, that would be helpful.

I also want to note the changes in institutional care, because I think it affects the care that we're talking about here, which is the

care by a family member in their own home. Right now we have a system which I think is under stress. The deal was that we were going to restructure the health care system but that all of these other community resources would be pumped up to pick up the slack, so to speak. Certainly there was an increase in home care dollars but nowhere near the level that was needed to adequately support these programs given the additional pressure that's been put on them.

3:40

We have a situation – this has been brought to my attention a couple of times in the last few months – where people who are qualifying for government home care or Capital health authority home care are being told that there's an automatic four-week wait, and I've been told that this is now a six-week wait before they will actually receive care. I think to myself: well, how are they supposed to get the care for those intervening four or six weeks? If they were in a position where they needed the home care through the Capital health authority, then I'm venturing to say that there isn't a family member about that's able to help them. That's why they qualified for home care under the government.

I think that this is serious. Is it an attempt to shift more of the onus onto the families by making it that much more difficult to get the institutionalized home care or the government-sponsored home care? Somebody is going to have to be picking up the workload for those people qualifying for that home care but not able to get it for six weeks. That's a long time for somebody that's having difficulty walking or having difficulty dressing or getting confused about taking their medication. Six weeks is an awfully long time, so of course someone has to fill in the gap. If family members are not available – and often they're not – then we've got neighbours and, well, in some cases aged friends or other friends that themselves similarly have other mobility problems, and we're leaning on them to do it.

You know, I spend time in my seniors' residences every fall talking about the legislation that was introduced in the spring and what's going to come forward in the fall, and this was brought up to me by some of the people there. They were having to sub in and help some of the other people that were living in this residence. So I hope I'm not seeing a move from government to push people off the home care available through government funding and into more of this family care, because frankly I don't think we can depend on it. You can't assume that that family member is always available. In pushing them into any family care, I think we run the risk of putting people at risk, and we need to be careful of that.

This has been an interesting proposal brought forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and I think a good one. Certainly it will help those people that already have enough money and enough resources and enough support systems around them to be able to care for a dependent adult in their own home. I don't know how many people that's going to affect. How many people can afford to have someone stay home or maybe have the only working person in fact not work and stay home to care for a dependent adult? I'm wondering if the sponsoring member did any research on that to find out how many people were likely to be using this tax credit.

Interestingly, I'm wondering if there has been any follow-through in establishing a performance measurement. This is forgone revenue. As soon as you say that it's a tax credit, it's forgone revenue. That's money the government doesn't get to collect. In every other instance where we're talking about expenditure of government money, there are to be performance measurements and targets put in place. The government appears to do that, although I'll argue with their performance measurements, but that's another time.

Here's an instance where what's being recommended is an \$8,000 difference in lost revenue that's not going to be coming to the

government. How many people is this going to be affecting? More to the point, what is the expected outcome? What are we expecting to save? What is the target for all of this? By what measurement do we know that this was a successful program? It's one thing to stand here and go: gee, that sounds like a great idea, a warm fuzzy feeling; let's go for it. But this is 2001. Where is the responsible look at how the program actually performs? What kinds of measurements have been put in place to decide that it was a good deal, that the people of Alberta got good value for money by forgoing this revenue? I'm not seeing any indication of that going along with this nor in the comments that I've heard prior to this. So I'm interested in what the government and government members and other private members have to say about the forgone revenue and what they actually expect to achieve by putting this tax credit into place.

You know, we are talking about money. When the bill was introduced, there were comments made about how the Lieutenant Governor had been notified, as is appropriate when you're talking about a money bill. I think people forget that when you're talking about a tax credit or a rebate or a refund, you in fact are talking about revenue the government doesn't take in. [interjection] Well, there's an awfully long list of forgone revenues that this government is involved in, and none of them seem to have any kind of performance measurement.

So here's where you could start out. You could look at this bill and come up with what you expect the performance measurements to be. What kind of output do you expect from this? What do you expect to achieve by putting this program in place? What does that \$8,000 per person get us? I think it's appropriate to say that it gets us a better society. You know, get your performance measurements in place and then measure them. Then you can come back to us and tell us whether this in fact worked. But I think there's too much, "Well, it sounds like a good idea." What do you guys call it? Blue skying. You like to blue sky stuff a lot, and this looks a bit blue sky to me too. So what's behind this? Let's see the financial responsibility that goes along with this. [interjections] Oh, I'm getting members of the backbench here all excited. They're going to leap to their feet and debate this bill right after me. I will be an old woman before that ever happens. [interjections] Yeah. Always nice to see government backbenchers not debating bills.

So those are the comments that I wanted to bring forward around this bill. It is about examining whether we, in putting this in place or using it as an incentive to people, are putting the right program into place to assist those people that are trying to provide in-home care for dependent adults. Is this the right way to do it? We also have to balance that, I think, by looking at the home care provisions that are funded by the government now and whether there's a possibility that it's perhaps a deliberate move by the government – many of their social programs are hidden behind economic agendas, so perhaps that's what's going on here; I don't know – to move people off regional health authority funded home care and into having family members care for dependent adults.

Lastly, a look at what performance measurements are expected. How do we tell that this bill or this idea in fact was successful? What performance measurements are in place to tell us what our \$8,000 got us with this program?

So I'm looking forward to hearing the sponsor of the bill or perhaps some of his colleagues. He can pass his notes and answers on to one of them, and they can stand up and answer the questions that I've brought forward.

I do appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 210 in second reading. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It never ceases to amaze me that with a perfectly good idea and a wonderful opportunity to encourage and enhance the quality of care, the opposition takes the opportunity to surround it with cynical negativism.

I want to rise and join the debate and speak today on Bill 210. It's a very important bill to Albertans. It will provide improvements to the quality of life of seniors, dependent adults, and their families. The focus of this particular bill is on the strength and encouragement that it is going to give to those who are middle members of the sandwich generation. By providing nonrefundable tax credits to Albertans for the care of dependent adults, we would be accomplishing two goals. The first is to reduce Alberta's tax burden, but the second is to provide equity to families who take on the responsibility of caring for the elderly or infirm in their family.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has shown its commitment to lifting the tax burden off families, and we have done so in a very fair and equitable manner for all Albertans. The flat tax along with the increase of the basic personal and spousal exemptions have removed more than 200,000 Albertans from the tax rolls altogether. The taxes in Alberta for all income levels are by far the lowest of all Canadian provinces and even undercut those of many of the American states. So taxes are far more than a method for government to collect revenue. Taxes or the absence of taxes provide incentives and, more often, disincentives for any variety of behaviour. It is just as important that we target our tax structure to reflect priorities as our spending decisions. We have to make judgments about which taxes are fair and where there should be tax breaks in our society, and Bill 210 does that specifically.

I believe that providing tax breaks to individuals who take care of our elderly and dependent adults is a good solution to many of the challenges facing Alberta today. I think that the benefits would far outweigh any losses in revenue, and quite frankly I ask the question not rhetorically but specifically: how can you measure the quality of life and the familial setting that individuals would experience should they be able to have their income recognized by a tax break as they care for their elderly?

Providing a nonrefundable tax credit to families that take on the responsibility of caring for the elderly and dependent adults will propel Alberta in a direction of family-oriented and community-oriented housing. Families will be better equipped to pool their resources and face the challenges of providing for their extended family. Additionally, the elderly and dependent adults would have advocates living with them, caring for them, and being attentive to their needs as members of a family. The opportunities to improve the lives of our seniors as well as the families that help them find their necessities for living are substantial. Just as families will help their dependants, so too will seniors give back by contributing the wisdom of their years and their substantial skills.

Granted, this credit targets families that have taken on individuals who may not be as capable as most Albertans, but they can nevertheless contribute meaningfully to family life. Having the presence of seniors in our lives gives family a sense of timelessness and hearkens us all to imagine the times of a distant experience that we cannot fathom. It is truly a great thing to encourage this kind of interaction between seniors and their adult children and, of course, their grandchildren.

Imagine the benefits of being in the financial position to spend every day with grandchildren. This is the kind of opportunity that Bill 210 gives to Alberta seniors. And let us not forget the benefits to our children. They are just as plentiful. Youth will learn from their seniors and hear of their history and know where they come

from. Having the day-to-day mentoring and the guidance of family so rich in experience and understanding can only benefit our youth.

Mr. Speaker, this is a viable alternative to care for seniors and dependent adults that would save some money too, but most of all – and I would like to emphasize this – it is an investment in the quality of intergenerational opportunity for community and familial living that we all so wish and desire.

For the better part of Alberta's history there has been some role played by government funds in the care and housing of the elderly and dependent adults, and that is as it should be. Bill 210 presents the opportunity to involve families in the care of their own elderly relatives and to an even greater degree than so many are already involved. This presents a number of positive economic trade-offs that cannot be ignored. This bill would widen the financial options for families that may be considering taking on the care of a dependent adult in their own home. The bill then can achieve the goal of providing good quality housing to more Albertans while simultaneously alleviating costs on some – and I say some – of the social housing system. This is not meant to replace our responsibility for providing independent housing for those who need care, but it is to enhance and encourage families to provide direct, immediate, and daily care for those whom they know and love within the family.

For providing shelter and services to the elderly and including them as an integral part of their families, wage earners deserve a tax break. I believe this response to be not only fair but also efficient. Bill 210 proposes that families who care for their elderly or disabled dependants be allowed to deduct \$12,900 instead of the current deduction of \$3,500. This shift would have an effect on the decision-making process of many Albertans in a beneficial direction. Providing a tax break for the inclusion of the elderly and dependent adults in the family unit will affect the lifestyle decisions of Albertans in a number of ways.

First, when Alberta families are encouraged to stay together, the nonmonetary but nevertheless valuable contributions of the elderly, such as child supervision, assistance with cooking, or helping around the house, would be realized to a greater degree. Therefore, this tax break will provide a venue for the elderly to maintain a productive role in our communities. Secondly, this tax structure would encourage Albertans to enjoy the company of their elderly and dependent relatives on a daily basis and to realize the intangible contributions these individuals can bring to family life.

All of these effects add up to the larger vision of rewarding Albertans for valuing seniors and their dependants. By providing the tax incentives for families to take good care of their elderly on a daily basis, we would relieve pressure on our somewhat strained in certain circumstances seniors housing market. For every family that decides that it is a good and possible, right and just thing to do to take care of their dependants and in consideration of the substantial contributions of the dependent adult, with the encouragement of a tax break all Alberta will be richer for it.

Mr. Speaker, it's an oddity of human behaviour that we sometimes are willing to spend a dime to save a nickel, especially if we are spending that dime on something we believe in. This phenomenon can be seen when observing tax deductions for charity. There is substantial evidence to suggest that a \$1 tax rebate will cause a greater than \$1 increase in charitable donations. This would apply to families that want to take care of their elderly and dependent relatives as well. It is because of this beautiful aspect of human nature that we can expect that the care for seniors and dependants would be of equal or greater value to the tax dollars the province would forsake.

This is one of the greatest aspects of Bill 210. It not only contributes directly to the well-being of our seniors and dependent

adults, but it also encourages families to respond directly to the challenges of these individuals. Also, this tax credit will give Alberta families the freedom to make more of the decisions about how to care for their elderly in their own homes, and many of these decisions would be guided by the seniors themselves.

With the implementation of this bill, more families would provide a familial kind of care. Families are often best equipped to know, understand, and probably share many of the likes, dislikes, habits, and activities of their own blood. An elderly father or mother would be able to share their experiences of life. Familiar domestic surroundings are often critical to the health of all of us.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, Bill 210 would foster choices among Albertans that encourage the respect and fair treatment of elders and dependent adults. Primary income earners would be assisted for taking on the responsibility of caring for their parents and relatives. These hardworking, responsible breadwinners deserve such a tax break as much as any single group of taxpayers. These are the sons and daughters who have turned around and said to their parents: thank you for being there for me; it's my turn to be there for you. These Albertans are a fine example of everything that is right about our province. We should encourage these types of living arrangements, not exclusively but as a matter of choice, and we should reward those who take the care of the elderly upon their shoulders. Indeed, the inclusion of the elderly in our community, on our streets, and in our homes would promote a lifestyle for all intergenerational concerns more focused on family. It would demonstrate values to our youth. Alberta would demonstrate that we value families, and this would be modeled far more frequently to our youth.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think that each and every one of us in this Assembly . . . No, I can't. I'm assured that many of you can recount how an elderly family member shaped your development for the better. Some of us did not know our grandparents; some of us did not have our parents live to be elderly, so we don't have this experience. I can only imagine that for most of us this would be, indeed, a rich opportunity. This bill will provide the means to bring seniors close to the youth of this province and closer to the families they helped build.

I would genuinely like to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing forth this bill. It can accomplish so much for Alberta families by fostering a win/win relationship between the elderly and their children and their children's children. I encourage all members of this Assembly to cast aside any negative thoughts about negative implications of the implementation of this bill and instead to embrace it and vote for it, because the member from Calgary who brought this forward is cognizant of the fact that we need to provide choice for so many of our taxpayers and give them a tax break in order to let it happen for an extended, intergenerational family circumstance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to Bill 210, the home care and dependant tax credit act. I am in full agreement with the intent of this bill. I believe that the way in which a government acts towards its elderly and dependent citizens, the most vulnerable members of our society, measures the quality of that government. This bill seeks to improve

the well-being of Alberta's elderly and dependent people by allowing them to live in the comfort of loved ones' homes. Although we hardly need studies to prove it, there has been a tremendous amount of research demonstrating the many benefits of allowing elderly and dependent relatives to stay with families. It is a living arrangement that this government should attempt to encourage and accommodate to the greatest extent possible.

After saying this, Mr. Speaker, as much as I agree with the intent of the bill, I find myself concerned with some of its implied method. There are two major concerns I wish to address this afternoon. First, I am not fully convinced that tax incentive is the most responsible way to provide families who keep their relatives and dependants at home with income relief. For several reasons I believe it could be better to provide this type of relief directly to the family through a grant rather than through the tax system.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I am worried that the bill attempts to address very real needs with somewhat arbitrary remedies. Proposing that nonrefundable tax deductions be set at the same level for family dependants as for spouses certainly promotes some degree of equality, but I am not sure it is necessarily the right monetary figure for dependants. There has to be some relationship to the nondiscretionary costs that the credit is intended to alleviate.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to expand for a minute on why I agree with the fundamental intent of this bill. Over the past few generations in North America and indeed much of the western world there has been a trend towards involving elderly family members less and less within the family. Community care centres and senior citizens' homes, where our aged are somewhat more isolated from their homes and families, have become increasingly common. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Group homes do offer a camaraderie for people of similar age and interests that is not easy to obtain from being at individual homes with younger families, but the benefits for elderly and family dependants of being taken care of at a home with family members are enormous.

Living at home, elderly people can interact on a regular basis with people of the younger generation. They are surrounded by youth and activity. They are encouraged and inspired to fulfill the potential of their minds and bodies, a potential that even the elderly people themselves sometimes considerably underestimate. Just talking with people of a different age, seeing their smile, and feeling their genuine compassion can improve quality of life substantially for the elderly or dependent person. Having elderly or dependent relatives at home can also improve the lives of other members of the home. It relieves the emotional burden of having someone you care for go to institutional care.

It provides an opportunity to learn a considerable amount about life that might otherwise be missed. Our elderly are unmatched fountains of knowledge. They can offer us insight gained from years of experience in developing our set of values and in understanding our history. They give us a better sense of where they came from and who we are. The better we come to know and understand our elderly, the stronger our entire community becomes. By encouraging the elderly to be taken care of at home, we are encouraging more intimate bonds to be developed with parents and grandparents, allowing for this passage of knowledge from generation to generation to flourish.

Encouraging home-based care also makes financial sense, as many of my colleagues have pointed out this afternoon. Certainly, providing a financial incentive for families to keep elderly and dependent family members at home will cost Alberta, but the gains will likely be made back many times over by the savings from reduced volumes of patients at extended care centres. In addition to sometimes offering better health delivery, home-based health care is often significantly less expensive.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a few statistics here this afternoon that suggest that some form of financial support would indeed be necessary to encourage family members to provide home-based care for elderly and dependent family members. A comprehensive study done in the United States by the Bureau of National Affairs found that 77 percent of employed women who provide care for aging parents reported a conflict between caregiving and work demands. This is no wonder, since a report from the same source found that 80 percent of caregiving families provide caregiving between four and six hours a day seven days a week. Surely if this burden were somewhat recognized with some form of financial assistance, families would be more able to provide home care for their elderly relatives and dependants.

4:10

Given these many good reasons for promoting home-based health delivery, it is little wonder, then, that the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee's final report, referred to by many this afternoon as the Broda report, made as its first recommendation that support for home care services be increased so more people can receive the care they need at home rather than at facilities.

Mr. Speaker, you can see that I am fully in support of the intent of this bill. Alleviating the financial strain of caregiving families who seek to keep elderly and dependent relatives at home provides immense therapeutic benefits to the elderly and allows for the younger caregiving generation to gain a better grasp of tradition and values. Encouraging home-based health delivery might also save the province money in the long run.

But once again I do have to mention that I have some serious reservations about some of the details suggested in Bill 210. First, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that this bill seeks to deliver financial assistance to caregiving families in the form of a nonrefundable tax credit. I believe it would be simpler and more fair to provide this assistance directly. Essentially, providing a tax credit is exactly the same as providing direct financial assistance to caregivers in terms of the dollars spent by the Alberta government. Whether the gain to home caregivers shows up as a tax credit or as some form of monthly support, the cost will be the same to the provincial government. By delivering the support as direct cash payments, however, there are many advantages to home caregivers and to the province as a whole. With Alberta's new flat tax system many families that earn below \$27,000 pay no provincial tax at all. Thus caregiving families that earn below this value of income would not be eligible for the nonrefundable tax credit. If, on the other hand, families were provided with cash assistance, this barrier would not prevent families earning less than \$27,000 some form of compensation.

As well, providing a cash incentive is more transparent than a tax credit. This means that spending can be better contained and there would be better discretion and flexibility. The government would have better accountability of how much money it is spending, and recipients of financial assistance would have a better grasp of how much they are receiving. This improves the efficiency of the program for everyone.

My second objection, Mr. Speaker, is that it is unclear that there has been analysis done to arrive at a figure of \$12,900 as an appropriate level of support for caregiving families. It seems that the only reason this figure was chosen is because it matches the level of nonrefundable tax credits currently provided for spouses. The level of support for spouses was decided upon after an evaluation of the financial burden of a non income-earning spouse. It takes into account issues such as food and housing costs. Granted the value of \$12,900 is by no means entirely accurate, as in different areas of the province the cost of living is sure to fluctuate, even though the value

of the tax credit does not. But the value has been researched to be at least proportional to the cost of living, and it fluctuates with this cost. For instance, the value of the spousal tax credit only became \$12,900 on January 1 of this year, 2001, following a decision that the cost of living had substantially increased.

My concern is that the cost of providing care at home for dependent relatives and the elderly may be quite a different level than the spousal credit limit provides for. The elderly and dependants probably require more capital expenditures than middle-aged spouses. Inevitably with age comes increased risk to health concerns. Wheelchairs and the infrastructure to accommodate wheelchairs, products to ease mobility within the home, uncovered health care expenditures like some prescription medicines and special diets are all some very real expenditures that might be expected for the elderly or dependants. This is, of course, in addition to the many hours devoted family members commit to the person through feeding them, clothing them, and giving them appropriate levels of love and affection. These are hours forfeited from income-generating work. As mentioned, these hours can accumulate to become quite a large cost. The support that is given to caregiving families must reflect the cost of providing that care. Without appropriate research to make an accurate estimate, potential caregiving families may be provided with substantially less or potentially more than might be necessary to make home care a realistic option. This would undermine the very worthy intent of this bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate that I am strongly in support of the intent of this bill. This province and indeed this country could and should do much more to encourage elderly and related dependants to stay with relatives. The benefits are enormous in terms of building stronger families and communities and in saving health care costs. I am afraid, however, that I believe this bill needs to undergo some revision before it should be passed by this Assembly.

I believe we should investigate the possible alternatives in lieu of tax credit because it would be simpler and more fair. As well, I believe the value of whatever form of compensation is provided should be looked at more closely. Rather than merely imitating the spousal tax credit, it should be researched independently to reflect the true cost of providing home care for elderly and dependent relatives and the impact this credit will have on provincial revenues.

Bill 210 brings forward a quality idea. I believe, however, it would be most appropriate if the concerns that I raised are further investigated, and this could be brought forward with changes in the future, enabling it to fulfill its intent more equitably and more efficiently.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to Bill 210. I came into the Assembly this afternoon thinking that I had conditional support for this bill, but after listening to a number of private members who sit to the right of me speaking on this bill, I've nearly changed my mind. I think that there are . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Everybody sits to the right.

MS CARLSON: No. There are a few on my left side.

Mr. Speaker, it's a start, you know, when they start talking about at least recognizing that there need to be some changes for people who provide care to dependent adults or relatives in their home, but the problem with the private members on my right side is that they always think the answer lies in changing the tax system. Really, that seems to miss a couple of the key issues.

I think the key issue we need to take a look at in a situation like

this is: does this address the outstanding problems with caring for dependent adults in homes? The answer to that clearly is no. What changes to the tax system do is give people money at the end of the year, and it mostly isn't even money that they need. It's support. What they need when dependent adults come into the home, be they close relatives or good friends or whomever, is some help. The term is dependent adults. That means not only do they not have taxable income over a very minimum level, but they're most often dependent in other categories. They need assistance in their daily living.

So the problem for most families is that there isn't enough support in that daily living assistance. Home care we have, but it's very, very minimal in nature. It often doesn't address the key areas of need for the family. There is never enough time given to the families. We have a real problem, particularly in my constituency, of home care providers who cannot speak the language of the person they are caring for, so that creates another level of problems within the system. There isn't adequate respite care and certainly not adequate respite caregivers who speak the language of the person who needs to be cared for.

4:20

Yes, of course we want families to take care of family members. It's the first choice of dependent adults to go and stay with family members. They have a loving environment to be in. They're provided with the same kind of food that they normally would eat. Everybody speaks the same language. Extended families are always nice to have around. But the issues are that families often need help in caring for people immediately, not down the road when they file their tax return but today and tomorrow and tonight and over the weekend, because caring for dependent adults is a 24/7 job. It doesn't stop. There's very little assistance given, and there are no breaks. So does this address those outstanding issues? No. It gives them money at the end of the road.

You could say that, well, they could save that money and then pay for additional help for the family, but most families are not in that kind of a financial situation. Most families live from paycheque to paycheque, and it's a stretch. If you've got to pay up front, you've got to cut back on something else. When you're adding a person to the home who is dependent, that means financially dependent as well, and there are additional costs, not fewer costs, so it creates a great deal of stress and often hardship for the families.

I have often gone to bat for families in my community who wish to keep a loved one at home but who are just absolutely physically and mentally stretched. They'll find the money for extra food, they'll find the money for their medical needs – they can find that – but what they can't cope with is the daily pressures of having to take care of the person without ever getting a break. This bill would have been more properly brought in as assistance for these families for additional home care services. That would have really, really touched the need that's out there, Mr. Speaker.

I believe I'm going to support this bill because it is a recognition by the member who brought it forward and a partial recognition by some of those people who have spoken to the bill this afternoon of the kind of need that's out there. Perhaps this is one of those cases where we get to move two steps forward and only one back. So on that basis I will be supporting the bill, Mr. Speaker, but I would hope that this member, if this bill gets passed or even if it doesn't, will next year bring back another bill that touches on the real issues that are out there for families caring for dependent adults.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to

have the opportunity to rise and speak in support of Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act. I would like to thank the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for bringing forward this bill, which addresses an issue that will impact our province sooner than we realize.

Bill 210 would amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act so that those Albertans who are taking on the role of care provider for people in their lives who can no longer care for themselves will be adequately recognized and compensated under Alberta's tax structure. Currently Albertans who make career and lifestyle sacrifices to provide care for their loved ones – and this would be a very important value, I'm sure, to many of us here today – are eligible to receive one of two possible tax credits. Both of these credits are of an equal amount and in conjunction are designed to cover the spectrum of potential home care providers.

The first existing credit that I'll speak about is the in-home care of a relative credit. In the year 2000 this would provide for a tax credit of \$2,386. It was subsequently increased to \$3,500 in January of this year by way of Bill 18, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. The increase in this credit is evidence that this government does acknowledge the important role of informal caregivers in this province, and it also shows that we as a government are willing to address this issue.

The second tax credit available for home care providers is called the dependent adult credit. As I have already mentioned, it allows for a \$3,500 claim, as the in-home care credit does, and it similarly was increased to its current level by the amendment to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act in January 2001. The low level of the home care tax credits currently in place just does not seem consistent with the importance of the service these Albertans provide and will be providing to our most valuable citizens. The two credits alleviate the financial burden brought on by reduced capacity to work when individuals provide care for loved ones who can no longer care for themselves. As it stands, the two tax credit programs do not sufficiently compensate the men and women of this province who make personal sacrifices to care for the frail and elderly, and in particular I would refer to a parent or a spouse or a child even.

Bill 210 seeks to better recognize the contribution that these caring Albertans make to our province and to their loved ones. The bill proposes an increase in the tax exemption for individuals who are caring for dependent adults or relatives in their homes from its current level of \$3,500 to \$12,900. This increase in the home care provision tax credit will create a reduced financial burden for those Albertans who undertake the role of care provider when they are called upon by their families and friends. The increase in this credit would make the home care provider credit equal to the spousal tax credit. I think this comparison is something that can be considered as very fair.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, this government has made a great effort to communicate with Albertans about where long-term care in Alberta is at and where it should be going. We have commissioned studies concerning the effects of aging and the implications of the aging population and how as a province we would like to age. I must say that the level of response from our citizens during consultations and beyond has been very impressive. Aging is something that Albertans increasingly share concern over and care deeply about, and why not? It is always in the forefront to some degree in newspapers in Canada and around the world. Albertans are remarkably clear and uniform in their approach to aging, which we have found makes our job of representing Albertans' views much easier. Studies have shown that 90 percent of Canadians want to face the end of their lives in the comfortable surroundings of their own homes. Albertans do not deviate from the rest of Canada with

respect to this matter, I can assure you. We have asked them, and they have responded with this answer that I have just described.

Currently 9.8 percent of the Alberta population is 65 and over. By the year 2016 14.5 percent of our population will be comprised of senior citizens; that's 65 and over. In this year alone 20,000 Albertans will reach retirement age. The trend is plain to see, Mr. Speaker, that as longevity becomes more prominent in this province, our government will have to respond to the needs and demands of an older population. Now – and I would have to stress this again: now – is the time to take proactive measures in this regard. We will do this province a great disservice if we wait until it is too late to implement programs and strategies to deal with the increase of seniors that we are facing in the very near future. The Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act certainly is one such way to approach this pressing matter. It will work to promote home care as an alternative to institutional care, and that is in tune with the directions, as I've said, that Albertans want to take in this province.

The volume of seniors' care that will be demanded is growing and will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Statistics reveal that Calgary is among the top five cities in the world in terms of average longevity, so not only are there more of us getting older, but we are living longer. Now is the time to begin seriously exploring our options with regards to long-term health care and home care, before it is too late. It will be of great benefit to Albertans if there is a working plan in place when the baby boomers have retired, when they have reached retirement age. I would say that the first baby boomers will be reaching that age as early as 2001. Personally, I believe that if we put off planning for this time in this term, then we only have one short term following and then 2011 will be here.

4:30

We as a government understand that growing old is of keen interest to Albertans, and we have struck committees, as I've said, and drafted reports and strategies in response to the concerns of Albertans. For example, the aging population study which I chaired – actually the vice-chair was the Member for Leduc here today; you know, Mr. Versatile. Also, we have the Broda report. These are only two of the initiatives undertaken to understand and promote aging.

This government's aging-in-place strategy was crafted in response to the desires of Albertans to progress to the end of their lives in their homes and as functioning members of their communities for as long as possible. This plan was warmly embraced by the key stakeholders as well. With a provincial long-term care focus that moves away from institutionalization and to integration into the community, which also means towards home-based care and home-based palliative care, it's imperative that there be meaningful recognition for those who are making personal sacrifices in providing this care. Bill 210 would ensure that the acknowledgment that informal care providers deserve is most definitely afforded to them.

The Broda report, that was chaired by the hon. Member for Redwater, consists of a listing of 50 recommendations that were gathered and compiled by the long-term care review committee. The report's first recommendation states that "additional funding should be provided to address the pressing needs in continuing care," but more specifically it cites its first priority as the need to "increase support for home care services so that more [Albertans] can receive the care they need at home rather than in facilities." Bill 210 proposes a viable approach to address this need. Those who provide home care, the informal caregivers, will be left with a bit more in their pockets if Bill 210 is implemented. This will help to balance the personal sacrifice that they have made in terms of their income in order to care for someone they dearly love. Bill 210 certainly follows the spirit of the Broda report.

Bill 210 falls within the framework of the holistic approach that Albertans have asked for with regards to long-term care. The aging population is a phenomenon that will affect us all in some way, shape, or form, and fortunately as a young province we do have the time to be proactive and implant the values that a healthy, aging Alberta will need to prosper in the years to come.

Albertans have told us that they want to remain in their communities as they grow old. From this it is definitely implied that families have the greatest responsibility for their own health and longevity. The Alberta government understands that it must facilitate a combination of care and housing to create barrier-free environments and enable seniors to remain at home longer. Providing a tax incentive to the caregiver, as Bill 210 does, is one way to achieve this goal.

I stress again that now is the time to discover in concrete terms what programs and strategies will work for Albertans to achieve the goal of healthy living and a workable continuum of care in this province. I'm not saying that it will be simple or easy; there will be hills and valleys to be navigated. However, the only way to learn what works is to plan and then to implement, and what better time to discover what is viable and what is not than right now.

In closing, I would like to urge my colleagues here in the House today to support the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act. The caring people of this province that make sacrifices to provide care for those who cannot care for themselves and to comfort those who are near the end of their lives need to receive recognition for their efforts from this government. If Albertans want home care and we as a government want the people of this province to embrace the benefits of home care, there should be adequate compensation offered to those who provide it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001, as proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I support the aims of Bill 210 and commend the Member for Calgary-Buffalo for raising an important issue in this Assembly.

All of the recent studies show that Alberta's population is becoming older. Swift action must be taken to develop more options to deal with the pressures that an aging population places on programs and services. We all know that the proper care of the infirm and the elderly is going to be one of the key future challenges of our government. As Alberta's population continues to age, we have to understand that the way health care has been provided in the past is not going to cut it in the future. As more and more seniors are living with their families at older ages, we need to develop policy options to address the revitalization of home care for our aging adults. As many of my colleagues have said here today, it is desirable that we keep our elderly in their own homes for as long as possible before moving them to personal care facilities, should that become inevitable. This not only helps our seniors population retain a greater feeling of independence into their later years but also reduces the cost of caring for the elderly to our health care system.

Many of my colleagues have also noted that Bill 210 provides an incentive for families to keep their older members at home. By raising the nonrefundable tax credit given to those who care for dependent adults and relatives to \$12,900 from \$3,500, we reduce the cost of caring for an elderly member that a family would have to absorb. Also, by implementing this tax credit, we make it easier for

families to live together, especially when the intensive care of dependent members is at stake.

As people age and become more dependent upon the aid of others, it is especially important that they are surrounded by loved ones. I believe that this is a very worthy aim. When families have the opportunity to remain together, the sense of tradition, community, and responsibility shared by that family becomes stronger. The bonds between family members become tighter, and they become more aware of the appreciation they have for one another. It is unfortunate that in today's society the desire to retain a tight family bond often conflicts with the need to earn a certain amount of income in order to care for dependent members. However, this is the reality that many Alberta families do face.

I for one believe that the best way to counter this growing tension is through amending the tax system. If we lessen the burden of taxes on families that care for dependent members, then we make the option of living at home viable for both the person providing care and the person receiving care. In this regard Bill 210 can be seen as an innovative measure for a pressing social problem.

However, Mr. Speaker, I do have some reservations about Bill 210. First, it is unclear what impact this credit will have on the overall revenue of the province. Because a detailed cost-benefit analysis has yet to be done on this proposal, passing Bill 210 at this time could lead us down an uncharted fiscal road, one we may not want to travel. While restating my support for the aims of Bill 210, I would like to see some of these studies conducted so that we may see the actual effects that Bill 210 would have on both the finances of the province and the way that care services are delivered to our aging and dependent population.

Further, I think we should always raise caution flags whenever we see individual amendments to comprehensive legislation. The Alberta Personal Income Tax Act is not a body of statutes that can be changed in little pieces. It is an act in which the various sections and subsections work in harmony to provide the best system of tax relief in the country. Thus when we make changes to the Personal Income Tax Act, we should avoid making small touch-ups. Rather, we should remember where we see problems and look to remedy them in a wholesale revision of the act, which would include public consultation and substantial departmental review. When we change things by looking at the problem inside the scope of the big picture, we can see the effects that the change will have and we can see what other changes may need to be made in order to have the act work harmoniously.

4:40

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that there is another big picture that we ought to consider when debating Bill 210. That big picture is the whole field of home care and the care of dependants. When we do get down to providing comprehensive and wide-ranging policy solutions to the problems posed by the care of the elderly, we have to consider and possibly implement something more substantial than the legislation proposed by Bill 210. There are so many different ways of providing care to dependent Albertans, and we need to remember them all should we amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. In that regard we need to consider in a more in-depth fashion the possible effects that this legislation could have on health care providers in the province. In what ways will keeping more people at home change the jobs of current health care providers? In what ways will providing a tax credit advantage or disadvantage health care workers? How would the overall health care system be different, especially our acute care facilities, if more elderly Albertans remain at home?

There are a lot of questions that I believe need to be answered

before we can give a larger tax credit to those Albertans who care for dependants in their own homes. If we were to pass Bill 210 without studying it further, it would be hard to tell how this legislation could affect the health care system and its employees. However, I am confident that if we took our time with the issue, we would be able to come up with a formula that considers all of the factors listed above. By bringing the whole scope of the care of dependent Albertans under consideration when reviewing the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, we can make more comprehensive and complete legislation that takes every important aspect into consideration. Even more so, by not acting in a piecemeal fashion but rather by changing the act in a more cohesive initiative, this government has the ability to extend its scope beyond issues that solely surround the care of dependants and learn how tax relief for caregivers can directly and indirectly affect revenues for the province, the health care system, and even the quality of care these vulnerable Albertans can expect. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, while I support the aims of the bill, I can't recommend its passage at this time.

Although I've raised these concerns, I strongly urge the ministers of Finance and Revenue to take a serious look at the issues raised by Bill 210 and to consider including its intent in the next review of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. I do believe that the bill tackles some serious concerns. If we could incorporate its purpose into legislation that focused on the larger picture, I believe that we could provide real benefits to Albertans caring for their elderly families. I do hope that in a review of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the ministers of Finance and Revenue do take into account the very proactive measures proposed by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Once again, in light of the concerns that I have raised in the Assembly today and the understanding that Bill 210 could have rippling impacts far beyond its original intent that require further study so that we can determine possible results on our provincial coffers and our health system and providers, I propose hoisting Bill 210.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 210, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependent Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 210, Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependent Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SMITH: Legislative chicanery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on the amendment.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on the amendment. I think we heard from the minister that legislative chicanery was happening here.

MR. SMITH: Who said that?

MS CARLSON: That would be you, Minister of Energy, and I happen to agree with that, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt that there are few ways to oppose a bill at second reading, but a hoist amendment, or an amendment that is a delaying amendment, is the best known tactic in this particular Assembly.

I would like to ask the question why the private members and the government members don't want to just vote on this particular bill. If it's not supported by a majority, then it will be defeated in its

own right, but they don't have to fall into bold legislative tactics and tricks in order to do that, Mr. Speaker. We're quite happy to vote it down or support it in a majority vote on the floor. As my colleague said, what are they afraid of? The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake made most of my arguments in his debate. So just stand up and vote for it rightly or wrongly in second, and if it's defeated, it doesn't carry on. We don't have to have a hoist. They have no intentions of bringing this bill back six months hence. [interjections] I have an opportunity to speak to the amendment, and I shall do so. If you don't like it, you can respond as well.

There's no reason why we have to see this bill disappear forever. It's never going to come back here at any future time in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker. We all know that. It's simply a tactic to get rid of the bill. I would be greatly offended if it was my own colleagues who did that to me on a bill that I brought forward as a private member.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will be opposing this amendment. We will be standing in opposition on this amendment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This amendment that was brought forward was brought forward in good faith by the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, we're sure. We've listened carefully to the opposition talk about some chicanery that may be taking place, but it seems inappropriate that such aspersions would be cast on any of the members' intent here. To have this amendment move forward and be debated civilly here in the Legislature seems appropriate. We have listened carefully to the member's discussion that he brought forward prior to making this notice of amendment that he has put forward here. In fact, he's just asking that it not now be read a second time. We've had fully 117 minutes of debate on this bill, and he's asking that at this point in time we just set it aside and that six months hence we do review it.

So, Mr. Speaker, in light of the debate and the discussion that we've had up to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake bringing forward this notice of amendment, some good points have been made. We heard the Member for Calgary-West talking about the seniors' issues and issues that certainly concern her a great deal. We had in fact many other speakers that could have risen and spoken to this bill. However, at this point in time the motion by the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake stands, and he has the privilege to bring that forward. In fact, we will be able to vote on it. In spite of the opposition members' accusations that maybe he has no support on this – and he may not be supported; we won't know until after the vote – we will have that vote, and we will have the opportunity to see whether in fact his notice of amendment is supported among his colleagues in this Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:50 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Assembly has before it an amendment to Bill 210 which reads:

Bill 210, Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Depend-

ant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

This is often referred to as a hoist amendment. All members should realize that if this is carried, then this is the end of the matter and the bill disappears from the Order Paper. If the question is defeated, then the question is immediately put in the motion for second reading.

For the motion:

Ady	Graydon	Lund
Amery	Haley	Magnus
Calahasen	Hancock	Maskell
Coutts	Hlady	Melchin
Danyluk	Hutton	Nelson
DeLong	Jablonski	Oberg
Ducharme	Jacobs	Ouellette
Dunford	Klapstein	Rathgeber
Fischer	Knight	Smith
Forsyth	Kryczka	Strang
Gordon	Lougheed	Vandermeer
Goudreau	Lukaszuk	Yankowsky
Graham		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Cenaiko	Mason
Broda	Doerksen	O'Neill
Cao	Fritz	Pham
Carlson	MacDonald	Snelgrove

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 12
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[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Government Services, you wanted to do an introduction?

MR. COUTTS: Yes. I'm wondering if I could have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(*reversion*)

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three members of the Livingstone-Macleod constituency. They hail from the wonderful town of Pincher Creek. Mayor Art Bonertz – Art, would you please stand – and Councillor Lou Burnham and Councillor Don Anderberg from Pincher Creek are here for the AUMA conference. Please give them a warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On that note I think it would be an appropriate time to move that we call it 5:30 and that we reconvene at 8 this evening in committee.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:06 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 14, 2001** **8:00 p.m.**
 Date: 01/11/14
 [Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

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

Bill 18 **Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001**

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have amendment A1. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much. I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to this bill this evening. As my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview stated yesterday when speaking to this bill in second reading, we don't have a whole lot of concerns about it. It did go out for consultation to a number of groups.

MR. MacDONALD: Like who?

MS CARLSON: Well, the groups that we sent it out to were a large number: the AARN, the Health Sciences Association, the United Nurses, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses, and the federation of health professions. We did have a couple of comments of concern come back, which I think one of my colleagues will be speaking to in a few minutes, so I won't take away her thunder on that one.

The general concerns that we heard about this, Mr. Chairman, were that there weren't enough resources in the system available for all disciplinary hearings, and we know that's been an ongoing problem within the system. They still are concerned that there aren't going to be enough resources for those kinds of actions, so we would expect the government to be coming forward with some kind of a plan that would address that. Perhaps the best way to address it would be to work with these groups who have been consulted by both yourselves and ourselves and come up with some reasonable solutions that don't spend a whole lot of money but do address the concerns that are outstanding. So that is the major concern. It is relatively minor in nature, and as a result of that, we're not going to hold this bill up. In fact, we would expect to see it passed through committee tonight and, undoubtedly, third reading as well.

We know that the government thinks that the framework that was brought in in Bill 11 would be adequate to address the concerns that were outlined by organizations, and we're not sure if that will happen or not. We look forward to seeing some of those regulations coming forward at some point in time. That's part of the problem with not seeing regulations at the same time that we're debating the bill: people have to trust that the government is going to always be correct. It is very risky business, Mr. Chairman. We have seen time and time again that this government is far from perfect.

MS BLAKEMAN: They just don't trust them.

MS CARLSON: As my colleague says: some just don't trust you. But I will state that you're just far from perfect.

Certainly there's always benefit from healthy discussions and hearty discussions from people directly affected or people like us who sometimes, once in a while do come up with some good ideas that we've seen you incorporate into legislation that makes it

stronger. So I think that's once again something that could happen here.

Some of the clarification that comes into the bill is an improvement, I think, over what we had before. So, in general, not a bad bill, Mr. Chairman. Those are all of the comments I have at this particular stage of this bill.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 18 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
 The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 18.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports the following with some amendments: Bill 18. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: Government Bills and Orders
 head: Second Reading

Bill 22 **Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001**

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 22, the Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001.

For some years now we have been hearing from members of the oil and gas industry that the Builders' Lien Act is not working well for them in certain situations. The Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors and the Petroleum Services Association of Canada have told us that typically payments for certain work in the oil and gas sector are not made within 45 days from the completion date. As a result, legal remedies against nonpayments that are now provided by the Builders' Lien Act are not in practice available to this industry sector. The industry has requested that we extend the present 45-day filing period for liens to 90 days. The bill you see before you, Mr. Speaker, is the government's response to this request.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Along with the necessary consequential changes Bill 22 extends the filing period for liens to 90 days effective April 1, 2002. However, it also specifies that this extension only applies to contractors that drill oil and gas wells or service oil and gas well sites as they are the only ones that are affected by the unique industry payment practices that I have just described.

The major proponents of Bill 22 are the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors and the Petroleum Services Association of Canada. I'm very pleased to note that these two associations worked very hard with the producer organizations – that is, the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers – to reach a consensus. All four of these stakeholders have been consulted on the amendment and have recently written letters supporting this bill. Alberta Energy also supports this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of our stakeholders for their important input during the development of the bill. They have also undertaken to notify their members of the amendments, and they will provide further information and explanations on the application of the changes to the industry members that are affected. Bill 22 is important to the oil and gas industry, that plays such a significant part in our province's economy, Mr. Speaker, and I urge all members of this Legislature to give this important bill their full support.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Happy to respond to Bill 22. This is an excellent example of an industry that had an issue they wanted to be addressed and very effectively lobbied all three parties – the government, the Official Opposition, and the other opposition party – in terms of sharing the information on what it was they wanted and needed and the reasons why they were requesting the change from a 45-day filing period to 90 days and did a very effective job of doing that. After talking to their representative and posing some questions and getting what we felt were very good answers, we were quite happy as a caucus to support this change. We would never obstruct the ability of any organization or group of companies to earn income and to get paid for services once they have provided those services, and this certainly seems to be a streamlining kind of process for what is really a small piece of the oil and gas industry in this province.

8:10

They don't have some of the same options as larger organizations have, which would be interim billing or any kind of prorated payment structure. These folks need to wait till the very end of their project to get their money, and if for some reason the money isn't forthcoming, then they have a real tough time securing those dollars at a later date. So to give them a little extra time to put a lien in place if necessary, Mr. Speaker, certainly is a small request for them to make of this Assembly. We would have been happy to have seen it in miscellaneous statutes, I believe, after having had all of the information explained to us. So certainly this is a case where we are happy to work co-operatively with the industry and with the government on a bill, and we certainly expect that we'll see a speedy passage of this bill through the Legislature, which is the commitment we gave to the organizations and which we are happy to comply with.

It's a very good process that they've undertaken. They went to all the directly affected and indirectly affected user groups for com-

ments on the changes in this legislation. They had originally asked for a longer extension – I believe it was to 120 days – and had one group that objected to that length of an extension, feeling that it would handicap them in the reverse way by having too short of a filing period. So based on that one objection, they decreased the days to 90 from the original request. There was great deal of compliance within their organization and co-operation with other organizations, so we certainly applaud their efforts and their very effective lobbying of people who will make the decisions on the law, which is those of us here this evening.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that, we're very happy to support this bill in principle at this reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, I feel compelled to rise and thank the Official Opposition for their desire to co-operate on this bill, which moves the lien period out to a reasonable amount of time that is really acceptable industry practice.

From my experience in the oil industry and I know from others in this room and also from those in the service sector, Mr. Speaker, it's the service sector that really is the job generator of this industry. It's the service sector that provides the many opportunities for employment for individuals, whether they be from Paddle Prairie or from Manyberries. It's this government's ability to create the environment that allows those service companies to thrive in an energy industry that today exports more oil to the United States than Saudi Arabia and that I think indicates an expression of an ability for everybody to work together towards a common cause in a circumstance where all Albertans will benefit.

I think that congratulations should go to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who brought the bill forward and has done a good job in getting it through. Secondly, to the industry who – I don't think I'd use the term "lobby," but I would certainly use the term "expression of concern," expression of interest in an explanatory fashion as to how all would benefit from this, how people can charge either less or more now that they have more protection in collecting their bills. I think it is a bill that will without any cost to this government help promote employment, opportunity, and development of this great industry in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am supporting the previous speakers in their comments on Bill 22, the Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001. I think we're all willing to support this bill.

A couple of things struck me when I was thinking about this bill and casting my mind back over the presentations that were made to us by those requesting the changes. I think one of the things that I remember the most is that in many cases we're dealing with small or smaller providers or operators here, and I know that it can be difficult to try and keep up on the administration and the follow-up in a smaller business. You really just want to get out there and do the work that you're doing, and the paperwork can sort of follow along behind. So giving them an extension in the amount of time that they've got, from 45 days to 90 days, does allow for those small businesspeople to catch up on the paperwork and make sure that everything is going well for them and, if it's not, to make use of that extra time to file the lien. I think that's a question of fairness.

The Minister of Energy spoke about the opportunities for employment and activity in the oil and gas sector that this bill could be enabling. I think that's fair enough. One of the concerns we see

in this day and age is that I don't think you can count anymore on the larger companies that we might work for – and I think you can look at this in almost any sector – that we used to think of as reliable and rock solid and for sure going to be there to pay their bills. It's a bit of a surprise to these operators in this oil and gas business when they submit a bill to a huge company and they're not getting payment in a reasonable amount of time. I think the days when we could depend on those large organizations staying there forever are long gone. It's not hard to think of a few names of companies that we thought would be here forever and are not anymore. Woodward's is gone; Canadian Airlines, gone; Massey-Ferguson, gone. Those were names that we thought would have lived forever in Canada, and that's simply not the case anymore.

So we have to allow for small business operators to be able to make sure that they get paid, frankly, and to give them time to take advantage of court proceedings that are open to them to chase that money down. I think it is a question of fairness. Certainly we know that larger companies will have a staff of lawyers on high alert ready to do the bidding of these huge corporations and multinational corporations, but that just isn't the case with the sector that provides most of the employment and most of the economic activity in Canada, and that is the small and medium-size business. So I'm pleased to see this small change that is going to make their lives and their business a little easier.

Now, I know that my colleague also had some specific comments that he wanted to make on this bill, and I don't want to unduly delay passage of this, so I do appreciate the opportunity to make those few comments. I think it's a good bill, and certainly when we're looking at the principle of the bill, I'm more than willing to support it in second reading.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am anxious to say a few words on the Builders' Lien Amendment Act, Bill 22. I think that this amendment will be beneficial for the oil and gas sector in this province because it will better reflect and enhance the oil and gas industry payment practices, where payment is typically not made in full, as I understand it, within the 45-day period.

8:20

Now, there has been extensive consultation between the industry – I'm sure it was mentioned in this Assembly – and various ministers of the Crown. It is an amendment that while other people may consider it just a matter of a routine, we need to recognize and understand the importance of the oil and gas well drilling industry and the fact that this drilling and service industry is seasonal in this province, Mr. Speaker. As well, it has its ups and downs, which are reflected in the international prices of both oil and gas. Of course, we are entering, as freeze-up occurs – and it may be a little later this year. Its highest activity is in the winter, and it is also reliant on public resource development policy. Every now and then it would be, I believe, prudent of this House to study the current practices, the current incentives and perhaps change them as a reflection of commodity or royalty prices.

However, Mr. Speaker, over the last 25 years we've seen two periods of high activity. That of course was 1978 to 1980 and 1994 to '97. At the same time we have experienced activity levels that have been very poor. We look at what occurred between 1981 and '92 and '98-99. When activity levels are low, operators want to stretch out these payments. The payment terms are often 90 or 100

days, and in some instances, unfortunately, no payment is received. The sharp reduction in activity that occurred three years ago saw the failure of a number of significant public companies. Some contractors who had supplied services for years had financial difficulty.

Now, if we look at the time period before 1967, there was a lien filing period in this province of 120 days, but we changed that in 1967. The Buchanan commission report reduced the lien filing period to 45 days. This was done as a matter of consistency, and here we are changing it again. I support these changes. All hon. members of this Assembly recognize the economic contribution of the oil and gas sector to the economy.

In closing, I would like to say that as the industry shifts focus from southeastern Alberta over to the foothills front and up to the Peace River arch as the weather gets cold, I wish all Albertans who are involved in this industry a prosperous winter – not only a prosperous winter, Mr. Speaker, but a healthy drilling season in that hopefully no young Albertans will have an injury that prevents them from working further or perhaps even a death on the job.

With those comments, I'm pleased to say that I hope this bill has speedy passage through the Assembly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close the debate.

MR. DUCHARME: Question.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

(continued)

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay; we'll call the committee to order.

Bill 16

School Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We have before us amendment A2. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments and ask some questions about the amendment that we have before us. Last night we were fairly confident that the issues surrounding Bill 16 and the subsequent amendments had been pretty well resolved. I think we left fairly pleased that the minister had been able to accomplish that goal. Like all things to do with schools and religion, they can sometimes be not quite as smooth in trying to solve problems as we would like it.

Late this afternoon we had a communication, that I think has been shared with a number of MLAs in the House, from the Public School Boards' Association. They have commented in their memo that they're very pleased with the developments that have occurred thus far in Bill 16, but they have raised a number of issues that still need to be addressed. Some of those issues concern the bill itself and the amendments, and others are in the draft regulations that the minister was good enough to share with us. Sharing those draft regulations was important to us. We thank him and appreciate what he has done to make sure that we all understand, when the bill is passed, where the regulations are going, knowing full well that they are draft regulations and subject to change.

If I could, Mr. Chairman, I would like to raise the concerns that

the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta has shared with us if the minister would be kind enough to maybe respond to them. The very first is what the Public School Boards' Association labels as a fatal flaw. If I could read their objection to it: at this point the bill does not ensure that members of the minority faith can vote for or against establishment of a separate school education without going through a divisive organizational meeting. Now, I have to admit, Mr. Chairman, that I've never been to one of those meetings, and it's only secondhand that I hear the kinds of problems that arise at those meetings for voters. I notice that in the School Act it calls for votes at those meetings to be done by secret ballot. Nevertheless, the Public School Boards' Association has suggested that section 202 of the School Act be amended to provide for a plebiscite among members of the minority faith as an alternative to the organizational meeting. I would be interested in the minister's comment to that kind of proposal and how practical it is and whether it would be any less divisive than the process that's already in place. So that's the first issue that has been raised.

8:30

The second issue is concern with the proposition – this again is in the draft regulations, so I really feel a little uneasy addressing them in this forum, Mr. Chairman, but the issues have been raised, so I would like them on the record – that the minister can order a separate school board to provide services outside its jurisdiction. They go on to say that it's one thing to say that school boards sometimes may provide services at their own discretion, but the comment was made that it's quite another thing to allow the minister to make such an order. It's that provision of services outside their jurisdiction that has the association concerned.

There are a number of questions – and we've had these before us before – in terms of Francophone education. We've had this discussion in the Legislature, and I understand that the minister on previous occasions has commented on this. But I think it might be appropriate because the issue has been raised again this evening or this afternoon: that the constitutionality of the provisions for Francophone education would be questioned should Bill 16 be passed. It's based on the fact that Protestant trustees are excluded from decision-making for most Francophone schools, while Catholic trustees are included in the decision-making process for non-Catholic schools. That's really I think the crux of the matter. I think the minister has done some work in the area, has commented on it before, and I would appreciate the minister again addressing that issue if he might.

I guess the last item the Public School Boards' Association raised with us is that given there has been good progress, that association would like an opportunity to meet with the ACSTA. They've asked for four to six days for that kind of meeting to take place. I would ask of the minister that should the bill be dealt with this evening, which I think has been the intent of the government, to pass it through committee and third reading, that should that happen, would the minister consider convening a meeting of representatives from the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta to look at the issues that are raised about the regulations as they appear in the draft regulations and hopefully to work together to make a set of regulations that are satisfactory to both sides? I met earlier today with representatives of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association. They had not at that time had an opportunity to carefully examine the draft regulations, so obviously I can't speak for them, but I'm sure that an opportunity to discuss them would be something they would be open to.

Those are the issues that were raised by the Public School Boards'

Association of Alberta, Mr. Chairman, and I would appreciate if the minister would comment on them. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will comment on the issues as they have been raised.

The issue of a plebiscite as opposed to an organizational meeting. I will comment on it from a couple of points of view. First of all, this is a thing that is dealt with by the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association. It is their process. It is in the Constitution and is their process. They have stated that they are fully content with the existing process.

When it comes to the plebiscite, as well, at the actual vote it is a secret ballot. It is not a public meeting. It is not putting up your hands and being identified. Where the issue actually comes is after the organizational meeting and before the vote, where there is a lot of lobbying going on. I do not feel that a plebiscite would change that at all.

The second issue, in talking to our Legislative Counsel, is that because this is an element that has not been dealt with by the existing amendments or the existing changes to the bill, this would have to have unanimous consent to go back to second reading and subsequently on.

The third thing is that I do not feel, as I mentioned previously, that the plebiscite will change the divisiveness that occurs within a community when there are these votes. I feel that a plebiscite is very similar to a vote.

The second point that was raised, about the separate school boards outside of their jurisdiction being able to provide services. That is not true. Under this act the separate school boards will provide jurisdiction when their regions are expanded. They will not have the ability to provide services outside of their jurisdiction.

The next thing is the Francophone education. I will say on the Francophone side of things that through the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake and a lot of the work that has been done, all of the Francophone school boards, including the bishops from Alberta, have signed off on these changes. Is there a potential for a constitutional challenge? There may be, Mr. Chairman; there may be. But I guess the importance of this Legislature is that we do what the people want, and the Francophone school boards want this. I feel it is in the best interest of kids. Sometimes we have to remember why we're here, which is for the best interest of kids, the best interest of adults, the best interest of parents, not necessarily the best interests of the Constitution. That is what the Francophone component does.

With regards to the last issue, I'd be more than happy to sit down with the ACSTA and representatives of the PSBA to go over their draft regulations.

I believe that that has answered the questions the hon. member has put forward to me tonight. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At the outset I want to thank the minister for fully sharing the information that he brought to the House. Then he offered both the Liberal opposition and us more information related to that, and I want to thank him for it.

I also want the House to be very cautious. All of us need to be. It's a sensitive issue; it can lead to tensions. Divisiveness was associated with debates on this for a very long time. It's a historical legacy of the way this country was put together, and we have learned to live with it. It's a constitutionally mandated arrangement, so we

all agree that we must respect the framework, then, of the Constitution, of the historical legacy, and try as amicably as possible to deal with evolving situations that must be addressed. It's in that spirit that I think the minister has operated, and it's in that spirit that I'm going to be making my comments.

I had the opportunity this morning to meet with the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association. They're obviously anxious that we proceed with this as soon as possible. I've also been contacted by the Public School Boards' Association, and they urge me and us to give them a little more time so that they can have some further negotiation over the next week or so to see if at least on some of the issues they can develop a consensus and a common position. Certainly this plea was made in the name of coming to some sort of agreement on issues between the Public School Boards' Association and the Catholic School Trustees' Association, and the desire to come to some sort of common position through negotiation is a laudable one.

8:40

I know the minister feels that he has a timetable he wants to respect, but I do want to ask him to consider the possibility of allowing a week. I think there are several school board association meetings taking place over the weekend. Starting tomorrow, I guess, one association meeting, and the day after tomorrow another one starts. Then on Sunday I understand it's the Alberta School Boards Association that meets. It is during this third annual Alberta School Boards Association meeting that the Public School Boards' Association suggests they will have the opportunity to meet their counterparts in the ACSTA, so they're asking for some time. I want the minister certainly to consider this.

Moving from there to some other observations to the amendments proposed. I went through the bill as thoroughly as I could with these things in my hand, and the regulations the minister's office provided this morning around 11 o'clock were also studied very closely by me. One thing I noticed is that only one part of the bill is being amended. I recall the debate during the spring session, and there were all kinds of issues there. I'm a little bit concerned that the area of the bill where the minister had agreed to bring forward amendments deals with the concerns of one party, one set of stakeholders to the whole issue of the education act and changes to it. So I am a bit concerned about it. He has obviously responded fully, I guess, to the ACSTA concerns as well as he can. But the concerns on the other side, which I tried to put on the record I guess during the spring debate, seem still alive, and in the minds of some spokespersons on the public school board side they're still waiting to be addressed.

I have a letter here that came to my desk only today, but I'm sure the minister has received it before. It is from Gail Horner, chair of the board of trustees of Sturgeon school division, I think. There are several points that she makes there on issues related to choice, issues related to inclusiveness and the open boundaries policy. The last one that I think she raises has to do with the minister's ability to expand the school division. Then she closes her letter by saying that the amended bill, if it were to be approved, would provide yet another avenue for the expansion of what she calls Catholic schools or Catholic education. I'm quoting this simply because she had urged me this morning on the title page of her fax to me to table this letter in the House, that it is urgent, and I failed to do this. I didn't get it in time to bring it to the House, so I want to make sure I put this thing on record and apologize to Ms Horner for failing to table the letter earlier this afternoon.

The issue of choice, Mr. Chairman. Particularly the ability of a nonminority group of students and their families to be able to attend

and to be admitted to separate schools is I think an important one, because the public school board side does allow everyone on, I guess, request or demand to be admitted. I have always defined a school system as a good school system which in essence is guided by the principle of inclusiveness. Schools are more than just places where we learn to do math and science. These are places where we learn to be human beings, to be citizens, to be members of a broader community we call the national community.

So in that sense, I guess, the more inclusive we can make every dimension of our public school system – and we have two dimensions in our two streams, if you wish. They are partners in educating our children, giving them the very best education, both in citizenship and of course in other areas. We should try to strengthen that partnership and try to make exchanges across these borders as easy as possible, including the movement of students. So the issue of choice is something that I think perhaps needs to be addressed.

I have a few other questions. I'm pleased the minister believes that some of the concerns that have been expressed by the public school board representatives perhaps can be addressed at the level of regulations, and I would certainly encourage the minister to take this matter seriously and see if he can bring the parties together at the level of developing regulations which might address some of these concerns.

The last thing I want to say, in this round that is, is that the bill includes several other things. It has some provisions with respect to tightening up some regulations for the approval of charter schools. The bill also includes a section which leads to the elimination of that board. These two matters haven't received the attention, in my view, that they deserve, because we got very much involved with the sections that dealt with this historic sort of divide and feature of our public school system. We haven't either in this sitting, certainly up to this point – and I'm as much at fault as anyone else, I guess – or even in the spring session paid enough attention to all the different parts of the bill. After all, it's the School Amendment Act. It deals with various aspects of the existing act, but we have focused in our debate, I think, on matters that relate to the minority rights to education as historically entrenched in the Constitution.

As part of this very last remark that I made on minority rights, I am pleased that the Francophone rights to education in their own language, as are now, I think, guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of our country, are being accommodated here. I learned from the minister that there has been some problem in the southern part of the province with the school boards, so he has decided to grandfather those two, the public and the private or the Protestant and the Catholic boards, for the Francophone community.

The only concern I have here is that although at the moment other Francophone communities that are affected in the north, whatever, may not have the problem of some Protestant minority within the Francophone community seeking the right to establish their own schools, it would happen in the future. I wonder if the minister has something to say about it, if the provisions of this amended act will allow for that or not.

So with that I'll close.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Learning.

8:50

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to touch on a couple of points. There is ability within the act that when the number of Protestant Francophone students reaches 500, they can establish their own districts. That is in there.

The other comment I will make, Mr. Chairman – and I'll keep this extremely brief – is that I did talk to the person last night. I

apologize for speaking about someone who is not in the Legislature. I did sit down with her after session last night for about a half hour or three-quarters of an hour and explained it to her. She seemed relatively content. I also asked her, if she had any questions, to call me today, and she did not call. So I can only assume that she was content with that. She seemed reasonably content up to this point.

Mr. Chairman, all of the comments have been extremely good on this bill. I would suggest that in the commitments I have made to the hon. member about having the ACSTA and the PSBA sit down with myself to discuss regulations later on next week, I think we have a very good bill here. I think it's something that we should go ahead and vote on.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Just a few remarks. One, to first of all thank the minister for agreeing to expediting a meeting between the two associations so that the regulations can be examined and the interests of both the groups can be brought to the table. I think that's a good move on the part of the minister, and I thank him very much for doing that.

I suspect we could be here for a number of sessions trying to straighten out the School Act. As I said last evening, I'm having difficulty following the paper trail from the act to the bill to the amendments to the amendments, and then today we had the draft regulations. So it's becoming an interesting exercise in wordsmithing.

With that, I am pleased the minister has agreed to convene that meeting. I think it goes some way in meeting the concerns of the Public School Boards' Association that there be an opportunity for them to have a voice and to meet with the Catholic trustees to try to work out any kinds of disagreements on the regulations. I think there were a couple of concerns that were raised vis-a-vis the regulations, but as I said before, Mr. Chairman, I think it's inappropriate for us to be debating those regulations when they are in draft form, and the two associations will have an opportunity to address them in the near future, I assume.

So I think that concludes my comments, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 16 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 16.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports the following with some amendments: Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 16

School Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to move third reading of Bill 16.

I will limit my comments at this moment and save them for the closure of the bill so that I could answer some of the questions, if there are any further questions, as well as to sum up what this bill is all about and what this bill will do.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just about 10 minutes ago, when I was speaking, I did express support for a request that has come from the Public School Boards' Association that it would be advisable, indeed it will be helpful to not proceed to the conclusion of the third reading this evening. I would certainly be happy to see the minister agree with me on this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I think there is merit to this proposal that the two sides be given an opportunity to meet. One can always argue that these sides had three months to do this, but I think the attention doesn't get focused unless people see the amendments, see exactly the actions the minister is willing to take to accommodate lobbying done by each side. So although technically they had three months, they are saying that they didn't have the information you shared with us last night. I don't know when you shared it with them, but they didn't have this over the three months. For that reason alone I would think it makes sense to give serious consideration to the request and in fact accede to it. If I had the powers to do it, I would do that. A week in the life of a Legislature, in the life of a province, in the life of a society is not all that much if it can bring agreement, if it can bring people together. So that would be my position on that one.

There are some other parts of the bill that I will comment on briefly. The section dealing with charter schools in the bill. I notice that the act tries to tighten some of the conditions for approval, and to the extent to which the minister has gone in that direction, I welcome that effort. However, in my judgment the charter school experiment was undertaken in good faith, but it hasn't shown the results. On the other hand, we have seen that the alternative programs which it is now possible to offer within our public school system allow, more or less, for us to pursue the objectives that charter schools were initially designed for.

9:00

So even now I would have hesitation to vote yes to the bill, because I think we should simply stop chartering schools. I have given some reasons why that should happen on some other grounds too. In the light of some recent events I think what we need to do is to make our school system more inclusive, try to reduce and ultimately, hopefully, eliminate potential segregation of students into different segments of the school system. That can only serve all of us well in the long run. So the charter school portion, in my judgment, should be repealed. It's a failed experiment. There's no point in simply tightening up the requirements.

There are charter schools in existence. What do we do about those? I think we could certainly do the same thing with them that we've done with the Francophone, Protestant, and Catholic schools. We could grandfather them. So I have serious reservations about that part of this bill, that it hasn't really done the job.

On the abolishment of the board that dealt with capital grants and school buildings. In some ways it seems a neater arrangement whereby a committee, a board that represented the bureaucracy, if you wish, of the government is no longer responsible for making those decisions; rather, those decisions would be made through the active collaboration between the two ministries. The serious concern that I have there is that it opens the process to political influence, to be blunt, from within the caucus of the ministers, that it's subject to more of a political influence in the making of these decisions. That's why I said, when we were discussing the bill, that we didn't pay enough attention to the other segments of the bill, because the one very important part of the bill that we have dealt with consumed most of our concern and attention. So that's another major concern that I have.

I simply then conclude by asking the minister to consider not taking the third reading tonight, taking the bill to its final conclusion. If he can at all do this, give the School Boards' Association time to negotiate over the weekend, by Tuesday I think this should be over and we can return to this either Tuesday night or Wednesday.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to speak briefly about Bill 16. I listened with a great deal of interest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's remarks. I always have reservations about the charter school system in Alberta, and that is obviously reflected in the most recent report from the Auditor General. The flags that have been raised probably have been noted by all members of this Assembly, but again what sorts of guidelines are in place to confirm the performance measures of these schools?

For instance, we had a charter school from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar in here yesterday, and there were 14 students in that class. Meanwhile, in the separate system over at St. Gabriel school there are 34 children plus two with special needs, so there is an inequity here. The system does not seem to be in balance. The minister, to his credit, obviously has the interests of all Alberta schoolchildren whenever he or the department makes these decisions, but this issue of the charter schools is certainly not going away.

Now, we look at the dissolution of the School Buildings Board. People always talk about the creation of a new school. The education critic for the Official Opposition put it so well. It was stated by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods that so many politicians are anxious to appear and are fighting with one another over the silver

shovel whenever there's a groundbreaking ceremony for a new school, yet they do not, Mr. Speaker, show up to drive the bulldozer for the wrecking of an inner-city school whenever these schools are closed. They're certainly not anxious to participate in those ceremonies. I see the dissolution of the School Buildings Board as taking this issue and placing it in the hands of the minister's office. We are making this political. I do not think that is right.

Now, at this time last year we had a school in the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's constituency, Rutherford school. Another board wanted that school. I was present at the public meeting. There was a letter, apparently, from a minister of the Crown: here's a million dollars to the Edmonton public board; if you give us this school, you can take the million dollars and refurbish a school in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar, Idylwyde elementary school. Of course, the parents were opposed to this. The meeting was, to say the least, noisy. What did we find out at the end of the school year? At the end of the school year Idylwyde school is to be closed, transferred to another board, and everybody is suddenly going to be bused over to Rutherford school free of charge for a year. This was a political decision, and that's why I'm afraid things are going to even get worse with this.

I'm disappointed in Bill 16. I certainly hope for the sake of our children that I am wrong. To think that a decision will be made on how people vote or do not vote in an election on what sort of system and what sorts of school facilities they're going to have I think is wrong for the children of this province, and that's why I have a great deal of difficulty with this Bill 16.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments about Bill 16 and the amendments at this stage. It's an important bill. It covers a lot of ground, and I don't think any of us pretend that it's the final word. I'm sure that we are going to be back here if not in the spring then sometime in this Legislature making more amendments, some that will arise out of the things that we do this evening. As the School Act has been for a long time, it's a work in progress. Hopefully, that progress is making things better for youngsters in this province.

The provisions in the bill are important ones: the creation of new Francophone regional authorities and the clarification in terms of bringing employment action against teachers in all of the schools of the province: the public, the separate, and the private. I think the creation of separate school regions is certainly different from anything that's been done in the province before. I applauded the provisions that were put in place for the establishment of a charter school, asking first that they seek recognition as an alternative program under one of the two public systems. Again, as I said when we debated the bill at previous stages, I think that's a good provision.

9:10

Dissolving the School Buildings Board: I have questions about that, getting rid of the School Buildings Board and putting that directly under the minister. Certainly it may not be this minister, but the opportunities for political interference in the school building program I think arise when it comes under the purview of a minister. Now, having said that, I recognize that the School Buildings Board was certainly under the department and under a minister's direction and that their actions could be influenced by the minister, but at least it gave the view of an independent body acting on school buildings,

although I was one of the first to criticize some of the decisions that they made when I was a school trustee.

All in all, there are some important provisions in the bill. At the end of the day we've seen they aren't all agreed to by all parties, but it's been a very, very difficult task trying to reach agreement on some aspects of the bill. I think that's shown in the fact that the Alberta School Boards Association was unable to take a position on many parts of the bill and, in fact, I think had actually left and walked away from taking a position on some aspects of the bill. That's testimony to how difficult the issues that are dealt with in Bill 16 are.

With those comments I'd like to conclude, but I would again like to thank the minister. He hasn't agreed with the public school boards' request for four to six days, but he has agreed to bring the two groups together and work on the regulations. I think that's a good move and one that I thank him for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning to close the debate.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I thought I would do today is just go over a little bit about what the bill is about. As has been very graciously mentioned by the two previous speakers, there's a clause that deals with the charter schools. In essence, what it does is it allows for the formation of charter schools, but first they have to go through and ask the school boards for an alternative program.

The School Buildings Board. There have been some comments about that, and I would just leave it to the Assembly that the best reason as to why we are getting rid of the School Buildings Board is Amiskwaciy Academy, which was not allowed to go ahead because it did not meet the School Buildings Board's regulations. Subsequently I was forced to do that out of my own budget and go around the School Buildings Board. It's a perfect example of the excellent learning opportunities that we had the ability to tap into, but because it didn't meet all the regulations, it was not approved.

We have also tightened up the regulations for teachers who lose their licences or teachers who have problems so that things are communicated across the country, which again is very important.

Francophone governance is in here. This is something that has been agreed to by all parties involved.

Lastly is the so-called 4 by 4 proposal, allowing for expansion of the Catholic boundaries. I believe it's a very good process that we have brought in.

Very quickly, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to say thank you. First of all, thank you to the ASBA, Alberta School Boards Association, for the work that they did on these proposals – I realize that at the last moment they could not arrive at a conclusion, but they certainly brought it forward – the ACSTA for the work that they did, and the PSBA for coming on board toward the end of the process. I'd also especially like to thank the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, who very graciously agreed to step into something that I don't think he entirely realized how big a job it would be on the Francophone governance side. He and his colleague Pierre Desroches and a couple of other colleagues did an extremely important job and an excellent job in bringing the Francophone school population together and in bringing forward some very important amendments.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the two opposition parties for their co-operation over the last two days. I realize that as with every bill there is give and take, and I think that this was a very good example of how the Legislature can actually work when we sit down and talk with each other.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would move that the question be put before the floor.

[Motion carried; Bill 16 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 27

Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before introducing Bill 27 for second reading, might we revert to the introduction of guests?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I've recognized you; you have the floor.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then without the permission of the House I would like to move for second reading Bill 27, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001.

But quite apart from that, while on my feet I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a former member of this House who's been sitting in the members' gallery watching the debate on Bill 16. As I know most members know, David King has had a lot to say to us over the years on many, many subjects and particularly on Bill 16.

I think it's always in order to recognize people who have served the province of Alberta and to recognize friends when they do attend in the Assembly. I'd like David King to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of asking that he be appointed to the provincial bench. However, Bill 27, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, I would commend to the House because it is, I think, a very important piece of legislation. There are some minor items in the bill dealing with the operation of the court, but the significance of the bill really has to do with being able to retain judges who have attained the normal retirement age of 70, which is the retirement age under our current Provincial Court Judges Act, but who still are able and willing to make a strong contribution to justice in this province and to the courts of our province.

There are many members of the practising bar in this province who do not wish to leave practice early to seek appointment to the bench but who could be encouraged to apply for appointment to the bench and give of their wisdom if they had the opportunity of staying and doing that for a period of time. So many practitioners who reach the age of 65 or even their early 60s are not willing to now apply for the bench because of the retirement age of 70. There are also many judges serving on the bench who are very, very capable, who do a great deal of good work, and who could continue to serve this province and would be willing to continue to serve this province in that capacity if they had the opportunity to do so.

The provisions of Bill 27, in short, allow for the appointment of judges past the normal age of retirement for additional one-year terms until they reach the age of 75. The criteria for appointment would be spelled out by the Chief Judge of the province. So it would be a totally independent process from government. The recommendation of the Chief Judge for the reappointment would be the triggering factor. Of course, the Chief Judge, in setting up his criteria, would probably take some advice from the way that it is done in other jurisdictions. In Ontario, for example, there are criteria set out and an opportunity for a thorough medical examination to ensure that the person who is being proposed for an additional term of office is physically fit and able to carry out the job.

I don't want to go on too much at length with respect to the bill other than to say that the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court has requested that we make this amendment to the Provincial Court Act. It helps in some way to align the Provincial Court Act with the Court of Queen's Bench and the Court of Appeal, where the retirement age is 75. However, this does not take it directly to a retirement age of 75 but rather allows for the continuation on one-year renewable terms up until the age of 75 and will allow us in that way to keep some of the very good experience. It will allow the Chief Judge the opportunity to keep judges who might otherwise serve in a supernumerary capacity but in that capacity not be full-time judges, not be required to keep up on judicial education, and not be required to participate in the court in a full manner. So it's a small change but I think a fairly significant change which will allow the Chief Judge and the Provincial Court to continue to do the good work that they do for the province.

9:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Despite the urging from the Minister of Energy I'm not going to speak against this bill. In principle I think there's a good suggestion here. This bill was introduced for first reading yesterday, so I have had a bit of time to have a look at it in addition to the information that was provided to me by the minister previous to this. So there are some sections in the bill which are essentially housekeeping and clarification sections, which I think will just make the operation of the Provincial Court run smoother.

As the minister pointed out, the primary change that is put forward in this bill is allowing judges to be reappointed to remain in office past the age of 70, up to the age of 75. I think this is an important change and a timely change in light of the current situation that we have in justice in Alberta, and I think that issue is around timely access to justice. That has been impaired. We know that we have a problem with not enough Crown prosecutors. We're having problems with courtroom space, and currently I think there are still 10 vacancies for Provincial Court judges. So this is pretty serious because what the effect of this can be is that people do not get their cases heard in court in a timely enough manner. Constitutionally they are guaranteed that right, and although it's not an arbitrary date, it does become clear at a certain point that cases are going to be dropped or dismissed because the people charged did not have timely access to justice.

There are a number of things working against this, as I just outlined, right now. I think that imposing a 1 percent cut on the Department of Justice, as was done recently as part of the overall government cutbacks, has put additional strain on the justice system to be able to perform. That 1 percent cut is coming at a very bad time. Nonetheless, there have been a few things that the minister has attempted to do, and I will continue to encourage him to do better because I think that there's lots of room for improvement in this system.

Certainly he has tried to address the shortage of Crown prosecutors and the poor pay, which was having them literally run – not walk but run – across the street to other places for an increase in salary. He has provided funds for a slight improvement in their salaries and an additional 15 Crown prosecutors. They're working under a workload right now of 500 cases, compared to a national average of 342. So that's not reducing the caseload by that much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Relevance.

MS BLAKEMAN: It's about access to justice.

MS CARLSON: Go back to sleep, you guys.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, back to sleep.

Certainly looking at allowing trained, experienced judges to sit for longer will take some of the pressure off the system in trying to fill those 10 vacancies for Provincial Court judges. I don't think that that allows for the minister or the government to back away from appointing those 10 judges. I think that still needs to be done, and certainly I will continue to pressure the minister to do that, but this might give us enough breathing room that the province wouldn't find itself in a position where cases are being dismissed because of being unable to provide access to justice in a timely manner.

The minister has also tried to look at doing away with preliminary trials, and I think there are additional problems involved in that. Right now in the courtrooms there's a certain assumption of collapsing, that a lawyer goes in there and finds out that several of his cases or preliminary trials that day have been canceled, and that gives them a bit of breathing room. What we'll have now is that every trial they've got scheduled is going to go, which takes away some of their ability to catch up on their work, and I think that's a problem as well.

I did consult with the legal profession as much as I could, which wasn't very much, on this bill to see if there was any sort of violent reaction against this, and there hasn't been. The only comment that was negative that came back to me was just a comment – and this is the opinion of a lawyer being expressed – that if they weren't very good judges, at least they were gone by 70, and now they'd be around possibly until they're 75. I think the answer to that is to look into the legislation to see if there are safeguards built into the legislation. Indeed, the opportunity for those safeguards is there in that the legislation does talk about: "the Chief Judge or the Judicial Council" would determine that the reappointment would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the "administration of the Court" and that there will be "criteria established by the Chief Judge and approved by the Judicial Council."

Now, I'm always concerned when I see something that's sort of given a shell in legislation, but we don't actually get to see the specifics of it. It's appropriate that the courts are kept separate here and that they have a right to develop their own criteria – and they should; they're the ones that are experts there – and there should be that separation between government and the judiciary. So we will believe in them and uphold them and trust that those criteria will be developed that will be able to screen out any judges where it's inappropriate for them to be serving longer or to have additional reappointments past the age of 70. I think there are always other places to look, and the minister himself mentioned criteria that are being used in Ontario that involve a medical exam. All of that sounds quite reasonable to me.

Interestingly, aside from this being a rather necessary measure for justice in Alberta to be upheld, it's also recognizing an aging and healthier population. Certainly when we used to think of my grandparents' generation, somebody who was 75 was really old and probably not feeling very well. That is just not the case now; it's just not. People well into their 80s are living on their own, managing their own affairs. Some of them are still working or running their own businesses. Certainly with the availability of medical technology and pharmaceuticals any chronic diseases can be dealt with. So there shouldn't be an assumption now that someone that is past the age of 65 is somehow in ill health or unable to perform a job adequately, and I think we will likely see more and more positions that are opened up past the age of 65.

9:30

Now, in the case of Provincial Court judges we've gone till age 70. The higher courts have gone to age 75 for some time. So it's perfectly appropriate and I think applaudable that we are looking at capturing that wisdom and experience that's available through those judges that have already served. I think there is a double check or a level of appeal built into this legislation around that development of criteria, and that should give the courts lots of room to develop the best criteria for themselves.

There are some changes in here that clarify existing legislation, modernizing the language as much as anything. I noticed somewhere in here they're using the word "furnish" and that's being clarified to say "sending," so that's an updating of an archaic use of language which, I think, is more than acceptable. I think we need to make our legislation more understandable to the average person. And clarifications about use of mail.

A section that is obviously a clarification is that if a judge retires at the end of a case that he's in but the judgment hasn't been rendered yet, it allows the judge to render that decision, which again I think is a cost saving to the system. If we had to run the whole trial again just because the judge couldn't give the final rendering, that's a huge waste of time of a lot of people. So good clarification there.

At this point I am willing to support this bill in principle at second reading, and I look forward to any other debate that will be brought forward by members of the Assembly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am happy to support Bill 27, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001, at second reading. I think it is a small move towards solving what is becoming an increasingly serious problem in this province, and that's the backlog in the courts, and also maybe saving some dollars for the province at the same time. That is one of the questions I had that I hope the minister will answer once we get to the committee stage: what is the expected dollar saving he anticipates from this move? If he no longer has to retire these judges, pay them their pension, and then hire them back on a contract basis, clearly there must be some kind of dollar saving there, and it would be interesting to know what they project that to be over the next year and coming years. So if he could answer that question for me, that would be helpful.

As I understand it, one of the provisions I particularly like in this bill is that because these judges won't be retired and then hired back, there still will be all the ongoing professional requirements for their profession in terms of upgrading and training and information sharing, and I think that's a real benefit, Mr. Speaker. The last thing we want is judges on the bench who haven't kept up with current events and changes within their profession.

It seems to me that that in itself has got to be worth the changes we're seeing here to keep these people current and up to date on what's occurring in their field. Once again, I think that's a very good idea.

This is, though, merely tinkering with some of the outstanding issues. I expect that come the spring, we're going to see some significant changes – I hope at least that we're going to see some significant changes – in how the court system is run in this province, because there is no doubt that we are running into increasing problems with people within the system. There's a huge backlog for people, a huge problem with a lack of prosecutors, wage issues, people's right to a speedy trial, the problems that occur and the huge dollar settlements that occur when people are incarcerated for

lengthy time periods and in fact then don't ever end up in court for whatever reason: lack of evidence, perhaps wrongly accused, whatever those situations may be. We end up spending taxpayer dollars on settlements with these people, which would be smaller at least, if not gone completely, if the system was sped up. So it will be good to see that this at least addresses this in part.

It seems to me also that there's another good reason for having this go forward, and that has to do with the anticipated changes that we're going to see in our own Standing Orders here in the Legislature. It looks like there will be some changes to the sub judice rule. Some of those changes we're not very happy with, and we'll have quite a bit to say at the time they hit the floor of the Assembly for debate. Nevertheless, this government has a huge majority and will certainly pass those changes. Part of the sub judice changes will talk about when we can talk about cases that are not before the court but are pending in terms of potential appeals. That's going to have some impact on how this House proceeds. We're hoping that at the very least these changes to sub judice will only apply to criminal matters. We'll see how the debate goes when we have it here in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, but at the very least what it's going to do is block us from at least some time periods of talking about issues that are important to the people of the province and asking questions on those issues. So if the time period between when cases are decided and when the appeal time period expires can be shortened because we are keeping judges on the bench longer, then that's a good move forward. So there's another reasonable reason, I think, for supporting this bill certainly in principle.

I think those are all the concerns and points I would like to make at this time. I look forward to seeing some of those cost analyses from the minister and any other kind of factual data that he could share with us when this bill is in committee.

With those words, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to speak on second reading of Bill 27 to some of the features of this bill. The quick reading of the bill draws my attention to the very first substantive amendment there to section 21.21. That's obviously a very much-needed change, that a judge who retires right in the middle of a case that he or she has fully heard but hasn't had the time to write the judgment should be able to write the judgment three months after ceasing to hold the office. I wonder how we had done without this kind of provision in the past. It is clearly a much-needed amendment, but I don't know what kinds of arrangements were made where in fact something like this happened in the past and we were yet able to have the judgments written and delivered. But it's a good housekeeping amendment. I find no reason to find any fault with it.

9:40

Dealing with the reappointment of judges, I just want to remind the House that if anyone should speak in favour of it, it should be someone in my position. I just got reappointed, at the age of 68, some eight months ago to this position, and I think that 70 years of age these days, particularly in professions such as judges and others, is perhaps too early an age for retirement. People in these positions do represent extremely valuable experience, sound judgment, and continuing high levels of energy and intellectual vigour.

The manner of reappointment is outlined here. I find that in the case of Chief Judge or the Deputy Chief Judge or the Assistant Chief Judge, the appointment will be made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council but on the recommendation of the Judicial Council. In the case of other judges the recommendation will come to the Lieutenant

Governor in Council from the Chief Judge. Unless the Judicial Council is likely to be unduly burdened with making recommendations for other judges as well as the Chief Judge, I think it might be best if all reappointments become the responsibility, in terms of making recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, of the Judicial Council, in the case of judges who are not Chief Judge, Deputy Chief Judge, or Assistant Chief Judge, and that that be the responsibility solely of one person, called the Chief Judge. I think the recommendations will have a sounder basis if Judicial Council makes these judgments regardless of the rank of the judge, of the position of the particular judge who is being recommended for the appointment. The evaluation I think would be more thorough. The collective judgment of the council would, I assume, be superior to the judgment of one person, albeit that person would be the Chief Judge. So that's one little issue. I would like to see if the minister sees any merit in this suggestion that I'm making for his consideration.

My understanding is that the bill is proposing that the reappointment at any time will be made only for one year at a time and that every year additional will come up for reconsideration at the end of the year for which the appointment was made. That's good. I think I'm supportive of that.

I guess, with the little time I've had to look at it, the rest is mostly housekeeping and cleaning up the existing legislation and bringing it in line with the proposed changes in the Provincial Court Amend-

ment Act. I haven't been able to read it closely, so I will simply close my remarks at this point. I just wanted to talk about the reappointment of the judges and the arrangement that's being proposed for a retiring judge to be able to write a judgment within three months of retirement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close the debate.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been some interesting comments and questions raised, but rather than attempt to address them tonight, I will review *Hansard* and bring more comprehensive comments back at the committee stage.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we do adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:46 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 15, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/15

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province and, in that work, give us strength and wisdom. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it's my pleasure today. As I mentioned in this Assembly yesterday, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association is in fact hosting their 95th annual convention here in the city of Edmonton, and its president, Lorne Olsvik, is here today in the Speaker's gallery. Of course, he also is a member of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as a director. Also here today we have the president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, Jack Hayden. In fact, Jack's convention for the AAMDC is going to be hosted here in Edmonton next week. Now, they both represent over a million and a half Albertans. As we know, the Premier of Alberta represents over 3 million people in this province, so these gentlemen are representing over half.

We also have here today the newly elected mayor of the city of Calgary, His Worship Mayor Dave Bronconnier, and as we know, the city of Calgary represents over 1 million citizens. Finally, we have here today an alderman from the city of Calgary who is the first vice-president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and will soon lead the national assembly all across Canada, John Schmal.

I'd ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Bill 23 Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to request leave to introduce a bill being the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001.

The Assembly will be pleased to know that the three bodies regulating the accounting profession in Alberta – the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the society of Certified Management Accountants, and the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta – all support the proposed changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 23 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Bill 24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to request leave to introduce Bill 24, being the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001.

I'm also pleased to advise the House that the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association and the Alberta Forest Technologists Association support the proposed changes. I wish other companies would do the same.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 24 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Bill 29 Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to introduce Bill 29, the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001.

This bill would allow regional airport authorities to become shareholders in Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, thereby giving them the ability to apply for financing at AMFC rates.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 29 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, with your approval I wish to file with the Legislative Assembly the appropriate number of copies of two documents. The first is a copy of a letter I sent earlier today to Lieutenant Colonel Stogran, who commands the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Battle Group. This group of men and women based right here in Edmonton are preparing to head to Afghanistan to perform humanitarian duties. They are expected to leave shortly. My letter extends the profound thanks of all Albertans to these brave Canadians for their willingness to serve the cause of freedom. It also expresses our hope for their safe and speedy return to their families and loved ones.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a copy of a letter I sent this morning to Prime Minister Jean Chretien. The letter outlines my concerns and the concerns of this government with the health dispute resolution mechanism proposed earlier this week by the federal Health minister. It also acknowledges Alberta's appreciation that

work to establish this mechanism has at least begun, hopefully in earnest.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wish to table a news release outlining the Power Pool prices for today. The previous day average, from November 14, is 2.6 cents per kilowatt hour; the 30-day average, 4.4 cents per kilowatt hour. We think it's important to deliver a fair, transparent, accessible price for any commodity, particularly electricity, as the Power Pool has worked in effecting a market that works and reflects power prices in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings today. The first one is a news story in the *Calgary Sun* of last Sunday and the headline: Klein will contest health act.

The second one is a news story from the *Globe and Mail* from Monday last week: Klein considering user fees.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first tabling is a memorandum of agreement between the government of Alberta, Alberta Infrastructure, and the city of Edmonton for the city transportation trust fund.

The second tabling is an Alberta government news release regarding the city of Calgary and the province signing a trust agreement for infrastructure funding based on 5 cents per litre of on-road fuel sold in that city.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

1:40

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Albert Opstad, a senior from Edmonton who is very concerned over maintaining Alberta's first-class health care system, and he has a suggestion on how to pay for it.

The second tabling that I have is a report that I requested from Darrell Pidner with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and it's pointing out the work of their 250 members and the local benefit derived from their \$3 million payroll.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd table five copies of a speech by Edmonton philanthropist Robert Stollery entitled: In Alberta, It's Time to Reassess Our Priorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your approval I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of two documents: a report from the TD Economics group of October 12, 2001, indicating that their prediction for health spending in Alberta in 2006 is that it will be no more than 35 percent of our budget, and a document based on an analysis of Canadian Institute for Health Information figures

showing that Alberta's percentage of health care spending has been stable as a portion of GDP for the last 15 years.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission today I have the appropriate number of copies of three tablings. They are handwritten letters from teachers in my constituency who very eloquently outline their concerns about the lack of funding in education. They are from Raymond Rouleau, Lynn Koss, and Sheila Pierson.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter dated November 2 from my office to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment requesting the overdue WCB Appeals Commission annual report.

The second document is a handwritten letter from Mr. Jim Munsey, a constituent of Edmonton-Gold Bar, to the Premier and CCed to the hon. Minister of Learning, and this letter states Mr. Munsey's loss to understand why there is obvious animosity towards the teaching profession in Alberta from the government.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you the wife of one of our most committed members in our government caucus. She's in the Speaker's gallery today: Pat Klapstein, wife of our hon. Member for Leduc. Would Pat rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems the AUMA convention brought a few more members than the previously introduced distinguished guests. I have some very distinguished guests from the town of Olds that I would like to introduce to this Assembly through you. Mayor Norma Duncan and her husband, Kyle, are seated in the members' gallery just above me; Councillor Terry Peterman and his wife, Sandy; Councillor Harvey Walsh and Councillor Warren Smith, who were newly elected on October 15, as was Councillor Scott Dundas, and he's accompanied by his lovely wife, Lori, and re-elected Councillor Kris Bojda and newly elected Councillor Ben Coates. We'd like to welcome you here and would ask you to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a wonderful group of kids from a beautiful part of my constituency from the Fox Run school in Sylvan Lake, also their teachers John Fielder, Donald Teplyske, Michelle Doz, Karen Adair, and Robin Irvine, also parents and helpers Mrs. Girard, Mrs. Garson, Mr. Garson, Mrs. Magas, Miss Cunningham, Mrs. Badley, Mr. and Mrs. Machulski, Mrs. Gunnlaugson, Mrs. Knights, Mrs. Herder, Mrs. Weibe, Ms Becker, Mrs. Fitzgerald, Mrs. Meloche, Mr. Leshchysyn, and Ms Handley.

There are 155 in total in this group, and they're spread out in both galleries. I'd like them to stand and get the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't beat that. It's my distinct pleasure to rise in the Assembly today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a dedicated and long-serving member of the Grande Prairie and district Catholic school board. I would ask Mrs. Morag Mochan, seated behind me in the members' gallery, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce these people that worked so diligently on the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001. The first group I'd like to introduce – and I'd like them to stand after I introduce them all – is from the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association, Dieter Kuhnke, Robert Stokes, and Douglas Krystofiak; from the Alberta Forest Technologists Association, Don Podlubny and Frankie Kerr; and then from Alberta Human Resources and Employment, Brenda Johnson and Adrian Pritchard. Please would they stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise again today in order to introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly a very special guest who is here today to see the first reading of the amendments being proposed for the accounting profession. He's really a fellow you can count on, and I would ask that he rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly, Mr. Drew Thomson from the society of Certified Management Accountants of Alberta.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Health Care System

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been many specific hints given about the direction of coming changes in our health care system. Albertans are rightly concerned that all this musing may result in a shifting of responsibility from the government to a three-tiered health care system with more and more services being paid for through the private insurance industry or through Albertans' wallets. My questions are to the Premier. Can you explain to Albertans the difference between delisting and your term: changing comprehensiveness of the health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what I will explain to the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is that we want to achieve sustainability and affordability in the publicly funded health care system so it is there for his children and his grandchildren and my children and my grandchildren and their children for years and years to come. That's what it's all about and making sure that we have the ability to treat the sick and injured in society.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain to Albertans, then, how delisting or changing comprehensiveness, whatever term he wants to use, will actually lower total health care costs for all Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I refuse to become embroiled in a debate that is solely and absolutely based on nitpicking, assumptions, speculation. I have explained in this Legislative Assembly that Mr. Mazankowski, who heads the Premier's Advisory Council on Health, will be discussing his report with me on November 16. Shortly thereafter he will table his report, which I assume will have a number of major recommendations, certainly recommendations that have been alluded to in his preliminary report. At that time, the report will go to the agenda and priorities committee of this government, then it will be sent to the standing policy committee of this government, then it will be sent to the cabinet of this government, and we will then have a decision on the course of action that this government wants to take relative to bringing about meaningful and necessary reform to the health care system.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier explain to all Albertans how changing comprehensiveness will improve their overall health care system and their access?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader of the Liberal Party would read the letter that I tabled in the Legislature a few moments ago, addressed to the Prime Minister, it clearly called for a dispute resolution mechanism in accordance with the social union framework agreement, which says that such a mechanism should be set up to resolve issues relevant to the interpretation of the Canada Health Act. It could be and likely will be that the issue of comprehensiveness will be one of those issues that will be challenged relative to the interpretation of the term comprehensive.

THE SPEAKER: Back to the Official Opposition main question, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier provide any evidence at all that medical savings accounts will improve services or health care access for Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I am not going to become involved in hypothetical situations, speculation. Again, I urge the hon. leader of the Liberal Party to wait for the Mazankowski report and to be helpful and provide this government with constructive ideas and constructive criticism, because I'm sure that, as all Albertans want to achieve, he also wants to achieve sustainability in the health care system, that he wants to bring about meaningful reforms that are not going to dismantle the health care system as we know it today but make it better, and to ensure that it's going to be there for decades and decades to come. That's what we want to do, and I would hope that he would want to do the same thing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: can the Premier provide any evidence that a new tax such as user fees will improve services for Albertans and reduce the cost?

MR. KLEIN: You know, I find it interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the only mention of user fees other than a headline that I didn't write – and I can assure you of that, because I'm not in the newspaper business. The only people who are alluding to user fees are the Liberal opposition and the ND opposition.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: what is the government's priority? Appearing to change the revenue sources for providing health care or providing the best possible health care services to Albertans at the lowest possible cost?

MR. KLEIN: Absolutely. Now, finally, Mr. Speaker, we get an intelligent question, to which I can provide an intelligent answer. It was an intelligent question, and the answer is that that is precisely what we're trying to do. We are trying to provide the best possible service at the least cost and at the same time make sure that it's there for future generations of people of this province and indeed this country.

THE SPEAKER: The third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Care Spending

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier. Since this Legislature approved the health budget a mere five and a half months ago, health spending has been increased, then RHA deficits were announced, and then spending was cut. How can the Premier make any credible predictions about future health care spending when his own government can't figure out what it's spending today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the hon. member is so consumed by reading his own press releases and his own musings and his own writings that he doesn't read the newspapers. I would ask him to read the newspaper today and check the price of oil. It's below \$20. The revenue situation today, as opposed to what is was even six months ago, is vastly different, and we have to make the appropriate adjustments.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the TD Bank recently predicted that Alberta will be spending no more than 35 percent of its total budget on health in the next five years, can the Premier back up his claim that it will soon consume 50 percent of the total budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that if you do the math and you see the way that health care costs have gone up over the past five years, one could logically come to the conclusion that indeed it will consume up to 50 percent of the budget if we don't get things under control. I would remind the hon. member that in some provinces it is edging close to the 50 percent mark already.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier agree that Alberta's percentage of GDP going to health care is at about the same level today as it has been for the past 15 years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will give the same answer that I gave yesterday or the day before: it's entirely irrelevant. The fact is that even the amount of the GDP that we're paying for health care is steadily increasing. The simple fact is that over the past five years health care costs have doubled – doubled – from a little over \$3 billion, albeit Canadian, as I say, but significant nonetheless, to over \$6 billion a year. You don't have to be an academic to understand this. The simple fact is that health care costs have doubled, the population over that same period of time has not doubled, has nowhere near doubled, and the number of sick and injured people in this province certainly hasn't doubled. So we have to find solutions and find ways of making health care sustainable.

THE SPEAKER: The leader of the third party.

Health Care System

(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's flip-flopping on health care in the last two days pales in comparison to his flip-flopping before and after the election. Just yesterday he said right here in this House: "I have not been talking about delisting [services]." Today I'm happy to correct the Premier and set the record straight. My first question to the Premier: how can the Premier say he is not talking about delisting services when he openly admitted to the media on November 10 that medicare coverage for abortions will be revisited?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm alluding again to a statement that was contained in the preliminary report of Mr. Mazankowski, and that statement alludes to the fact: are there expectations – or there is an expectation; I think it was more definitive – that health care is there for all people, for all causes, at all times, and for all things, something to that effect. I might be paraphrasing it. That speaks to the whole issue of comprehensiveness and the interpretation of comprehensiveness. How we deal with that particular issue, that will be through the process that I outlined a few moments ago. That is the process of taking it to agenda and priorities, through to the standing policy committee, through to cabinet, through to caucus, and deciding as a government what we do to bring about reform based on Mr. Mazankowski's recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the Premier: how can the Premier say he is not considering user fees when the headline in the *Globe and Mail* of November 12 says quite clearly, "Klein considering user fees"?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will allude to remarks that are often given to me by reporters. When I complain to them about a headline, they say: don't blame me; I don't write the headline. Well, I don't write the headlines. I can tell you that for sure. I'm even many, many, many steps removed from the headline writer.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I would draw your attention and all hon. members' attention to *Beauchesne* 428(e). A question must not "inquire whether statements made in a newspaper are true."

The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier won't call an election to seek a new, honest mandate, will he at least say "I'm sorry" to this House for his misrepresenting government intentions?

MR. KLEIN: Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a headline for you. Six months following the last election here's the headline: NDs call for provincial election. Now, there's a headline for you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

2:00

Forest Industry

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure of talking with many members of the province's forest industry after the forest industry conference in Edmonton. This is a sector that is key to the economy in my constituency and many others throughout the province. In fact, forestry is the third largest industry in the province. Considering this, there was a fair bit of discussion yesterday around the need for better promotion of this sector. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the province doing to raise the profile of this important sector in Alberta?

MR. CARDINAL: To start off, Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question. Forestry is very healthy in Alberta. Today we just completed a publication, actually jointly with the Alberta Forest Products Association and my department, which shows a very, very good story and a healthy industry in Alberta. In fact, it's an over \$8 billion industry. Over 54,000 people are employed in that industry, and close to 50 communities across Alberta depend on that particular area as their primary industry and income source.

Mr. Speaker, we have some of the best mills in the country, the best pulp mills and the best sawmills, and the most efficient and productive. So the forest industry is very healthy and continues to play an important part in our overall economic diversification plan in Alberta, which includes the oil and gas industry, agriculture, forestry, tourism, and science and technology. In fact, we are now moving to the next step, and that's the value adding in all those areas.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Can you tell the Assembly what other items were discussed that were important at this convention?

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, that convention is very important to our whole forest industry and to all Albertans, and I'd like to commend the organizers and the conference participants: the industry, the major players, and also some various department staff who attended. It was a very, very productive conference. It's an opportunity to share ideas and to dialogue not only with industries in Alberta but also industries from outside of Alberta, including B.C. and Saskatchewan.

What we heard was that there are new technologies being applied in that industry – again, the sawmills are more efficient – and concerns they may have, including tenure in some cases, in that particular area, Mr. Speaker.

The other one that was very important was the aboriginal participation. As we move forward in harvesting our resources, especially in the north half of the province, there are a lot of aboriginal communities impacted. The industries are working very closely, in fact, with the Hon. Pearl Calahasen, minister of aboriginal affairs, who did a presentation yesterday, a very good presentation, very well received by the industry, and no doubt will go a long way in involving some of our northern neighbours in this most important area.

The industry does face some challenges, Mr. Speaker. That's the low commodity prices right now, the softwood lumber agreement, and the general slowdown in the economy south of us that impacts lumber prices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is to the same minister. With the softwood lumber discussion taking place in Washington this week, there were also industry concerns regarding the level of the Alberta delegation. Can the minister tell us why Alberta isn't sending a more senior level delegation to these important talks?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, thank you. That's a very good question. That did come up yesterday in our conference. We are working, of course, very closely with the Hon. Halvar Jonson, who is responsible for trade negotiations, as a lead minister on all issues. Of course, we will continue vigorously defending Halvar's stand in relation to the practices we have in Alberta in relation to forestry. We are of course participating in discussions on a potential long-term solution for that industry, because I believe that is what our industry wants. It has a major impact to some sectors of the industry. Probably, you know, 70 percent of the wood that's sold across the border from Canada comes from Alberta, and it's equivalent to about 1.1 billion board feet, or a \$500 million to \$600 million project. As we move forward, as the discussions get more serious and get more specific, we will of course be increasing our delegation and calibre of delegation in that particular process to make sure that the issues are addressed. One of the things we support is what industry wants, and that's free trade. It's very simple. The industry wants free trade, and we support that fully in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, yesterday in the House an hon. member of Executive Council mentioned by name another member of the House, and today this has happened again. That's inappropriate, so I'll ask the government whip to take the appropriate steps.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Municipal Funding

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was pleased to hear that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has listened to local governments and the Official Opposition and realized that it is time for a new provincial/municipal partnership. However, before getting excited about the future, we need some answers about recent cutbacks. What services does the minister suggest that the residents of Edmonton cut back on to make up for the almost \$10 million that was pulled from municipal coffers with the recent cuts to the fuel tax grant?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises a good question, but let me frame that, first and foremost, in this way. In light of the events that have taken place since September 11, there is no question, as the hon. Minister of Energy mentioned earlier today, that the price of oil today is at \$17. What is very important, though, is this. I am quite certain that the citizens of Edmonton and its mayor do not want to run a deficit, no different

than what the taxpayers of Alberta are telling their provincial government. I'm sure the hon. member will agree with that.

But what we are doing – in fact, this afternoon the Minister of Transportation and myself are meeting with the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary, talking about where the provincial government is at and how we work together, because at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we are all in this together as Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Calgary is already struggling to keep up with demands on its roads. How do you suggest they deal with the almost \$13 million that was taken away from their municipal budget?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

2:10

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to add some clarity to this issue, and we're going to be discussing this again with the mayors. What has not been reported, pertaining to the 5 cents per litre that the cities of Edmonton and Calgary do get, is that it's important to note that this program is the only one of its kind in Canada in terms of how a province treats an urban city like Calgary or Edmonton. What's more important is that over \$255 million has been advanced to the city of Calgary relative to this 5 cents per litre, and many people are not aware of that fact. So that money is in the bank in the city of Calgary as we speak.

What's important, though, to the hon. member's good question, is that it is my hope that the economy will improve and the reconciliation relative to the consumption of the 5 cents per litre tax versus what could go to the city of Calgary. Fortunately, to the year 2004, \$255 million is in the city of Calgary's coffers. I'm very pleased to say that we've advanced them that portion of the money.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is the government undermining municipalities' long-term plans by introducing programs that cannot be sustained?

MR. BOUTILIER: I think that if I were to interpret the question by an analogy, it would be this way: it appears that everything is broken, and everything isn't broken. In fact, let me give you an example. Even when a clock is broken, it gets it right twice a day. With that, I can say that we are not broken. We're working very closely in partnership, as to the question that the hon. member has raised.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Tourism Marketing

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since September 11 the tourism industry has been significantly impacted. Shortly after the acts of terrorism there were reports of major resorts with greatly reduced occupancy rates. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. What is being done to address the situation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank

the hon. member for the question. Obviously, our hearts go out to our American cousins after September 11. That was indeed a terrible situation, and unfortunately our tourism industry in Alberta was dramatically affected. We estimate that they may lose up to \$100 million because of that event.

So in answer to the hon. member's question, what I did was traveled around Alberta and talked to industry stakeholders, saw the evidence of what was happening, Mr. Speaker, and advised my department to reallocate money within our existing budgets to have a made-in-Alberta campaign extolling the virtues and values of what's available in Alberta to Albertans and that rather than travel outside of the country to stay inside Alberta this winter and see all the beauty and value we have to offer.

MS DeLONG: Where is the campaign being run, what is its focus, and what do you see as the government's long-term role in this industry?

MR. NORRIS: Well, three questions would be more than two ND members. Anyways, Mr. Speaker, the focus of this campaign quite simply is to talk about value, talk about the kind of beautiful nature and environment we have in Alberta, and to get people interested in coming back to Alberta to look at it. Where we are focusing in Canada is the rubber tire traffic, as it's called in the industry: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Our long-term vision for this is that once people come back to Alberta, they will see exactly what kinds of values there are, how beautiful the facilities are, and they will not leave and will continue to spend their money in Alberta, where it should be spent in the first place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Children's Services

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Children's Services told the House that "we are not directly taking away from those services that interface directly with the child." My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. How does cutting the hot lunch program for children in the elementary school in Cold Lake not directly affect children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, many of the programs that are being provided at the local level are a result of partnerships formed by the authority, the child and family service authority. In this case, that particular authority is working with partners in the community. Those authorities throughout Alberta have the opportunity to designate priorities as they see fit. Many times they tell us that the priorities of some of the programs could be altered so that they put the emphasis where it's more readily needed.

I have not been personally advised of any cut to that particular program, but it is within the purview of those local appointed officials with their CEO to define programs that most clearly affect the child in need. In this case, if there is a program that's cut that relates to a hot lunch program, then it has been because that board has determined that that isn't the number one priority. Those programs are, again, as a result of their articulation with other providers in the community.

DR. MASSEY: The second question to the same minister: how does cutting seven outreach workers in Cold Lake schools not directly affect children?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has, obviously, information which I have not been given. Cutting seven outreach workers is not something that has reached my desk, so I compliment him on his reconnaissance. But if I may again point out, if that is correct, those are choices that have been made in that community in consultation with the school community, no doubt with the parents in that community, and because that's what was determined as the most important thing.

Let's be clear. Children's Services is about child protection. I think it's regrettable in this province that we have more children in child protection than ever before. Why is that? It is because, no doubt, there are struggles in families that have nothing to do with programs that the hon. member is referencing. It has to do with the kinds of conflicts where more children today witness family violence and violence in the home than they do sexual abuse, all things that we struggle with in a society that is trying to make corrections. So if I have choices about where we place the funds, it will be for child protection for those children that are hurting the most, and where we have alternatives to provide other programs in schools and in community facilities, let that community help us pay for them.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, the minister is absolutely right, so how does cutting West Yellowhead's caseworkers' travel budget so they can no longer drive family members to the food bank or to counseling sessions not affect children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there are challenges, no doubt, in every community, but let me remind the hon. member that this is one of the few budgets in government that has accelerated over \$186 million in the last two years to improve services for children. There may be service adjustments and priorities that those local decision-makers will re-evaluate and reconfigure in some way, but in fact I will ask for a detailed explanation.

In this instance, I again advise that local officials are determining where the greatest priorities are. I will not subtract from those priorities where the child is most in need of protection, and perhaps – and I say “perhaps” understanding that this is at this point to me unsubstantiated evidence – there are other ways to get those children or those families in need to those services that they need.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Supports for Independence

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The rules for how cash benefits are calculated in the SFI program, supports for independence, were adjusted yesterday, starting in the month of December. My question is for the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. I understand that these changes will allow families to earn more money before their maximum calculated SFI benefits are reduced. Why is the minister giving more earning exemption capacity to families on welfare?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

2:20

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government firmly believes that it's better to be at work than on assistance, and we try to translate this philosophical view that we hold into some practical ways in which we can resolve, then, the situations that happen in many families. So what we're announcing is the fact that from now

on if we have a family that is low income and is receiving some supports for independence assistance in terms of income from us, we'll allow them to go out and earn more income before we start to reduce our SFI payments. We believe this is a way, then, that will allow them, once they've entered the workforce, to be able to stay in the workforce, and we believe that this is the best alternative they have.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: where does the funding for these changes come from?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, with the federal government national child benefit program we have an excellent example, in my view, of flexible federalism. What we have is the federal government providing income to families, and this allows, then, a provincial government to take a look at the income levels, to look at some of the other needs that are required around a family, and then of course move money into those particular areas. So in this particular case we have a situation where some \$6 million was freed up because of the federal government involvement in income support. We are using \$4 million of it to fund the aforementioned program, but we're also going to contribute to a person's employment needs that they might have. If they find a job, they might need work boots or a bus pass, something like that.

We're also, which I think is a very credible approach – at one time we included earnings from the children of a family in terms of the total family income and then started to reduce our SFI income support. Well, what we're announcing today is the fact that we will exempt 100 percent now of all children's earnings as long as that child is in school. We're not wanting to encourage any children over the age of 15 to leave school in order to participate in this program, but we feel that if the person has a paper route, gets a job at a local retail store, those kinds of earnings should benefit the family as a whole, so that's a part of the contribution again.

We'll be using \$4 million directly to support these programs. Two million dollars has been moved to Children's Services so that they in their way can support day care for, again, these same families.

MRS. ADY: Finally, to the same minister: how do these changes relate to the low-income program review that the MLA committee conducted this summer?

MR. DUNFORD: Early on we had some indications of where the low-income review would be going as far as recommendations, so we actually looked at how we were going to reinvest the money, and we started to listen, then, to some of the signals that we were getting from Albertans through the low-income review committee as to the primary concerns that people would have. So it was because of that influence that we then directed our \$4 million in this particular case to those exact programs that I tried to outline earlier.

I might add now for all members' benefit that I have in fact received the report of the low-income review committee. I want to congratulate all of them for the fine work that they've done, but, Mr. Speaker, they've given me a very, very complete and, might I say, comprehensive report. It's going to take a while for us to get through that very fine report and then come back to this room with some of the recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Forest Stewardship Council Certification

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The world market for forest products is changing rapidly as major purchasers and consumers indicate their preference for wood products that can be independently certified as coming from well-managed forests. Forest Stewardship Council certification is currently the only demonstrably independent system that has broad international support from indigenous people and other forest users, industry retailers, and conservation groups. Seven percent of the world's industrial wood consumption is now FSC certified. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Why has the minister's department not removed the legislative impediments that make it impossible for Alberta forest companies to participate in this new global market?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good question and a very timely question. I said earlier that forestry is a very important industry to a lot of Albertans, and one thing I want to clarify is that the certification is not part of the quality of the lumber that we produce in Alberta. That is a different process that is still in place and works very well. This certification ties in with the forest management and the environmental management that the forestry operations do as they harvest our resources.

The regional standards in Alberta have not been developed yet, and once they are, we will of course move forward to look at how we can make changes that are necessary to be able to accommodate the private industries getting proper certification. I don't believe there is a problem with a major industry getting certification now. The problem will be the small operators. There are a lot out there. Like I said earlier, close to 50 communities depend on sawmill operations and other wood-related operations. The smaller operators may have difficulty in affording the certification process. It's a very sensitive area. We have to keep a good balance to ensure that all industries, it doesn't matter at what level, can be certified in Alberta so they can market their products.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, why has the minister not supported a scientifically defensible protected area network in Alberta that would help companies get this certification? In fact, it's one of the major requirements for this certification.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this certification process is something that commenced not too long ago. Alberta has been part of the process, and when the time is right, as we move forward and once the regional standards are in place, of course we will make the necessary adjustments that would accommodate the process for private industry to become certified. But it's not as simple as that. Again I say that the larger companies will not have a problem getting certification, because we have one of the best managed forest industries in North America. So that's not a problem at all. The area where we will have some difficulty is the small operators, and there are a lot of them throughout Alberta that may be impacted in a negative way unless Alberta can come to some aid to assist them to get certified.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, is the minister then saying that he is willing to meet the second major criterion for getting this certification, which would be his department supporting reforming oil and gas tenure and planning regulations to ensure that the petroleum and forest industries can collaborate to achieve long-term forest planning and sustainability, not possible right now under current standards?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, that is not truly correct. There are a lot of industries already into joint planning with forest companies. One example is in my constituency. In fact, the Alberta Pacific project in the Fort McMurray area worked jointly with the heavy oil sands developer and actually reduced the impact as far as disturbance to the area by 50 percent. So already the companies are working, and of course as we move forward, we will ensure that part of the process will be to do joint planning in the future. It only makes sense.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Municipal Funding

(continued)

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before the last election the Conservative government signed three-year legal agreements with the cities of Edmonton and Calgary to provide those cities with transportation infrastructure funding based on a portion of the fuel tax. Three years of funding was provided in advance to those cities in order to allow orderly transportation planning in Edmonton and Calgary. Last month the government announced its intention to tear up these agreements and asked for 15 percent of its money back, \$20 million in the case of the city of Edmonton alone. To the Premier: how can the government tear up a legal agreement with Alberta's two largest cities and demand its money back?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have asked them to share in the restraint program, and certainly if things turn around, that 15 percent, the difference between 5 cents and 4 and one-quarter, will be restored.

Right now the city has the money, is earning the interest. I think the cities have the money. I don't know about Edmonton, but I know that Calgary has the money. I would have to check for sure.

We're asking municipalities, as we are regional health authorities, as we are school boards, as we are all departments of government, to work with us and help us through these somewhat difficult times, times that have become dramatically worse since the horrific events of September 11.

2:30

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: how can the government expect Alberta municipalities to accept the government's offer of partnership if it can tear up legal agreements after only one year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs pointed out, we want to work with municipalities on a collaborative and a co-operative basis. I'm sure that municipal leaders, like all of us, read the newspapers to see that the price of oil is not only below \$20 a barrel today but indeed at noon was at about \$17.45 a barrel and going down. We have to deal with these situations, and we seek the co-operation of all Albertans.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier justify what is simply another example of saying one thing before an election and doing another afterwards?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that the program even at 4.25 cents is far more generous than the per capita grant program that was in place before the fuel tax program was introduced. I would remind the hon. member that it was brought about through a collaborative effort involving various departments

of government, representatives of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, representatives of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and the mayors of the two major cities. It was always understood that as the result of that process, the result of bringing that committee together, we would continue to work in the spirit of co-operation and collaboration on these particular matters.

Mr. Speaker, we saw representatives of those organizations in your gallery this afternoon. They know full well what is happening. They know the tremendous pressures that are facing the province of Alberta, and they know that we're dealing with these problems as responsibly and as effectively as we possibly can under the circumstances.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Smallpox Vaccine

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. It's obvious to all Albertans that the horrific destruction of September 11 has deeply affected us in many ways. Many concerns that would never have entered our minds prior to that day now disturb our daily thoughts. There now exists the possibility that terrorists could obtain and use smallpox as a biological weapon. Can the minister say what the Alberta government has done to protect Albertans from the threat of smallpox from terrorist action?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the outset I'd like to point out that the risk of contracting smallpox from any source, including bioterrorism, is a very remote possibility in the province of Alberta. That's not to say that we shouldn't take precautions, and we have. Notably we have worked with our regional health authorities to advise physicians who work in our emergency rooms in hospitals throughout the province to report immediately any changes in numbers or symptoms so that we can identify patterns as quickly as possible and help us to take quick action.

The department has also been in contact with its counterparts and I have been in contact with my counterpart federally, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we can deal effectively with any outbreak. That includes discussions on the availability of smallpox vaccine. I'd just reiterate that the risk of contracting smallpox in Alberta is considered to be low. The last reported case of smallpox in Alberta was in 1947.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, also to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what has the minister done to ensure Alberta has enough vaccine to prevent any problem with terrorists using smallpox?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the obtaining of smallpox vaccine in response to a bioterrorism attack, that is a responsibility that falls within the purview of the federal government. It is the federal government that is responsible for obtaining, stockpiling, and distributing vaccines for diseases that could be used for bioterrorism. I've been in contact with my federal counterpart, and our department officials have been in contact with their counterparts in Ottawa. They have assured us that Alberta would receive the vaccine that the federal government has obtained if it was needed.

I should say, Mr. Speaker, that if there is an occurrence of smallpox in the province, the vaccine does work after the person has

contracted it, so it need not be used prior to contracting the disease. It can in fact be used after it's been identified.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, my final question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister reassure Albertans that they will be vaccinated to prevent any risk of infection only if terrorists use smallpox in our province?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal government, as I said, is responsible for obtaining and distributing vaccines for diseases such as smallpox, and they have assured us that we will have such vaccines if there is an outbreak.

It is notable that the World Health Organization has recommended against mass vaccinations for smallpox if there's no real risk of exposure. The reason for that is that there can be very serious side effects associated with getting the vaccination, and the side effects are at this time considered to be a much greater threat than any risk from actually contracting the disease. It's for this reason that the province of Alberta stopped providing smallpox vaccinations back in the 1970s. Because of the risk of side effects from the vaccine, we would meet any outbreak of smallpox in the province with the currently accepted medical practice, and that would mean that we would vaccinate only those people who have the disease and anybody that they had come in contact with.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I will simply state that the risk of contracting smallpox from any source is very small in this province.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Alex Young

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to recognize one of my constituents, Alex Young, a 13-year-old grade 8 student at R.A. Reynolds school in Cold Lake. Alex was the first-place winner of the 2000-2001 intermediate poem competition sponsored by the Alberta-Northwest Territories Royal Canadian Legion. His award-winning poem, entitled *On the Eleventh*, also received second place in the 2000-2001 intermediate dominion poem contest.

On November 8 at a Remembrance Day ceremony here at the Alberta Legislature, hosted by yourself, Mr. Speaker, Alex shared his poem with a recitation to those present. This young man composed a very compelling and moving poem which belies his 13 years of age. His level of maturity and understanding of events during the last two World Wars and the Korean War shines through in every verse.

Prior to the Remembrance Day service at the Legislature, a copy of *On the Eleventh* was given to all MLAs. I have received many complimentary remarks on Alex's poem, and I know that it was used in several constituencies during their November 11 services.

To Alex I say that we are proud of you and your accomplishment, and we thank you and your family for the gift you have given to all Albertans and Canadians. Thank you.

I would now like to read into the record Alex Young's *On the Eleventh*.

On the eleventh hour
Of the eleventh day
Of the eleventh month
I shall pray,

For all the soldiers
Who went and fought

To win our freedom
Which they brought,

For all the men
Who went and died
And the teens who went
Because they lied,

For all the soldiers
Who lost their lives
Also lost families
And their wives,

For every minute
that I pray
In my mind
I shall say,

Thank you for fighting
To make us free
Thank you from everybody
Not just from me,

For every poppy
That I see worn
I shall remember the hearts
That were torn.

So many dreams
And lives were lost
When those soldiers died
At a very great cost.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

2:40 **Independence of Legislative Branch**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each and every member who has a seat in this Chamber is part of the legislative branch within our Westminster system of government. This branch is independent of both the executive and the judicial branches. Although parliamentary independence has never been doubted, it was enshrined in the English Bill of Rights of 1689, which explicitly prevented the Crown from reaching into the realms of the legislative branch.

In addition, all Legislative Assemblies in Canada, at both the federal and the provincial levels, look favourably upon the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling in the Donahoe case, which reinforced the legislative branch's independence after the repatriation of the Constitution in 1982. We can also point to the recent decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal in Speaker of the Legislative Assembly versus Ontario Human Rights Commission, where the court agreed that no board, commission, department, or other such body of the executive branch can interfere with the legislative branch's parliamentary privileges and procedures. Mr. Speaker, in Alberta the codification of the powers, privileges, and immunities of the Legislative Assembly resulted in the Legislative Assembly Act, which has undoubted constitutional pre-eminence over all other legislation in the province.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I urge all members in this House to take note of the legislative branch's entitlement to be and to be seen as being independent of the other two branches of government.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The events of

September 11 have left an impression on all Albertans as we deal with the emotional, economic, and political consequences of the tragedy. No doubt, among the most affected by the events have been the men and women who proudly serve in Canada's armed services. The call has been made for these citizens to prepare for the duty they trained for, to defend against the global threat to the values of peace and compassion that so finely define Canada.

It is a privilege and an honour this afternoon to recognize the members of Canada's armed forces stationed in Edmonton who have been called upon to contribute to this effort, the 3rd Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry from the Canadian forces base in Edmonton. Members of this battalion currently compose part of Canada's immediate reaction force to the situation in Afghanistan. Approximately 800 soldiers are on a 48-hour notice that could see them departing across the globe in days or weeks ahead. With the continually changing situation in Afghanistan, the exact duty of these soldiers has not yet been fully confirmed. It will likely involve the protection of humanitarian missions urgently needed to secure a stable supply of food and resources to the impoverished population as the winter approaches.

The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry has a storied tradition, Mr. Speaker, in the Canadian armed services. It has served during some of Canada's most urgent times of need, from Ypres in World War I to the invasion of Sicily in World War II to service in the Korean War. In preparing to go overseas again, these soldiers honour this brave and defiant history. Canadians and Albertans salute the commitment to duty that these soldiers are displaying today. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your families in these anxious days. Our hope will be for a safe and peaceful return. Thank you for your commitment to securing a better future for Canadians and those in need across the globe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Election Campaign

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. General elections are the cornerstone of democracy. During the weeks of an election campaign we politicians cease being decision-makers and have to apply for our jobs all over again. The single most important task of each office-seeker is to honestly and accurately represent their view of what must be done, changes that must be made, and their vision of the future. Doing so allows voters to exercise their own independent judgment. It allows them to choose between competing visions and policies. In order for the citizens to make an informed and meaningful choice, they must have all the information about the candidates and their party's positions and intentions.

Now, over and over again before the last election the Premier assured Albertans that he was committed to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. On February 15 he said, and I quote: without hesitation we will fully commit ourselves to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. This statement is just one of many made by the Premier and his ministers.

With the election over and a majority safely under his belt the Premier now feels free to break every commitment he made. He wants to challenge the Canada Health Act, he wants to introduce user fees, he wants to delist services. Everything that he said he wouldn't do before the election he plans to do after the election. Whether it's a flip-flop or a genuine change of heart on the Premier's part, it is incumbent on him to seek a fresh mandate from Albertans on his so-called health care reforms before he implements them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The Official Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the government share the projected business for next week with us at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to provide the projected government business for the week of November 19 to 22 inclusive. On Monday, November 19, in the afternoon there'll be second reading of bills 25, 26, 23, and 24. That evening, commencing at 8, there'll be second reading of bills 29 and 28, and there'll be Committee of the Whole on bills 27 and 22 and as per afternoon progress.

On Tuesday, November 20, commencing at 4:30 in the afternoon, there will be Government Motions and second reading of bills 28 and 25. That evening, commencing at 8, there will be second reading of bills 28 and 25, Committee of the Whole on bills 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27, and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, November 21, commencing at 8 p.m., there will be messages, supplementary supply, and second reading and/or Committee of the Whole on bills 29 and 28, Government Motions, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, November 22, in the afternoon there will be Committee of Supply, day 1 of one, supplementary supply estimates, there will be the introduction of the supplementary appropriation act, and as per the Order Paper.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 21 Electronic Transactions Act

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act. I would like to address a couple of questions that were raised during second reading. The first question was in reference to section 8 of Bill 21 regarding the meaning of inferred consent. Mr. Speaker, the concept of inferred consent is found in all of the legislation dealing with electronic transactions in Canada. To provide a picture of what this means, I'd like to offer the following example. If a person places an order with a company through their web site, this can be deemed to have provided inferred consent to conduct the business transaction on-line with the company. Another example of inferred consent could be a client handing out a business card with his e-mail address on it to a private company. The company may take this as inferred consent to conduct business with this client electronically. The key words are: "if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the consent is genuine and relevant to the information or record." In both of these cases there is a tie-in to the use of electronic means because of a person's conduct.

The second question that was raised related to section 29 and what is meant by a material error. The definition of a material error, Mr. Speaker, will depend on each case. However, the general application of this section is as follows. The law has rules about the effects of mistakes. Not all mistakes in law are enough to make a

contract invalid. It is only when they are material or go to the heart of the contract that they become important enough to invalidate the contract. However, in the electronic realm it could happen that a key is hit in error when typing or a person might click the mouse in the wrong spot on the screen and, by doing so, send a command with more significant consequences. As an example, if a person types in 1,000 chairs but means really to only buy 10 chairs, that would be a material error.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that this explanation has answered the questions raised in the House, and with that I would like to move third reading of Bill 21. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

2:50

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 21 and to thank the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert for sponsoring this bill. Certainly I would like to add my support for the bill, especially considering that there was consultation with the stakeholders to develop this necessary legislation. As well, one of the strengths I do like about this bill is that it still allows consumers the choice as to whether they are going to use electronic transactions or paper transactions in the course of their business. I know it is certainly the future. I doubt that there is anybody in this Legislature who hasn't at some point given their credit card number over the phone for purchases or whatever. Again, it is a direction that we're moving in, and one that we do look forward to supporting.

I also support the idea that electronic transactions will be given the same legal status as paper transactions with this bill. It is certainly a bill that is required. It will speed up our transactions in business, and I think it also helps to address some of the skepticism about our giving permission for electronic transactions. Certainly this will help to alleviate consumer concerns, and I think that we have to address those concerns, the concerns of confidentiality and legality of electronic information. As well, Mr. Speaker, I think this is also a piece of legislation that will certainly bring us up to par with certain other provinces in the country. I certainly urge all members of the Assembly to support this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to this legislation today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been anxious to speak about Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act. As the critic for consumer affairs, or Government Services, as it's now called, I think that this is noteworthy legislation and it's certainly worth supporting.

Now, as I understand the research that has been conducted by our side of the House, this measure brings us forward along the same lines as the British Columbia legislation. It certainly is going to be an increasing means of having transactions. I have looked at the recent budget update that was released by the hon. Minister of Finance, or the Provincial Treasurer, and in those documents it was indicating that 61 percent of Albertans have access to the Internet. Obviously, whenever we have a bill that its intent is to legally recognize electronic information – this bill does not require any person to transact or consent to agreement through strict electronic methods unless the person agrees to it.

Now, I heard an hon. member talk about the Supernet. Just this very weekend I was looking at the *New York Times*, and they were advertising an electronic version of that newspaper and how you

could be billed for that newspaper. I was scanning through this paper – it's a very good read; it's a pleasant way to spend part of a Sunday – and I saw in there "An Oklahoman From Up North," and this caught my eye. Here it was, one member of this Assembly, the Minister of Energy, quoted in the *New York Times*. All hon. members could look at this in the electronic version, and they could sign up to receive the electronic version on their legislative laptop if they so wished. Their signature, after this bill becomes law, would be valid, as I understand it, on that bill. The hon. Minister of Energy said, "We're the new Oklahoma." He declares in the *New York Times* Sunday, November 11, edition that Alberta is the new Oklahoma, and I thought this was very, very interesting. It was quite a proclamation. I don't know if John Steinbeck would like Alberta to be called the new Oklahoma, but certainly the Minister of Energy did.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in light of the Electronic Transactions Act, we have to note that the definition of "public body" used by this act does not include:

the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly or the office of a Member of the Legislative Assembly . . . the Court of Appeal of Alberta, the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta or The Provincial Court of Alberta,

and a "legal requirement" is a reference to any law "that imposes consequences" if proper records are not used, signed, or retained. When consumers consider the use of this information, the first two things that consumers think about are privacy and security. I have concerns about the security of all e-mail. So whenever these electronic transactions are going on, whenever people have these concerns, I think they're very valid. I'm sure there's not a member of this Assembly who would like any electronic transactions that they may make or that they're through the process of deciding whether they will make – that's their business, and it should remain their private business.

When we look at the security of on-line payments and how it is a key consumer concern, many experts have suggested that making on-line payments through a secure site with state-of-the-art encryption is safer than handing a credit card to a stranger in a restaurant or a gas station. However, few consumers understand encryption and must take on faith a merchant's assurances of payment security. Now, I don't know where we're going to wind up with all these electronic transactions, but any on-line payment system, whether your signature, or your so-called John Henry, goes on, that system must be secure, it must be reliable, accurate, and lastly, accessible.

Purchasers, or in this case consumers, need to be assured that their payment will not be intercepted by thieves and that any financial information goes only to the intended merchant. Individuals are going to have little control over that signature, in my opinion, in an on-line transaction or, specifically, a purchase. Each transaction leaves a data trail that anyone can compile in a profile of preferences, spending patterns, demographic particulars, and financial status. Merchants can collect valuable marketing information this way.

Now, hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert – I finally got that right. When we think of the enormous commercial potential, I don't know if we are taking enough thought, but that will be determined. Perhaps that can be addressed through regulation if there is a need for that. But the use of that signature should be for what it's intended.

3:00

As more and more personal information becomes digitalized and transmitted through networks, the risk of misuse increases, and when we think of misuse, what do we think of? Well, perhaps these days we're thinking of national security organizations, whether it's the FBI or whether it's CSIS. They are following patterns of electronic

exchanges between terrorist organizations or individual members within that organization. There's no doubt in my mind that it can be done, but there has to be control.

We also have to consider with electronic transactions children, children who are home and children who are vulnerable to slick marketers. We saw reference to this recently on an evening newscast about the slick marketers and seniors in this province, and any system can be exploited.

Those are a few of the cautions that I would have regarding this bill, but I certainly think it is a step forward, and we will see how it works. This bill legally, again, recognizes information that is in electronic form, and on any document that legally requires a signature, an electronic signature can or will fulfill the requirement. It sets the guidelines for electronic transactions, including payments. As I said before, we will see if this is enough. There is always a need for improvement.

I think in closing, Mr. Speaker, this bill is a long overdue recognition of the importance of electronic information to businesses and to government. Guidelines are needed for electronic transactions in order to give reassurances to the clients and providers of the confidentiality and legality of electronic information. Again, I would like to say that I appreciate the work that the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has put into this bill. I certainly hope that if there are any deficiencies as the marketplace progresses with electronic transactions, they can be dealt with forthwith and that consumers are not burnt like the consumers that are faced with large bills after the unfortunate collapse of Canada 3000. But that is another issue, and it's an issue that I'm sure the hon. Minister of Government Services is going to deal with forthwith.

I hear a whisper behind me about pine shakes, and that's another consumer transaction that is still unfolding. It's before the courts, and the courts certainly will deal with that, I am quite confident.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to make some comments about Bill 21, the Electronic Transactions Act, at third reading. It's the practice, of course, that at third reading we will revisit the principles of the bill.

I believe that the bill, as far as it goes, embodies principles that are reflected certainly in electronic transaction elsewhere, and certainly the similar legislation that's been enacted in British Columbia and the California and Pennsylvania acts which we looked at are much more comprehensive than what we have before us today.

The whole business of electronic transactions is not, of course, confined to the Internet. We've been involved in electronic transactions for a number of years. My first sort of scrape with an electronic transaction that went awry was with my credit card. I had used the credit card at an establishment – it was at a hockey game – to pay for a meal. Lo and behold, the next month I received a bill, an entry on my credit card statement, for \$1,000 from a florist shop. I reported to the credit card company that I hadn't made any such purchase and heard nothing. The next month another statement with another entry for a flower shop for \$800; these were for roses. I was subsequently visited by a detective for the credit card company, who informed me that my credit card number was being phoned in to a flower shop in Edmonton by an inmate at the Grande Cache jail who was ordering flowers for his friends and selling the flowers to them at half price and charging the orders by telephone to my account. So it was sort of an early lesson in the kinds of difficulties that electronic transactions, primitive as it was on the telephone, can get you into. I think I've been suspicious ever since, and I'm still very

careful in terms of Internet transactions and haven't quite brought myself to take full advantage of that medium in terms of making purchases and paying for services.

One of the items that the bill touches on, of course, is the question of signatures. Signatures have been central to much of the legislation that has been enacted elsewhere. The questions surrounding signatures are three. First of all, is it signed? Secondly, what is signed? Three, who signed it? Those three concerns have been central certainly to disputes and certainly to fraud cases, and they are dealt with in the bill but only tangentially in terms of those concerns. This is of course more of a concern with faxed materials than it is, actually, with material on the Internet.

But "is it signed?" is a question that is really a very, very difficult one to answer, and unless there are arrangements that have been made by the purchaser or the client and the supplier of a service or a product in terms of how that signature is going to be verified, then it can possibly lead to a great deal of difficulty. In trying to determine that signature, a number of jurisdictions have gone to some lengths to try to make a rigorous test of if it is signed so there's confidence that the signature that appears on the paper is actually the person they think it is. Again, I think this legislation doesn't address that in the kind of detail that it has been addressed elsewhere.

3:10

The second question: what is signed? The question usually surrounds whether a signature that is actually on the record is the signature of the person who has made an order or has asked for a service. It gets involved, particularly if there are attachments to an electronic document. If there are attachments, it becomes much more difficult to determine exactly what is signed unless there is provision for the signature to be generalized to those attachments or some method used to verify that that is the actual case. A number of law cases have centred around the challenge that someone makes claiming that they did not in fact sign a document that a supplier of services holds.

Again, with "who signed it?" it's the need to authenticate that the person whose signature appears on a document is really the person who actually signed it and that it wasn't someone else. Of course, with faxed materials and other such materials then it becomes harder to verify actually who has signed the material. Given the difficulties, particularly in fraud cases, that there have been elsewhere, this has become a greater issue and threatens to be a larger issue in the future.

In the act before us I think one of the highlights is that it legally recognizes information in electronic form. It's the growth of Internet business in particular, I think, that has been the impetus for legislation like this and legislation elsewhere, and it's going to be an increasingly important aspect of our lives. It will be surprising to me if we're not back with amendments to this bill in the spring session or certainly within the life of this Legislature as the kinds of problems that arise from conducting business electronically emerge and require solutions.

So it's a good bill in that it's our initial bill and recognizes the importance of information in the electronic form. Also, the bill recognizes that electronic signatures are legitimate and that it's legally acceptable to do business through electronic means using electronic signatures. Again, it doesn't address some of the questions I raised earlier about the nature of that signature, but I think that will come. It will be interesting to see the kinds of regulations that fall after this bill is passed in the Assembly. It also sets forward the guidelines for electronic transactions, including payments. Again, those are much needed by those people who engage in electronic commerce.

I guess the final and important part of the bill is the part that deals with the Alberta Evidence Act and the use of electronic evidence and the acceptance of electronic evidence by the court system. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we have indicated that we are supportive of the bill. I think that there are other things that need to be developed following the bill and that there are going to be, as I said, new situations arising that will cause amendments back with the bill. I think a number of speakers have addressed the problems of privacy, a concern that all of us have and that, again, is becoming a larger problem as electronic commerce increases.

So with those comments I'd like to conclude. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's well known that electronic transactions are multiplying very, very rapidly. What started out as just a way to order books or music or a way to auction off your goods has become a fundamental part of the business transactions and many other types of transactions of a legal nature that occur within the economy and within society as a whole. So I think that this is a case of the legislative function catching up with the commercial and legal reality of today's world. Even after the collapse of the dot com bubble about a year ago, electronic transactions have continued to become a more and more significant part of the commerce and the interaction of organizations and individuals right around the world. I think it's timely that an act should be established to try and recognize and control the legitimacy of electronic transactions in our society.

I think that this act may be just a first small step in that regard. One of the things that has struck me since I've increasingly been making use of the Internet, including occasionally to purchase things, is the enormous capacity of computer technology to deceive, to trick, and to ensnare people. I think that people need and deserve adequate protection. In that respect, I think that the bill is not going to go far enough in providing those protections, but its focus is really much more on just legitimizing transactions.

I'm concerned, though, that parts of the bill do not provide enough clarity. It indicates: if there's "reliable assurance as to the integrity of the information. . ." It generally doesn't provide clear and strong definitions of some of those things. I suppose those things will remain to be determined by courts, by common law. I don't know. Perhaps on third reading the mover of the legislation could speak further to that. My view is that electronic transactions have become a fact of life, but it's going to be an extremely difficult and onerous task to ensure that the rights of individuals, organizations, companies, and so on are actually protected in the legislation.

3:20

I just want to get back a little bit, Mr. Speaker, to some of the things that I've seen. One thing that I've seen on the Internet is deceptive advertisements that may commit somebody to actually entering into a contract, but what actually appears on the button that you press when you put your cursor over it and click on the mouse is not exactly what it appears to be. The difficulty of proving those things, I think, is something that we should be taking into account when we look at this particular piece of legislation.

There are, I think, many definitions that could be added to this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. For example, it says that consent must be given by a person to "provide or accept information . . . in electronic form." Consent may be "inferred from a person's conduct if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the consent is genuine." The difficulty of proving some of those things

is what the rub is. Everything on the Internet is so transitory, and what appears there one day when you click your mouse is not necessarily what's going to appear there the next day. So I believe that there should be stronger protections for people. It's great and it's fine and it's necessary to recognize electronic transactions, but policing electronic transactions is a much more difficult thing.

I think we also need to go further, Mr. Speaker, and talk about the uses of electronic information that is collected. One of the things that I've noticed is that almost every chain store now when you make a purchase asks for your address, asks for an e-mail, asks for phone numbers, asks for all sorts of information which you're not required to provide to them, and they don't tell you what it's going to be used for. What it's used for primarily is for marketing. So there are types of electronic transactions you may enter into yet not even realize that your information has gone into a computer. The technical development of computer systems and the Internet provide a real challenge for regulation and provide a real challenge to protect consumers and ensure that transactions are, in fact, as enforceable as they may be on paper.

I think the act is a good first step towards that, Mr. Speaker, but it is only a first step and not to be seen, I think, by anyone as the final answer with respect to electronic transactions, which are going to continue to multiply and multiply. I would predict that within 10 years the majority of transactions in the entire society will be conducted electronically, and this act will have to grow and change in order to accommodate those developments.

There are many unforeseen challenges ahead, and I hope that the hon. member will continue to endeavour to stay on top of these emerging issues and provide us with bill after bill, perhaps in electronic form, Mr. Speaker. Maybe one day we'll be voting and amending from home and writing our speeches so that everyone can read them or not, as they choose.

With those short comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and indicate that we are prepared to support this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As usual, it's a privilege to speak to legislation in this Chamber. Our position, as has been made clear, is that we will be supporting this bill. The effect of the bill ultimately is that it recognizes an electronic signature as sufficient to fulfill any legal requirements for signature in a formal way, and as we've all said, that certainly goes with the changes in times in commerce and, indeed, in all kinds of transactions in society, commercial or otherwise.

We've probably all had experiences which raise concerns for us, however, about security with credit cards or, indeed, with other electronic transactions. I know that if I'm in an airport, for example, and make two or three phone calls using a credit card, a phone call is almost immediately made to my house to confirm that I'm actually on the road, because of the prevalence of abuse of electronic commerce.

I actually would concur with the comments of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands that this is probably only a beginning in terms of legislation for electronic transactions, that we really do need to take further steps, and undoubtedly this bill in other forms will be coming back. I wonder, for example, about issues of national security, and while those are certainly beyond the scope of this Legislature, if we are implementing a bill, a law that formally recognizes electronic transactions in this way, has there been any consideration of how this will play into issues of transactions of funds from Alberta to other countries, especially if they are illegal transactions?

I wonder about this because when I look at the definition of an electronic signature here, the meaning seems to be vague, and I'm not at all sure how it is that we are going to avoid or even identify fraud that's occurred. The definition of electronic signature under Bill 21 is: electronic signature "means electronic information that a person creates or adopts in order to sign a record and that is in, attached to or associated with the record." My concern is that this is simply going to allow an undefined number of things to qualify as an electronic signature, and there's no way of verifying the legitimacy or validity of those signatures. I think, for example, of the ability to identify a handwritten signature, and I compare that to the ability of identifying an electronic signature. I don't see any comparable security there. So I am concerned that this bill doesn't go far enough, in effect, in providing security.

This is a case where society has run way ahead of our ability and our speed as legislators, and we are needing to catch up, so it is a reasonable first step. We are seeing that legislation almost identical to this is already in existence in other provinces, like B.C., so certainly we'll support this, and undoubtedly before the next three years are over, we will be back to extend it. In fact, it wouldn't surprise me if that happened sooner rather than later given global developments with electronic commerce and concerns over international security.

Nonetheless, I am pleased to stand and throw my weight behind this. So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to refer the hon. members to my comments of November 13 in *Hansard* which do address a lot of the privacy, security, and other issues that were raised here this afternoon and some good issues. The issue of federal law has also been dealt with in my comments which are in *Hansard* and with regard to the federal act that was passed.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to close debate and ask the support of all members of this House for the passage of Bill 21.

[Motion carried; Bill 21 read a third time]

3:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 28 Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to move second reading of Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001.

These amendments will give the province responsibility for approving, monitoring, and enforcing standards for new and expanding confined feeding operations. These amendments will also increase the province's ability to deal with nuisance complaints such as odour and dust associated with agricultural operations. These are important issues to many Albertans and to many of our agricultural producers.

I should mention, before we go further, that confined feeding operations previously have been referred to as intensive livestock operations. This new term, CFO, is a description that more closely reflects the nature of these livestock operations. CFOs are fenced or enclosed areas where livestock are confined for the purpose of feeding. They do not include grazing or seasonal feeding and bedding sites.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments were not conceived yesterday. They are the result of more than three years of extensive consultation with the livestock industry, the public, municipalities, and other organizations representing stakeholders across the province. You will recall reports prepared by the Livestock Regulations Stakeholder Advisory Group in May of 2000, which proposed a regulatory framework for livestock operations. In addition, a committee that I had the pleasure of chairing recently prepared a report titled Sustainable Management of the Livestock Industry in Alberta, which dealt with the issue of roles in an approval process.

Through three years of work that included countless hours of presentations and thousands of pages of submissions, there were several clear, common threads. We heard the need for consistent, transparent, science-based decisions that would guide the development of new and expanding CFOs. We heard the need for improved monitoring and enforcement of these livestock operations. We heard the need for a system that would ensure the sustainability of our multi million dollar livestock industry while ensuring the protection of our air, water, and soil. The amendments that we are debating today meet those needs. Firstly, by broadening the mandate of the Natural Resources Conservation Board to include the approval, monitoring, and enforcement of new and expanding CFOs, we will provide a one-window approach for the livestock industry and the public. Secondly, we will achieve consistency and transparency, because the NRCB will be the single agency that will approve applications for new and expanding CFOs rather than a myriad of municipal councils. Finally, we will achieve our goal of science-based decisions rather than, as we have sometimes seen, emotion and political expediency.

Municipalities will continue to play an important role in this process. We encourage municipalities to develop land use plans that identify where CFOs would not be compatible with new or future developments. Each municipality will automatically be notified and its input will be sought when an application is received for a CFO within its municipal boundaries.

Mr. Speaker, the NRCB is an excellent choice for administering this provincial responsibility. It has the basic infrastructure in place so that we can add to its responsibilities. The NRCB is an agency that does not report to Agriculture, Environment, or Municipal Affairs. Its neutrality through a reporting structure to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development will be critical for its credibility in locating, monitoring, and enforcing new or expanding CFOs. As well, the NRCB will ensure that existing CFOs continue to comply with the municipal conditions under which they were approved. These existing operations as well as seasonal feeding and bedding operations will all be required to comply with new manure management regulations within three years.

It is quite true that not all municipalities support our decision to assume provincial responsibility for CFOs, but not all municipalities have the same level of technical expertise to approve and monitor this ever changing industry, nor do all municipalities have the will to make decisions that are often charged with emotion and conflict. This is precisely why we are assuming provincial responsibility for new and expanding CFOs.

The livestock industry is a critical part of our Alberta economy. Last year it contributed \$4.4 billion, and this year livestock receipts are expected to grow to a record \$5 billion dollars. It is the strength of the livestock industry that is supporting our agricultural industry during times of adverse weather conditions and low commodity prices. In order for our livestock industry to grow, we need to eliminate uncertainty and inconsistency. We cannot continue to see livestock operations leave Alberta in favour of neighbouring provinces or the United States because of a lack of clear and

consistent regulation. But our livestock industry will not grow at any cost in Alberta. Equally important is the protection of our environment. That is why it is so important for us as a province to assume responsibility for new and expanding CFOs. We need consistent regulations and standards that ensure the protection of our environment and the stewardship of our air, water, and soil.

Via the expanded role of the NRCB we will be able to show Albertans that the livestock industry is responsible. Through the work of municipal land use planning we'll be able to identify areas where the development of CFOs would not be compatible with current or future land uses, and through a consistent process across Alberta we'll be able to ensure the successful development and expansion of the livestock industry in our province, an industry that can produce world-class product while creating economic activity and jobs.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to begin by complimenting all of the people who have worked on developing this set of recommendations and all the work that's been put in by members of the livestock industry and the Member for Leduc. It's been yeoman's work indeed in terms of trying to get a consensus. Well, in fact, I don't really think it is a consensus yet at this point, but it's at least a good majority of the stakeholders in the industry and in the communities outside with the kind of changes that are being proposed.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

We look back, Mr. Speaker, and I think everyone has to accept and recognize the benefits that will come to Alberta if we move to the provincial level environmental approval as proposed in this act and through the approval process of the NRCB. The thing that is important is that when we were dealing with approvals before, in a lot of cases conflicting information was provided, and the local municipalities in the context of their decision-making didn't have on staff the expertise. In some cases the cost of providing or bringing in experts became prohibitive, and what we saw was basically a lot of discussion without the ability to truly evaluate the information being presented as to whether or not it was really a threat to the environment and the community.

Mr. Speaker, there were also a lot of allegations that some local governments were using the environment and environmental standards as either means to prohibit or to encourage future development and more development. In the areas where they were trying to encourage that development, you were ending up with lower standards, and that basically affected the environment for all of Alberta, not just, you know, that one particular operation. So we had to look at what was needed, and the process that the committee went through in trying to come up with a set of processes I think has given us kind of a starting point here where we're going to be able to see whether or not it works.

3:40

There are some real issues that come up in terms of, I guess, the recommendations, the changes that are being put into place in this act. I think I'll start with kind of the lighter side of it that I see in the sense that, you know, we're changing the name again of the operations we're dealing with, just at a point when the public begins to understand what an intensive livestock operation is and what impact that may have on their community. I know that now carries

a reasonably negative connotation, but when you look at the new name, a confined feeding operation, you look at it from the point of view of: I've got a neighbour that's got a few little goats that are totally confined, and there's only about 10 of them. Most people would say: "Well, they're confined. That's a feeding operation because he carries the food out to them every day." I think the idea of an intensive livestock operation, that title in itself, notwithstanding the potential negative connotation that's out there in the community, reflected the issue much better than a confined feeding operation title, because its density really has the potential environmental threat, the potential community nuisance effect. It's not whether or not they're confined in an area. It's the level of density that is really significant.

You know, I don't see the change in name really helping all that much. In fact, to me it really creates another interpretation problem that we're going to have, and the definitions that show up in the act don't really help a lot, other than the fact it excludes grazing activities. So if I've got a little pen the size of this Legislature and put 50 animals in it and go out every day and plant a piece of grass, I can say that my animals are grazing, that I'm not really feeding them. How do we get around these kinds of definitions? We have to start talking about process as much as we do about definition.

I guess the real issues that come up, Mr. Speaker, are how we go about dealing with both the approval process and the impact that we see coming out into the community. One of the things that I think has always been important in terms of how we define and how we put together the legislation under which our communities act has been: what is the point of control? I guess when I look through Bill 28 now, I come out and I say: okay; what options are available for a local community to in effect determine their character, who they are, what they want as a community? I come back and I say: well, you know, we've really taken away from those local communities the chance to determine who they are, what they are, the kind of economic activity that goes on in that community with respect to livestock production.

The act goes through – and we've heard the minister on numerous occasions stand up and say: well, you know, the local community will be able to have input because they're going to have a land use plan. Well, I was hoping, Mr. Speaker, to be able to look into this bill and see this bill provide flexibility for the local communities in determining their land use plan, because right now basically the local community can define land as agricultural, as pasture, or as irrigation under the Municipal Government Act. We end up with land that's classified as agriculture then having two options: the first being permitted uses on that land and discretionary uses. Well, if we go through, the options that are now available in that land use plan are to take this agriculture area and either designate it as livestock permitted or livestock discretionary. So in effect what we've done is given the community a chance to say: yeah, over here we're not going to argue if there's an intensive livestock operation; it's okay to put it over there.

I'll use the county of Lethbridge as an example. You know, Feedlot Alley gets lots of good publicity and some not so good publicity, but the idea is that the county of Lethbridge, just by default almost more than by plan, has divided by the river. On the north side of the river we see a lot of our large-scale livestock operations. On the south side of the river we see more acreage developments. We see the McCain potato processing plant coming in there. The livestock activity that's there is what you would call small to medium size as opposed to what I call intensive livestock but I'm going to have to now call confined feeding operations. What we end up with is that that community in a way made a choice that over here, in the aggregate, intensive livestock is a permitted use.

When you start talking to the individuals who are affected by one of those operations, they don't see it as a permitted use; they still see it as discretionary. Even if the county were to say: okay; in this area we want to have permitted use; over here intensive livestock is discretionary – that's the only options they've got under the Municipal Government Act.

Now, if someone wants to put a confined feeding operation over here where it's discretionary, they make application to the NRCB, the NRCB looks at it, and from what I read out of this so far – you know, we don't have the regulations yet, so we can't really understand how this is going to be applied. What I see here is that, essentially, if this is a permitted use by the local municipality in their land use plan, the local municipality has very little if any input into a decision by the NRCB. If it's a discretionary designation, the local municipality can come in and say, "Okay; we've got these concerns," or "No; let it go ahead." Now, the trouble is that if they say, "We've got these concerns," and the NRCB says environmentally, because it's only environmentally that they can make a judgment – you know, if it fits all of the criteria that are outlined in the guidelines and the regulations, the NRCB basically can't say no. So what happens is that we've got a discretionary parcel, the NRCB is confined by the regulations as to what they can consider, and if it meets all of those, they basically have to approve it. So the local community had essentially no say in whether or not that operation went ahead or was stopped.

Mr. Speaker, I guess what I was hoping to see in this piece of legislation was some absolutes at the local level. Why shouldn't we take this act and also amend the Municipal Government Act and say, "Let's give the local municipality not only the agriculture discretionary/nondiscretionary options within their land use plan, but let's give them an option of, say, as a minimum, three levels of agriculture development"? One would be kind of minimal livestock and cropland-type agriculture land, the other one would be small-scale or medium-scale livestock, and then the other one would be intensive livestock, or confined feeding operation, compatible. This way the local community in effect can say no. Under this bill the local community cannot say no.

What we also can do in this context that I've just described is put in a set of guidelines or requirements or even a law that says: you can't effectively exclude confined feeding operations from all of your land; there must be some land in your jurisdiction where intensive livestock, or confined feeding operations, are a permitted use. This would in effect take away the option that we saw come up, Mr. Speaker, when the Taiwan Sugar application was going in in the county of Forty Mile. There was a lot of discussion about the fact that one of their five barns was going to be in a place that the community felt was too close to a recreation park. Well, what we could do, then, is under that kind of an activity, if the local community wanted to say: okay, around that recreation park, for the dust or for the odour reasons, which we don't really have good scientific evidence to talk about minimum distances on, let's talk about, say, giving them an extra mile or giving them an extra two miles' distance separation. The local community can say: that's what we want. Taiwan Sugar then could have just moved their one out of the five barns two or three miles away, found another place where it fit the environmental standards, and it would have fit. To me this is the kind of flexibility in determining the local community that we should be encouraging for our rural municipalities.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, if we're an urban municipality – a city, a town, a village – we get a whole range of classifications for the commercial and industrial development of our land base. How many within the

city of Edmonton or within the city of Calgary? I know in the city of Lethbridge we have a whole series of levels of industrial land classification. We have a whole series of levels of commercial land classification, never mind residential. But what we've got there is that basically the community can say: we want heavy industry over there, light industry here, medium industry here, high-density commercial. They get a choice. Why is it that we're not willing to give that same choice of defining the community to our rural municipalities? We're basically saying: if you don't want this confined feeding operation, as long as it meets the environmental standards, too bad.

Well, I think that that is not being responsible as government. We as a government are elected to basically make sure that our communities that we represent have a chance to have a degree of self-determination, of self-definition, and I think it's very important that we reconsider this aspect of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, in the end I'm going to vote for this bill because this bill does essentially create provincial level environmental standards, which are an absolute must for this industry. But if we're going to do that, what we also should do is remember the communities we come from. We've got to make sure that these communities have a sense that they are part of the process.

Mr. Speaker, I live two miles south of what is going to be called a confined feeding operation. I live a mile and a half east of what will be called a confined feeding operation. Now, I enjoy my community. I don't think there's been more than maybe one day in the 13 years I've lived there that I've felt: boy, I don't like living here because of those two feeding activities. When we have responsible operators, we can have enjoyable communities. The interesting part is that I live in the county of Lethbridge, but I got a letter last spring from the city of Lethbridge, a questionnaire talking about what should happen in the fringe area around the city. The city boundary is two miles away from me. They're talking about controlling what we do two miles into the county, yet we're not going to allow a local community any say in how they define what goes on in their area. If the city of Lethbridge gets their way, my land is now going to be subject to development approval by the city of Lethbridge. I live in the county, yet the county is going to have no say over what I do with my land. Kind of a little bit of a discrepancy here.

I think we've got to start looking at: how do we deal with the sense that the communities should have some input? As I've said already, I truly believe that we have to also make sure that a county doesn't have the option to say: zero; no confined feeding operation. There has to be a blend, where we can give those counties a choice.

I was involved in another one of these appeals this summer. I went and I sat through it and I listened to it. In this particular case, Mr. Speaker, the appellants won the appeal. The confined feeding operation was not allowed. You know what? The very next day I got a call from one of the individuals who was leading the opposition to that feeding operation saying: "Ken, do you think it's okay if we go talk to this farmer? We want to help him because we know where we can put that. We know where we'll support him putting that. We just didn't want it in the area he wanted it." Now, that's community control. That's communities working together, Mr. Speaker.

This does nothing to promote that kind of working together. If we don't give them a chance to develop a reasonable level of community location, definition, community character, all we're going to do is continue to create a situation that leads to more and more of us versus them in a rural community. Mr. Speaker, I get along well with my neighbours. I don't want a situation where it's us versus them. If we've got options, if we've got a planning process that is inclusive but not in any way exclusive to the point

that we can eliminate an option, that's what creates community, because we work together to define that kind of community. That's what's important. That's what's missing in this act.

The environmental approval process that the NRCB is going to be given, Mr. Speaker, is great. I commend the committee for doing this. There are a couple of issues that we need to talk about in that area in terms of how they create standards. We talk about nuisances associated with dust and odour. How do we define those standards? The study that was done in southern Alberta at one point in the last couple of years showed that there were levels of chemicals in the air that were at levels deemed harmful to human health. How do we control those? How do we measure those, and how do we deal with it? Mr. Speaker, if I remember right – you know, I've been up here for four days now – once in a while the wind blows in southern Alberta. Maybe it's going to blow it this way today, and it's going to blow it that way tomorrow. If it doesn't blow, that's when we really get concentration problems, because normally the winds move it out into eastern Alberta and Saskatchewan before we get a chance to smell it. You know, those are the kinds of things that we have to look at: how do we deal with appropriate levels of measurement?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

One of the big concerns that I've heard from a lot of the landowners in connection with some of the manure application guidelines has dealt with: how do we deal with issues that have not yet been fully quantified? The material that I saw presented by the committee when they traveled the province doing their consultation was excellent when it came to showing the impact of livestock waste application and nitrates and nitrogen and the ability of crops to take up that nitrogen as a nutrient in the subsequent growing year. There was really good information there. There was a lot of information about how if we start using that land base as a nitrate sink, where we're actually putting on more than the crop can take up, then we're basically creating a potential water quality threat. I know, because it was talked about at length during the process of dealing with these consultations, that manure applications will be limited now to the uptake ability of the crop in the subsequent year. Great. This is the kind of rule we need.

What do we do with phosphates? There is very little information that talks about what is a harmful level to plants in the soil. Many of our soils in Alberta have exceedingly high levels of some chemicals and still grow crops well; others don't. So we need to make sure that that kind of scientific information is available, and it's through an agency like the NRCB that we'll have the co-ordinated effect and possibilities to basically bring together that kind of information. A local community would never be able to do it one community at a time.

4:00

I guess what we have to also look at is some of the impacts of the heavy metals or the metal compounds that are being applied with these livestock wastes. We're seeing now some areas and some lands in Alberta where very high levels of livestock wastes have been applied over a period of years. The content of some chemicals could be harmful both to the plant or to animals grazing on it in the future. You know, I'm talking here about some of the heavy metals, copper, some of these that basically can create toxicity levels if they're there in too heavy a concentration. The question then comes as: at what point will we be asking farmers to do soil tests, and what standards will we be using to effectively make sure that these concentrations don't end up being in our land at a level that becomes either detrimental to future crop growth or detrimental to livestock

if they're subsequently grazed on it or even potentially a danger to humans if they're associated or in any way use that land in a future activity?

I guess those are kind of the questions that come up in the context of the planning process that's allowed by this act. I would really encourage the government to look at the option of changing the classifications within the Municipal Government Act as opposed to just allowing for this land use plan where you have the agriculture discretionary/nondiscretionary option, because it doesn't provide sufficient control or sufficient input by the local community.

The other issue that I wanted to address kind of briefly is that it doesn't show in wording in the bill, but in some of the background information that was put out with the government's announcement, there is an indication that the Farmers' Advocate will be involved in this process when there's a complaint being raised. Mr. Speaker, I see the Farmers' Advocate sitting in the gallery, and I welcome him here to join us in this debate. Maybe we should all just give him a round of applause, because he does a lot of good work for rural Alberta out there.

The issue that comes up, Mr. Speaker, is that historically I've always perceived the Farmers' Advocate office as basically an office that works as its name describes. It's an advocate for farmers when issues of disagreement arise between them and the community, between them and other business activities, or between them and the government. What we're possibly seeing here, if I put what's in the act together with the news release that came out where it specifically named the Farmers' Advocate as the minister's representative, is a possible crossing of the line by the Farmers' Advocate office in the sense that where the Farmers' Advocate has always been there for the farmers, now all of a sudden if an acreage owner or a business in the community or someone else in that community decides they don't like a confined feeding operation, what they'll do is they'll be directed to the Farmers' Advocate office for first contact resolution, if you want to call it that. It's the first chance to hear that complaint.

So what you've now all of a sudden done is you've put the Farmers' Advocate office over here advocating against an agricultural operation. You know, I know that the intent here is to come up with a mutual solution, but you also have to remember that perception is a big part of how we deal with the issues of confidence that work with our public agencies. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that on a number of occasions when attending these hearings about intensive livestock operations in the past three or four years, there was always the question raised about: well, where does Alberta Agriculture stand? At the last meeting they were over here with the appellants complaining about an agriculture operation because they were being subpoenaed or being used to support opposition to this agriculture operation. The next day you go to a different meeting and here they are over on the side with the farmer, promoting the intensive livestock operation. So everybody was saying: "How can we trust Alberta Agriculture? One day they're over here fighting against agriculture. The next hearing they're over here fighting for agriculture."

Mr. Speaker, the Farmers' Advocate office does great work for the agriculture industry of this province, and I really express concern that we're going to reduce or in some way influence the public's perception of where that Farmers' Advocate's office has its responsibilities. To me it should be out there advocating for the agriculture community, not supporting individuals or being a voice for individuals who are arguing against the agriculture community of this province. I haven't had a lot of chance to address that issue in terms of getting the Farmers' Advocate's true perspective of how his position will be fixed by that because we've only had the bill in this form for a couple of days and we just haven't been able to

schedule that. But this is my interpretation of it. I would hope that the minister and the Member for Leduc sit down with the Farmers' Advocate office and fully discuss what are the implications of that office being designated as the nuisance contact.

Mr. Speaker, given the way our government is set up and the role of some of the other functions, I think it might be more appropriate in this context for these nuisance complaints to be handled through an agency something like the Ombudsman office rather than an office whose specific mandate is to deal on behalf of the agriculture community in this province. That's an issue that comes up, about how public opinion and public acceptance of this bill are going to work out, so I don't want to see us being in any kind of a situation where we end up with any kind of a lessening of the farmers' confidence in that office.

The other issue that I wanted to deal with was associated with the process a little bit, and maybe I should delay this to the committee stage. But when we're starting to look at the process that's gone through when an application comes out, what we're seeing in here is that with the notification requirements for individuals in the area around an application for a CFO, section 19 of this act makes that notification conditional. In other words, they don't have to notify the affected parties. Mr. Speaker, when you go back to the definition, the affected parties will be defined by a set of conditions given to us in regulations, but I've always assumed that affected parties would be, say, people – landowners, landholders, other businesses, whatever – who are within the potential area of impact as defined by the environmental setbacks that are going to be necessary. Now all of a sudden we've got a law which says, well, maybe we don't have to notify everybody in that area.

I don't think that notification should be conditional. The word "may" should not be in that part of the act; it should be "must." If we are going to be open in this process with the people of the community, especially the affected parties, and if we have proper regulations, we'll be able to clearly determine who is and who is not an affected party. It's not like we have a lot of debate right now about, you know, whether or not I'm an affected party when I'm 50 miles away from it just because I don't happen to have a particular liking for that kind of an operation. Well, I don't think that is reasonable in terms of an affected party, but when we're dealing with specifically notifying individuals who by regulation have been designated as an affected party, I personally and I'm sure most Albertans would not accept a conditional notification as part of this process. I would like to encourage the government to really consider the possibility of making that notification mandatory. Change "may" to "must" in section 19.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, I guess part of what we have to do here in this process is build confidence in this new process, this new approval which is going to be done, in a lot of people's minds, a long ways away from their community. We should make sure that they feel confident about it, and by having "may" in there, it's conceivable that at some point in the future someone may just make a choice and say, "Well, this seems to be quite simple; we won't," and no notification goes out. Yet when it gets to the community level, all of a sudden we have a reaction, and then the confidence in the credibility of this process will be questioned. I don't think we want to have that just for the sheer lack of sending out a couple of letters. I think that the cost of those few letters going out to those people in the community is well worth the effort because it will sustain and will build confidence that this process works, that this process is in the best interest of all Albertans, and that this process will surely create a better Alberta, where agriculture has a chance to flourish

and where the debate and the community divisions that we've seen over the last few years associated with this process can become a thing of the past.

Again, Mr. Speaker, in concluding I want to say thank you very much to the Member for Leduc, and I want him to make sure he expresses that thanks to all the members who served on his committee, to all the people in the communities who had input to it. This is a great start. There are a few fine-tuning things to it that would even make it a better piece of legislation. I think I've addressed a few of those, and as I get a chance, maybe over the weekend, to look at some of the particular clauses in it, I may have some more comments when we get to committee debate. But at this point I would encourage everybody to support this. It's better by far than what we've got right now, but it could be a lot better. It could be a lot more sensitive to the communities, and it could create a really great Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak as well to Bill 28 and also would express appreciation for the work of the people who worked with the hon. Member for Leduc on this, but I can't stand here like the Leader of the Official Opposition and say that I'm prepared to support the bill.

There are a number of reasons for that, and first and foremost I think one has to look at the underlying motivation for the bill. This bill arose out of some disputes that occurred in different parts of the province over the siting of, in some cases, some very large hog feed operations in which local authorities used their jurisdiction in order to prevent the siting of these plants. We heard the Premier yesterday at his scrum talking about the capacity of Alberta to increase hog operations and that there was room in the province, according to the Premier, for an additional 10 million hogs. We in the New Democrat opposition have to conclude that whatever other positive benefits in terms of uniformity this bill may bring, the underlying motivation for it is to ensure that local authorities cannot hold up the development of large-scale livestock operations, particularly with respect to pig operations.

So we looked quite carefully at the bill and what it contains, and we think that it's a serious matter. If the Premier is sincere about wanting to increase hog production to the point that we have 10 million more hogs, which is I think a three- or four-fold increase in the number we now have, then that could have very serious ramifications not only for the environment of the province but for the quality of life of people in rural areas and in many towns and, indeed, cities around the province.

One of the biggest threats – and I quoted this when we debated the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler's motion last time. We drew attention in the House to the numerous examples of contamination of groundwater by these large-scale farms, not all of them, in the United States. There were many examples cited in the report that I referred to in my comments at that time.

Groundwater in this province is probably our most threatened natural resource. When we're touring the province, we run into stories from people from all walks of life, but quite often from people who are involved in farming, about contamination of groundwater, depletion of groundwater by drought, contamination through the activities of the oil and gas industry, and also contamination due to unregulated agricultural activities. We happen to believe that as an environmental threat, the threat to Alberta's groundwater is probably one of the most profound problems that will

be facing this province in the next 10 years, particularly if we see a continuation of drought conditions in the southern part of the province.

So we're concerned when the Premier says that he wants to introduce up to 10 million additional hogs into the agricultural industry of this province. We think that this act is designed first and foremost in order to facilitate that occurring.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about local jurisdiction, because it's interesting in the Klapstein report, which I have here, that when people were asked about the approval process, they favoured for the siting of these operations, ILOs – now they're CFOs, CIAs, KGBs. I don't know what they are. They're not NDPs; we know that. Thirty-eight of the respondents surveyed supported local permitting of these operations with provincial standards in place, and only seven of those responding to the committee supported provincial approval as being the most desirable way to handle applications to introduce these.

So we see a strong role for the provincial government in regulating environmental standards for these livestock operations, and that is not incompatible with local control over permitting and maintaining local independence when it comes to land use planning. I'll come back to that a little bit later, because I think that that independence is not taken away explicitly but is curtailed by implication in this act. So local permitting is not something that I think most people object to.

4:20

What's got to happen, in our view, is that there need to be very strong environmental regulations and requirements that have to be met and that the information must be provided and that the province needs to make sure that standardized information is provided to local authorities in order for them to make their judgment. If you can provide a high level of information and standardized information, you will go a long way towards helping local authorities make more or less uniform decisions which still reflect the rights of citizens in their community to say no to an intensive livestock operation if they believe that it will compromise their local environment or the quality of their life.

I don't believe that bureaucrats in Ottawa . . . Ottawa? This is Edmonton. I don't believe that bureaucrats here any more than in Ottawa . . . [interjections] I'm just trying to use your arguments, I guess. I don't believe that bureaucrats here in Edmonton are in the best position to determine for people in different parts of Alberta, whether it's southern Alberta or eastern Alberta or northern Alberta, whether or not the kind of large-scale industrial operation that is now becoming more common is right for them. That is something that we believe very strongly belongs to the locally elected people and locally responsible people in their community to make the decision on what's good for them. It shouldn't be up to bureaucrats from whatever board or whatever department to make those kinds of judgments for the local people. There's nothing incompatible, Mr. Speaker, between having strong provincial regulations, strong provincial standards, strong provincial protection of the environment and maintaining local control over the final decision on whether or not a particular operation should be sited.

Now, I want to come to land use. The act retains the ability of local municipalities to do their own land use planning, and that's as it should be. But there's a clear implication that there's a negative option here that's implied in the legislation, and that is that the municipality must define places where these operations will not be allowed, and clearly they'll not be allowed to make that on a blanket basis. So instead of saying, "We're going to plan for intensive livestock operations in this particular part of our county, and we think that this is an appropriate place to deal with them," they have

to say, "These are the places they can't go," and then anybody that wants to put one in is allowed to go anywhere else in the county that's not specifically designated as off-limits. Clearly, there's an implied suggestion here that any county that tries to put too many areas off-limits will run afoul of the provincial government, and they won't be allowed to make use of that to protect themselves from this.

There are some specific things that I want to deal with. I appreciated that the Deputy Premier and minister of agriculture yesterday indicated to the Assembly that we would be allowed to see the draft regulations, because as is all too common, much of the devil is in the details, and the details are in the regulations. So we appreciate that fact, but I would argue strongly, Mr. Speaker, that we need to see those draft regulations before we get to committee stage on this bill. How else will we be able to judge which amendments might be appropriate for the act if we don't see what's going to be in the regulations? There may be things in the regulations that we strongly disagree with and therefore would like to see enshrined actually in the act itself and not left to the regulations. We can't make that judgment here until we have the draft regulations. So I would urge the government and urge the Deputy Premier and minister of agriculture to bring forward those draft regulations before the bill leaves the committee stage.

I've received a letter from some farmers in Hughenden, and they have some interesting comments about the current state of protection for the environment and the community with respect to large-scale operations. They're talking about the codes of practice, and I'll just quote here.

Although lip service is given in the text to the possibility of considering phosphorus as a limiting nutrient in manure, the land base tables continued to be based, not only on nitrogen, but on crop available nitrogen only. This is the nitrogen available to crops in the first year only from the breakdown of manure and represents about 1/3 of total nitrogen in manure for beef cattle and 1/2 in liquid hog manure. Thus the land base needs to be 2 to 3 times greater for sustainable nitrogen application only. When one considers phosphorus utilization (and countries who are more advanced in ILO development have eventually chosen this as their standard), the land base needs to be 6 to 7 [times] greater than the Code's tables for sustainable manure application.

Another point that they make which I think is really important is that "there is no consideration given to the cumulative effects of ILO developments." Another point which I think is very interesting:

The engineering standards for earthen manure storage are completely inadequate . . . these structures can hold millions of gallons of untreated manure – lagoons for treated human waste require a 1" thick engineering protocol, Design and Construction of Liners for Municipal Wastewater Stabilization Ponds, prepared by Alberta Environment.

What we have is a situation of very, very, very large lagoons of untreated liquid hog manure that don't even have the same design standards as those required for municipalities for treated human waste.

So, clearly, we have a long way to go in ensuring the protection of our environment from the hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of tonnes of manure that are going to be produced in this province if the government's policy proceeds as proposed. Mr. Speaker, I think there's a long way to go and many things that have to be done before we in our place here will be satisfied with the government's policy with respect to intensive livestock operations and satisfied with the bill that's before us.

There are a couple of other points I'd like to just make, Mr. Speaker. I think that the definition of an affected person needs to be defined in the legislation. Someone who's affected may not actually be entitled to have standing before the board in an appeal, so we

think that that's a very, very important definition that needs to be set out in the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, just to conclude my comments, I believe there are some positive elements to this bill. I think the establishment of some uniformity across the province is a desirable thing, but it does not have to come at the expense of local autonomy. It's entirely possible for very strong and very uniform standards to be established by the provincial government, yet the permitting can remain in the control of the local people, who are most affected by those decisions. That's the fundamental flaw with the bill. It's not the fundamental flaw with the government's policy of encouraging very large-scale developments and very large increases in the hog population of Alberta, which is going to have impacts that I think the government doesn't yet foresee, but there is no reason, in our view, to take away that local autonomy over permitting or, indeed, to require local authorities in their land use planning to essentially use negative option zoning for the siting of these plants.

I just make a comment that the last few times I have driven down to Calgary – and I don't know if other members have had the same experience – just north of Red Deer there is a very, very bad smell. It's on highway 2, and I made some inquiries about it, Mr. Speaker. I've been traveling between Calgary and Edmonton my entire life by car, and I almost went into the ditch, as a matter of fact, the first time I smelled it. It was terrible. It was pretty bad. [interjections] You know, the members might find it humorous, but the fact of the matter is that if you live there, it's pretty bad.

4:30

What happens when the government policy takes its final effect and we have this massive increase in intensive hog operations in the province? There'll be large parts of the province that will smell like that, and I can tell you that the people will recognize that the smell goes far beyond just the livestock operations, that it extends as well to a government that puts the hog industry ahead of the quality of life of the people of Alberta throughout the province, Mr. Speaker. So you can take it as lightheartedly as you want, but it in fact is going to be a very, very serious problem for all of the members of this Assembly to deal with over the coming years as these operations multiply and as the provincial government does away with local autonomy in order to facilitate their development. The people will know where the smell is coming from.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001. I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments on this particular subject, and I would like to start by thanking the Member for Leduc, who did do extensive consultations and extensive work in bringing this particular amendment act to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act forward. I have been most impressed by all speakers this afternoon and what they see in the act as strengths and some of the shortcomings of the act. I would have to say that I certainly would in the end be supporting this. I think it's going to take us to a position that we require in this province.

I also have had the opportunity on numerous occasions to listen to the Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, who I think, when it comes to agriculture, is considered one of the leading people not only in this province but in the entire country. So we've certainly benefited as a caucus from his wise counsel, and that is certainly one of the benefits that we have had and I do enjoy.

When we are dealing with these confined feeding operations, there

are some things, and one of the concerns brought up was how this will impact our municipalities and how the control for allowing these in municipalities is going to be taken away from the municipalities. This certainly seems to fly in the opposite direction of comments made in this House by the Minister of Municipal Affairs when he announced that he is looking at a new format, a future where there will be stronger partnerships between provincial and municipal governments. So to take that control away from our municipalities and place it under provincial jurisdiction certainly is something that I think we have to address in this act, particularly when you think, Mr. Speaker, that this act could come into effect in 47 days, on January 1, 2002.

Now, there are certain conditions that do support intensive livestock operations, or confined feeding operations, as we now are calling them. I had the opportunity approximately a year ago to tour Feedlot Alley in southern Alberta. As part of that tour I had the opportunity to discuss these operations with a number of owners, and these are owners, Mr. Speaker, that I would certainly call responsible. They were owners that certainly realized the impact of their decisions. What impressed me most about their decisions was that if they didn't adhere to strong environmental conditions, then the effects of those decisions would shut down their operation.

One of the other things that impressed me on that tour is why that particular location has so many intensive livestock operations in it. Of course, one reason is the type of soil that we have down in that particular region. What we have there is a clay base, a clay base that is quite thick, and we all know that clay, certainly because of the very fine texture of it, is a soil that will compact. The more it compacts, the less permeable it is to water. What it does is it allows these intensive livestock operations to actually sculpture the land so that they can control any runoff that occurs on that property, so they are able to collect all the waste. As well, it gives them the opportunity, for example, if it is a cattle operation, to keep those pens extremely clean. So from that perspective I'm not concerned.

A second perspective that I was very impressed with in these operations is the amount of research they have done in order to test different types of food, different types of feed that these animals will use, and in doing that, they also looked at the amount of manure that would be produced and not only the amount of manure that could be produced but the different quantities of land that they would require in order to be able to spread this manure to grow their feed and whatever. So certainly a tremendous, tremendous responsible operation.

We have to remember that some of these have an extremely huge impact on the particular neighbourhood that they're in. We toured one particular lot, and this person had three lots which were capable of holding 25,000 head of cattle. If we think that each one of those animals is worth somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1,000, we are looking at an operation of \$25 million worth of stock in those particular pens. It is a huge impact and particularly a huge impact if it is not governed properly. So what we have here with the responsible owners was a system where certainly the manure waste was reused as fertilizer to grow their feed, and this production was very, very responsible.

Now, then, the other thing that I like about this particular bill is that for once we are getting standard regulations throughout the province, and there has been a great need for these since the 1980s. As well, when we look at the need for these, it was outlined very, very specifically, Mr. Speaker, with a letter that I tabled in the House two days ago. It was from Barry and Lana Love, and they reside in the county of Flagstaff. What they wrote in their letter was that they felt "the need to strongly urge you not to take the ILO sitting out of the hands of local Municipalities and Counties." Again,

when I look at this bill, I certainly see this as one of the weaknesses and one of the few weaknesses of this bill in the fact that the decisions that impact these people are not going to be made at a local level and not by people who are familiar with that particular region.

4:40

As well, we heard the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East talk earlier of how even though he is outside the city of Lethbridge – he's two miles away – they wish to make regulations which will affect people outside of the county on intensive livestock operations. So again certainly a concern.

I see in the bill, when we look in here at section 5(1)(b), that we'll appoint 3 persons as an agricultural practice review committee to consider the application or referral, 2 of whom must have experience in the type of farming operation to which the application or referral relates.

It is the Farmers' Advocate who will establish the agricultural practice review committee. Again, there is no guarantee that this person will be familiar with what is happening in that particular municipality. Certainly I think that over time the concern is, as well, that as this process gets entrenched, there will be less and less monitoring of local conditions.

Now, then, as well, when I look into this particular bill, it certainly does recognize the need that across this province we do have to have standards. It does recognize that need. However, Mr. Speaker, the standards that need to be developed by the province should not only be based on scientifically sound research that assesses the unique environmental characteristics of Alberta, but they must be applied and evaluated by staff with technical and professional expertise, enabling sound, objective planning decisions at the local level. Certainly in the feedlots that I visited, some of this was taking place. In fact, in all of them it was taking place. These people were very, very concerned about water quality, and they did have processes set up so they could test their water quality and to make sure that there hadn't been leakage into the water table. Again, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has indicated, our water in this province is a great resource, one of our greatest, and certainly one, if conditions as they have been in recent years continue, that is going to become more and more valuable. Certainly the last thing we would want to do there is to pollute that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Now, as well, another issue that was raised here today was certainly the density of ILOs. Again, these confined feeding operations, as we said, can hold a tremendous number of animals in a very, very small space. Certainly people in municipalities should have some control over the number of those that would occur in any given area. As I have read through this – and I have to be quite honest; I have not had the opportunity to delve into this in great detail – that certainly is an issue that I think I would like to see addressed, if not in the bill then certainly in the regulations. I look forward to looking at the draft regulations when they are available.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think that pretty well completes my comments on this particular bill at this time. I do look forward to the comments that other hon. members have in relation to this bill. It not only has a tremendous impact on our communities but on the economics of this province and certainly has a great potential to develop the agriculture industry in this province even more. So with those comments I will cede the floor to other members.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just make a few remarks about Bill 28. First, I want to compliment our member who has worked so hard to try and put together a bill that would be a balance, if you like, or a reasonable way of deciding whether or not intensive or confined feeding operations should go ahead. This has not been easy. We have had committees in the past for a number of years now going across the province planning and making recommendations, and of course it certainly is tough to arrive at the proper balance.

I wanted to say that the constituents in the Wainwright constituency are certainly looking forward to this bill, and we have had in the past some very bitter disputes over confined feeding operations. If you ever get into the middle and see what happens to the people and to the towns and the hard feelings that come out of it, it's a lifetime of disagreement between families, sometimes between neighbours, and it does do a lot of harm to the communities.

We do look forward to it for a number of reasons, but one of them is that there's got to be a higher comfort level that we are protecting our environment. I truly believe that we've done a good job in this province in the past, and I know that we work hard at protecting our water and have been successful at it. We need to be able to portray that comfort to the people that are going to have these livestock operations somewhere in their constituency, and this bill is going to help give that comfort level that is needed.

I wanted to say a couple of things about local autonomy. I know that's always a bone of contention, whether you give it to the local folks or you give it to the conservation board. I have my reservations about this particular one myself, but after going through some of the disputes and after seeing what happens, what's written down on paper doesn't always happen out there in the real world. The fact remains that if we're not prepared to give and take and have some balance so someone else can make a living, you're going to have lots of disputes. I've seen that when you get a lot more acreage owners in a county or an MD, then the vote is certainly not to have any.

Now, that really impacts some poor person that might be 25 miles from no one, but he's in that county. It restricts his farming practices altogether. We have to address that, and I believe that by having the local autonomy taken away – and when we say “taken away,” they have an opportunity, the public has an opportunity for input, and the municipal governments have another level of opportunity to get in there and get their say-so in. I have to say that between the two of them there's got to be pretty heavy influence on the decision-makers.

4:50

Probably the biggest benefit – and it might be a future benefit. The opportunity is there now for the municipal governments to get busy and do a development plan and do their zoning and properly identify which lands they would like to have with farming practices and which ones they want for residential. I think this will force a lot more of that, and when you say that local autonomy is taken away, that whole thing is full autonomy for the local people to do that. I see that coming along as a big benefit. I know that's very hard to do, because when you first begin, it has got to be a gradual thing, because as soon as you start declaring some lands as good for agriculture, you could impact somebody that doesn't believe that. Yes, if you zone a residential area in an agricultural area, you're going to interfere with somebody's business, but the reality is that the long term has to be planned better, and then some of these problems will go away.

So I just want to thank again our Member for Leduc for bringing it forward, and I look forward to it. The sooner the better. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments at second reading on Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001. There are, I suspect, a lot of Albertans affected by this act. We have a summer cottage west of the city, and it is only in the last couple of summers that odours from a confined livestock feeding operation have started to impact the enjoyment of that property. It came as a bit of a surprise, because we're fairly isolated. So it's a bill that I think a number of people, both urban and rural, will be interested in.

It's a difficult task because of the kinds of competing interests that it seeks to compromise and to bring together, with the interests of the operators and the interests of neighbours and environmental concerns. They are groups and individuals who have strong feelings about the operations and strong interests. A lot of those interests are financial interests that are affected by those operations.

It seems to me that the bill is based on some fairly sound principles, and the first of those, I guess, is that aggrieved owners have recourse to a process where they can have grievances, if it's a disturbance that they're concerned about, dealt with in a systematic and fair way. It's usually letters about those disturbances that we receive, people concerned about noise or odours or other impacts from operations. So the principle that there has to be a process in place is one that underlines part of the act and, I think, is dealt with in a way that should make people feel that they have recourse should they have a complaint.

The second principle that the act tries to deal with – and it's the most contentious in the act – is the need for affected people to be informed and to be part of the decision-making. Here's where the bill gets into the to and fro between local control and provincial control, and there's a legitimate argument on both sides. You can argue strongly that local authorities should be the ones making the decisions about operations that are going to take place in their jurisdiction. But I think you can also argue – and this is the side the government has come down on in this piece of legislation – that there is a broader interest, that what goes on in a particular area has the potential of affecting the entire province, so there's a strong provincial interest that goes on, and the crafters of the legislation, the government, has come down on the side of provincial interests.

I know that that's a source of contention, and there is a great deal of heat being generated around that whole issue, and rightfully so, because I think that in the end it'll lead to a better understanding and will lead to some action on the part of some jurisdictions, as the previous speaker has indicated, in terms of development plans and making sure that those plans are completed and in place.

I think a third principle that sits behind the legislation is that there has to be a process that will help resolve conflicts between urban and rural, nonfarmers and producers. I went to the government web site. The purpose of the bill, according to the government web site, is to provide an institutional framework for the resolving of conflicts between agriculture producers and urban/rural nonfarmers. In fact, I thought I might find more on the web site than what's there right now, Mr. Speaker, and I assume that it will be updated. I note that the mover of the bill had an interview that is not yet on the web site and accessible, and I hope that that might be included by the government. A major part and a major principle underneath the bill is that there has to be a process to resolve those conflicts, and that's closely related to the first principle that I had outlined.

Again, I go back to the difficulty. The crafters of the legislation have had a difficult time, and there have been a number of reviews. As was mentioned, since the mid-80s there's been concern in the province, and there have been a number of reports that have been considered. This is the culmination of those reports. It has been difficult, and it's not going to make everyone happy. That's a given

when you have the strong feelings that surround this issue.

I look forward to moving to the committee stage of legislation when we'll have an opportunity to debate the individual sections of the report. With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] It's going to be short. Save it for next time.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to have this opportunity to speak to this bill. First of all, I want to thank all of the committees that worked over the last two to three years on this very important issue. As you know, a committee traveled the province, and then there was another committee that traveled the province and reported back with very, very useful information. Actually, quite a good report, but it was a little short in a couple of areas, and that was the whole issue about the approval process and what to do about the existing operations that some people were having some discomfort with. So the hon. Member for Leduc chaired a committee made up of other MLAs who once again went out and took input on those issues and came back with a very fine report, so we've been able to come forward, then, with this legislation. I want to take the opportunity to thank all those people that participated, particularly the most recent committee, who did a very, very fine job of bringing this to the point where we can now talk about a bill.

5:00

It's very encouraging when we hear the Official Opposition speaking in favour of the bill. I think that they will be able to add some value to it. It is discouraging, though, to hear the third party speak against the bill, and of course it would be one of my objectives, speaking to the bill, to help convince them that, yeah, this is a good bill and that they should support it. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, they are not within hearing distance of me today.

I would at this point, then, adjourn debate. Hopefully we'll be able to carry on later.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 18

Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have taken the opportunity to review *Hansard* and noted the comments made by individuals. I thank hon. members for their comments to this bill and its speedy passage and hereby move third reading of this bill.

DR. TAFT: I will keep my comments brief, Mr. Speaker. I have to do something for applause here. We will be, as I've indicated throughout, supporting this bill. I just want to get on the record that, of course, as I suppose with all legislation, there are voices of concern. There are people who are concerned about the implementation of some aspects of the bill, and there are concerns about providing and ensuring that there are sufficient resources available to the various professional organizations to ensure that disciplinary procedures can be handled in an expeditious and fair manner. Those kinds of concerns I'm sure the minister will turn his attention to in due course and resolve. We have no desire to hold this up, so with those comments I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 18 read a third time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until Monday, November 19, 2001, at 1:30 in the afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:04 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 19, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/19

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: At the conclusion of the prayer would you all remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. At the beginning of this week we ask You, Father, to renew and strengthen in us the awareness of our duty and privilege as members of this Legislature. We ask You also in Your divine providence to bless and protect the Assembly and the province we are elected to serve. Amen.

Now we'll call on Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very privileged to introduce a former Member of the Legislative Assembly. He is a personal friend of mine, and he has chosen to continue his career in the elected forum by being elected as chair of Chinook's Edge school division No. 73. Seated with Mr. Roy Brassard is Mr. Jim Gibbons, superintendent of Chinook's Edge school division, and Mr. Ian Taylor, vice-chairman of Chinook's Edge school division. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm blessing of this Assembly.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I wish to file with the Assembly copies of two letters I sent earlier today. The first letter is to the Calgary Stampeders' coach and general manager, Wally Buono, and the entire Stampeders organization. The letter of course congratulates the Stamps for winning yesterday's western final and wishes them the best of luck in next Sunday's Grey Cup game in Montreal.

The second letter, Mr. Speaker, is to Manitoba Premier Gary Doer. The letter challenges Premier Doer to a bet. If the Blue Bombers win the Grey Cup, I will agree to wear a Bombers jersey for one day in this Assembly, with your permission, and make a \$100 donation to the Manitoba charity of Mr. Doer's choice. If the Stampeders win, which I'm sure you'll agree is a more likely scenario, Mr. Doer will be obliged to wear a Stampeders jersey in the Manitoba Legislature and make a \$100 donation to the Alberta charity of my choice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 2000 annual report of the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table eight copies of each of the responses to the questions posed in estimates to this member, to Alberta Revenue, on May 23. Although these responses were generated, we were in recess at the time. The responses were provided to the members in hard copy in a timely fashion, but we thought we'd now table them in the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Boilers Safety Association's annual report for the year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table five copies of the following reports: the Law Society of Alberta annual report, 2000, and the 28th annual report of the Alberta Law Foundation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to file a report with the House. This report was done by Mr. Allan Jobson, a constituent of mine, regarding the WCB recommendations.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative offices I'd like to table five copies of the following reports: the annual report of the Auditor General of Alberta, 2000-2001, and the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 2000 provincial confirmation process and the Monday, March 12, 2001, provincial general election of the 25th Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Both reports, hon. member, have already been tabled in this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table the required number of copies of a letter from Dorothy Ackerman, who is deaf and is in need of interpreting services and is looking forward to when the government comes through with their promised \$400,000 for interpreting services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is on behalf of Ms Eleanor Ifody, a resident of Edmonton-Gold Bar. This is a letter that the Premier's office has sent to her. It is regarding compensation for retired teachers.

The second tabling is a letter also regarding teachers and the calculation of benefits under the teachers' pension plan. This one is from the office of the hon. Minister of Learning.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies today of a letter from Ms Sandra Badun of Edmonton. The letter also has 29 other signatures. These residents of Alberta are in support of Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of the submission made by SALT, the Seniors' Action and Liaison Team. This submission was made to the Romanow commission on health care in Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have two tablings today. First of all, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly copies of a letter that is being sent today to Celebrate the Season participants indicating that Christmas caroling is back on in the Alberta Legislature Building rotunda. Choirs are being scheduled to participate daily between December 3 to December 22 during the hours of noon to 1 p.m. and from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. As always our first priority is for the safety of our children and all visitors to these precincts. On a personal note, the chair for one could not be happier.

Hon. members, I table in the House today five copies of a letter of resignation received from Mr. Peter Valentine, Auditor General of the province of Alberta.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a distinct privilege today to introduce two groups. The first group, seated in the members' gallery front row, consists of the president of the Rotary Club of Sherwood Park. He is also well known as president of Petersen Pontiac, a car dealership in our community. He is accompanied by a wonderful young man from Switzerland who is a Rotary exchange student. His parents are both educators. He's a 17 year old, and he is enjoying Canada very much. Please join me in warm applause for our guests, Marc Suter and his accompanying host, Al Petersen, in the members' gallery, if they would stand.

1:40

The second introduction. Eighty wonderful and boisterous students from Pine Street school have joined us along with their teachers and parent helpers, and may I congratulate all of them. Alex Newhart, Cheryl Hawryluk, Peggy Brown, Heather Wright, Val Danard, and parent helper Nancy McKay accompany all of these students from Pine Street, who are in both galleries, I believe. Please join me in applauding them as they rise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you some constituents of mine from grade 6 at Lymburn elementary school. They are here with their

teacher, Ms Susan Galloway, and parent helpers Ms Trautman and Mrs. Bayn. The children are participating in School at the Legislature this week, and although they are probably as disappointed with the Eskimos as I am, would you please join me in giving them the warm welcome of the House today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly five students and their teacher from the adult upgrading class at Augustana University College's centre for community education. They are here as part of their social studies course. They're studying government, I understand. Included in the group is the teacher, Kathryn Elford, and students Kirby Colter, Lena Morningchild-Baker, Tessa Pearce, Victoria Steiner, and Erika Steiner. I believe they're sitting in the public gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive our warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Sid Saraya and Perry Duquette, who in conjunction with an artist from Castle Downs, Ms Gracie Jane Genereux, have presented the city of New York mayor, Mr. Guiliani, with a print depicting the Twin Towers, which is now being sold and destined to earn in excess of \$2.5 million American. This print is being displayed right now in the New York city hall and in the NYPD headquarters. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 24 social 10 and legal studies students from NorQuest College. They are accompanied today by their instructor, Ms Elaine Nichols. I believe they're sitting in the public gallery. If I could get them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. It's an honour for me to introduce this first group of world travelers that have joined us. Dr. Sarah Jennings; her husband, Rob Nicholl; and their two delightful daughters, Rosie and Alice, are here with us in the Assembly today. Sarah is a PhD from the U of A teaching at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, and Rob is an MA in economics graduate of the U of A now working in the equivalent position of an ADM with the government of Tasmania. They have taken a three-month leave to show their daughters the world and are renewing old friendships during their stay in Edmonton. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second set of introductions are longtime friends and well known to many people in this Assembly. They are the family members of a former member, Peter Sekulic. We are joined today by Angela Sekulic and their children, Brennan, Olivia, and Jared. Brennan is eight years old and a grade 3 student, and he is a keen political observer and a real history buff and certainly knows more about the history of this Legislative Assembly than I'm quite sure all of us put together. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you six representatives of the Council of Alberta University Students. These university students are here all week as part of their political action committee to meet with members of the Legislature, and I would ask that everyone open their doors to these six individuals. Oliver Bladec is the chair of CAUS and vice-president, external, University of Calgary Students' Union; Barb Wright is the president of the University of Calgary Students' Union; Matt McHugh is the president of the University of Lethbridge Students' Union; Kory Zwack is vice-president, external, University of Alberta Students' Union, and vice-chair of CAUS; Toby White is the CAUS administrator; and Terri Jackson is the vice-president, academic, University of Lethbridge Students' Union. I would ask these individuals to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier indicated that Albertans can expect to see more cuts, or what the Premier refers to as adjustments, if the oil price does not recover. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us whether any further adjustments will be made to the budgets of the people programs such as health care, education, and children's services?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Finance supplement my answer, but quite simply the minister has directed all departments to achieve a 1 percent savings in expenditures this year, and all ministers responsible for capital projects have been asked to defer or to stage as many of those projects as we possibly can.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On October 18 we announced an economic update to Albertans to keep them abreast of some of the volatility that certainly existed within the marketplace as it pertained to our revenue base. At that point we also announced that we were able to take corrective actions to reflect that volatility and pull our spending back by \$1.26 billion. That was done, as the Premier has alluded to, by ministries coming forward with a 1 percent reduction and freezing hiring and holding off on discretionary spending.

It's no secret to Albertans that the marketplace for oil and gas is very volatile. It has been going down, particularly on the oil side, these last few days. We are monitoring that very, very closely. I will say, though, that on the gas side those revenues are firming up and have gone up. So the market has been shifting somewhat. We will monitor it, and if necessary we will make further corrections. We have a commitment to Albertans to balance our books. It's the law in this province, and we will uphold that commitment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how much of the onetime spending that was in the budget this year has not yet been contracted or signed and could possibly be still delayed?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I don't have those figures at my fingertips. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Finance can shed some more light on this matter.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, on the capital side we asked for a staging and deferral of some \$700 million of capital projects by the departments of Transportation and Infrastructure, and they were able to do that. That's included in the \$1.26 billion that we are holding back.

Now, I've stressed the words "staging" and "deferral" because those projects will have to go forward at some time, and it will have to be dependent upon the revenue base that comes in next year's budget and the year after. They have not been removed from the table, but they will not proceed until we have the money in the bank. In other words, we won't spend money that we don't have.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. Mr. Premier, can you commit to Albertans that if any further cuts are necessary, they'll come out of those onetime expenditures rather than the people programs that are so important to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, onetime, Mr. Speaker, means precisely that – or at least it's supposed to – that is, onetime spending. As far as I know, that has all been committed. The two ministers who can talk to this more specifically would be the Minister of Infrastructure and the Minister of Transportation, because that's where most of the capital works projects lie. If you wish to hear their supplementary relative to the specific question, I'll ask them to respond.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, in the Department of Infrastructure we had a number of projects that were approved, and they will eventually go ahead, but even though it was allocated to a project, some of the onetime spending hadn't been given to the health authority or the college or the postsecondary institution or the school board. Where those occurred, we did not send out the money for the year 2001-2002. However, in many cases the money is out there, and it will be staged. Where we have to add to those funds, the budget shows that we will be able to do that over time.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Infrastructure Funding

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Liberals have recommended using a five-year moving average for projecting oil and natural gas prices. If the government had followed our advice, revenue projections for this year's budget would have been \$19.2 billion, about \$3 billion less than the government's projected spending in the budget. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government not use the concept of an infrastructure enhancement fund and earmark the \$2.3 billion of onetime infrastructure expenditures for next year so that they could be done out of revenues that had already been received rather than out of expected revenues in a budget when we have such volatile revenues?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would have to say that the Liberal policies are interesting, but we as a government decided to adopt a different policy and different priorities. Our priority was clearly that of debt reduction. I would have to remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that there was a \$5 billion plus contribution to

reducing the debt, which in turn freed up hundreds of millions of dollars in interest payments. The priority of this government is to not raise taxes, to keep a very competitive tax regime. The policy is to have the most competitive, in fact, tax regime in Canada and, at the same time, dedicate funds as we can to priority projects. There were indeed very significant contributions to onetime infrastructure projects.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If these onetime infrastructure programs that the Premier is speaking about were so important this year, why were they not included in the regular Infrastructure budget rather than put in as onetime?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, indeed they were. There's only so much that we can do. We try to do as much as we can with the money that we have. If you think that we're in a peachy position right now, I'll have the hon. Minister of Infrastructure outline for the hon. leader of the Liberal Party just how serious the Infrastructure deficit is, notwithstanding the fact that we have committed very significant amounts of dollars to infrastructure projects.

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition's proposal is quite interesting, but the fact is that when we had the extra funds, we did send them out to the postsecondary institutions and the school boards. There is a lot of money sitting out there currently that will be used over the next three years. So it is feathered out. It's not as though the money was all spent in the year it was received.

Mr. Speaker, the onetime spending did not pick up the deficit that we do have currently in what we would call the preservation end of the structures that we have a responsibility for. As a matter of fact, as we go through the whole system, it looks like that deficit could be in excess of \$3 billion. Really what the industry is saying is that we should be spending about 1.5 percent of the book value of the asset annually to preserve it. We haven't been coming to that level. We've been at about 0.3 percent. So, in fact, the onetime spending has gone a long way to address some of those issues.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, now they're calling it back.

My final question is to the Premier. If you now have such a deficit in the infrastructure in this province, is that not a result of not properly funding infrastructure over the past 10 years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that there are many contributing factors to funding infrastructure and the rising costs of infrastructure. One, of course, is related to growth. We try to achieve in this province a balance, a balance of funds to operate what the hon. leader refers to as the people programs, a balance of funds to maintain as best as we possibly can the infrastructure, which includes not only buildings but certainly roads, a balance to achieve an orderly or an accelerated pay-down, if we can, of the debt, and a balance to maintain a very competitive and unobtrusive tax regime in this province.

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

Electricity Pricing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a legacy of high-profile boondoggles: Gainers at \$207 million, Swan

Hills at \$470 million, and the up-to-now champion NovAtel at \$646 million. My questions are to the Premier. Will the current champion be replaced by electricity deregulation deferral costs of \$700 million, which were hidden from the voters of this province last winter, the true costs of electricity?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank God for this government. I'm talking about this government and this administration, because while Gainers and NovAtel – well, we still have to deal with Swan Hills, and I'll speak to that, because I totally disagree with the assertions of the hon. member relative to Swan Hills. Relative to those, this government got in there, acted and acted quickly, and resolved those issues, cleaned those issues up.

Relative to the Swan Hills situation, I've tried to explain. I'll explain once again. There is a cost to garbage. This hon. member in the city of Edmonton pays through his municipal taxes – and I don't know if he pays a user fee on top of that – to have his garbage cleaned up. In the case of Alberta we've tried to find ways through the private sector, but ultimately we have a responsibility to society to make sure that this province is clean and free of toxic, poisonous waste. It's garbage. It's garbage, and there is a cost to garbage.

MR. MacDONALD: Given that this province is not clear of high electricity bills, will the Premier please explain what he thought was hypothetical last spring, the deferral accounts on electricity in light of third-quarter results from EPCOR, Enmax, and other electricity providers? The deferral accounts now owed are \$700 million. Your boondoggle is electricity deregulation now, Mr. Premier.

2:00

MR. KLEIN: There wasn't a boondoggle in electricity deregulation. As a matter of fact, there has been a tremendous correction in the market, Mr. Speaker, and we no longer hear complaints. The only people complaining are the Liberals. Relative to the deferral account situation, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, as the Premier says: thank God for this government. I'd say: thank Ralph Klein for this government.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to table today's power pool prices, which indicate that the price today is some \$33.50 a megawatt hour, which is a far cry from the \$100-plus. I also think, to help answer the member's question, that we may want to table the covering page of Enmax's third-quarter earnings. Enmax's third-quarter earnings reflect declining energy prices. In fact, the profit has dropped from \$95 million in the second quarter to \$35 million, reflecting lower energy costs.

Also, the proceeds from the auctions were returned to customers in terms of \$40 rebates last year, and the deferral accounts which were agreed to with the utility companies, Mr. Speaker, will be collected from consumers over a three-year period. We are waiting for the appropriate calculation and the Energy and Utilities Board to reflect on next year's RRO filings made by the utilities. This is money that will be collected from consumers to the utility companies. It does not – does not – impact the bottom financial line of this government in any way, shape, or form.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: since neither Enmax, EPCOR, nor the public know how deferral rates will be collected, the \$700 million, will the hon. Premier please tell us how this new tax, the Klein electricity tax, will be collected

on the individual power bills in this province? Where is it going to be?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: I don't know if the hon. member was listening or not, but I think the hon. minister outlined it quite clearly as to how it is to be collected, Mr. Speaker. But just in case the hon. member wasn't listening, I'll have the hon. minister explain it again.

MR. SMITH: We have already concluded in the previous answer that this does not impact the bottom line of this government that is not going into a deficit today, will not go into a deficit tomorrow. So, Mr. Speaker, the deferral accounts, which are a reflection of last year's rate riders, will go onto the utility company accounts in a way that they're clearly marked, very transparent, and easily understandable by every consumer in Alberta so that they know exactly how much they owe the utility company.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, may I repeat my admonition of the other day when I indicated to please not use personal names in the Assembly. That's to both the Minister of Energy and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Abortion Funding

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadian women have fought long and hard for access to safe and legal abortions within the publicly funded health care system. The medical profession is clear that it's a medical procedure which can be critical to women's physical and emotional health. However, the Premier has indicated as recently as November 11 that ending medicare coverage for abortions would be part of the review of health care whether he, i.e. the Premier, likes it or not. My questions are to the Premier. Why has the government floated the suggestion, why has the Premier floated the suggestion that medicare coverage for abortion may be eliminated?

MR. KLEIN: You know, Mr. Speaker, there ought to be a law. There is a rule in this Legislature about calling a person a liar. There should be a rule against telling lies. The assertions of the hon. leader of the third party are not true in any way, shape, or form. My position – and it's a personal position, because I don't believe there'll ever be a political resolution to this very sensitive, very delicate question – is that this is a matter that's between a woman, her doctor, and God. What's more, it's covered under the Canada Health Act, and we have vowed through our own legislation, the Health Care Protection Act, which he opposed, to abide by the principles of the Canada Health Act.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you stood up. Are you rising on a point of something?

MR. MASON: I was, Mr. Speaker, but I was under the understanding that points of order in question period were taken at the end.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, but were you rising to advise me you wanted to rise on a point of order?

MR. MASON: Yes, I was, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier's inflamma-

tory words aside, let me ask him the second question. Does he and his government believe that Alberta women have the right to abortions irrespective – irrespective – of their financial circumstances?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I just answered that question. I will remind the hon. member once again that abortion is deemed a medically necessary procedure under the Canada Health Act, and this government, by virtue of passing the Health Care Protection Act, has agreed, as the preamble to that act, to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

DR. PANNU: Will the Premier show this House, Mr. Speaker, that his so-called review of the comprehensiveness principle will not touch the right of Canadian women to abortion under the public health care system?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of comprehensiveness doesn't go to the issue of that principle in the act. It goes to the issue of the interpretation of that principle. That is going to have to be a question that this government, through the due process procedure, will have to resolve and have to deal with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Mazankowski Report on Health

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Last Friday you met in Calgary with the Premier, meeting with Don Mazankowski with respect to his report on health care. Could you please tell us in this Assembly when the final, complete report will be publicly available?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Premier met with Mr. Mazankowski as well as the Premier's Advisory Council on Health on Friday at McDougall Centre. It was a very productive meeting where Mr. Mazankowski and his committee outlined a number of principles that they were operating under, including solutions to ensuring that our health care system is sustainable into the future. I should note that none of the solutions that they brought forward would result in a necessary change to the Canada Health Act. Clearly, their mandate was to work within the principles and the spirit of the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Mazankowski indicated a legitimate need for more time to prepare the written text of his report. I can advise the hon. member that his report should be prepared by the end of this month or perhaps the beginning of December. We expect the report to be delivered to the Premier at that time, and the report will be released publicly some time after that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. My supplemental question to the same minister: with respect to the report, can you give us any idea of the flavour of any of the topics or any of the details in general that you might have discussed on Friday?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, we're talking now a several-hour answer. If you can put it into 30 seconds, please proceed.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, there may be a number of different solutions put forward, but if I can categorize them, there would be a category of solutions that can be dealt with within the province of

Alberta that do not at all infringe upon the Canada Health Act. There may be a second category of solutions that may require a challenge to the interpretation of terms of the Canada Health Act, as the Premier noted earlier. The third category might be solutions that would require change to the Canada Health Act, but as I indicated, there are no solutions being put forward by Mr. Mazankowski that fall within that third category.

2:10

I can say also that some of the ideas put forward by his committee are things that can be dealt with in the short term. Others will require perhaps legislative change here in the province of Alberta and would require more discussion and a longer term for implementation.

I should also note finally, Mr. Speaker, that it is the Premier's intention that he will take this report to the Premiers' Conference which will take place in British Columbia at the end of January of 2002.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: in terms of process for here in Alberta, what does the government plan to do with the report itself?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Mazankowski's report will go through the normal review process before we make any decisions, and that will include but is not limited to a review by the agenda and priorities committee, the standing policy committee on health and community living chaired by the hon. member, and also cabinet and caucus. We have been open and transparent about what comes next. We will move quickly where the recommendations fall within provincial jurisdiction, and this report, I must emphasize, will not sit on a shelf to gather dust. It will be a living document that will help us chart a new plan for health care in this province that will be high quality, accessible, fair, and sustainable.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

Regional Health Authority Deficits

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health and Wellness. This year the Calgary and Capital regional health authorities were projecting combined deficits of well over \$70 million even before this government's recent round of cuts. Can the minister tell the Assembly if the regional health authorities are expected to borrow to cover these deficits?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to meet with the chairs and all members of the 17 regional health authorities and two provincial health authorities in the province of Alberta. I indicated to the Capital regional health authority as well as the Calgary health region that we expect them to be tabling business plans that will accommodate the projected overexpenditures that they have. Indeed, as quickly as this afternoon the Minister of Finance and myself will be meeting with them to re-emphasize that message not only to the two major regional health authorities but to the remaining 15 RHAs as well.

Mr. Speaker, there are legitimate concerns expressed by regional health authorities with respect to how they will deal with these overexpenditures, and each one is coming up with different solutions, whether it be timing differences, out of working capital, or changes in the delivery of service that they make. They are coming

up with different ways to be able to pay for those deficits in addition to meeting new budget targets that will be required as a result of the October 18 announcement by the Provincial Treasurer on reducing overall expenditures in all departments by 1 percent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the minister or his department had any communication of any kind with the regional health authorities about borrowing money to cover their deficits?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, a number of solutions have been brought forward by regional health authorities in order to deal with their respective deficits. I should note that there are a number of regional health authorities in this province that, notwithstanding the change in targets they may face, will still be able to post surpluses. But of the number of different options put forward which have been considered for dealing with deficits, borrowing has not been one of them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister then rule out the possibility that he may allow regional health authorities to borrow from financial institutions such as Alberta Treasury Branches or banks to cover their deficits?

MR. MAR: I will rule that out, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

National Institute for Nanotechnology

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few days ago the Minister of Innovation and Science signed a memorandum of understanding with the federal government, the National Research Council, and the University of Alberta to establish the National Institute for Nanotechnology right here in the city of Edmonton. My questions are to the Minister of Innovation and Science. Since nanotechnology is not exactly a household word for most of us, could you briefly tell us what it is and what this institute is expected to do for the province?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, let me first say how pleased I was on behalf of the provincial government to sign the memorandum of understanding that created the National Institute for Nanotechnology. The question asks for a definition or description of what nanotechnology is. There are many experts and researchers and scientists that are much better qualified to give that description, but I'll try.

Nanotechnology is the science and engineering of materials, devices, machines, and systems carried out in the size scale of atoms and molecules. In other words, it involves controlling matter at the molecular and even the atomic level. Mr. Speaker, to put this in a word picture, to help the imagery, at the nanoscale dust particles become boulders, so . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, thank you very much. I would like to advise all members in the Assembly that we do have dictionaries available here.

The hon. member.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is it usual for a province to help pay to establish a national research council? I understand that Alberta is one of two provinces that don't already have a national research council.

MR. DOERKSEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is important that the public understand what nanotechnology is. When we were presented with this opportunity from, in particular, the National Research Council, I sat down with my advisory body, which is the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority, and the University of Alberta, and I said: what impact will this have in the province of Alberta? This council of independent Albertans, who understand the science and technology, told me that this was platform technology, which is the base for the research strategies that we're undertaking in this province in energy, in ICT, and in life sciences.

Mr. Speaker, the model we have set up, which is unlike other provinces, is a collaborative effort between the province, the National Research Council, and the University of Alberta. It's a collaborative approach which allows the cross-pollination of scientists and researchers from both the university and the national research centre and allows us to draw on their expertise both ways. It also has impact for the graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Alberta and allows them to gain further experience and further education in that field.

In short, Mr. Speaker, this is a tremendous opportunity for this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HERARD: Thank you. My final question to the same minister: do we expect to be competitive with other regions of the world who have also established nanotechnology centres?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, there are other nanotechnology initiatives that are happening throughout the world. We expect and have geared this national nanotechnology centre to be among the top five to ten in the world. To be competitive in this environment, to produce the economic benefit that's going to flow from it, we have to have the critical research mass for that to happen. So we are very excited about this institute and are looking forward to the potential it has for Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Teacher Remuneration

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Premier this afternoon. Last evening, in speaking to the Alberta School Boards Association, the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association characterized education in the province as being in crisis. He was referring, of course, to the 52 school boards that have yet to renew teacher contracts. My questions are to the Premier. What action has the government taken to avoid this situation worsening?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the action we have taken has been very significant, and that was to put an unprecedented 6 percent guaranteed wage increase as a line item in this year's budget – I can't recall any other time that a salary increase has been guaranteed at all, never mind of that magnitude; so that is a good first step – plus to give the school boards the flexibility to provide additional dollars in salaries if indeed the school boards

deem that that money can be spent best in that particular area.

Mr. Speaker, I might have the hon. Minister of Learning supplement my answers. I don't know what more he can add, but that's the long and the short of it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to add that, yes, the president of the Alberta Teachers' Association did quantify the education system as being in a crisis state, but the very interesting point came when the Edwin Parr winners were announced last night, the six first-year teachers from around the province. Each one of these teachers gave very heartwarming stories, and I will quote, about how they loved their boards, how they loved their administration, how they loved their jobs.

AN HON. MEMBER: How they loved their minister.

DR. OBERG: They didn't say that.

I will quote from the gentleman from Lethbridge who said: I love my job so much; they wouldn't even have to pay me, and I'd still come.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that school boards can only increase their offers to teachers by increasing class sizes, has the government not placed school boards in a lose/lose situation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that assertion is entirely subjective. You know, no two school districts are the same. Different school districts have different approaches to the use of their money. Yes, they are all required to abide by the fundamental curriculum set down by the Department of Learning, but beyond that they have the ability to negotiate with their teachers with a starting point of a 6 percent increase, which I would remind the hon. member is unprecedented, and to make the decision as to where they want their resources to go and where those resources can be spent in the best possible way to meet the requirements of not only the board but the teachers, the parents, and the students.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: will the Premier agree to convene a meeting between school boards and teachers to avoid the situation worsening?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to intervention by this government where it is ostensibly a matter between the teachers and the various school districts, I will have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to negotiations between the Alberta Teachers' Association locals and the school boards for their contract, it is exactly that. The school boards sit down with local ATA representatives, and they determine their contract. The central ATA then has the ability to ratify it or not. From what I understand, as early as today we have an offer on the table in one of our school boards that the local Alberta Teachers' Association potentially will accept. The local school board, from what I understand, has already agreed to it. So we could see something happen as early as today, and I very much look forward to having all the contracts ratified, to having all the contracts

accepted so that the teachers can go back to where they belong and can continue where they belong, which is in front of the kids, teaching in classrooms.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

English as a Second Language Programs

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Learning. Given that the immigration into Canada has stayed at mostly the same level in the last few years – in fact, a smaller number of people immigrated to Canada last year than the years before – why, Mr. Minister, do we have the issue of increased demand in English as a Second Language at schools in Calgary and Edmonton?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think what it is is purely a value of economics. What we're seeing is roughly the same amount of immigrants coming into Canada, roughly the same amount of people who are immigrating to Canada that cannot speak English. What we are however seeing, though, is that once they're in Canada, the majority of them are coming to Alberta. Indeed, we have seen unprecedented increases in the number of English as a Second Language students in Calgary specifically but also in Edmonton. I really feel that probably the primary driver behind this is the economic activity that is happening in Alberta today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that ESL is a recognized publicly funded program in Alberta schools, could the minister tell us what the proven benefits are and how it is funded?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, the obvious proven benefit is that we have a group of our new Canadian population, who are the immigrants who have come here, that are learning to speak and to work in English. What this does is make them much more viable members of our community, of our working community, and they will be able to go out and find jobs anywhere in Alberta.

We spend 14 and a half million dollars per year on English as a Second Language programs, and if I say so myself, Mr. Speaker, I think it's money well spent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My last supplemental is to the same minister. Given that immigration is a federal jurisdiction, could the minister explain any funding from the federal government for the settlement of immigrants in Alberta, and does it include ESL?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to adult settlement in Alberta, the federal government is responsible for the ESL funding. Indeed, there are many programs in all of our communities that are funded by the federal government. We do fund a portion, roughly 20 percent of this money, as well for English as a Second Language. I feel that it is a good partnership between the federal government and the province of Alberta, and hopefully it's something that we can expand on with such things as our provincial nominee program.

Mr. Speaker, immigrants are extremely important to Alberta. We need them, and we will continue to ensure that they know English.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Provincial Parks

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. How does the minister explain the decrease in the number of visitors to Alberta's park areas in the year 2000-2001?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I'm not sure I heard the question quite correctly. Is the question: how do we explain the number of visitors to our parks?

MS CARLSON: The decrease in visitors.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have one of the most fantastic systems of provincial parks, protected areas, campgrounds anywhere in the world. From time to time there are peaks and valleys in the number of visitors who come and visit these parks, but I suspect that the member is trying to link this to something more deeply, that will come out in her supplemental. So I will simply allow her to go ahead and do that. I do want to say very clearly that we are very proud of these parks. We do put significant dollars into them every year, and we are working on the parks reinvestment strategy to bring about necessary improvements where possible.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, as this minister should know, the number of visitors has been steadily decreasing over the years as this government has not maintained infrastructure. What is he doing to ensure that sufficient dollars will be committed to infrastructure, which is the major contributing reason for decreased visitors?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that the provincial parks system, the campgrounds, the playgrounds, and all that stuff have a tremendous impact on our bottom-line revenue picture from the standpoint of tourism. We also are making as many of these spaces available across the province for everyone to enjoy. We're trying to keep prices affordable, but costs do go up, and from time to time in our lease agreements, through some of the operators who help us in these operations, they do increase those fees, and that might contribute to a little bit of a slowdown in certain areas. But I can tell you that in other areas, such as throughout Kananaskis Country, for example, numbers are usually up every year.

2:30

Now having said that, I will just reiterate that we are looking at all of the provincial parks right now. We are looking at reinvestment strategy to help improve these excellent places and make them even more attractive. Once dollars come available after we're through this economic downturn, then we'll engage in that discussion of how we can go about providing those necessary dollars to ensure that we continue to have the very best and the most accessible parks anywhere in Canada and perhaps even around the world.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the minister make public any studies or reports about the effects of user fees in the park system and the effect of not having adequate washroom and playground facilities and campground facilities in these parks?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, we do have adequate facilities in

all of these parks places. Some of them are a little more of the Cadillac variety perhaps than some of the others; nonetheless, we do have a very good system in place that looks after that.

I should also add that we monitor these parks and the campgrounds and the playgrounds and so on on a very regular basis. We do have qualified inspectors who go out and get into these matters, and they do provide information back to the ministry with respect to what needs to be done where. Obviously, we are very concerned with some of the places in terms of some of the safety features that exist, and we're working through that process right now as well, but I can assure the House that everything possible is being done within the dollars available to make and maintain these spaces to the best of our ability.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Public Affairs Bureau

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government prides itself on cutting costs. [some applause] Yes, I know you'll all applaud. Okay. Just ask Alberta teachers looking for a new contract. This government prides itself on reducing bureaucracy. Just ask thousands of laid-off government employees. But the Premier has a real blind spot when it comes to one area of big government. To the Premier: why has the number of government communication directors and officers nearly tripled, from 47 when he first became Premier to 133 today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjection] I'm going to tell the truth, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer the question, in regard to my responses to the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and in anticipation of the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, in the event that I have offended the House, I wish to withdraw my insinuation that the hon. member was telling lies and apologize. I don't know where the hon. member obtained the quote he attributed to me, but I believe I have made my position very clear today, as I have on previous occasions, and I hope that that is accepted.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands says is true. Yes, there has been some expansion commensurate with the growth of the province and with our responsibilities to disseminate factual information, and that may have contributed to some of the growth in the Public Affairs Bureau, but I would have to get the factual information relative to the growth in the PAB and where that growth has actually occurred.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier. We will provide him with the research which we have done to demonstrate this.

Given that during the same period the civil service as a whole was reduced by 10,000 people, how can the Premier justify nearly tripling the number of spin doctors working for his government?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, they are not spin doctors. I think that if I had the opportunity to go through my estimates, which of course I will in the spring, the hon. member will see – and I'd be glad to share the information that I shared with the Assembly last time around – exactly where those dollars are spent and for what reasons.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous functions within the Public

Affairs Bureau, not the least of which is to get out in the spirit of accountability and openness as much factual information as we possibly can about the departments of government and about the activities that take place within the government of Alberta. It is immense, you know, the number of services we offer, the number of programs that exist, and it's a huge job. In the spirit of accountability and in the spirit of openness we want to get as much factual information out there as we possibly can.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the Premier's sense of humour, will he assure all Albertans that this bloated PR bureaucracy will be downsized in order to save the taxpayers money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have a very competent director of the Public Affairs Bureau. I'm sure that she, like the directors of other departments, will abide by the hon. Minister of Finance's directive to achieve at least a 1 percent savings and more if she possibly can. Again, I would remind the hon. member that we do have an obligation. As a matter of fact, we have an obligation to fulfill the mandate of this government, and part of the mandate of this government is to be open, honest, accessible, and accountable, and to do that, we need a mechanism to disseminate factual information.

THE SPEAKER: I apologize to the six hon. members who because of my inability to marshal question and answer period were not recognized today.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

National Addictions Awareness Week

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission I am pleased to inform the hon. members that this week, November 18 through 24, is National Addictions Awareness Week. This week is a designated opportunity for individuals and communities to increase their awareness of alcohol and other drug and gambling problems and their solutions.

National Addictions Awareness Week promotes positive action by Albertans toward the prevention of substance and gambling abuse. Activities taking place during NAA Week help to strengthen personal independence and empower individuals to make informed lifestyle decisions. AADAC, through its involvement in NAA Week, helps to create healthier families and communities and demonstrates the government's commitment to sustaining the health of Albertans. By continuing to work together toward an addiction-free future, we can make a difference in people's lives to help ensure the future prosperity of our province.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

National Addictions Awareness Week

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to recognize National Addictions Awareness Week from November 18 to 24, 2001. In particular, I wish to recognize and thank the many individuals and agencies who work so hard to combat addictions and to help those who have succumbed. In particular, those working with gambling addictions need to be applauded, especially after the government's recent announcement of increases to gaming activity in Alberta.

Although the government continues to increase its revenue from gaming, there is no corresponding increase in money to combat addictions. Over a billion dollars a year goes into government coffers, but the amounts available to counter gambling and other addictions are not tied in any way to the revenue. So even though the government makes more, the groups dealing with the negative effects do not get more to deal with increased problems. Groups like the Nechi institute, Gamblers Anonymous, the Canadian Foundation of Compulsive Gambling (Alberta), and our own AADAC deserve our attention this week and our gratitude for waging an uphill battle.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:40

Inskip Spencer

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to recognize the Westmount Community League volunteer of the year 2001 award recipient, Inskip Spencer. For those members who don't know, Westmount Community League falls in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Glenora.

Mr. Spencer's contributions to the community include organizing the Westmount summer sprint and family fair, the seniors' tea and variety show, the annual volunteer appreciation dinner and the unsung hero award, the holiday gathering potluck and dance, and the fall aboriginal round dance. He is a well-deserving individual, and it's most appropriate this year, as this is the International Year of the Volunteer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. David Schindler

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to recognize Dr. David Schindler, a great Albertan and a leading environmental scientist and pioneer in the study of freshwater lake systems. Dr. Schindler is the Killam Memorial professor of ecology at the University of Alberta and teaches limnology, public policy, and environmental decision-making.

Dr. Schindler is indeed a leading scientific mind and a highly respected strategic thinker. He's a recipient of the prestigious Stockholm water prize. More recently he won the 2001 Gerhard Herzberg Canada gold medal for science and engineering. This award includes \$1 million in research funding and is considered the highest honour for Canadian researchers. Having worked on key national and international bodies, a five-star scientific expert and authority, Dr. Schindler is committed to solving real-world problems and is a role model for every budding scientist.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Schindler is, I think, seated in the public gallery. I'd ask Dr. Schindler to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on a point of order. Citation, please.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cite Standing Order 23(h), where a member may be called to order when he "makes allegations against another member." I also cite *Beauchesne's* 489, unparliamentary use of the expressions "lie" and "lies," which is on page 146 of *Beauchesne's*.

Now, I appreciate, Mr. Speaker, the apology from the hon. the

Premier, but I would also point out that the hon. minister of health – and it was clearly heard on our side – called the leader of the New Democrat opposition a liar. I believe that ought to be ruled unparliamentary and should be withdrawn.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed unfortunate when a member of this House does the honourable thing, stands up and withdraws the use of language where it's appropriate to do so, and then members of the opposition do not have the good grace to accept that apology when it's made. In fact, I was sitting right here and did not hear anybody call anybody a liar in the House but did hear a reference to information which was being brought forward to the House which was lies. When it was pointed out that the word "lies" might be inappropriate in the House, the Premier had the good grace to stand up and withdraw it on a very timely basis. I think it could be taken from that context that he withdrew the use of that language on behalf of anybody who might have used it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that I appreciate very much what the Premier said in response to what he realized was wrong, and I thank him for it. The point of order is not with respect to what the Premier said. It was what preceded what the Premier said, and what preceded was the utterance from the minister of health. That's what the point of order is about.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, it only goes to point out that if all hon. members followed the rules of question period about the way the questions should go and the way the answers should go, we wouldn't have these little things happening. But let's just talk about what really did happen. Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona issued a question, and it had in it certain views addressed to the Premier of the province of Alberta, who obviously took quite some degree of exception to these views in the preamble to the question. So the hon. leader of the government says:

You know, Mr. Speaker, there ought to be a law. There is a rule in this Legislature about calling a person a liar. Mr. Speaker, there should be a rule against telling lies. The assertions of the hon. leader of the third party are not true in any way, shape, or form.

Now, at the same time that that was happening, then, the point being made by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands is that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness – and that's the correct title. The assertion is that the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness called someone a liar. Well, unfortunately the Blues do not pick any of that up. However, the chair heard it, and what the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness said was, "That is a lie." If the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness accused someone of being a liar, there would have been an immediate response, a pretty quick response. So one of the things that we have to do is we have to listen very attentively, but we also have to be very careful about what is said in here. Look; the mood today was incredible. I mean, there was none of the normal kind of raucous behaviour, but on the other hand there were continuous violations of questions, and they were not restricted to one caucus.

Without any doubt, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, if I read *Beauchesne* 428(a), which reads that a question must not "be ironical, rhetorical, offensive, or contain epithet, innuendo, satire, or ridicule," it strikes me that one of your questions might have been ruled out of order.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, if I read *Beauchesne* 428(f), it says that the question must not "contain an expression of

opinion.” I could clearly have ruled out of order a couple of yours.

To the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. If I would read 428(j) in *Beauchesne*, a question must not “be framed so as to suggest its own answer.” I would most definitely have ruled out one of yours.

Well, I can go on with additional examples, because it does not apply to just one caucus or one representative of the various caucuses. These rules are actually not that difficult to read. Just a little time and a little attempt at it might help us all, and then we don’t have to have this kind of an exercise. So, I think, caution in the utilization of words. Everybody in here is honourable. There are honourable people in here, really good people. The English language is actually a very, very nice language.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 25

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise today and move Bill 25, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, for second reading.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 25 is an important new bill that will allow the courts to use wrongfully obtained profits and property to repair harm done to victims of crime and other illegal acts. It will do this by making it easier for Albertans to regain their property or obtain court-ordered restitution for losses suffered as a result of illegal activities. The bill will also allow the court to order an interim restraint order to prevent the property from being sold or disposed of prior to legal proceedings. The bill also includes provisions for penalties for failure to comply with restitution or civil forfeiture, assistance orders, and for the appeal and review of decisions made by the court. I’d like to use the time I have today to provide you and all members of the Assembly with a brief overview of the bill and to highlight what we expect it to achieve.

Let’s consider part 1, the legal action regarding property acquired by illegal means. Where a peace officer reasonably believes that property in Alberta was acquired by an illegal act, a crime, or other specified federal or provincial offence, the Crown may apply for a property disposal order for the purpose of taking that property away from the person responsible for the illegal act and returning it to the victim. This action can take place whether or not the person responsible for an illegal act has been charged or convicted. The application is made entirely at the discretion and direction of the Minister of Justice. Where a court is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the property was acquired by an illegal act, the court may issue a restraint order to preserve the property and prevent its disappearance pending the property disposal hearing.

2:50

Where a police officer becomes aware that property was acquired by an illegal act and there is a risk that the person in possession will dispose of the property before a restraint order can be obtained, the police officer can direct that the property be restrained for a short period until a restraint order can be obtained from the court. If the Crown proves in court on a balance of probabilities that the property was acquired by an illegal act, the court may grant a property disposal order and rule that the property be taken away from the person responsible for the illegal act and returned to the person lawfully entitled to the property. A summary procedure with civil rules of evidence and procedures will be used for this purpose.

Where no victim or person entitled to the property can be found, the court must order that the restrained property be sold and the proceeds of the sale be paid, in accordance with a ministerial order, to an agency or program devoted to addressing the social harm caused by the illegal act, failing which the moneys are to be paid to the victims of crime fund.

There are existing provisions in the Criminal Code allowing for the forfeiture of proceeds of crime and the return of these proceeds to the victim. However, these provisions require the Crown to lay a criminal charge and prove a case beyond a reasonable doubt in a criminal court. Because of the constitutional protections afforded to the accused in criminal cases, it’s sometimes difficult to obtain a conviction. Under this act a legal action can be commenced to return the illegally obtained property to the victim even if there is no criminal charge or conviction, because the focus of the act is the civil compensation of victims, a provincial purpose, not the criminal punishment of offenders, a federal purpose.

Mr. Speaker, part 2 of the act focuses on restitution and compensation orders and the conviction requirement. Where a person has been convicted of committing an illegal act and the court orders restitution paid to a victim pursuant to some other act, most often the Criminal Code, the court can order under this act that any assets owned by the offender be transferred to the victim up to the value of the restitution order. In order to put the court in a better position to make a restitution payment order, the court can order the person convicted to disclose financial information; that is, to tell the court what income and assets they own. Where a person has been convicted of committing an illegal act and the court that convicted the offender has made a determination as to the amount of the gain made or the value of property acquired by the offender by virtue of carrying out the illegal act and there is no victim to be found and thus no restitution order, the court may order that the offender pay that amount, in accordance with a ministerial order, to an agency or program devoted to addressing the social harm caused by the illegal act, failing which the money is to be paid into the victims of crime fund.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Where a compensation order has been made by a court, a court may make another payment order to ensure the offender complies with the compensation order by paying money, transferring property, et cetera. Whereas the compensation order says that this is what you must do to help victims, the payment order essentially says: this is how you will do it. In order to put the court in a better position to make a compensation order, the court can order the person convicted to disclose financial information.

In summary, Bill 25, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, will make it easier for Albertans to regain their property or to obtain court-ordered restitution for losses suffered as a result of illegal activities. In the past victims had to use a civil lawsuit to have their property returned. Bill 25 streamlines the process through which victims can regain their property or obtain restitution without the time and the financial costs of a normal civil lawsuit. In other words, Mr. Speaker, this is a manner by which we can ensure that victims are not revictimized over and over again by the process.

I would encourage all members of the Assembly to provide their support for Bill 25. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was going to move adjournment of debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 26
Trustee Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Assembly for allowing me this privilege to get both of these acts on the floor of the Assembly this afternoon.

Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001, I'm very pleased to move for second reading.

It's not a large act, but it's a very significant act, Mr. Speaker. One of the principal tasks of most trustees is to invest trust assets for trust beneficiaries. For example, if a parent leaves a sum of money to an underage child in his or her will, the parent may decide to appoint a trustee to look after the investment of that money until the child reaches the age of majority. Frequently a trust specifically instructs the trustee on how money in the account can be invested. Occasionally, however, no instructions are given to the trustee, and this is the circumstance of the provisions where the Trustee Act comes into play. If a trustee has no instructions as to how to invest, the act says that the trustee may only invest in certain approved investments. This list of approved investments is known as the legal list.

The present legal list restricts a trustee to very conservative categories of investment such as debt instruments issued by certain governments or regulated financial institutions. The idea is that the Legislature can and should prevent trustees from exposing trusts to undue risk by restricting them to investing in safe assets or at least severely limiting the ability to invest in risky assets. However, the downside to this approach is that trustees' investment options have become unnecessarily limited and inflexible. In practice, as the Law Reform Institute has told us, legal lists tend to be long and convoluted, and it is doubtful that a typical, unsophisticated trustee would take much comfort from or derive much guidance from the list.

The objective of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to replace the legal list approach with a more flexible approach to investing. The Alberta Law Reform Institute has recommended that the legal list in the Trustee Act be replaced with the prudent investor rule. All other Canadian provinces except British Columbia and Quebec recognize the prudent investor rule. Similar rules are recognized in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and in many if not most American jurisdictions. While the legal list approach attempts to limit risk by prohibiting trustees from investing in something that has been deemed to be too risky, the prudent investor rule focuses on diversification as a key strategy for managing risk. The prudent investor rule is a variation on the old saying: don't put all of your eggs in one basket. This approach allows a trustee to diversify investments to control risk and improve financial returns to a trust fund. The trustee can use his or her own best judgment when investing funds. The Trustee Amendment Act legislates the prudent investor rule, which requires a trustee to make investment decisions based on obtaining reasonable returns while avoiding undue risk.

The proposed amendments will eliminate the list of approved investments and instead ask each trustee to consider the circumstances of the particular trust. Trustees will need to look at a number of factors including the purposes and probable duration of the trust, the needs and circumstances of the beneficiaries, the need to maintain the real value of the capital or income of the trust, the need to maintain a balance between risk and return, and the importance of appropriate diversification of investments.

Mr. Speaker, the bill also emphasizes the importance of establishing an investment strategy, considering such questions as what risk

level is appropriate to the particular trust, what kinds of returns are most appropriate, and how the trustee can best invest to reflect the purposes and the circumstances of the trust. A trustee will be required to review the investment portfolio at reasonable intervals to ensure that it is still appropriate to the circumstances of the beneficiaries. This new approach does not mean that a trustee will be held liable because in hindsight a different investment strategy would have produced higher returns. Rather, as long as a trustee invests in a manner that is prudent, the manner in which a prudent investor could have invested, the trustee is not likely to be liable for his choices. As is the case with the legal list approach, the prudent investor rule will not apply when the will or other trust instrument outlines specific investment options for the trust.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to point out that we have not eliminated the legal list entirely from the act. It will be maintained as a schedule to the act. In this way those Alberta acts and instruments that refer specifically to the legal list can continue to make use of it. At the same time, however, the Trustee Amendment Act empowers those enactments that currently use the list to adopt the prudent investor rule if and when they are ready to do so at some point in the future.

On another note, the Trustee Amendment Act will allow a trustee to invest in mutual funds. The present act does not allow this.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, the bill allows trustees to tailor their investments to best suit the needs of their beneficiaries by diversifying the portfolio after considering the particular circumstances of the trust. The amendments reflect a course of action adopted by many other jurisdictions around the world and is the approach recommended by Alberta's Law Reform Institute. The prudent investor rule is a practical approach. It emphasizes the importance of intelligent diversification as a means of controlling risk.

In conclusion, I would encourage members of the Assembly to support Bill 26 and the updating of our trustee investor legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in second reading to the newly proposed Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001. I'm going to have to disagree with the minister right off the top, because although he calls it a minor change, it's a fairly hefty bill. It does get into a good deal of legal detail of what's accepted and what isn't accepted. So while I'm likely to be supporting what's being put forward here in principle, I have some hesitation in that I need to run a feedback loop of the information that's in here through the community to find out any hesitations that they have. However, it speaks well to me that the Law Reform Institute would be recommending that this is the way to go.

I'm remembering when I had my will done, which was this spring, and in reading through it, I had asked specifically about a section that was written into the will. It was the equivalent of what this legislation would now do in that it set out very clearly what a trustee could do. I spoke with my lawyer for some time about it while she sort of set out why it was reasonable and what the expectations were and the prudent investor rule. I think, in fact, that she may have referred to that in the will. So she was writing in essentially this legislation. That says to me that if lawyers are doing this on a regular basis to make sure that it's included in documents that they're drawing up for people because they can't rely on the legislation that's in existence, then we probably do need to look at updating.

As with any change, I always want to know, you know, is there a current problem that needs to be addressed, does this bill address it, and does it cause any problems in itself? Does it cause additional problems that it didn't set out to do?

There are a few things that come to mind. I've already briefly discussed that there are indications to me that there is a need for this bill to allow the trustees under the legislation to go ahead and invest prudently those moneys that are entrusted to them. Therefore, even if you didn't put it in your will, those rules would apply to you once this legislation is enacted. So is there a need for it? Certainly it's useful. I don't know that there's a great crushing, special, urgent need for it, but obviously it's something that the legal community has been considering for some time.

Does this legislation address the problem? It likely does. There's a good deal of legal detail in here, and although I think there's been an attempt here to try and get the language into layperson's terms, it's still a fairly hefty legal document. It's not the kind of thing that most people would pick up for a little light reading on the bus to Calgary. As always, I urge the government to try and make any new legislation or regulations as readable as possible for people. If we want more Albertans to be taking an interest in what we're doing and the laws of the land, they've got to be able to read it. This is pretty detailed and gets into a lot of legal components of what's involved here.

Essentially it's setting out that a prudent investor rule would apply, which has not been the case previously. As I said, as it stands now, if the trustee's investment duties and powers are not specified, then it's not possible to do. This legislation would make it possible that there is enacting legislation that can be referred to if it's not spelled out in somebody's will.

The tricky part of this is always that if a trustee has acted in good faith and with reasonableness, they would not be held liable for any loss. On the one hand, you say: "Okay, that's fair. They can't determine the price of a barrel of oil or whether the mutual funds are going to tank or how the stock market is going to go." I mean, two years ago who would have imagined that all the dot com companies would take a fiery plunge. So, no, I don't think it is reasonable to expect that people can understand that market and be right on top of it. They need to be understanding that they're dealing with somebody else's money. They have been put in a position of stewardship, in a position of trust to look after someone else's money, and often in a trustee situation it's a young person's money. It's a child's money. It's important that we have people who are looking after this money with the best interests of the child at heart.

So that provision always makes me cautious. I do, as I said, think it's reasonable that if the trustee as investor has taken every possible precaution, they would not be held liable if things go wrong. On the other hand, they really have to exercise every possible opportunity for prudence.

There are a few examples that I wonder about. The act does allow for trustees to delegate investment authority to an agent or an adviser. They can be initially instructed by the trustee, but from then on the adviser is doing the work. Now, one assumes that the adviser is in fact a professional who deals in investments all the time, and that's why a trustee would have in fact hired them probably. I think that's where it always gets interesting. I don't deal in the stock market, but anybody that has ever talked to me that did – your stockbroker is taking a cut of every investment that they make: every buy, every sell. They get a little bit of money for doing that. That takes away from the trust fund, so that's a very important and delicate relationship between the trustee and an adviser or an agent to make sure that we don't just end up with a situation where a professional gets paid a lot of money for doing something, and at the

end of the day there's no trust left and the funds in fact have not been held secure for people. So the agents really do have to be carefully selected, instructed as to what the trustee feels is acceptable, and I think there has to be a monitoring and an evaluation process involved in that.

We have the need for the bill. We are looking at whether in fact the bill does address the issues that have been brought up. Yes, in fact I think it does.

So to continue on in looking at some of the things that bring a caution to me or that perhaps could have been done better or perhaps there's an opportunity to amend them as we get into Committee of the Whole, what we had originally was this statutory list of allowable investments, and that was pretty safe. I mean, just look at the old version: securities of the government of Canada or other provincial or municipal corporations. That's pretty safe stuff there. Securities of which the principal and the interest are guaranteed or covered by the Bank of Canada: again, a pretty secure investment.

- (c) debentures issued by a school division . . . drainage district, hospital district or health region . . . that are secured by or payable out of rates or taxes;
- (d) bonds, debentures or other evidences of indebtedness of a corporation that are secured by the assignment to a trustee of payments that the Government of Canada . . . has agreed to make, if the payments are sufficient.

3:10

The old list is very carefully laid out to be narrowly focused on what a trustee could do with the funds. Given the changes that we've seen in the stock market, in what's available there, and the percentage that people are allowed to hold that are out-of-country stocks or mutual funds – there have been a lot of changes in that area in the last 10 or 20 years. I think it's reasonable that the legislation recommends that the trustee is given more latitude with how to invest things, because this list is pretty narrow and would miss out a lot of what's available today. If you are trying to either maintain or grow a trust on behalf of someone else, I think a reasonable person would be wanting to take advantage of that, and you wouldn't have been able to under the old rules.

I already spoke about a trustee that hires an agent or an adviser who then takes a commission on trades that are executed, and I don't think that's addressed in this bill, but perhaps when the minister speaks to it again, he can answer that question for me. I think it is possible for the situation I've described to in fact happen, because it hasn't been specifically addressed in the act, although there are a number of cautions about prudence and the honour of advisers and that sort of thing. It's certainly clear that the trustee cannot profit from the trust, although in a lot of cases a will or a trust may say that the trustee can take expense money, but that's different from making money on every trade that would happen if the moneys from the trust were put into the stock market, a different deal there. I don't think that has been particularly covered here.

I'm wondering – perhaps it's in this bill and I'm not reading it – if there is more monitoring of an agent that's operating for a trustee. If things go wrong, is there a method for the government or an agent of the government to monitor or step in to stop things before they got too far out of hand? So could they, for example, revoke a delegation of trustee powers that had been delegated to an agent or an adviser? Is an agent of the government still able to be involved in ordering the return of profits to the trust if it had been whittled away?

I'm not keen here on a lot of government oversight. I think that makes the process cumbersome. What I'm concerned about is when I look at other areas that exist in legislation that people are pretty much – it's set out in legislation and then you go off and do it. I'll give you an example that I've worked with quite a bit, and that's

under the Societies Act. Once a nonprofit society is registered, there's really nothing in the legislation that sets up monitoring and enforcement if things go wrong. I'm questioning whether that is incorporated in the proposed legislation we see in front of us.

What happens in the Societies Act is that once a year the board of directors is supposed to submit their new list of directors and their previous year's financial statement. The problem is that nothing in the act says: if you don't do it, the following punishments will apply. Increasingly we have more activity in the nonprofit sector here, but there's now nothing in that act that allows any agent of the government or even an agent of the public to insist that there is monitoring and enforcement if things go wrong there. That's my concern with this legislation. We could be talking someone's livelihood or someone's safety and security if they are the recipient of the trust. What's the involvement here to monitor that things are going as they should? What ability is delegated through this legislation for an agent of the government or someone else to step forward and go "This isn't working the way it should be." So who is monitoring it, and who has an ability to enforce that it's going the way it is meant to be?

As we give a freedom or as we open the doors for things to be less regulated, I think at the same time that has to be balanced by some sort of monitoring. I think we get into trouble and this Assembly is not serving Albertans well if we don't follow through on that kind of thing and we leave Albertans out on a limb. I think as stewards and as legislators one of the areas that we often fall down on here is that we don't follow that through and make sure it's in our legislation that we will have monitoring and enforcement of it.

I think what's important here is that both the trustee and an agent or adviser, if that's who becomes involved, have to operate reasonably and we've got the prudent investor rule. It's quite clearly laid out that they should operate under court supervision and they should avoid conflicts of interest.

I will continue to look at this legislation. As I said, I was a bit surprised in that it was a considerably denser piece of legislation than I was led to expect based on my earlier conversations with the minister, so I don't feel that I've had enough time to go thoroughly through all the sections that are being proposed here so that I feel everything is being addressed. It's incumbent upon me to do that, and I will, certainly in second reading when we're discussing the principle of the bill. I can certainly support the principle of what's being put forward here. I'm a little concerned that the specifics of the legislation need to be quite clear when we are allowing someone control over a third party's money. That's my concern, and that's what I'll be spending more time looking at. When we come to this again in Committee of the Whole, I hope that I can go through those clauses one at a time and make sure that all of that is in fact covered.

I believe I have some colleagues who wish to speak to this. I will clear the way to allow them to do that, but thanks for the opportunity to speak in second reading on Bill 26. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to make some comments about Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001. At second reading, of course, we're concerned with the principles that the act has been based upon, and it seems to me that a number of the principles here are sound. I first ran into the whole notion of the prudent investment rule when the Standing Committee on Private Bills was looking at a submission by a couple of trusts who wanted the legal list that by law they had to abide by in their charter changed

to the prudent investment rule. I remember that when I first heard it, I was somewhat alarmed, because moneys held in trust like this I believe have to be handled very, very carefully. My initial reaction was that opening up and allowing more flexibility would open the door for people relying on trusts to lose and to be vulnerable to some bad decision-making.

3:20

But as the discussion proceeded and the groups that were administering trusts made their presentations and the experts that were brought along to support their position for the change made their cases, I became more and more convinced that it made sense. So I think the amendment of the Trustee Act and the big shift in it that allows the trustees to diversify portfolios by using the prudent investor rule is a good move and one that will ultimately benefit those people who depend on others to administer their financial affairs. As has been stated by the minister, this most commonly involves young children who have not yet reached the age of majority, so it's important that those trusts that are held for them are well managed.

As the preceding speaker indicated, the trustees are at the current time extremely limited in terms of the kinds of financial instruments they can place money in by current legislation, and being restricted works in many cases against the interests of the people they're holding money in trust for. So increasing that kind of flexibility for trustees I think is a wise move and one that will benefit those who have money held in trust.

There are a number of questions and a number of qualifications. Some of those qualifications surround the selection of an adviser. A trustee now under this legislation is able to delegate authority or some of the authority to an adviser, to a financial adviser. Although there are constraints in terms of that adviser and in the selection of that adviser, the trustee ultimately continues to be responsible for decisions that are made. One could foresee difficulties if an adviser is selected who is less than competent and would provide advice that would ultimately hurt the investment that is being handled on the part of the trustee.

Some of the constraints I think are open to interpretation. The whole notion of reasonableness, that a trustee has to take into account the reasonableness of the advice that he or she receives from an adviser, I think does open the door to a very, very wide interpretation if anyone were to question the actions of a trustee. What is reasonable to one may seem quite unreasonable to someone else, particularly when it's in the area of investments and those that are involved in the stock market. You don't have to read many books on advice to investors to see the kinds of wide range of opinions that you can get from so-called experts on any one investment decision, so there is some danger in allowing a trustee to delegate some of her or his powers.

The introduction of commissions that were not previously there is something that again may work against the interests of someone who has a trustee handling their investments. Although there were commissions paid before, I think it's quite different when you have someone handling an entire portfolio. I think standard rates for handling an entire portfolio would run in the order of 2 percent a year on the sums invested. That can start to amount to considerable sums of money, and I think that introduces a whole new area in terms of what is done with investments by trustees.

The adviser is in quite a different position from the trustee, and the responsibilities are really quite different one from the other, so it's a concern and I think a concern that we'll probably hear more about when the bill enters the committee stage. I think it can be argued that there are some provisions that safeguard the beneficiary,

but whether those safeguards are wide enough or do the job is a question that we'll be looking at rather carefully as the bill moves through the Assembly. There are, as I said, some safeguards now. The court can remove or appoint an adviser. The court may revoke a delegation of trustee powers to an adviser. An adviser must disclose all the remuneration and benefits that he or she might receive from a transaction. The adviser must operate under the same conflict of interest guidelines as a trustee. The court can order an adviser to return the profits to the trust. The trustee remains liable for the adviser.

So there are built in some constraints, some checks and some balances. Whether they are adequate, as I said, we'll be taking a closer look at as the bill enters the committee stage. But I think the underlying principles – and there seem to be at least four major ones: first of all, that the legal list restricts the actions of trustees; secondly, that the prudent investor rule would allow trustees to diversify portfolios in the interests of those who they hold money in trust for. The third principle, that trustees can delegate some investment authority, I think is the essence of the act. I think the important principle in the legislation is that trustees cannot be held liable for investment decisions, and that may be a principle that we want to come back and re-examine in terms of its soundness.

One of the overriding comments that I think can be made is that the act does bring legislation in our province into line with legislation elsewhere. I think that that kind of consistency is appropriate.

Those are my comments at second reading, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to the bill moving to committee stage. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a second time]

3:30

Bill 25

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act

[Adjourned debate: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. This is my special day: two bills in one day. I'm speaking now in second reading to Bill 25, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. This, in fact, is a new bill, which you don't see that often in this Legislature. Most of the proposed bills we deal with are in fact acts amending existing legislation. So this is brand new.

Again I'm looking at whether there is a need for the bill, whether this bill addresses that need, and whether there are any real concerns raised by the way the bill is worded. I'm not sure if this is true – it may well be just my imagination – but I rather fancy that the need for this bill comes out of the whole drug culture and how it has changed North American society, because I know that that culture brought us just enormous amounts of money and also enormous profits, enormous property purchased – and there are all kinds of terms that I'm just not up on here – illegally gained or wrongfully gained. That's how it is. I think that's what's underlying this bill: how do we set it up so property that has come into existence as a result of a crime or a wrongful act can either be returned to the person it was taken from or somehow used to benefit society at large?

Secondly, if there is something out there – cars, the example that's usually used – that we know is being used in a crime, but the car itself is not the crime, how do we get at taking that vehicle away? It is facilitating crime, but it isn't the crime itself. If it's sitting outside of a school, it's not doing anything wrong. It's just parked there. But if drugs are being sold out of the trunk – you know, the car's not being driven; it's not being parked illegally. Still, if there was no trunk to put the drugs in, they wouldn't be sold outside of the

school. So how is it possible for the police to get at some of these vessels – maybe I'll call them that – that are used, especially in the drug culture?

I think the other thing that is also addressed in this new bill is that the victims, before, had to go to court at their own cost to try and recoup any property, and what this bill is setting up is that the minister can go to civil court on behalf of the victim or on behalf of other victims at large. If there wasn't a specific victim in a crime, they can do it on behalf of a set of victims that aren't specifically involved in what was happening here.

So is the bill necessary? Well, probably. Could we have gotten along without it? Yes, I think we probably could have. I mean, there are other ways to get at this. As I mentioned, the victims right now go to civil court on their own. They can certainly continue to do that. What this is doing is empowering the minister to go to court on their behalf.

DR. TAYLOR: That's exactly what we want.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, the Minister of Environment is very eager to join in the discussion, and I'm sure he'll be jumping to his feet right away to speak as soon as I'm finished and not while I'm speaking. I'm looking forward to that. [interjection] I still have the floor.

So this is trying to work on wrongfully obtained . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, I just wanted to reiterate, in a sense, what you're saying and remind hon. members that the custom is that only one person speaks at a time. The hon. minister will have ample opportunity in the time this afternoon or in the weeks to come to get in on Bill 25, but right now Edmonton-Centre is the only member who has been recognized.

Edmonton-Centre.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was just reviewing what was actually being covered in the legislation: the wrongfully obtained, the victim's restitution, and taking the onus off the victim to recover. So this is really allowing the Crown to commence an action to take property away.

One of my concerns is always that when you start giving the police more powers, more laws to enforce as we write more laws, how much is that impacting on an average person, and what are the chances if a mistake is made that it can be rectified quickly? Certainly mistakes get made. They get made all the time. They get made by computers; they get made by people. They get made in all kinds of different areas. We have to be really careful when we're playing around with the ability to lock people up or take away individual freedoms or take away property that we have lots of checks and balances in place.

I need to go through this legislation more carefully, but I noticed a few things in here. There is a section that notes that when a court is commencing a property disposal hearing, it will happen "not later than 45 days from the day of the granting of the restraint order." Well, that's six weeks. Six weeks is a fairly long time. I think that's why the legislation also allows that the police can put literally a restraining order to stop the property from being disposed of. There's a long list in the legislation about under what circumstances. If a police officer believes that the property is going to melt or disintegrate or lose its value in some way, this allows the police to take control of it and to sell it or somehow hang onto the value of it.

We have to be so careful here when we enact legislation that empowers the police to be doing that.

One of the things that came out to me very quickly is that we're not talking about people who have been charged and convicted. We are talking about people who've simply been charged and in some cases, as far as I can tell, not even that. It's about the property, not the individual who has committed the crime. So we can easily end up in a situation where property is taken from someone who hasn't even been to court yet and hasn't been convicted and may never be convicted, but their property has already been taken and – who knows? – disposed of. At that point you've created another victim down the line.

One of the other areas that I'd like the minister to respond to is: how much consideration is given to creating other victims further down the line? I'll give you an example. If we have someone whose vehicle is taken for whatever reason under this legislation and that person drives for a living or has to have a car to make a living, whatever that is, they can no longer earn money. But they have a maintenance order against them, and that maintenance order, of course, is in support of children. We've now created a second victim in this scenario. How is that balanced by what's available in this legislation? If the police can be taking away a car because they believe that it was wrongfully obtained but that takes away someone's ability to earn an income and to pay a maintenance order, we've now got a child further down the line that isn't getting the maintenance money that they are entitled to and that a court has ordered for them. This legislation has then created a victim. How does that victim have recourse then?

3:40

So what are the checks and balances that the minister is willing to uphold with this legislation to make sure (a) that we don't create additional victims further down the road and (b) that we're darn sure that we are not unreasonably seizing people's property without having a pretty good reason why we're doing it? I have noted that there's a long list of things that a police officer is supposed to be looking at before they seize something or before they give a restraining order on something. Those lists always look really good, but it's time proving further down the road what should have been an obvious loophole to us.

So that's why I get concerned with new legislation, and I'd be interested in hearing from the minister what the process was in developing this. Whom did he consult with? Where did this idea come from? How many times has it sort of been through a feedback loop? I've sent it out to my advisers, but it's not a thin document. I mean, this thing isn't two pages long; it's a good 40 pages and filled with legal beagle stuff. How did this come into being, and what safeguards has the minister put in place? Or was this somebody's idea who was just sick of looking at that drug car being parked in front of the school and wanted a way to get rid of it? What have we done to make sure that we are not imposing something on the public, on Albertans, that puts them in a position of being more likely to have police interference in their life or with their property? I think that if legislation like this works well, great, but it has to be balanced with not having additional police presence in people's lives or additional legal or court presence in their lives. I'll move off that topic, but the minister can certainly see where I'm trying to get with that. It's to make sure that we don't put Albertans in a worse case than before we actually passed the legislation.

The Crown has to prove on a balance of probabilities that the property is the proceeds of an illegal act, and then a civil action will be used to institute a property disposal order. Property could be returned to the lawful owner. That's probably the most direct part

of this legislation, the most obvious part: if someone had property stolen from them and the police are able to identify it, then it can be got back to them. That's very straightforward. But life is not usually straightforward, and certainly what the criminal mind is capable of is never straightforward, especially when you've got drugs involved, because then it gets really kooky.

One of the things that I did like in the legislation was an understanding that sometimes – and I don't like this term, but I'll use it because everyone understands it now – there are victimless crimes, or there are crimes where you can't identify one specific individual or group of individuals as the victims of the crime. In that case, under this legislation the minister can be going to court to dispose of these assets, whatever they're allowed to do here, and the proceeds from that can go into a victims' crime compensation fund. We do have one that is set up in Alberta, and the money from those funds is available in response to an application from groups who provide services for victims or for Albertans. So, for example, the battered women's shelters have been able to access money there for special programs. John Howard, Elizabeth Fry, the Sally Ann, or a number of agencies that are offering those programs can apply for this money. I like to see that the minister in proposing this legislation has thought of that and has incorporated it into the proposed bill.

I listened carefully to the way the minister was describing this act. He actually went through it very quickly. I am looking forward to his responses to the issues and questions I've brought up so far. For most of what appears to be in the legislation, there is no current provision. There's no way to do this. So this is truly enabling legislation.

Those are the questions that I'd like to raise and hear back from the minister on. It's a unique piece of legislation. That's one of the other questions I had. Does anybody else have legislation like this? That's one of the things I was listening for from the minister. He did mention it in connection with the other bill that the minister has up before the Assembly today but not in connection with Bill 25, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. So I'm interested in where else this exists and where else it's working and what lessons we can learn from that. Where have the loopholes developed? Has this legislation addressed those loopholes in the way we know it can go wrong or be misinterpreted?

Those are the remarks I'd like to bring forward in second reading. In principle I think I am in favour of this bill, but I'd like to get some of those questions answered and get a lot more information around this before I can give it full support. I appreciate the opportunity to bring forward the questions that I do have.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 25, the new bill, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, in its second reading. At the outset I want to acknowledge that the minister, last week I guess, invited the two opposition parties to a briefing in his office on the bill as it was being drafted and redrafted. I want to thank him for taking this step. It certainly helps in understanding the reasons behind the minister's decision to initiate such legislative action.

Having acknowledged that, I want to come to the general observations on the bill. Victims' restitution and compensation payment is an important issue. I and my caucus fully support the idea that the victims who suffer from acts of crime by people who commit them are entitled to restitution and compensation for the losses that they suffer and that criminals, people who commit criminal acts, should not be permitted to enjoy the proceeds of

crime, benefit from the proceeds of crime. So in general, insofar as it is this principle, this set of considerations that is embodied in the bill and that drives its details, we are in support of the bill to a degree, but there are obviously questions.

3:50

It's a fairly far-reaching bill because it does deal with issues of private property and the rights to private property. It does deal with the distinction between criminal conviction and the ability that this bill will give to law enforcement agencies and the minister to proceed with action against individuals who may not be convicted under the Criminal Code yet may be taken to the civil courts. As a consequence and conclusion of the civil court proceedings, the individual who is criminally not held to be guilty may be held guilty using the different judicial and procedural conventions of the civil courts.

So there's a bit of a tension, a difficulty here that I would want to draw the attention of the House to. We need to address it and address it very carefully so that in our zeal to help the victims, we don't violate, at least in spirit, some other fundamental principles that we also are committed to; that is, not to be treated as guilty unless proven to be so. You know, that's an important principle in our system of justice. It's a fine line that will have to be treaded if this bill becomes law. So when we have an opportunity to study the bill in detail, we will certainly be asking those questions as we go clause by clause and section by section in the bill and see to what extent the provisions of the bill measure up to some of these fundamental principles that all of us want respected and want ourselves to recognize and make part of our decisions and practice.

Since this is a complex piece of legislation and bears careful scrutiny, one of the questions that has come to my mind is the relationship between the provisions of this bill and the federal proceeds of crime act. Where are the overlaps? Where might there be some territorial issues that need to be sorted out? On the whole question of seizure of property, which I think is also provided for in the federal act, who has the first claim to the proceeds from the property that may be seized and disposed of, given the fact that there already is in place federal legislation dealing, at least in part, with what this bill purports to deal with? There is the question of to what extent the provincial act steers clear of any potential contradictions and conflicts between the two pieces of legislation. We need to pay attention to that question, and I hope the minister will have more to say on it. Given the resources at his disposal, he is surely in a position to address some of these questions and have them addressed in his department through the legal expertise available to him. I would like to hear him on this. How do we ensure that both the federal government and the provincial government are not chasing the same proceeds of crime? That's a delicate matter, and we need to address it.

Another question that comes to mind is that it certainly will increase the work of the courts. The legislation will allow the Minister of Justice to go to the Court of Queen's Bench to do several things: to keep someone from disposing of the proceeds of crime and to conduct property disposal hearings. This certainly adds to the work that courts will be faced with. What we know about the workload in the courts and the delays and the waiting times already is a reality as a result of the shortage of resources in the court system and the justice system. So I have some questions about this. What does the minister plan to do with this? How much more work does he anticipate his bill will create? In a sense, that also speaks to: how significant is it for us to pass this bill? How big is the problem? If the problem is big, if it's going to generate lots of new and additional work for the courts, then how does he propose to address the

problem that will result from the passage of this bill and its enforcement, that will follow?

The civil courts, obviously, will also have additional demand on their time, and similar questions therefore arise there. The magnitude of the problem, the amount of resources that will fall into the hands of the government or go back to the victims, I think needs to be known. What's the amount? What kind of amounts are we talking about? Why should we answer that question? Why should we have asked this question? Because we have to weigh that against the cost to government of proceeding with this bill and then implementing it. Will the costs of making the changes that are being proposed here weigh favorably with the benefits that may be derived from them? I need some sort of assessment from the minister about the situation out there and what kind of revenues he thinks will flow from it that will compensate both the treasury, in terms of the additional costs it will incur, and generating funds for actually compensating the victims of crime.

Another question which has already been touched on: is there something that we learn from other places, other jurisdictions that may have already had some experience with similar legislation? The questions that I just posed perhaps can, to some degree at least, be answered if such an experience is available elsewhere. Has the minister done this kind of work to see to what degree such a law has achieved the objectives that certainly justify bringing in this piece of proposed legislation to the Legislature? Are some of the other provinces already in a situation where they may have tried similar measures and therefore have some experience that we can learn from? Is he looking across the border in some U.S. states? What's their experience? Does it also help reduce the probabilities of the commission of crime in addition to increasing the probabilities of compensating the victims of crime? These are questions that need to be addressed and addressed seriously.

What happens if a wrongful conviction results from the civil courts? Courts, as we all know, are not infallible. We've seen that in the case of criminal courts. We have seen it in the case of people who get convicted for murder, and then years down the line we find that they were innocent. What happens if mistakes are made? What happens if property is disposed of under Bill 25 – if it becomes law, you know, tomorrow – and it's subsequently found that it had no link to a criminal action? Would the Crown be liable to compensate someone whose property had been inappropriately disposed of? These are important questions. We all agree that courts make judgments on limited information, information that's put before them, and the information that's put before them, we know with the benefit of hindsight, can sometimes be so limited as to not provide the basis for a sound and appropriate judgment.

4:00

Again, another question. The minister is seeking, I think, fairly wide-ranging powers from the Legislature, a balance between the executive's ability to undertake certain actions and the ability of the Legislature to keep control for such vital matters as the rights to private property, as the ability to compensate victims, as the ability to fund organizations which do work which helps victims and all that.

Division 2 of the bill, Payment of Compensation. I was looking at page 32 and particularly the sections on grants, the victims of crime fund. The minister is seeking fairly wide and broad powers from the Legislature so that he can on his own make these decisions, which in my view are fairly important decisions. To what degree should the legislative say in those decisions be maintained? I will be able to say more on it as I look more closely at this, but in reading through it, the questions that came to mind had to do with the

appropriate balance between the legislative power and the executive power. The minister, in my view, is seeking very, very wide-ranging powers here that deserve and merit very careful scrutiny by this Legislature.

I understand that this bill will also be exempt from the provisions of the Regulations Act. We won't have an ability to tell the minister that some of these regulations that are drafted either don't express the spirit of the act or go beyond it or give him too much power. So there'll be really no compensatory opportunity for the Legislature to go back to the minister and say: "Look; this is not what the bill was about. This is what you have usurped as power, which is not really in our judgment indicative of the intentions of the act itself." So there are these issues.

I know that the minister is well-meaning. I know that the minister was careful in listening to some of the exchanges that we had with him during the briefing, and he conceded that there was a need perhaps to tighten the role of the courts in the whole process of seizing property and disposing of it to compensate victims. So he sees some risks, some dangers. They may be potential, but they're here. I think the Legislature would be well advised to ask some of those tough questions at this stage to help the minister and the Legislature to improve the bill. While it does give strong assurance to the victims of crime that they will be compensated and certainly sends out a strong message to criminals who commit criminal acts that they will not be able to benefit from the proceeds of crime, at the same time we want to make sure that the due process of law and the conventions of our justice system are fully respected and, in fact, reinforced by the provisions of the act by the time it becomes a final piece of legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll close my remarks on second reading.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make a few comments about Bill 25, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, in second reading, where we're looking at the principles of the bill.

I'd like to preface my remarks, Mr. Speaker, with some observations that I made about the School Act when Bill 16 was under consideration last week, and that is the plea for plain language legislation. It seems to me that there are some acts that so directly involve the public that they cry to be written in plain language. The School Act, I think, is one of those acts because of the interest that the general public has in it, the number of people that have to read that legislation. It seems to me that this bill is another one that demands plain English.

I know that we aren't supposed to consider the specific sections of the bill at second reading, but there are some classics in this bill in terms of obscure legal writing. I think they do a disservice to the drafters of the bill and to the government's intentions when that kind of language is such a major part of legislation like this, legislation that's read by people who have been victimized and are seeking some redress and their friends and those who are possibly offering them advice. So if ever there was an act that should have been written in very understandable plain English, I think this is one of those acts, and I think I'll have some more to say about that when it reaches committee stage.

Nevertheless, the bill rests on a number of principles and important principles, Mr. Speaker, that arise, I think, out of a growing intolerance on the part of Albertans and the public for criminals and the kind of injustices that have existed when criminals were allowed to undertake their activity and those that they victimized were left to

suffer the losses. So it's arising, I think, out of that general public sentiment that there was an unfairness and that that unfairness needed to be addressed. The basic principle is that the loss of the victims should be compensated by those individuals responsible for the loss. That just seems to make good common sense and I think serves as a warning to people who would take advantage of others that they are going to be called upon to make retribution.

A second principle is that a person's right to pursue other remedies shouldn't be limited. The act makes it very explicit that if a victim moves under this legislation, that in no way restricts his or her ability to seek redress in using other avenues, and I think it's an important principle and one that needs to be maintained.

Another principle that seems to play some importance in the act is that the minister should play a central role in compensation and restitution. I'm not sure that that's a good thing. I think that if you go through the act and look at the number of times the minister is called to take action, you can't help but feel that there's an overinvolvement of the minister in the whole process, and I wonder if it's appropriate for the minister to play that role.

Another principle that has been mentioned and that I'm sure is going to be a matter of public discussion before the bill has passed is that of actions being taken before charges are actually laid. We can recall that we had a similar discussion in the last meeting of this Legislature when police were given authority to take roadside actions without reference to the courts. I recall that at that time there was a great deal of concern expressed by various groups in the province at that being allowed to happen, and the same can occur with this legislation, that the peace officers are allowed to take property and are allowed to take action before an individual is actually charged. Now, there are some good reasons in the bill for that to happen, but again I think it's something that we shouldn't undertake as legislators without very, very careful consideration and assurance that safeguards have been built in to protect those people who haven't been charged and may not ultimately be charged with a crime.

4:10

Another principle is that it seems that it should be made far easier for victims to regain their property or to obtain restitution, and that's a good principle, Mr. Speaker. For far too long I think many victims have felt that it was just too much work, that it was just too difficult many times to go after restitution or to get their property returned, that the system was too complex, that it just involved too much time and energy, at least for some of the minor cases, for them to get involved. This legislation is intended to make it much easier.

There are some other principles and sort of subprinciples that we could look at; first of all, that property shouldn't be disposed of prior to a case being heard. I think it's going to be important for that to be upheld, that people being charged will not have property taken away before the case is heard.

There are a number of other comments that can be made, but I think the length of the bill – it's 37 pages of rather detailed explanation in terms of how the process is to proceed – demands the kind of detailed look that committee allows us to take. So I'll wait until that opportunity arises to pursue that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a second time]

Bill 23 Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.
[some applause]

MR. LORD: Well, thank you, everyone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 23, the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001.

Now, before I start, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the three accounting organizations to the development of these amendments. Representatives from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the Society of Certified Management Accountants of Alberta, and the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta worked closely with staff from Alberta Human Resources and Employment to identify these amendments to improve the Regulated Accounting Profession Act. All three accounting organizations strongly support the amendments proposed by this bill. My colleague the Hon. Greg Melchin sponsored the Regulated Accounting Profession Act in 1999, and you can always count on him.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Since then, supporting regulations developed in collaboration with the three accounting organizations underwent extensive stakeholder consultation, and it received royal assent in December of 1999. During this time, the accounting organizations also developed or revised bylaws, resolutions, rules of professional conduct, and related policies. The Regulated Accounting Profession Act came into force on September 13, 2001. The Regulated Accounting Profession Act brought the legislation for the three accounting organizations under one statute and replaced the Chartered Accountants Act, the Certified Management Accountants Act, and the Certified General Accountants Act.

The new act provides for a common regulatory framework for registration, complaint investigation, discipline, appeal hearings, and professional governance. There are separate schedules in the act, one for each of the three accounting organizations. These schedules address profession-specific requirements such as protected titles and transitional needs.

Six key principles are incorporated into the new act. The paramount principle is to ensure the public is adequately protected when seeking services from the accounting profession. Secondly, the profession's competency, credibility, and integrity are maintained. Thirdly, professional regulation should be flexible enough to permit businesses in capital markets to operate effectively without unnecessarily constraining the ongoing work of commerce. Fourthly, complaint and appeal processes should be transparent to the public, and information on the professional status of members should be credible and easily available to all Albertans. Fifthly, the regulatory processes should be fair and the principle of natural justice observed throughout, and decision-makers should be held accountable for the decisions that they make. Finally, the professional regulatory system should support the efficient and effective delivery of accounting services.

While staff at Alberta Human Resources and Employment were working with the accounting profession to bring the new act into force, a few amendments were identified to fine-tune the legislation by clarifying wording and policy intent and by correcting or updating provisions and references.

The proposed amendments for the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act have 12 sections. Section 1 provides authority to amend the act. Section 2 amends definitions to reflect the current titles used by the Society of Management Accountants of Alberta and to correct the reference in the definition of practice review. Sections 3 and 7 extend regulation-making authority to include retaining information about applicants for registration, including the need for complete registration applications. Sections

4, 5, and 9 clarify bylaw and regulation authority respecting practice standards and the definition of professional services and provide for consistent use of the term "specialty." Section 6 clarifies the conditions to approve an applicant's registration. Section 8 clarifies that the exemption from registration by public accounting firms and professional service providers applies only to specified services. Section 10 clarifies the definition of employer. Sections 11 and 12 correct and update the protected titles used by the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta and the Society of Management Accountants of Alberta.

That concludes my remarks, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would like to get on the record a few comments regarding Bill 23, the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, as presented to the Assembly by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Now, certainly this is amending existing legislation and providing a consistency with other similar statutes. However, it's not long since this act was developed, but I would urge all members of the Assembly to support these amendments, as certainly the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, which originally was passed, was perhaps done in haste. When I say that, we see these corrections – some would call them simply housekeeping – and we have to be very careful, Mr. Speaker, in scrutiny of all legislation as it comes before the Assembly. [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre states that one must always remain vigilant, and she's absolutely correct with that assessment.

This act does, effectively, provide simplified legislation for Alberta's three self-regulating accounting agencies, which were mentioned by the previous speaker. These changes, I've been assured, will ensure that the act is interpreted correctly.

4:20

Now, there has been quite an extensive consultation process. Sometimes there is a perception, Mr. Speaker, that employees of the Crown or civil servants are not doing their jobs or they're not working diligently. Well, this certainly is not the case when one looks at the correspondence that has come from the Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the Certified Management Accountants of Alberta, or the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta regarding this issue. All these pieces of correspondence are addressed to one specific individual, in this case the manager of professions and occupations, Adrian Pritchard. This gentleman is obviously doing his work so that there is a better Alberta for all, whether one is an accountant or one is a client of an accountant or their office.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I support these amendments as proposed. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie to close the debate.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to see that this bill seems to have met the expectations of the stakeholders in the industry as well, apparently, as those of the opposition and hopefully of this Assembly. So I'm very pleased to hear those comments and certainly can assure everyone that any questions and concerns that do come forward will be directed to the stakeholders involved in the drafting of this act.

As to our actions today, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members to support second reading of the act before us as it covers a number

of relatively minor housekeeping-type issues and assures that the membership that is being governed by this act feels comfortable that they're able to do so in complete compliance, that all the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed, so to speak, with the precision that is a hallmark of their profession.

I would again just reiterate that the major goals and principles that this act is proposing to foster within the accounting profession are centred around protection of the public when seeking professional services from accountants and, furthermore, to not just maintain but indeed to foster even more competency, credibility, and integrity than already exists now in the accounting profession. I think it's an admirable goal.

With this in mind, Mr. Speaker, I close debate and ask for the Assembly's support for second reading of this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a second time]

Bill 24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 24, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act.

I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of the foresters and forest technologists to the development of these proposed amendments. Representatives from both the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association and the Alberta Forest Technologists Association worked closely with the staff of Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development to identify these amendments that improve the Regulated Forestry Profession Act. Both professional forest associations supported the amendments proposed by this bill.

I had the honour of sponsoring the Regulated Forestry Profession Act in 1999. Since then, the proposed regulations have been developed in collaboration with two forest organizations. Recently the two associations jointly sponsored a series of community meetings to review the proposed regulations with their membership. During this time the forest organizations have also been developing and revisiting supporting bylaws, standards of practice, a code of ethics, and policies required to bring the new act into force. External consultations are also under way with organizations in the industry and other professional organizations to meet the requirement of the agreement on internal trade.

The new Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act will replace the Regulated Forestry Profession Act and consolidate the regulations of two professional forest organizations under one statute. The new act was developed to improve the quality of forestry service in Alberta by improving the regulations of foresters and forest technologists. By continuing to ensure the quality of our forest professionals, the act contributes to protecting Alberta's sustainable forest resource.

The Regulated Forestry Profession Act is a statute modeled on the Health Professions Act. It has two sections: a common section establishing registration, professional conduct, continuing compliance, and appeal processes and governance and accountability requirements; and two schedules, one for each forest profession, which protect forest-specific titles and provides for transmission requirements. We're working with the forest professionals to develop the regulations that will bring the new act into force, several amendments that will improve the legislation by clarifying words

and policy intent, and by correcting or updating provisions and references where identified.

To ensure consistency with current government policies for professional legislation, we are considering relative amendments to the Health Professions Act introduced by the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000, and proposed by Bill 18, the Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001.

The proposals for the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act have 26 sections. Section 1 provides authority to amend the act. Sections 2 and 25 clarify the authority of the regulatory body to approve education programs for registration and require consultation with the Minister of Human Resources and Employment and with the Minister of Learning for changes to education program approvals.

Section 3 clarifies eligibility requirements for public members. Sections 4 and 8 clarify information required for registration and practice permits and enable the regulatory body to recognize professions from other jurisdictions for registration. Section 5 clarifies the conditions for the approval to register a complaint.

Section 6 changes the plural to singular for consistency and adds a requirement to identify time restrictions on a member's practice in the professional register. Section 7 provides for superceding or canceling a practice permit if a renewal application is not received. Section 9 removes unnecessary cross-referencing. Sections 10 and 11 clarify that the registration or practice merits or both may be canceled, reinstated, or reissued and provide authorization for names of deceased members to be removed from the register. Section 12 clarifies that regulation is mandatory for a member teaching students, members, or both.

Section 13 clarifies the authorization of a council to establish continuing competence programs. Sections 14 and 22 clarify when the continuing competence committee may make referrals to a complaints director and protect the confidentiality of information collected on members through the continuing competence program. Section 15 provides authority for the complaints director to attempt to resolve a complaint. Section 16 permits the complaint director to act on a referral from the complaints committee. Section 17 permits the identification of parties in the alternative complaint resolution process to be revealed only if permitted by a ratified settlement agreement.

Section 18 clarifies that an investigation person may be required to pay the expenses of the investigation or hearing or both. Section 19 clarifies the reference to court to mean the Court of Appeal. Section 20 clarifies the rules of access to information about regulated members and notification requirements, updates the definition of employer, and corrects a cross-reference. Section 21 clarifies that the complete registration applications must be retained for at least 10 years.

4:30

Section 23 clarifies the regulation-making authority for the evaluation, registration, and practice permit applications, reissuing practice permits, reinstating registration, and information requirements for registration applications. Section 24 clarifies the bylaw-making authority concerning reinstatement and provides authorization for the regulatory body to recoup the cost of accreditation. Section 26 clarifies the standards of practice and not a type of code of ethics.

In conclusion, the amendments to the Regulated Forestry Profession Act establish clear, accountable requirements and provide the authority of self-regulated professions to respond to the public expectations through more transparent and consistent registration compliance and professional conduct requirements. The degree of

collaboration between the forest industry, the professional foresters, the professional forest technologists, and the government in developing both the new act and the proposed amendments has been extraordinary. In the future I would hope to see more examples of this level of industry and professional participation in other sectors.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 24, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, this afternoon. I have had a series of consultations with people on the RITE line from all across the province on this initiative. Certainly, I appreciate the meeting that was organized this morning by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead along with, I believe, eight other individuals and myself and a member of the Liberal research staff. We had quite a discussion on this bill.

I entered the room with the hon. member, and I saw a large painting on the wall. I don't know whether it was a Percheron or a Clydesdale, but it was a workhorse. Immediately I thought of the experiment that occurred in the forest out by Hinton. I couldn't decide whether it would be a technologist or a forester with a university degree from Alberta who would be overseeing the experiment. It was an experiment to see if we could keep the forest intact as we selectively log. I suspect that that painting was in recognition of that experiment. I haven't heard any of the details of that experiment: whether it was economically viable, what happened, whether it occurs in the winter, or whether it is occurring all the time. That is just one example of what individuals involved with the forestry profession do in this province.

We have seen a remarkable growth in the forest industry in this province. In the mid-80s there was a significant effort to diversify the Alberta economy. We saw a large number of projects go ahead, and there are others on the drawing board. One would have to assess what role the foresters will have, whether they have a degree and they're registered with the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association or they're technologists and they're with the Alberta Forest Technologists Association, whether they are the ones that are going to be conducting the accurate forecast of the per cubic metre of timber harvest that will be available in this province.

We have to ensure that there is a sustainability to the timber harvest, and I'm not convinced that the studies that have been done to date have been accurate. Now, individuals in these professional associations certainly are going to have a say in those discussions as to just precisely, regardless of the forest region, how many cubic metres of wood there are. Heaven forbid if there is not the supply of harvestable timber that we originally thought. One has to be careful but, at the same time, recognize the importance of these professional groups and the members within them.

Certainly with this amendment act, Bill 24, we will amend existing legislation for consistency with other similar legislation, including the Health Professions Act. The group this morning was helpful in addressing not only my concerns and to a certain degree the concerns of the people on the RITE line but also the concerns of Mr. Smolak, the researcher. Matthew Smolak has been keeping his eye on this legislation and doing a very, very good job of it.

The hon. member earlier spoke about addressing issues of registration, professional conduct, and governance requirements for both associations. In essence, if I'm to understand correctly, it gives the two associations and their members equal status under the act. Forestry technologists, as I understand it, may work independently or under the supervision of foresters. There are a lot of general activities, Mr. Speaker, that they can be involved in, whether it's

reforestation, surveying, measuring, and mapping forest areas. That is of the utmost importance if we are going to continue to have a viable forestry industry in this province. They can keep records on the amount and the condition of each load of logs. They can supervise road locations and the construction of access roads. They can inspect trees and collect samples of plants, seeds, foliage, bark, and roots to record insect and disease damage. They can assist in laboratory field experiments of plants, animals, insects, diseases, et cetera, supervise timber harvesting in primary processing operations, also do log scaling, or measuring the volumes of a cubic metre of, I guess, in this case the trucks that would be hauling the logs from the forest to the mill.

The forest technologists are sometimes called forest officers. Maybe that's not the case anymore, as the hon. member has stated, but I'm led to believe that they're still called forest officers. There are many other things that these forest officers can do. They can manage forest-protection activities including fire control, fire crew training, and co-ordinating fire detection and public education programs. They can issue fire permits, timber permits, and other forest use licences. They can even supervise land use activities such as livestock grazing and recreational activities like snowmobiling to ensure compliance with regulations, supervise pipeline, seismic, and mining operations and/or oil and gas drilling sites in relation to forest disturbances. So there is a lot of work for those individuals to do. We must understand that some of the conditions under which these individuals will be working will not be, to say the least, the most luxurious.

4:40

Now, what are the educational requirements for these individuals? What can they exactly expect to make once they get their qualifications? Forestry technologists are graduates of a two-year or three-year forest technology program. It should be noted, Mr. Speaker, that forest technologists and forest technicians may be used somewhat differently by specific employers in postsecondary institutions. This is information that I have received from the occupational profile put out by Alberta Human Resources and Employment. It's quite interesting when we consider Bill 24, because the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology in Edmonton offers a two-year forest technology program. Now, there are many ways that one, as I understand it, can enter this occupation or profession. This can be used as a stepping-stone to get one's degree. This is one of the questions that was put to me: why should I take the time and expense to achieve university accreditation when there is supposedly going to be equal status given to a forester with a university degree and a technologist with two years at NAIT? There's a two-year difference here, and there's a lot of money involved.

The first year of training in this program would include going to the Kidney Lake field training camp in Swan Hills in the autumn. The second year of training is offered at the Environmental Training Centre in Hinton. The entrance requirement is a general high school diploma or equivalent with English 30 or 33, math 30 or 33, biology, and chemistry, with preference given to applicants who have a 30-level science course. Now, a CPR health-saver certificate and St. John's Ambulance courses are also required. An Alberta class 4 driver's licence is highly recommended. There's no mention in here, fortunately, of an Alberta ID. This is a quota program with competitive admission.

Now, what's the pay after one graduates? According to this document, the starting salary for a 1998 diploma program graduate is anywhere in the range from \$26,500 to \$31,000 a year. According to the 1999 Alberta wage and salary survey, most Albertans in the forestry technologist and technician occupational group earned – and

there's a wide range here, Mr. Speaker – from \$23,600 to \$54,000 per year. Unfortunately, at this time I don't know what one would get with a university degree. That's the problem with a lot of consultations that take place on bills in the mornings and then you find yourself debating them in the afternoon: you just don't have the time to get a lot of adequate or necessary research done. I would hate to see in all of this individuals with degrees and the information and the knowledge and the skill that they have acquired put aside. I've been assured that this is certainly not the case, but at the same time one has to recognize that there are market forces involved, as it was explained to me, and if an individual has the option or the choice perhaps of hiring an entry-level person with a technologist's certificate at, say, \$24,000 a year or someone with a university degree starting at \$35,000 a year – well, we cannot as a result of this allow our university system and the people that come out from that program to be shortchanged. I've been assured that this is not going to happen, but it's certainly one thing that I would like to bring to the attention of this Assembly.

We think to ourselves: well, there's a job for everyone in Alberta. Last week with great fanfare there was an announcement made about a program to allow guest workers, as they were described, into the province, but at the same time I read in the paper this morning – and I'm sure that the hon. Minister of Economic Development shares my concern with this – that there's a steel fabricator laying off individuals because there's no work. The steel fabricator said that this work is going offshore. So we have to be very careful about these things. We just can't replace one group of workers simply with another by de-skilling.

I certainly hope that the people that have contacted me, the Albertans who are involved in the forest industry who have contacted me on the RITE line regarding this issue can be assured by this legislation that there's going to be a place for every member of the professions in this province, that the industry is going to accommodate both groups. They're just not going to look at the bottom line; they're going to look at the skills that each group can provide so that the industry not only will benefit but will also grow and make for a better Alberta.

In conclusion, at this time, Mr. Speaker, at second reading I would cede the floor to any hon. member of this Assembly who has a view that they would like to express on Bill 24, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, and I look forward to committee.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Just a few comments and questions that I had on this Bill 24, Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001. Now, I note that the sponsoring member did a very thorough job in walking us through, reading out from his script what the different sections of the bill meant. I'm sure that's helpful to people reading the *Hansard*.

A couple of things have occurred to me. One, right off the bat, I notice is that this is amending a statute from 1999, and in fact I think this Regulated Forestry Profession Act was never proclaimed. We've seen a couple of those bills here today, so I guess I'm wondering what is . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Are we going too fast for you?

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I think it's more about a hitch in the government's process here, with all these committees that they pass these bills through.

MR. MacDONALD: We can't sit on them, and these mistakes pass.

MS BLAKEMAN: I think so. I think that because these are behind-closed-doors committees, there are obviously mistakes being made. The bills come forward to the Assembly, we ask questions about them, and the questions aren't usually answered before the vote is called. Here we have at least two acts back this afternoon from 1999. There might have even been three. They're back on the floor here in 2001. I notice that this one didn't even get proclaimed, so there's something going wrong here in this process.

4:50

What this is looking to do is to give consistency to the two different types of foresters that we have. The major difference seems to be that one is a two-year diploma from a technical institute and the other is a four-year degree from a university. There's an attempt by the two colleges or associations representing these people to bring together the registration, the professional conduct, and the governance for these two associations.

It's interesting how often the Health Professions Act is being referred to here, because I think that's another act that's also – it has; it was Bill 18 – been brought back here just recently to have things fixed in it. So while there's a great temptation for me to stand here today and go: "Yup. Fine. Look's great to me. Let's go" . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MS BLAKEMAN: And I can see the eagerness of the government members to in fact do that. I think we need to be cautious in that we've already seen that mistakes were made before in moving it through too quickly and frankly I think from not paying attention to what's actually being proposed. So let's take a deep breath and make sure that we're doing this right this time so that we don't see this same act back here in front of us in another year and still not proclaimed, which isn't doing any favours to the two organizations that are trying to exist under this legislation. It's sloppy work, and it's not helping those organizations that are trying to get their registration and their requirements and professional conduct in place and to operate under that.

The other similarity that I keep hearing with the Health Professions Act is the desire of this government to delegate authority to associations over their respective professions. On the one hand, I can see why that makes perfect sense. These are professional organizations. They know better than others what kinds of requirements are going to keep them at the top of their profession. There's a certain amount of pride in doing very well and in keeping the bar high. On the other hand, the government in this case is operating in a consumer protection function. If this is the legislation that various professions have to adhere to, then once they've passed that bar that this legislation sets out, the government is in effect saying to consumers in Alberta: these people are the top in their profession, and they will do all the things they're supposed to do. So we have to make sure that when we set this legislation out, it is in fact setting the bar high, because the rest of the people in Alberta look to the government and go: "Okay. If the government has put its Good Housekeeping seal of approval on it, great; we'll believe them."

We've seen other examples of this government doing that. The one that comes to mind most quickly is the pine shakes scandal, where the government put its seal of approval on something and, in fact, it shouldn't have, and it cost a lot Albertans a lot of money. Albertans believed the government was performing a consumer protection function there. So I'm cautious about why there is such pressure to be following the same mold as the Health Professions Act and having everything delegated over to the professions.

The bill is not addressing labour issues such as wages, but the

regulations do have clarification for registration requirement, degree graduates, and diploma graduates. Right. That's the other thing that comes up with this, and I think we see this in a couple of other professional areas, but it's pretty evident in this one. Essentially, this legislation is now setting up both the forestry technicians and the foresters – that is, the ones with a certificate or a diploma from an institute of technology versus someone with a university degree – as equivalent in this act, and it does raise the question: if you can get the same things essentially, why, in fact, would anyone go and get a university degree in three or four years and rack up a debt of at least \$20,000 now when you could just do two years at an institute of technology or a college and reap the benefits of essentially the same thing, which is what the legislation is setting out? [interjections]

I see that I have managed to engage some members of the frat boys over here, and I know he'll be leaping to his feet to . . . [interjections] Yeah. I'm glad I could entertain them, but I'm looking forward to his contribution to the discussion, aside from playing with his fart pillow. That would be much more interesting. [interjections] Well, they're frat boys; they play little frat games.

I think that that is the question that hasn't been addressed clearly in the presentation that we heard from the sponsoring member, why this is being set up as an equivalency. In fact, they're quite different. What is the justification behind that, and what is being anticipated in the future from it if, in fact, we have people that are no longer interested in achieving a university degree? I suppose if I had to guess, part of the answer might be that the BA doesn't do you much good. You'd really want to go on and get a master's or a doctorate, and then you could be leading the research or the research team. I think that hasn't been addressed, and it does need to be clarified.

I did look through the information that was provided and the consultation sessions input summary that was done just recently actually, in late October, with the professional foresters and professional forest technologists. They seem fine with this and even seem eager to get onboard. I would like to just make sure that we're not rushing through something again and leaving another loophole

that will put us back here in another six months or a year trying to fix this yet again to make sure that we've done it right this time. So I'll be consulting with people that I know in the community to make sure that, in fact, it is reasonable.

In speaking in principle in second reading, I don't see a problem with the bill other than those problems that I've already outlined, so I'll be looking forward to addressing this in Committee of the Whole. I thank the Speaker for the opportunity to address it in second reading. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close the debate.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I have to thank the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association and the Alberta Forest Technologists Association for their due diligence on this as well as Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. I think this is a good example of how different industry levels and professionals can work together in sectors to make our province accountable in these sectors.

At this time it gives me great pleasure to move second reading of Bill 24, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that such excellent and outstanding progress has been made in the House today with many good comments from several colleagues who have risen to their feet to do so, I would move that we call it 5:30 and reconvene tonight at 8 in Committee of the Whole.

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

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 19, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/11/19

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

Before I recognize the next speaker, could we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure tonight to rise and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly a considerable delegation from the neighbourhood of Ottewell. These are the 120th Ottewell Cubs. There are 14 children, and there are 10 adults, five leaders and five parents. The group leaders of the Ottewell Cubs this evening are Mr. Lee White, Mr. Mike Maidens, Mr. George Wharry, Mrs. Beverley White, and Mr. Blair Himmelrich. The devoted parents in this group this evening are Mr. Dean Rosychuk, Mr. Brian St. Pierre, Mr. Rick Woodward, Mrs. Damaris Crawford, and Mrs. Gale Hanasyk. I would now ask them to rise – they're in the public gallery – and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

Bill 22 Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of the guests seated in the galleries, this is the committee stage of the Legislature. It's a little more informal than the normal procedure. You will see people moving around, being able to take off their jackets. That doesn't happen normally in the regular proceedings. It only happens during committee stage.

On Bill 22, Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001, are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. At this time for the record I would like to indicate in committee as the spokesperson for the opposition that we certainly agree with and support this amendment. There has been a consultation process, as was said earlier, and I look forward to any comments from other members of the Assembly regarding this amendment to the Builders' Lien Act.

Certainly the Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors seems anxious for this increase in the 45-day period to a 90-day period. We need to ensure that there is a system in place where people, if they need to, can register in due time a lien as it would arise in the normal process of doing business. Now, the extension was required so that the holdback period will again correspond with the lien registration period. I think that everyone will be well suited by this amendment. I'm not going to go into any details. If the members want to refer to second reading, they certainly may.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all hon. members just how important the oil well drilling contracting business is to the economy of this province. As I said before, we need to ensure that there are processes where people can receive the money that is owed them.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd also like to speak briefly tonight in regards to Bill 22, the Builders' Lien Amendment Act. Certainly, in looking at this piece of legislation, it is one that is dearly needed by contractors in this province. We do know that wells are drilled in the province on a day-work basis, and it is a contractual arrangement which finds service companies essentially renting their equipment and personnel to the operator for a specific procedure and time period. The operator independently purchases any materials required and functions as the prime contractor directing the work program. Now, particularly in the province and with the volatility of this particular industry, when oil prices are high, we do get a tremendous amount of drilling activity, and in periods of downturn, which we are experiencing presently, then what happens is that some of these people can go out of business. It doesn't leave these people that drill these wells much opportunity to recover their costs. They're also in a very delicate position in that they cannot go after some of these oil companies because at that point they are virtually ensuring that they would not get any more contracts. So the amendment here to increase the lien period from 45 to 90 days is a good amendment. It will certainly help these people, give them more of an opportunity to collect their money, and certainly make the whole industry much more stable.

So with those few comments I will cede the floor to some other members who may wish to add something to this debate. Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 22 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 23 Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much. Bill 23, which was discussed at second reading, was introduced by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. Again, we need to have a look at this section by section. It certainly is legislation that, as I said before, is going to bring existing legislation into a consistent format with other similar pieces of legislation.

Now, perhaps the sponsor of the bill can update all members of the Assembly on how this corresponds to the Health Professions Act. Specifically, this amendment addresses registration, practice

reviews, and information on protected titles. Also, we are going to be addressing the structures for the three self-regulating accounting agencies: the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the Society of Management Accountants of Alberta, and the Certified General Accountants' Association of Alberta.

Now, some may feel that all of these changes are very much about housekeeping, but if we have a look at the act in a section analysis, section 2(a) and (b) represents corrections in the titles of these positions and groups, and (c) is amended to acknowledge that the practice areas are specific through bylaws, not regulations. Section 3, for all hon. members, includes "applicants for registration" to registrants and former registrants as those covered by regulations on maintaining information files. Section 4 includes regulations as items which a governing body may make bylaws in response to. The section 7 provision requires accounting organizations to "maintain complete applications for registration."

8:10

Now, finally, Mr. Chairman, section 10 replaces 96(2)(b)(v) with a new clause (v), that clarifies and expands supervision to provide information on employers in the interests of the public when an employee is being investigated. This is to include both paid and unpaid employees, consultants, contractors, and volunteers. As I understand it, sections 12 and 13 are corrections in titles and abbreviations.

I think there has been a very good consultation process. Our office has received calls, Mr. Chairman, and the Liberal research staff has received calls of reassurance from various groups that the Member for Calgary-Currie is certainly on the right track with this legislation. Again, I'm not going to go into detail like I did this afternoon with the groups that are endorsing this, but it's certainly legislation that we are delighted to say that we support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The clauses of Bill 23 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. This legislation is, again, similar to the legislation that was presented by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. I listened with interest this afternoon to the remarks from the hon. Member for West Yellowhead at second reading on this bill.

Again, at this stage, in committee, I think we need to consider the extensive consultation process. There were 200 individuals consulted from various places in the province. I believe the meeting in High Level was held in the Stardust hotel. It's an establishment that I'm not familiar with, but it certainly has a noteworthy name. Now, if the hon. Member for West Yellowhead was there, I would

like to hear the description from that hon. member about the meeting that was held in High Level and that 25 people were attending. One of the questions I had, Mr. Chairman – and I would like to share this with all members – is that in the consultation process that was developed, there were many groups represented. As I understand it, there was industry, there was the forestry technologists professional association, as well as the professional association of the foresters. In light of that, one can only assume that the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association is satisfied with this initiative and that the Alberta Forest Technologists Association, or the AFTA, is also satisfied with the amendments proposed by the hon. member.

Now, when we consider the consultation process, we have to ensure that everyone has confidence in the system. Earlier today I expressed my opinion that whenever people are using the RITE line to phone opposition members when they have concerns about legislation like this and this specific piece, they're not comfortable talking to government members, and it is odd. It's sort of a reflection on a democracy that perhaps is not as healthy as we would like to think, Mr. Chairman, whenever individuals are just not comfortable coming forward with their opinions because they feel there may be some retribution, whether it be in the employment field or not. I don't know, but certainly what was expressed to me on the RITE line is, "No, I don't feel comfortable with that consultation process because I would like my opinions to remain confidential." That is noteworthy. I feel that at this time, after the meeting we held this morning, this should be a matter of public record: that there are some people outside the 200 that did attend the consultation process that was arranged who are just not comfortable with that process. For whatever reason, they feel intimidated. I don't know what it is, but maybe other hon. members of this Assembly can provide me with an answer.

With that, Mr. Chairman, unless I hear back in the next day or two from those individuals, I will have to support this bill, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001, in committee but with the reluctance that I expressed at second reading this afternoon.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 24 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

Bill 26 Trustee Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? Are you ready for the question? Is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar rising to speak?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I have one question, and I would like to put this question on the record at committee on Bill 26, Trustee Amendment Act, 2001.

This afternoon during second reading the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was speaking, and I noted with interest her remarks and what was said earlier in the afternoon during question

period. Perhaps hon. members on the other side of the House can clarify this for me. The Trustee Amendment Act, section 5, authorizes trustee investments.

8:20

Now, section 5(c) says:

debentures issued by a school division, school district, drainage district, hospital district or health region under the Regional Health Authorities Act in Alberta that are secured by or payable out of rates or taxes.

I was led to believe in question period that this would never occur with a regional health authority, that there was going to be no form of deficit financing in this manner. I wonder if at this time a member opposite could explain the rationale of even having the regional health authority mentioned in there. Perhaps in the flow of question period and the excessive noise from the members of the third party I didn't hear that exchange correctly. Maybe I did not, but I thought I heard specifically that regional health authorities would not be running a deficit in that way, and I'm obligated at this time in committee to point that out.

Specifically what this would mean – another point, Mr. Chairman, would be clients on AISH. A couple of years ago we had a significant debate in this Assembly on setting a ceiling on the value of the assets of individuals who are . . .

MR. BONNER: It was \$100,000.

MR. MacDONALD: It was \$100,000, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry reminds me, the ceiling that was set for clients of AISH. Now, how will this be handled with the new Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, Mr. Chairman? Will there be a list somewhere that will conveniently be available to individuals in Alberta Human Resources and Employment as a means of cross-referencing to ensure that this ceiling is correct or is not above it?

Now, there are issues here that I think we need to talk about, and one is the issue specifically of that list. What information is there? Who would use it? Would they use it or could they use it? That is also an issue of concern, as well as the regional health authorities. Earlier this afternoon when the hon. member was speaking, that was one of the concerns that I also had.

This existing trustee act lists authorized trustee investments. I don't know whether section 5 is that attached list or not.

In conclusion, I would like some answers in due time regarding my question on clients of AISH who perhaps have a trust fund set up that is \$100,000. I assume not, but I think it is worth while to investigate, if there was a list of individuals such as this, if it could be used, perhaps, against them to deny or to reduce benefits.

With those comments on the record, Mr. Chairman, I will cede the floor to another hon. member of this House regarding Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 26 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 25

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are two sides to the issues that are being addressed by this particular act. I feel like I can offer it support but not without some concerns and doubts. At least there are some issues that need to be thought through perhaps more than has been done so far so that we don't have this bill coming back for amendments and corrections and adjustments next year, which seems to happen with bills from time to time.

In particular, we've heard concern raised in this House that the court system, the civil court system and the provincial courts, are already overloaded, bogged down, and moving very, very slowly. One of the risks or spin-off effects of this Bill 25 could easily be a surge in the number of civil actions in provincial courts, and that would only add to the burden that we are already experiencing here. I would be interested to know if there has been any prediction or any analysis done on the impact of this bill on the workload of the provincial courts and on delays and staffing levels and costs required to meet the parameters of the bill.

I'm also concerned about the liability of peace officers who may be acting in good faith under this bill but may nonetheless be making an error. If property is seized under the act on the peace officer's advice and then it turns out that a mistake has been made, we need to ensure that the peace officers will not be held liable, assuming that they are operating in good faith. So there is a concern here for the well-being of our police and other peace officers.

One other point I will make is that this bill focuses very much simply on property crimes and not on victims of violent crime. So while it's of course commendable to address the rights of victims of property crimes, we also need to be looking at ways of addressing the rights of victims of violent crime: sexual crime, assault, and so on. I think it's a gap in the concept behind this bill and a gap in the bill itself that the rights and the concerns of victims of violent crime are not addressed, as I understand it. I think we need to take steps to ensure that victims of violent crime enjoy the same protections and the same possibilities of restitution and compensation that victims of property crime get. Victims of violent crime will have lost wages, medical costs, and of course the costs associated with the stress or distress of the crime itself.

So there are some concerns with this bill. All of that said, I think we will be offering it our qualified support. So I will make those comments my last.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. I listened with interest also earlier today to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre and now the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview discussing Bill 25, the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act. Certainly the goal of this is encouraging if this legislation is to direct initiatives that will make it easier to regain property or obtain court order restitution for losses suffered as a result of an illegal act. Well, fine, but there are a few cautions, one, of course, which was just discussed. One of the objectives is that the action or any other proceedings under the act can proceed under this whether or not the person responsible for the illegal act has been charged or convicted.

8:30

Now, we are also allowing the minister to direct the Crown to commence a legal action for the purpose of taking property away from a person if a peace officer reasonably believes that a person has acquired the property from an illegal act, and that is noteworthy. There doesn't seem to be anyone across the province with any issues with this. Certainly I haven't heard of any. When you think that there has to be a balance – and we have to recognize this, Mr. Chairman, that there is a balance between the rights of victims and alleged criminals, and we have to emphasize “alleged” – where should the scales tip? It's hard to say. But I would remind members that the powers outlined in this legislation are already available to victims in the Court of Queen's Bench, and the shift is that the Crown can now pursue the remedies in our Provincial Court system, and the victim can pursue, as I understand this, the same remedies in Queen's Bench.

Now, the Minister of Justice should take into account the wishes of the victim in exercising his discretion or in future times maybe her discretion – his or her discretion – under the act. For example, if the victim is seeking remedy in the Court of Queen's Bench, then the minister should not do anything incompatible or counterproductive to the victim's efforts.

It has been noted by other speakers that the legislation deals only with property and does not deal with victims of violent crime. A sexual assault victim has no ability to obtain a judgment for lost wages or medical costs or anything like that from the criminal in criminal court. The victim can only obtain remedies again in Queen's Bench. However, the power to freeze assets or issue restraining orders in criminal court could really help victims of crime, Mr. Chairman.

The question outstanding is: what resources is the hon. minister making available to enforce orders and collect on orders given that police, prosecutors, and civil lawyers at Alberta Justice are already overwhelmed? This issue was discussed by previous speakers as well. What accounting and recording mechanisms does the minister have in place to adequately manage the collection on orders and distribution of settlements to the victims of crime fund or to victims?

Now, this also would make me think of what Mr. Valentine from the Auditor General's office had to say on the mechanism and the procedures in place to collect outstanding traffic fines from individuals who were in violation in this province but who live in another province. All these matters would seem related, because in my view a crime is a crime, Mr. Chairman.

With those remarks on the record for Bill 25, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, I will cede the floor to another hon. member.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to make just a few comments here as well on Bill 25, Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act, 2001. In reading over the bill and looking at some of the objectives of the bill, it reminded me very much of the powers that are currently held by Canada Customs in that when people are trying to cross the border from the United States into Canada or if they arrive on international flights and they have contraband or whatever, then the powers of Canada Customs are quite extensive, and it can be seized. In that regard, I see some strengths in this particular bill in that when a crime has been committed and we do have victims of that crime, then the court can

issue a restraining order to prevent the disposal of any assets. Now, I think this is a very strong piece here in this legislation and certainly will ensure that victims of property crimes will have an opportunity to have some restitution for the crime that was perpetrated against them.

Now, also with this legislation, Mr. Chairman, a peace officer can direct that property to be held until a restraint order can be issued. Again, this is a strong recommendation and part of the act since it will ensure that assets cannot be disposed of while the courts get involved. As well, if the Crown proves on the balance of probabilities that the property is the proceeds of an illegal act, then civil action will be used to institute a property disposal order. The property will be returned to the lawful owner, and certainly we see examples of that now. When the police do uncover large amounts of property they feel is stolen, they make every effort they can to return that, but in this particular case I think it will strengthen what we currently do have in there.

Now, another area that I think this bill addresses is restitution. Under restitution in this bill, Mr. Chairman, the court can order that the property of a person convicted of an illegal act be transferred to a victim, so we do have the restitution aspect of this bill as well. When we look at compensation in the case of where there is no lawful owner, property will be sold and the proceeds directed to an agency or a program devoted to remedying the social harm caused by the illegal act. As well, compensation payment orders can be issued to ensure that the offender does pay.

Now, then, under administration in regards to this particular bill, Mr. Chairman, provisions are made for disclosure to the courts of financial information from the offender, again a very good recommendation. As well, the act does contain penalties for contempt. Those, as I see it, are very strong points with this particular act.

8:40

As well, I must note, as did the members for Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Gold Bar, that this legislation deals only with property. It does not deal with victims of violent crimes. I think that when we look at this bill, we certainly should be looking at how it could be strengthened to involve all victims, whether they be victims of a sexual assault and particularly where those people have no ability to obtain a judgment for lost wages, medical costs, or whatever from the criminal in criminal court.

As well, Mr. Chairman, the victim can obtain remedies in Queen's Bench. However, we do know that when we do get involved in the court system, this is a very lengthy, a very cumbersome system, and while I do have confidence in the system that the proper outcome will occur, we still must look at the impact on victims who are left in a rather compromising position because they are left without any assets or with assets. Until that restitution can be made, then they certainly are put in a position of jeopardy.

So with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I will take my chair and certainly look to comments from other hon. members of the Assembly. Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 25 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I would move that committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 22, 23, 24, 26, 25.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would move that the Assembly now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 8:44 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 20, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people. We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a good friend, a former Member of the Legislative Assembly, and a gentleman who has made many significant contributions to this province. George Ho Lem Sr. will be recognized further in this Assembly a bit later on this afternoon, but I would like to say that Mr. Ho Lem has done much for sports, business, community service, and politics in Alberta. Mr. Ho Lem was a Calgary alderman and an MLA for the Social Credit Party. His community service ranges from work with the Stampeder Football Club and the Calgary Stampede to the Calgary auxiliary hospital and many organizations in the Chinese community.

Mr. Speaker, George Ho Lem Sr. is seated in your gallery today with his wife, Edie; daughter Cherie Ho Lem; son George Ho Lem Jr.; daughter-in-law Ursula Ho Lem; grandson Stephen and granddaughter Stephanie; nephew Gerald Yuen and his wife, Sharon; nephew Ronald Ho Lem and his wife, Dianne; nephew-in-law Ray Lee; Greg Ho Lem; Marilyn Ho Lem; Kevin Ho Lem; and Candice Ho Lem. I would ask Mr. Ho Lem Sr. and his family to rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Alberta's Ombudsman, Mr. Scott Sutton. He is accompanied by his executive assistant, Ms Dixie Watson. They are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all hon. members a great Albertan, a constituent, a good friend, and recently honoured with the Order of Canada. In addition, this gentleman is the spouse of the hon. Member for St. Albert. Mr. Jack O'Neill is seated in your gallery, and I would ask that he rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and

present a petition signed by 500 Albertans. With your permission I'd like to read the text of the petition.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in travelling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader and Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 5.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 14, 15, 16, and 17.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Bill 214

Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 214, being the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will allow for the value-added agricultural industry to prosper in Alberta.

[Motion carried; Bill 214 read a first time]

Bill 215

Health Insurance Premiums Act Repeal Act

MR. VANDERMEER: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce Bill 215, being the Health Insurance Premiums Act Repeal Act.

This bill proposes to eliminate health care premiums altogether.

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Bill 218

School (Class Size Targets) Amendment Act, 2001

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely pleased today to request leave to introduce Bill 218, School (Class Size Targets) Amendment Act, 2001.

I believe that this plain language bill will place Alberta first among Canadian provinces to set class sizes, and with it we will join a number of enlightened American states that have taken steps to ensure that children enjoy classroom conditions that maximize their success.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 218 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table with the Assembly today a memo from Ms Fay Orr, managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau, to myself which shows that, in response to a question asked yesterday by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, in 1992-93 the number of full-time employees in the Public Affairs Bureau was 213, compared to 130 today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today questions and answers from the Committee of Supply meeting of May 9, 2001.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, an agency of the government of Alberta reporting to the Minister of Health and Wellness, contributes in a major way to the health of individuals, families, and communities in the province. Today it's my pleasure to table AADAC's 2000-2001 annual report. This report presents the significant work of the commission in providing alcohol and other drug and gambling problem prevention, treatment, and information services to the people of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table with the Assembly a number of letters that I have received from constituents in support of Bill 207.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

1:40

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the appropriate copies of a document from the Edmonton Coalition on Homelessness regarding their Edmonton housing strategy events taking place on Thursday, November 22, 2001.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table the required number of copies of 26 requests from Albertans who urge the government to vote in support of the class size targets bill to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics" and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of the 2001 Sustainable Calgary State of Our City Report, done by the Sustainable Calgary group, which has some great ideas in it.

My second set of tablings is the appropriate number of copies of 11 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of our class size targets bill to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics" and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for [all of] our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is the required number of copies of 26 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill so that "classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

The second tabling this afternoon is a chart indicating between 1976 and the year 2000 the remaining established reserves of crude oil in the province of Alberta. This comes from the EUB Statistical Series 2001.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the required number of copies of 26 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size target bill so that "classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table 26 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of Bill 218 so that "classrooms will no longer be overcrowded."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the required number of copies of 26 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of our education bill on class size targets so that "classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for . . . basics," and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from a constituent, Carmela Travale, who is pointing out the difficulties of living on assistance of \$615 per month and asking the provincial government to make social services programs more humane.

For my second tabling I join my colleagues in tabling 37 requests from Albertans who also support the class size targets bill, ending parent fund-raising, and the need to attract and keep teachers in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 27(1) of the Ombudsman Act I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 34th annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period April 1, 2000, to March 31, 2001, and the financial statements of the office of the Ombudsman as at March 31, 2001.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: Mr. Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly another group of young people who have given their time and efforts to raise money for the relief efforts in the United States. Four young students from Warburg school started a campaign called Pennies for Peace. The nine-year-old girls have been collecting pennies since September 11. To date they have raised almost \$5,000 and, incredibly, most of that in pennies. That's an incredible amount of pennies and an awful lot of counting and rolling.

The four young students who spearheaded this effort are with us today along with a fellow student who designed a Pennies for Peace graphic T-shirt. They are accompanied by their very proud parents and grade 4 teacher, Sharon Martin. I would ask Taylor Gidosh, Lauren Sarvas, Jody Wilson, Jaylynn West, and Conor Hess to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't often have visitors from my constituency, but today I've been doubly blessed. I had a group in from George MacDougall high school this morning, and this afternoon I have a member of the Rocky View school division board in attendance from my riding, and I'm just absolutely delighted. He's a good friend. He's on my board of directors as well, so he keeps me in line and informed as to what's going on in the school division. I'd like John Murray to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly visitors in the members' gallery, 27 students and six adults from the Neerlandia school, located in the Barrhead-Westlock constituency. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce today a group of grade 6 students from Fultonvale elementary school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Karin Bittner, and Mrs. Doreen Langdon. They're in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My guests have not arrived yet but will be here at 2 o'clock. I would like to recognize and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 26 grade 6 students from the Thorhild school. They're accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Mike Popowicz, and parents Mrs. Stacey Kirk, Mrs. Suzanne Turchanski, Mrs. Linda Ewaskow, Mrs. Tammy Rosenberger, Mrs. Mary Toronchuk, Mr. Don Fleury, and Mr. Ed Turner. They will be seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that we give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today

to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly an Edmonton-Glenora constituent, Mr. Bill Daly. Mr. Daly is a very, very strong advocate for a disease that we males don't like to talk too much about, and that is prostate cancer. I'm honoured today to introduce him because over 400 Albertans will lose their life to this disease this year. Mr. Daly is a strong advocate for awareness and early detection, early detection, early detection. I'd ask Mr. Daly to please rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 12 students from NorQuest College. I believe that they're seated in the members' gallery; I'm not sure where they are. They are accompanied today by their instructor Mrs. Elaine McPhee. Whichever gallery they're in, I would invite them to please stand and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the House two Alberta mothers, Ms Jette Badre and Ms Coleen Taylor. These two individuals are the parents of diabetic children and are concerned with the quality of life of over 1,500 children in Alberta who are suffering from the same illness. They are the founding members of an organization called Parents of Kids Experiencing Diabetes, and the acronym for that is POKED. Ms Jette Badre and Ms Coleen Taylor are seated in the public gallery. I would now request that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the Alberta School Boards Association is having their working convention this week, and my colleague the Minister of Learning spoke to them this morning. I'm very pleased to introduce a Fort McMurray public school board trustee whom I had the privilege of teaching during my days as a teacher. He's here with us today, and I'd like to ask Jeff Thompson to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. He endured my teaching practices.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you some guests who'll be joining us at approximately 2 o'clock. They are the grade 6 students of Callingwood elementary school, which is in my constituency. If and when they get here, would you please give them a warm Assembly welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Heather Rempel. Heather Rempel is a hardworking member of the Edmonton Mill Woods Liberal Constituency Association. In addition, she's the women's commission president, serving both provincial and federal women. She's in the public gallery, and with your permis-

sion I would ask her to stand and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Stony Plain I'd like to introduce 11 guests that are here today from the Stony Creek school. The parent helpers are Lisa Hansen, Charlotte Smith, Judi Lucas, and Nancy Romano, and with them are students Jake Romano, Casey Hansen, Garrett Berube, Josh Smith, Jordan Hamilton, Rylan Lucas, and Joel Outten. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Budget Process

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each spring we go through a public debate on the legislative process of developing a budget for the province. This fall the government changed that budget. The questions are to the Premier. Why did you not go through the same kind of public debate to facilitate the establishment of that obligation to Albertans before you made the cuts this fall as we did in the spring before we established the budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that we have a very unique procedure relative to budgeting in this country whereby we report to Albertans on a quarterly basis. Because of our prudent financial planning we are able to shift and change our budget requirements to meet the flow of revenues.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier didn't get to the point on that. Mr. Premier, why is it that you do not have public consultations on those changes before you actually implement them? The fact that you do change is a given.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition can advise me as to what public consultation takes place when the price of oil plummets. There's no public consultation. We have to be in a position to react to changing circumstances.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, the obligation of this Legislature is to provide a budget for Albertans. Do you not have a sense that we have an obligation to discuss with Albertans when we make changes in the commitments we make to them in the spring?

MR. KLEIN: I think Albertans have been well aware, certainly since 1993, that this is a government that is reactive to changes, and we do react. We have to react, Mr. Speaker, because we have made it against the law in this province to go into a deficit situation. Now, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition would like us to change that law and run deficits, then we wouldn't have to change our budgets at all. All we would do is simply go out and use our credit card and borrow and borrow and borrow and spend and spend and spend, which of course is the Liberal way.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again: is it not true that the agencies that deliver services to Albertans are also under law to deliver those services such as health care, care for our children, education?

MR. KLEIN: They will do it, and they will do it based on realistic estimates relative to expenditures and to revenues, Mr. Speaker. All of the agencies that depend on government for finances, including the departments of government, are well aware that if revenues go down, we have to find ways to offset the expenditures.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Premier, so you're expecting them to break contracts with their suppliers, with their teachers, with the people who are obligated to provide those services. They have legal obligations as well.

MR. KLEIN: No, sir. We are challenging school boards, we are challenging regional health authorities, and we are challenging all departments of government to find efficiencies within their departments, Mr. Speaker. I allude here to a news release put out today by the Calgary health region. The headline on this press release reads, "Region lowers spending by \$30M; no reductions in frontline services." Where do they plan to get those savings?

Non-clinical spending reductions include Support Services, Corporate Services, Human Resources, offices of the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Medical Officer, Chief Nursing Officer, Capital Development and Communications;

in other words, out of the administration or the bureaucracy. System efficiency: they think that they can achieve savings by targeting "planned closure of operating rooms for non-urgent surgery over the holiday and Easter periods," by bringing about a number of other operating procedures, by curbing discretionary spending, by not filling FTEs that do not need to be filled at this particular time, and by reducing overtime by 5 percent. These are the kinds of efficiencies we have challenged the authorities, boards, and commissions to achieve, and the Calgary regional health authority has to be commended for doing a darned good job.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Premier. So you're telling us that your ministers were not diligent when they submitted their business plans to this House in the spring, when they had so much leeway in them.

MR. KLEIN: They were diligent. They were diligent at that particular time. I don't think that anyone – anyone – could have foreseen the horrific events of September 11 and the impact that that would have on the revenue stream. What this government is doing is what governments indeed throughout the world are doing, what businesses are doing. They are making necessary and major adjustments to reduce expenditures to meet a reduced revenue flow. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

It would be helpful if the document quoted from would be tabled with the Assembly as well.

2:00

Teacher Remuneration

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the inclusion of 4 percent and 2 percent budget line items for teachers' salaries, the government trashed local bargaining. Now, for the first time in 60

years, the central ATA has refused to ratify the Medicine Hat agreement because moneys will be taken out of the classroom. We are into provincial bargaining. My questions are to the Premier. How are local boards going to reach agreements now that you have moved the system to provincial bargaining?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have not moved the system to provincial bargaining in any way, shape, or form. This is something now that will have to be worked out between the particular local – and I don't know what the local number is of the ATA in Medicine Hat – and the central body.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: how successful can local bargaining be when it's clear that the decisions are being made by the government in Edmonton?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have the hon. Minister of Learning supplement my answer, but the only involvement we have had in teachers' salaries is to take the unprecedented step of including a guaranteed 6 percent increase over two years as a line item in the budget.

Relative to bargaining procedures I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will say at the outset that it is a bit of a surprise to me that the hon. member is saying that the central Alberta Teachers' Association is not going to ratify something that their local of the Alberta Teachers' Association has voted on and agreed to and, from what I understand, that the local school board has agreed to. This is what local bargaining is all about. It is not us as a provincial government that is moving away from local bargaining. If what the hon. member across the way says is true, I think that's a true slap in the face for the local ATA.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are again to the Premier. How ethical is it for the government to place school boards in the position of providing better wages at the expense of larger classes?

MR. KLEIN: Again, that statement is not true. School boards have the option of spending their money in areas that they consider to be priority areas. If indeed more money for teachers is deemed to be a priority area for a particular school district, then they have the flexibility to spend those dollars in that particular area. If reducing class sizes is a priority, then school boards have the flexibility to address the problem in that particular way. So there's a tremendous amount of flexibility, and that speaks to the issue that is so important, Mr. Speaker, and that is the issue of local autonomy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would just add to that that with this particular school board, following the elections in October I went down to Medicine Hat and sat with them, as they had some other issues as to what had occurred during the election. So this school board was extremely cognizant. They knew how much money they had, they knew what they wanted to do, and they went and put it on the table. It was an extremely informed decision that this school board made when they made the offer to the

teachers. I want everyone in this Assembly to understand that: that they put forward an offer that they felt they could afford, that they felt the teachers would accept, and that they felt they could deal with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Children's Services

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands there's a young man who I will call Jim. He is an aboriginal youth suffering from severe depression and suicidal thoughts. With the help of a program at Ben Calf Robe school he is now doing well. Now that program is being cut. My question is to the Finance minister. In the \$23 billion budget of the province of Alberta why can't you find the money to help Jim and thousands of other kids just like him?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, we have put forward a budget that we believe meets the priorities of Albertans and at the same time shares the benefits of being in a very fortunate province. How the individual allocations are determined is based on the priorities set within ministries.

I would ask the Minister of Children's Services to respond directly to the question.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in MáMōwe over 93 agencies are funded, and these agencies provide everything from foster care to care of children with special needs. These are agencies that work as part of the team. Of these agencies, 20 were asked to take some reduction, and that is because in the envelope of our service there are millions of dollars provided for early intervention programs. Those ones that are deemed to be closest to the child that would become most at risk if they were not given a program, who may in fact become part of our child welfare caseloads, are being protected.

Now, there are other programs that are provided in agencies for children where they've been reduced, and if anybody provides me with the name of someone who they believe to be truly at risk to be a part of this growing caseload phenomenon that we've got Canada-wide, then we will be pleased to make sure that this person, this child, gets the services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that there are 10 programs that have been completely wiped out, to the Finance minister, why are preventative children's programs, like the one helping Jim, the first to be cut by this government?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly this question should go to the Minister of Children's Services, but let's make it abundantly clear again. As the Minister of Children's Services has indicated, if there are people who are in need who are not fitting into the programs, the names should come forward so they can be dealt with directly. This budget is, again, about meeting the priorities of Albertans' needs and sharing benefits, and we believe that we have dealt with the issues that Albertans have put forward in a very responsible way.

Again I'd ask the Minister of Children's Services to supplement my answer, but clearly I think she has explained this.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, I think it's important for me to tell this Assembly that as Minister of Children's Services I have

a huge concern when in one authority 31 percent of the children coming into child welfare this year are 11 years of age and over, which says that because of parent/teen conflict some children are becoming part of this child welfare caseload when it could be better addressed by extended family members, the family and community offering support.

Mr. Speaker, again, we will look after any young person at risk brought to us, but we have to make choices, especially when in this particular area of MáMōwe there was a projected \$17 million deficit because of so many of the children coming forward needing programs. So we have to cut where those cuts are furthest from the child that needs care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would appreciate it if this question is not deferred to the minister of preventative social services. Will the Finance minister come with me to my constituency and meet Jim and the thousands of other kids just like him?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. HUTTON: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Children's Services. The minister has told us that she's cut a number of nongovernment agencies that provide services to children, yet she is hiring more government staff. Could the minister please explain this in a little more detail?

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in the budget this year and cumulative of last year's additions, 75 staff were added from Human Resources and Employment and other staff that had been part of delivering child services in Alberta. So the advocate's position and other payroll and other support staff were moved from Human Resources and Employment to Children's Services. No additions; just a change of department. The 300 staff that were added on the front lines deliver services directly to children based on the workload standards of the AUPE agreement that we have, and based on the numbers of caseloads, we have had an increase in delivery staff. Now, since the hiring freeze we have not increased staff, and these reductions that I have spoken of on contracts are, again, done to be prudent with our expenditure lines.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my final question, and it's very close to home because a number of these people work in my constituency. The Mennonite society Welcome Home has been cut. I'm curious why we would cut nongovernment partners at a time when these valuable services are needed.

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the reason for 18 child and family service authorities is to in fact get local people involved in establishing priorities, setting the goals and objectives, and targeting the funding where it's most needed. Where funds have been reduced to some agencies, my conclusion is that their selection has been to protect funding in other areas that, again, deliver most closely services for children at highest risk. We are looking at all of the funding reductions across the province, and I'm satisfied that to the largest

extent possible all of the authorities are doing the best they can with the dollars they have.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Electricity Pricing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this Conservative government electricity deregulation has turned into a \$700 million don't-pay-a-cent-event sale until after the election. The government delayed on purpose the electricity companies' ability to use rate riders to collect energy costs incurred but not covered in existing rates. This year the price cap is 11 cents per kilowatt. However, the Minister of Energy told Albertans in September that they should not expect the province's electricity subsidies to continue beyond December. My first question is to the Premier. What, if any, is the price cap going to be next year?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will legitimately defer to the Minister of Energy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's quite a bit of information in the member's preamble, some of it good, some of it reasonable, and some of it not so good. But let's just talk about the prescribed rate regulation. This government is going through a series of decisions with respect to electricity on deferral accounts, prescribed rate, pool price deficiency regulation, export principles, PPA arrangements, Clover Bar bidding arrangements, and all the factors that put together an integrated and composite plan which we'll be coming forward with and discussing with Albertans in a transparent, open fashion.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: why delay announcing next year's price cap when residential consumers need this information before they purchase long-term contracts, whether they're for one, three, or five years?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can provide a very short answer, and then have the hon. Minister of Energy supplement. It's anticipated that electricity rates will be comparatively low.

Perhaps the hon. minister can shed more light on it, so to speak.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, absolutely correct. It's not shocking news to know that electricity prices are lower, but as the member of the opposition has clearly pointed out, there is the issue of deferral accounts that are owed by consumers to the utility companies and approved by the process through the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board that will go forward in the next year. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talks about: why not put a cap now? He is assuming that there will in fact be a prescribed regulated rate option for next year, and that final decision has not yet been made.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: when will consumers know how they are to pay back the \$700 million boondoggle that this Conservative government has

created through electricity deregulation? The \$700 million, how are they going to have to pay that back? Explain that.

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there was no boondoggle. The move to deregulate had been in motion since 1995. It's working out well. A number of factors came together, unfortunately, at the beginning of 2001, I believe it was, that boosted prices, but since then those prices have stabilized. There's tremendous competition now in the marketplace. We see more power projects being announced and coming onstream.

Relative to the specific question as it relates to rates, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the . . . [interjection] I'm sorry; I didn't hear the call. I'm sorry, but that island voice rings loud in the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Coal-fired Electricity Plants Emissions Standards

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, my question today is regarding emission standards for new coal-fired electricity plants. I understand that Alberta's standards have been of some discussion at the recent Energy and Utilities Board meeting on EPCOR's Genesee 3 and TransAlta's Keephills expansion. My question is for the Minister of Environment. Is Alberta somehow lagging behind with its standards?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can state most emphatically that Alberta is not lagging behind. In fact, our June update of standards gives us the most stringent standards in Canada, significantly more stringent than the federal standards. The federal government is not even talking about bringing in new standards until at least 2003. I will say as well that this is only a first step in the updating of our standards. In the near future I will be asking the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, which is a nongovernmental organization made up of both environmental groups and industry, to develop new standards for the province of Alberta.

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, my second question is for the same minister. I understand that the U.S. EPA standards for new coal-fired plants are more stringent than ours. Can I ask why?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of areas that you measure when you measure emissions, and I will say that our particulate matter is about the same as in the U.S. In nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxides the U.S. is somewhat more stringent, but they have a different problem. They have a problem with smog that is caused by these two chemicals. We do not yet have that problem in Alberta. As we update our standards, I expect that in the areas of sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxides these new standards will take those U.S. standards into account.

One further comment that I would make is that the ambient air quality standards that we have in Alberta – that's the air you breathe – are much stricter, Mr. Speaker, than in the U.S.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the same minister. Recently federal Environment Minister Anderson was quoted as saying that the federal government would be coming up with new standards soon. He also expressed some concern with allowing Genesee 3 and Keephills expansion to move forward based on the fact that they do not utilize best available emission reduction technology. Will the minister care to comment on whether Alberta will adapt these standards and whether the federal minister's comments about best available technology are legitimate?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've indicated, the feds are talking about new standards, but we don't expect to see anything until 2003. I would assume that the Clean Air Strategic Alliance, who I'm going to ask to look at our standards, will take into account these possible new federal standards as they go forward.

In regards to the best available technology, Mr. Speaker, we set standards. We're technology neutral as a government. What we ask the companies to do is choose the technology from their business case that will meet the standards we have. We will not choose one company's technology over another company's. Standards are important.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

2:20

Teacher Remuneration

(continued)

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the beginning of this year the Premier promised teachers that they would be rewarded for taking a 5 percent cut but then in the budget gave school boards only 4 percent for salaries. Four percent won't be enough for school boards to cover the salary grid costs and the costs of inflation for teachers and certainly won't come close to matching the settlements awarded to nurses and doctors. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why has the government singled out teachers for punitive treatment?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'll go back to what has been said in *Hansard* for the last four or five months. First of all, in the last budget there was 4 percent and 2 percent that was put in exclusively for teachers' salaries, which meant that the school boards could not touch that. It had to be for teachers' salaries. This was a minimum. They also had 3 and a half percent on their general grant rate that they can negotiate with the teachers, and that's exactly what they're doing. That's exactly what they're doing, for example, in Medicine Hat, where the school board and the ATA both voted to accept their contract. I may not have said that already.

The other point that I'll make is that the rationale behind the 4 percent and the 2 percent made them the highest paid teachers on average across the provinces in Canada. Mr. Speaker, let's take a minute and take a look at what's happening in the rest of Canada. In British Columbia they just announced that there would be a spending freeze on education for the next three years. In Quebec they're talking about lowering the wages from \$60,000 a year maximum to \$53,000 a year. All of these things are happening across Canada right now. Our teachers will be the highest paid on average in the provinces across Canada. We have to remember that.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can the minister claim that the 4 percent and the 2 percent raise will make teachers the highest paid in Canada when his arguments are based on a faulty comparison of salaries in other provinces as they stand now and in Alberta as they will be in two years?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, a lot of these school boards across the country, a lot of the provinces across the country have already settled their contracts for the next two years. Obviously, when we made that announcement, it was at that time, but to date no other province in Canada has surpassed the salary commitments that this government has given to our teachers.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, when will this minister tell Albertans that teaching salaries have not even kept pace with inflation, which in real terms means that salaries have gone down?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, a couple of things. First of all, since around 1995 teachers' salaries have gone up an average of around 17 percent in this province. I have already said it, but I'll say it again: it does make the teachers the highest paid in Canada, the 4 and the 2 percent.

There is another interesting component. The hon. member has talked about nurses' salaries. Mr. Speaker, we could quite easily take the nurses' grid, superimpose it on the teachers' grid, and it would be quite acceptable. What it would simply mean is that the people at the lower end of the scale would increase their wage; the people at the higher end of the scale would decrease their wage. Those two scales are superimposable.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Provincial Achievement Tests

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In September Alberta Learning released the results from the grades 3, 6, and 9 provincial achievement tests. Although we are cautioned every year not to rank the quality of education within individual classrooms based on these exams, parents and some of the teachers that I've spoken to in my constituency are concerned that teachers may be focusing on preparing students to write achievement tests instead of focusing on the curriculum. My questions are for the Minister of Learning. Given that there are some concerns about the potential of teachers focusing too much on these tests, has there been any consideration given to discontinuing the provincial achievement tests?

DR. OBERG: No, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Learning. Given the concerns of the parents, what is the value of the provincial achievement tests?

DR. OBERG: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, what the provincial achievement tests allow us to do is give a general measure of what is happening with our curriculum in the province. It helps us show how many kids are learning to read, how many kids are learning numeracy skills, what exactly they're learning. Is our curriculum getting old? Is it getting dated? Should we be changing our curriculum? All of these questions are answered by the provincial achievement test.

More importantly, though, Mr. Speaker, what we are now able to do is give individual jurisdictions their results and allow them to take a look at the trends that have been occurring over the last four or five years. These trends are extremely important, because all around the province the trends are very different. What we need to know is: what are the ones that are experiencing very positive trends doing that's different from the ones that are experiencing negative trends? This is a very powerful tool. It's a very powerful tool for the betterment of education in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Learning. What is the minister's response to organizations that attempt to rank the schools or school jurisdictions based solely on these achievement tests?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll try to be generous in here. The response that I tell these people is something that usually can't be said in here. The bottom line is that I completely wholeheartedly disagree with this ranking of school systems that goes on. Everyone in this Assembly realizes and knows that every kid is different, that every classroom is different, the conditions are different, and I think it's a very simpleminded person that puts together these comparisons of schools.

Mr. Speaker, these tests are incredibly important to us from a curriculum point of view. They're incredibly important for those of us who want to better the school system, better the educational environment, and the people that put it forward as a tool to create dissent, as a tool to create controversy, as I say, they're just simple minded.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Children's Services

(continued)

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I note in a report tabled today a one-year 37 percent increase in the salary of the AADAC CEO. I'd also like to note that in 1995 the Mennonite churches accepted a long-term funding commitment from the provincial government and started Welcome Home Community, a program for families at risk. Now the government is breaking faith with the Mennonite church and the families they serve. To the Minister of children's Services: why has the government again broken a promise to this church?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in my response previously in the House this afternoon I identified that there are 93 agencies or supportive groups that have contractual relationships with MāMōwe child and family services. We have selected the 20 agencies that were beyond the direct interface for children most considered at risk.

Mr. Speaker, what I am identifying for the hon. member is that the real tragedy here in Alberta is the rapid increase of child welfare children, children who need the protection of the House, people who need very definite work on assessments because of exposure to family violence, being victims of family violence, being victims of physical or emotional or social abuse.

Clearly, many of these preventive programs that do good work we would certainly like to retain, and we would like to have an opportunity to do that in the new calendar year. In the case of this particular program the costs were rising and many of the programs that we're administering today are being evaluated on their effectiveness both

from a dollar point of view and the effect on how well the children are achieving in overcoming their particular problems because of the delivery of the service.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then I'm wondering, given the soaring rates of child welfare cases, how these will ever come down if the minister is cutting funding for prevention.

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm very grateful for the hon. member's question. Quite honestly, across Canada we're looking at a new response model so that those children that are assessed to be the least at risk can have their needs addressed by Boys and Girls Clubs, other community agencies. Then we can structure those that are most at risk on the other end of the spectrum to be those that are removed for adoption, kinship care, and other very focused programs.

Mr. Speaker, my fear today in the child welfare caseload review, the statistics we have so far, is that we are doing more by taking the child out of the home than we should be. We should be working on a home improvement model. We should be working on a community improvement model. We should be working as a community to overcome in Canada, Canada-wide, the embarrassment of growing caseloads in a country that has so much.

DR. TAFT: Again, Mr. Speaker, how are we going to achieve those laudable ends if we continue to cut preventive social services?

2:30

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, much of it will deal with family case conferencing. The local Edmonton police are opening a one-stop intake centre where we can put professionals together with the child and the family. We can deal with an expanded family case conference, and we can help our social workers understand the transformation model of working together with community agencies to support those children outside the case management system, inside the family, and with other supportive agencies. It's going to take a lot of work. It's going to take the goodwill of the professionals, and it's going to take the work from other agencies in support of what government is attempting to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton Meadowlark.

Crossroads Program

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past several years, under the leadership of the member who is now the provincial Solicitor General, this government made protecting children involved in prostitution a major policy priority. A safe house for street children, run by the Crossroads outreach program in Edmonton, is a key component of that strategy. Now the shocking news. Yesterday Crossroads were notified out of the blue that funding for this safe house will be terminated in 90 days. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Will this government make a commitment today to find money to ensure that the Crossroads safe house for children involved in prostitution will remain open?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I will make a commitment to this House that this government will fund priority programs, that this government will carry out the mandate that the people of this province gave it in March of this year, I would say in a significant way, that we will provide sound fiscal management, priority

programs for our people, and carry those out in the best way that we can. That's what this government has committed to do, and that's what this government will continue to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me ask the second question to the Treasurer. Why are important frontline services that help vulnerable children and families such as the Crossroads outreach program and many other important programs that assist the aboriginal community in particular being sacrificed in the government's frenzied rollback in its budget commitments?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, when you're charged with the responsibility of dealing with the fiscal situation of the province, striking the right balance is always difficult. Reality does come into play. We have made a commitment not only on the fiscal side of the equation but in dealing with the needs of people. Quite clearly, I think our Minister of Children's Services has enunciated that if there are those in need, she needs to be made aware of them, that she has a number of programs that are there to deal with some of the pressure points for children. I would ask her once again to get up and explain in this House today the programs that she has.

THE SPEAKER: No. We've spent a lot of time on this series.

The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Solicitor General, who I'm sure has a stake in this issue. Can the Solicitor General tell the Assembly how many more children will be prostituting themselves on street corners as a result of this government's reckless cuts to the Crossroads outreach safe house and the cuts to other frontline services for children in Edmonton and elsewhere?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question. I can tell you that since we developed the PCHIP legislation and the PCHIP legislation was enacted, child prostitution is going down in this province and will eventually be eradicated. I appreciate his concerns in regards to Crossroads. Crossroads is a very effective agency, but we also have Catholic Social Services, that can deliver the program. We also have the Edmonton police, that deliver and pick up these children. So our children in this province who are involved in prostitution will be taken care of.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Beer Bottle Recycling

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend two of the Alberta-based beer companies announced that they're being forced to increase the price of a case of beer by 20 cents because they are being forced into the province's public recycling system. My question is to the Minister of Environment. Is the government directly responsible for this price increase?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment. [interjections] Hon. minister, we await.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for calming the House on

this very contentious matter. I want to say that I do understand that one brewery in the province sent out a letter to all liquor stores that they feel they had no choice but to increase the price of beer and that the government is at fault. I want to state quite clearly that this is a business decision. We did not encourage or force any beer company to raise their price for beer. I think it's really unfortunate that they are blaming the government, but what is even more unfortunate is that they are very unhappy about being forced into a public recycling system, which ensures that all consumers get their full refunds. That's what this is about, giving all consumers the full refunds on their bottles, in spite of what a beer company might say.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will Albertans still be eligible to receive their full refund if they were to return empty beer bottles and cans to the retail outlet where they bought them rather than to the bottle depot?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is important here is that in fact they will return a full deposit charge at the public depots. In fact, this puts back into the pockets of Albertans about \$4 million a year in deposits through the public depot system, that they were not getting in the past.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Electronic Racing Terminals

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Casino operators that purchased electronic racing terminals from the provincial government signed a contract requiring quarterly reviews and adjustments of compensation rate clauses in the contract. My questions are all to the Minister of Gaming. Mr. Minister, why haven't these quarterly reviews been done since the contracts were signed in 1996-97?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of that particular provision. I will do an inquiry and provide an answer to the hon. member when it's available to me.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, given that the casino operators have recouped their cost years ago, why is the minister allowing 70 percent of the revenue from these machines, an estimated \$21 million, to go to these casino owners rather than to the charities that need the money?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, this particular product was brought into the province as a result of the initiative of the casino owners. An arrangement was made at that time pursuant to contract, and we have honoured that obligation. The Auditor General in investigating this particular contract pointed out that it was necessary to alter it. The AGLC, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, has done that. We have said to the operators that they have choices, and the choices will ensure that the matter is brought into compliance by December 31, 2003.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this minister also had a choice, why has the minister chosen to allow those casino

operators to continue to receive this money when the money should be going to the charities that need it?

MR. STEVENS: I think it's fair to say, with respect to these machines, that each and every casino operator has developed a business plan which is based upon certain expected revenues. What we have said to the casino operators is that we are going to give them a reasonable period of time to make their decisions, and our judgment is that that reasonable period of time is until December 31, 2003.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have done is we have addressed the issue. We are continuing to receive revenue in the Alberta lottery fund as a result of the operation of those machines. The casino operators will have a decision to make as to how they wish to deal with those machines, either sell them back to the government or take the other option. Once again, that will be done by December 31, 2003.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

2:40

Noise Suppression Equipment

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our cities and towns are becoming progressively noisier places to live in mainly from vehicle noise. Power station coal haulers, which are far from anyone's bedroom, have spent large amounts of money to make their trucks whisper quiet. A picture of a large power station with some geese in the foreground is titled *Only the Geese are Heard*. Yet we continue to allow the sale and installation of very loud vehicle mufflers, which are polluting our cities with noise and also disturbing the engine emissions. My questions are all to the Minister of Transportation. Could the minister elaborate on Alberta's existing laws, if any, which address the retrofitting of vehicles with other than manufacturers' noise suppression equipment?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Highway Traffic Act prohibits anyone from retrofitting an exhaust system that's provided by the car manufacturer to increase the noise level of the muffler for expulsion of gases. The exhaust muffler is designed in such a way as to cool the gases before they're expelled and to ensure that most of the gases are of course combusted before they're expelled into the atmosphere.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why are vehicle noise laws not being enforced?

MR. STELMACH: The very same act also prohibits an individual from operating a vehicle that has an exhaust system that has been tampered with – opened, widened, or retrofitted – which increases the noise level. Whether it be through municipal bylaw or perhaps through the very same act, the Highway Traffic Act, there are provisions there to ensure that individuals driving these cars are prohibited from doing so and are fined. It's just part of the overall enforcement. Along with many other things that our enforcement agencies have to do, this is one area also that they have to pay attention to.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can Albertans look forward to quieter towns and cities through tougher, enforceable vehicular noise laws in the future?

MR. STELMACH: Another component of the new highway Traffic Safety Act is a provision allowing local municipalities to set their own bylaws. Of course, those bylaws will have to be enforced by that particular municipality, but it does restrict retrofitting, again, the exhaust systems of cars and motorbikes. As you know, many times on a nice, warm Sunday afternoon, when you want to enjoy a barbecue, there are individuals ripping up and down the street, destroying the peace of the afternoon. The good thing about this is that the local municipality will now be able to not only write their own bylaws but also enforce them.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

George Ho Lem

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To follow the introduction by our Premier this afternoon, I would like to speak about our guest of distinction. Mr. George Ho Lem Sr. was born in Calgary in 1918 to Mr. and Mrs. Ho Lem. George's mother, Mary, was the first woman of Chinese descent to move to Calgary. George is one of Alberta's outstanding examples of success and civic duty. He has had a distinguished career in business and politics as well as an exemplary record of community service.

He founded a cleaning business with his family members in the 1950s and later expanded his business to restaurants as well as to a true western business, horse breeding. He won two Alberta Derbies and has been declared thoroughbred breeder of the year. In politics he was the first visible-minority politician elected in Canada, serving three terms as Calgary city alderman in 1959 as well as a term in this Assembly as a member of the Social Credit Party in 1972.

His commitment to the community is outstanding, having been a member of the Calgary Stampeder Football Booster Club, an 18-year director and also a lifetime honorary director of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Board, president of the Calgary Junior Chamber of Commerce, the chairman of the board for 16 years of the Calgary auxiliary hospital, the founding director of the Metropolitan Calgary Foundation, as well as the co-chair of the 1978 Commonwealth Games. He was the personal host to Prince Philip during his stay in Calgary. He served as president, chairman, and founding member of many community charity organizations such as the Sien Lok Society, the Oi Kwan Society, the Calgary Chinatown Development Foundation, the Calgary multicultural society, and many more.

He also worked tirelessly on his own assisting many immigrants in becoming Canadians. The Ho Lem family has set an outstanding model for immigrants and their descendants in integrating and contributing to Canadian society.

Mr. Speaker, may I take the liberty of representing our Premier and all members of the House to say to Mr. George Ho Lem Sr. and his wife, Edie, a traditional Chinese wish. [remarks in Chinese] Or in my westernized paraphrasing: longevity lasting as the Rocky Mountains; blessings coming as waves of the Pacific Ocean.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Jack O'Neill

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise this afternoon and recognize my constituent Jack O'Neill, husband

of the hon. Member for St. Albert, and to honour him for his nomination as a member of the Order of Canada. Jack O'Neill has been a passionate advocate of human rights in this province, working towards a personal dream to help Albertans and Canadians understand the importance of believing in the dignity of every human being.

Jack served as a special assistant to former Premier Peter Lougheed, deputy minister of culture, chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission, and after retiring as chief commissioner, he co-chaired the human rights conference here in Edmonton, which brought 743 participants from around the world. The conference was in 1998. Currently Jack serves on the boards of the Youville Home in St. Albert, the St. Albert arts and heritage fund, St. Albert Economic Development & Tourism, and the board of the John Humphries Centre in Edmonton for the development of peace and human rights. He coedited a book called *Peace, Justice and Freedom* with professor Gerry Gall and citizenship court judge Gurcharan Bhatia.

Jack O'Neill was notified he had been nominated as a member of the Order of Canada back in June of this year. He will be traveling to Ottawa to receive the distinguished award on December 4. Congratulations to Jack from all of the Assembly, and thank you for a lifetime of public service.

Sustainable Calgary State of Our City Project

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the Sustainable Calgary State of Our City project was initiated in 1996 by a group of citizens interested in ensuring that their legacy will be one they can be proud of. They came together as a project team – community researchers, indicator think-tank members, and resource people – to examine, through sustainability indicators reporting, how to define progress, quality of life, and sustainability. The 2001 State of Our City Report, which I tabled earlier, documents 36 sustainability indicators. This is the work of almost 2,000 people volunteering over 10,000 hours. Their analysis reveals that even though tentative steps are being taken to address resource consumption, there are signs of wear in the fabric of community life. Education and health systems are showing signs of stress, there are growing inequities in the city, and the ecological footprint indicates that people are consuming 30 percent more of the Earth's natural capital than is regenerated.

The report indicates that Calgary cannot be considered sustainable. They propose four priority actions that they believe can make a real difference to their sustainability: create a sense of community assessment tool, and this is a decision-making tool that assesses how social, economic, or community planning proposals impact sense of community; reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent over 30 years through reduced energy consumption and a shift to renewable resources; integrate a green tax system, the genuine progress indicator, and ecological footprint analysis into municipal decision-making; support and promote a culture of simplicity.

Mr. Speaker, the Sustainable Calgary group should be congratulated on the very progressive work they have done. I sincerely hope that they become the role models for this level of scrutiny and development of sustainability models for all communities and all levels of government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

2:50

Fox Run and Mother Teresa School

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure that I rise today to speak about the Sylvan Lake multifacility school that recently won a prestigious international design award. The Council

of Educational Facility Planners presented the award over the weekend. The honour recognizes the Fox Run school, which is run by Chinook's Edge, and Mother Teresa school, run by the Red Deer Catholic school division. I would also like to note that this award was the only one given in Canada and one of only three in North America.

The school opened its doors last year and is the first of its kind in Alberta. The school not only provides a state-of-the-art learning centre but also is a true community centre. The key to the school's success is due to the design process and collaboration of the partners involved. Officials from Chinook's Edge and Red Deer Catholic school divisions along with representatives from the town of Sylvan Lake worked closely together to create a facility that unites a community of learners, respecting that each participant has specified needs and unique circumstances. The partnership approach taken on this facility is certain to establish a precedent for future joint ventures between school divisions. Everyone involved is to be congratulated for their creativity and co-operation in combining resources to enhance student learning. Our government supports lifelong learning, and co-operative projects like this one promote that belief.

Thank you very much.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will call the committee to order.

Bill 207
Alberta Personal Income Tax
(Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for allowing us to bring Bill 207 forward to committee this afternoon. When the bill went through second reading, I was pleased to see that there's so much support for it. I look forward to passage of the bill at this stage as well. Many people across the province have sent faxes telling me of their support for this bill, and I expect that many of you have also received those faxes.

Mr. Chairman, this bill has received support because it makes sense. It aims to put money back in the pockets of hardworking and deserving Albertans. Currently they have to purchase tools with after-tax dollars in order to do their jobs. In a moment I'm going to speak on several aspects of this bill, and I'd like to ask the Assembly to keep those Albertans in the back of their minds in our discussion this afternoon.

Some of the specific aspects of Bill 207 I'd like to focus on include the benefits of the new targeted tax credit for tradespeople, namely journeymen or apprentices, the benefits this tax credit will have for them and their families, and finally the way that Bill 207 will highlight the role of tradespeople in the province. Bill 207, especially section 2(2), puts money back in the pockets of Albertans. Our government has shown it believes that the reduction of taxes is a means to spur economic growth and a better life for all Albertans. Bill 207 is another stage in the fulfillment of that vision. Lower

taxes will spur investment and growth and promote personal independence and freedom. These are some of the reasons this government brought the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act forward a year or so ago.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 207 gives tax relief to registered journeymen and apprentices working in Alberta trades who spend over \$500 on the purchase of their tools. During second reading we heard about the high price of tools for journeymen and tradespeople, including the apprentices. All of us in the Assembly have become aware that the price of tools makes it difficult for tradespeople to enjoy Alberta's tax relief initiatives in the same way that other Albertans do. That realization and concern for fairness for our workers caused many of us to stand in this House in support of Bill 207. Passing Bill 207 would give our workers the opportunity to perform much-needed and appreciated jobs in Alberta and enjoy the Alberta advantage.

Section 2(2) of the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act reinforces the notion that tax reduction is always a positive goal, and especially in this case it is directed towards helping a hardworking and sometimes overlooked segment of our society. Mr. Chairman, the introduction of a tools tax credit for journeymen and apprentices is well overdue, and I think that this Assembly would again show itself to be forward thinking in passing this bill.

Next I'd like to speak of the way that Bill 207 grants tax relief to these middle-class, blue-collar Albertans. It's a tax credit that will favourably affect many families. For example, consider the statistics of just one group of tradesmen, auto mechanics. The average income of an auto mechanic in Canada is about \$35,000. Tradespeople have families to support, and \$35,000 isn't a huge amount when there are children to be taken care of. Bill 207 won't give our workers in these fields a huge amount of money, but it will give them an opportunity to purchase many of those things that all families require. Some may argue that all families have these costs, but consider a tradesperson who has to put a sizable portion of income into the purchase of tools necessary to complete the work. Registered journeymen in any trade have to have tools probably more than \$10,000 in value in order to do their job. That money comes from their pockets, paid for with after-tax dollars. There is a difference, Mr. Chairman, and we seek to address that difference.

Next, Mr. Chairman, I'd also like to remind members in this Assembly of the figure that was brought up earlier during second reading. A starter set of tools for apprentices is, at minimum, about \$4,000. Each young apprentice would have to put that forward before beginning work in his trade. The government of Alberta has introduced the 10 percent income tax rate as a means of putting more money back into the wallets of individual Albertans. Bill 207 indicates that more can be done and should be done, and this specific circumstance that journeymen and apprentices find themselves in shows the need for this targeted tax relief. By allowing young apprentices to receive a nonrefundable tax credit through section 2(2) on costs related to tool purchases, maintenance, insurance, or repair, we can in a manner in keeping with this government's desire to keep taxes as low as possible alleviate the costs of working in a trade.

3:00

Specifically what 2(2) does is allow a registered journeyman or apprentice working in one of Alberta's trades the ability to deduct an amount related to tool purchases, maintenance, and repair not exceeding his or her income for the tax year. The deduction is determined by the following formula. The total expenditure for the purchase, rental, or insurance of tools used on the job is multiplied

by the specified percentage of tax credits given that year.

Section 2(3) of Bill 207 requires that the worker applying for the tools credit must give proof that he or she is a journeyman or apprentice in Alberta trades, and the tools have to have been purchased for work-related purposes.

First, by setting the threshold at \$500 in section 2(2), the bill acknowledges that every job has expenses that need to be borne by employees. At the same time, it recognizes that tradespeople and journeymen must in many cases spend several times the amount that others have to spend. By setting a \$500 threshold, we say to people that, yes, very often there are acceptable expenses related to employment, but at some point in time they do deserve a break.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we considered the role that skilled tradespeople play as the population of this province booms. To support this growth, we've needed to develop new land, build new homes, buildings, highways, and other infrastructure. The creation of a tax credit for the benefit of trade journeymen would go a long way towards recognizing the growth in trade-heavy employment sectors. These sectors include goods production, forestry, logging, oil and gas, manufacturing. Bill 207 recognizes the contribution of these and other workers to our economy.

Before I conclude my remarks, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to acknowledge the support of many members in this Assembly in bringing the bill forward to this stage in committee. I look forward to their continued support and so do the journeymen and apprentices of our great province.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I find this bill really interesting, and I'm quite supportive of what it's proposing, but a couple of things have occurred to me. Being as we're now in Committee of the Whole, this is the time to discuss those issues and parts of the bill in a bit more detail.

I think it's a good idea to be doing whatever we can to encourage people working in the trades and in the skilled trades right now. Certainly we're aware in this province that if we want to be a smart province, if we want to keep moving into the future and staying ahead of the pack, we need to have skilled and educated workers. It's difficult to attract people to that if all they can see are obstacles in front of them. So I think what's being offered here may not remove an obstacle, because the cost of paying for tools and specialized equipment, safety equipment, specialized clothing for the job, can still be an obstacle even with what's being proposed here, but it does move us some way down the path to making this more attractive.

I certainly see the need for more skilled workers and tradespeople in this province. Somebody was talking to me the other day on the phone and was concerned about a clerical job disappearing, and I said, "Well, the clerical job may well disappear, but it will be replaced by a job for a skilled technician, and that person or those people will in fact get paid more than the clerical position, so overall I think we're ahead of the game."

I come from a family of tradespeople. My father was in the trades; both my brothers are ironworkers. I can certainly look at how many tools they have, what kinds of tools they have, and how important those tools are to their safety, to the safety of the other workers on the site, and ultimately to the safety of the public, because if they're not using very good tools and they make a mistake – and they wouldn't; they're very conscientious. That could either injure someone else on their work site or even down the road if a

building they helped to put up isn't done as well as it should have been and – who knows? – a piece of siding could fall off and hit a member of the public. I mean, all of these things have to be taken into consideration.

Where I was struggling with this bill was whether in fact it was putting one group of people in Alberta far ahead of others in advantages through taxes and through tax credits here and was that creating an inequity between people? The second thing I was wondering about was forgone revenue and what had been done around forgone revenue. So I can perhaps prevail upon the proposer of the bill to be answering that question when he wraps up or to answer it even sooner than that.

Has the mover of the bill looked at whether this is creating a special category of workers in the province? I've been sort of asking around and talking to people, and it seems like academics, for example, can claim some small expenses, nothing nearly as large as what's being anticipated in this bill, but there's also an expectation that any academic institution would in fact be paying for anything else that an academic wanted, magazine subscriptions and that sort of thing.

So then I looked at self-employed people. Certainly in the arts community that I come from everyone is self-employed, and in fact their specialized tools and equipment and apparel are deductible as necessary to getting and keeping a job. So okay. I kept looking. Well, what about other self-employed people: consultants, businesspeople, accountants, small businesspeople, that sort of thing? They can either have the tools and equipment paid through their company, or as self-employed they probably are able to get some sort of tax credit for having expended that money.

So as far as I'm able to tell, there is an equity in this bill, but I still put it forward to the mover of it to ensure that this has been looked at. Has it been anticipated that it could be creating an underclass, some group of workers in the province who are now being left behind and who will want to be coming forward to get their share of this as well? So with this bill would we be creating yet another group of people that would be wanting to come forward to claim some sort of benefit similar to this?

The second issue that I'm increasingly interested in is forgone revenues, because anytime the government doesn't collect money through whatever scheme, whether it's through a tax credit, a refundable credit, any scheme that exists whereby you are not paying tax on a certain amount of money, that is money that the government doesn't get to collect. We are very careful – I can see the Treasurer smiling at me. Yes, she knows what I'm talking about. Any expenditure that we look at in this Assembly, we expect there to be a performance measurement with it, a target. You know, what is this money to be used for? How is it to be used? What is the expected outcome? How are we going to measure this? How are we going to evaluate it? Was the money well spent? Did we get good value for our dollar? But we are not doing that when we look at forgone revenue.

3:10

What's being proposed in this bill is another form of forgone revenue. It's money that the government will not take in once people have been able to apply for this revenue. Perhaps Madam Treasurer has worked with the proposer of the bill to actually work this all out. If so, I'd be delighted to hear her contribution to this. What has been worked out by way of what the government expects to gain, or what is the expected outcome of this forgone revenue? If they're not collecting income tax on \$500 from every tradesperson or apprentice in the province, that adds up to a lot of money. What are we expecting to get from that? We're expecting to get more

people working in the province. Well, then, how many? What's the performance measurement? What's the measurement to know that we've been successful with this scheme?

Well, okay. I just mentioned more people working. Are we expecting to have less accidents on the job? If people are able to afford a better quality of safety equipment because they will now get a tax deduction, is there some measurement by which we are saying: okay; we expect there to be fewer accidents on the job in Alberta? We have a shocking number of accidents on the job, particularly, it's been pointed out, because we're working with so many young workers and especially in the oil field.

So I'm asking: what can I expect? What can I go back and tell my constituents is the anticipated benefit to the government, the benefit to all Albertans from giving these individuals this tax credit? If we are willing to scrutinize expenses that this government wants to expend on behalf of Albertans, why are we not examining the money that we're not bringing in, which is what's happening here? I will leave that for the mover of the bill and the Treasurer to respond to. I think it's a valid point, and I think it's important that we do balance these things when we are looking at programs like this.

That's what I was interested in asking while we are in Committee of the Whole. I do think it's an interesting idea. I would like to see it followed through, but I wouldn't be doing my job as a legislator if I wasn't asking: how are we evaluating the success or failure of this program? What monitoring mechanism is in place? What evaluation mechanism is in place? How do we know if it worked or not? Over what period of time? So I'll put that question, that challenge forward to my hon. colleagues across the floor and hope that I will get an answer back.

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the hon. member for some very valid comments towards the bill.

It's indeed my pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001. I, like the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, am pleased to see Bill 207 in Committee of the Whole. This bill is a good step for Albertans. It provides us with the opportunity to use our new unhooked tax system to provide added incentives for Albertans to enter the trades and to reward blue-collar Albertans who must spend thousands of dollars on tools each year just to do their jobs.

However, while I like the intent and spirit of the bill, I do believe we can refine it here today to make it even better, and I propose a few amendments, Mr. Chairman. I would like the amendments to be dealt with as a single amendment and voted on as such.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair has a copy of the proposed amendment, and we shall refer to this as amendment A1.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just give us a minute so that they can be distributed to all the members.

Hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, you may proceed.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I would like to change the title of the bill from the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, to the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, 2001. Second, I would

like to make several changes to section 2 of Bill 207. The most important of these is to add an upper limit to the amount of money spent on tools that is eligible for a credit.

First, Mr. Chairman, those members gathered here today may ask why the title needs to be changed; it seems straightforward enough. Well, I assure you that I'm not just nitpicking here. First, we notice that Bill 207 would amend section 10 of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act and, if passed, would actually slide in as section 10.1. This puts it square in the middle of the tax credit section of the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. In fact, it is structured much the same as other mechanisms that we refer to as tax credits. [interjection] I'll get back to you.

So, first off, this leads to a question: why would we refer to Bill 207 as a deduction when the rest of the section refers to these mechanisms as credits? Doing so may cause the average Albertan to scratch his head in confusion when doing his taxes, and I for one will say this much: I'm already annoyed when I do my taxes; the last thing I need is to be confused.

Second, this is a technical point. What Bill 207 offers is a tax credit, not a deduction. To recap, Bill 207 allows tradespeople and apprentices the opportunity to lessen their tax burden by showing that they spent money on tools to be used on the jobsite. These workers are then credited a specific amount of money dependent upon the tax rate of the province. The money is not paid directly to them but is instead taken off their taxes. Essentially what is going on here is this. If a tradesperson or apprentice spends X amount of dollars on tools, then he does not have to pay taxes on that amount. In essence, he is being credited a certain amount of money that he does not have to pay taxes on. Thus, we should be calling this bill a tax credit and not a straightforward deduction.

Next, I'd like to propose the following amendment to Bill 207. Clearly put, I would like there to be an upper limit on the amount of money that an individual can be credited. As it stands, there is an upper limit. This upper limit is the worker's employment income for the tax year. This is fine, but it seems to leave a lot of room for abuse. For example, we've heard it said that an average auto mechanic makes \$35,000 a year. Now, as much as we know that tradespeople have to spend a lot of money on tools per year, we also know that the average tradesperson doesn't have to spend that much money on tools. On the average we're looking at a ballpark of around \$3,000 per year.

This leads to an interesting point, however, that needs to be explored. If the average tradesperson spends \$3,000 on tools but can be credited right up to his full salary, then are we not opening up the tax system to abuse by those less honest in society? I would argue very strongly from experience that the Alberta tradespeople I've met are by and large hardworking, honest people who want nothing more than the ability to take care of their families, live comfortably, and help see our province prosper. We also know that one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch. What would happen if a few of the less honest people in our province decided to take advantage of the extra room by buying tools on behalf of their friends or neighbours, getting the money back from those people, and having their bosses or supervisors sign off on the receipts? The way the bill is set up now, they could do this right up to the point where they spend an amount equivalent to their income on tools. If they were to do so, they would put themselves in a position of having to pay no provincial tax whatsoever, Mr. Chairman. Why would we open up the province and the people of Alberta to that abuse when we can nip it right in the bud right here by adding a maximum limit to the amount of money tradespeople and apprentices can be credited?

Mr. Chairman, I propose that we amend section 2 of Bill 207 by adding an upper limit of \$5,000. In brief, with the lower limit of

\$500 and the upper limit of \$5,000 we are making available \$4,500 that tradespeople and apprentices can receive a tax credit upon. Under the current scheme this frees up a maximum of \$450 off their taxes per year. I think this number is fair. It is slightly above the average amount of money that is spent on tools per year by tradespeople and apprentices and therefore takes into account what most tradespeople and apprentices would use.

Well, some will no doubt say that we are not providing enough relief to those who spend upwards of \$5,000. I can only say that no government can appease everybody. These workers would still receive a sizable credit but would not be eligible for a credit above the upper limit. This is a fair price to pay, getting a tax credit and making sure that the tax credit can be equally distributed amongst tradespeople and apprentices without being open to abuse.

Mr. Chairman, I therefore would like to refer all of the members here today to the motion for amendment form that has been distributed and call upon them to accept these amendments.

In closing, I'd like to reiterate my support for Bill 207. It's about time that our tradespeople and apprentices were recognized for the hard work that they do. I would also like to once again applaud the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for raising this issue in the Assembly. I call upon all the members of the Assembly to help him support our workers and support Bill 207.

Thank you.

3:20

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, on the amendment.

I'd like to first note that I support this bill in principle and also am excited to see that it has got the rest of the Assembly thinking about ways to improve the bill. In that spirit I'd like to give my support to the amendments proposed by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. The amendments proposed by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster are both sensible and fair.

I say that they are sensible because they protect all Albertans from the possibility, even the slightest possibility, of tax abuse. I say that these amendments are fair for two reasons. First, they give all tradespeople an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of tax relief. Second, these amendments are fair because they help to fine-tune Bill 207 to keep it in line with its original spirit to improve the lives and relative equality of all Albertans.

In order for our economy to thrive, we need tradespeople. If we do not have enough tradespeople, we have holes in our workforce, and our economy suffers. When our economy suffers, the lives of Albertans suffer. This was one of the rationales behind Bill 207: to help all of Alberta, we would give a tax credit to some Albertans. But we obviously wouldn't be helping all of Alberta if we made it possible for some Albertans to abuse our tax system, so as a means of preserving the best of both worlds, fairness for workers and fairness for Albertans, the amendments to Bill 207 are excellent suggestions. These amendments make even better a bill that is already commendable and one that received considerable support from this Assembly in second reading.

Today, in addition to my earlier comments on the proposed amendments, I'd like to speak about how this bill helps preserve the Alberta advantage, especially in these global hard economic times. Alberta continually leads the country in economic growth. We do this by maintaining and growing our Alberta advantage. The Alberta

advantage creates a healthy economy, which contributes to a growing workforce and boosts wages.

Alberta had the strongest employment growth in Canada between 1994 and 2000, and more new jobs are being created every day. The tremendous growth in new jobs coupled with low unemployment levels suggests that we are heading towards a skill shortage in certain industries. Mr. Chairman, recent reports have indicated that nearly half of all occupational groups, including construction trades and various manufacturing workers, have unemployment rates of less than 3 percent. It is no secret that in a booming economy with numerous megaprojects under way or scheduled to begin, tradespeople are in great demand. Many local corporations have resorted to putting up help wanted billboards in an effort to attract specialized tradespeople.

Mr. Chairman, we need to ensure that these industries have enough skilled labour to meet their needs and keep our economy growing. We cannot afford to have our economic growth constrained by a shortage of skilled labour. Attracting tradespeople from other provinces has become standard practice in easing the growing shortages of tradespeople here in Alberta. While attracting new employees to Alberta is good for the province, we should also provide local Albertans with real incentives to enter the trades. Bill 207 does just that.

As stated in section 2(2) of the act, tools used in the performance of a tradesperson's occupation above a \$500 threshold can be deducted from the employee's employment income. This means that employees who are required to purchase tools in order to perform their jobs are credited the purchase cost of their tools for any amount over the \$500 threshold. This is money that they do not have to pay taxes on when tax season comes around. This provision is especially important for the young people of this province who are looking to begin their career in the trades or in a trade-related industry. Oftentimes these industries require employees to purchase their own tools in order to perform their jobs. These costs can be significant and therefore unaffordable to young people who are just starting out. Given the tremendous opportunities available in these industries, we should endeavour to make it easier for young Albertans to enter these fields.

Mr. Chairman, on April 1, 2001, the first stage of the province's four-year plan to cut corporate taxes kicked in. When our finances improve and this plan is fully implemented, large and small businesses will pay about half the tax that they do today. Alberta businesses enjoy the lowest taxes in Canada, and it's only going to get better. This is great news, and it speaks volumes about the Alberta advantage.

It is my belief that tradespeople are very similar to small businesses. Oftentimes these people work independently using their own tools and equipment. In fact, if they were to incorporate themselves as small businesses, they would be able to claim their tools as a business expense. In most cases, however, the incorporation process is impractical and expensive for a single employee. Bill 207 offers a simple and effective solution.

It provides tradespeople with a nonrefundable tax credit for tool purchases over \$500. This provision grants tradespeople some of the same advantages bestowed on small business operators, and in doing so, Bill 207 will encourage more people to enter the trades by sheltering them from the potentially significant tool expenses associated with entering or re-entering trade-related industries. In order to maintain and increase our Alberta advantage, Mr. Chairman, we need to ensure that these people are treated fairly. These people work hard for Alberta, and they contribute to our province through the work they do and the taxes they pay. This bill will increase incentives for people young and old to enter or re-enter the trades

profession by providing a nonrefundable tax credit for any amount over the \$500 threshold.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 207 is a positive step towards ensuring that Alberta has a strong and continued source of labour in the trade-related industries. It is for these reasons that I support Bill 207.

Mr. Chairman, I support the amendment and would like to see us vote on it now. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee has to rise and report by 3:30.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It being imminently close to 3:30 p.m., I'd move that we rise and report progress on Bill 207.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on Bill 207. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Delivery of Provincewide Health Services

508. Mrs. Gordon moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to prioritize restructuring of the parameters for delivering provincewide services such as renal dialysis and multiple sclerosis special therapy programs to focus more on patient need and outcome with emphasis given to service delivery closer to the patient's principal residence.

[Debate adjourned November 13: Mrs. Gordon speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To briefly recap, by allowing outlying regional health authorities to offer and administer some provincewide services such as renal dialysis, patients could and will receive treatment closer to home more comfortably and more conveniently. This motion would put the decision-making process for administering and offering these services in the hands of the regional health authorities actually delivering them.

The development initially of regional health authorities emphasized a shift towards community-based care. This motion further emphasizes the importance of allowing people to remain in their communities. I ask this Assembly to please vote for this motion. Help me help those people that need these services delivered in their communities.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I address this motion, I try to look at all sides. I've consulted with a number of experts in the field and ended up with a range of thoughts and suggestions. My first concern when I read the motion, frankly, was with the wording of the motion. When I read a sentence that urges "the government to prioritize restructuring of the parameters for delivering . . . services" – I think I know the gist behind it from the hon. member's comments, but "restructuring the parameters for delivering services" is a remarkably vague statement. I would be more comfortable with the motion if it were to say specifically what kind of restructuring, what sorts of parameters we're talking about, and whether we want the priority raised or lowered. Obviously from the sponsoring member's comments, we want the priority raised. The vagueness, frankly, of the text of the motion was a concern for me.

In inquiring into the nature of the provincewide services and into how they're delivered, what makes them feasible, what makes them economical to deliver, and what keeps them safe, a number of things came to the surface. Clearly, a fundamental concern and one of the reasons that these are organized as provincewide services as opposed to local services is the need for a critical mass of patients requiring the service. In other words, a dialysis unit that only has one or two patients is not going to be economically feasible nor is it going to be optimally safe, simply because the staff working the system, working in the unit just won't have the necessary volume of patients to fully develop their skills.

One of the concerns with moving these services into smaller and smaller communities is that the critical mass of patients will not be there, and if we get into a smaller centre, there may only be a need for one or two patients to have kidney dialysis, for example, and then the cost of serving these patients becomes enormous and their safety really does become a concern. There are various evaluations, very good studies done on the safety performance on kidney dialysis, and there's no question that the way in which cases are managed and the way that the programs are administered has a direct impact not just on patient well-being but actually on the life or death of a patient. So moving these services into small communities is something that we should also be very concerned about.

I would also raise concerns about staffing and financing these kinds of facilities. If we have a very, very small unit in a small town, how do we staff it? How do we get the specialized technicians, the technical staff in the community? If it's a community of 1,000 or 2,000 or 3,000 people, there's not likely to be a kidney dialysis expert there. So then we need to look at incentives and ways of getting those staff to move and live in those communities, so the costs become high. In addition, if the person is practising in isolation, they may not be able to keep up their professional skills, so the quality diminishes. The entire feasibility of this from both equality of patient care and the cost to the taxpayer is something we really need to keep in mind.

On the other hand, I am drawn to support this motion because I know the spirit that's behind it is one of compassion for patients, for families, for friends of people who need these often lifesaving medical services. It is a genuinely heavy burden for people to bear if they're living in a small community and need to travel a long distance every few days for kidney dialysis or for proper assessment and treatment of conditions such as multiple sclerosis.

There may well be ways in which we can resolve the problems that arise from moving these facilities into smaller communities, and certainly we'll never know if we don't try. So on the basis of compassion I would in the end come down on the side of supporting

this motion, albeit on the understanding that there are very serious concerns about costs and quality. Certainly before any actual steps are taken to implement the motion, to extend these services into smaller communities, I could only support the actual steps being taken if I were convinced that a full evaluation of the cost-effectiveness and the quality of the service was done and the outcome of that evaluation was successful.

I support the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler. I think the spirit behind this is well intended, so I'm pleased to say: yes, I for one will be supporting this.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Motion 508 for the simple reason that this motion encourages the Legislature to encourage the government, of course, to restrengthen the ties with the home community in the provision of health care.

I'd like to focus most specially on the multiple sclerosis special therapy programs that are mentioned in the motion. I do have a number of constituents who do suffer from the condition, and I do know that they receive treatment in our close neighbouring community of Edmonton and certainly service through the Capital health authority. However, I am aware through my colleague from Lacombe-Stettler that there are a number of individual citizens around this province who could very well benefit greatly for their greater comfort and strength and accommodation and also by all the broad range of services that are attendant upon the service being provided in their local community.

So I applaud the two major health authorities that do provide through provincewide services those renal dialysis clinics as well as the multiple sclerosis special therapy programs. They are doing a very good job. But this motion suggests that the local health authorities, the regional health authorities, would be able to determine the cost-effectiveness, whether there is the critical mass of users of these programs, and whether they would be able to provide in their overall plan this provision of health care as they acknowledge the boundaries of their revenues and the programs that they wish to offer.

3:40

The sheer strength of this motion is the fact that there are individuals receiving both of these treatments or programs who are in many cases to a degree debilitated in their swiftness of being able to travel and by the discomfort that comes to them as a result of seeking this service a distance from their own homes. If the regional health authorities were urged through this motion of this Legislature to look at their ability to provide both of these programs so that the recipients did not have to increase their discomfort by traveling far to receive the services, indeed I think it would be an opportunity for the regional health authorities to deliver close-to-home services to people who could benefit greatly from them being delivered close to home.

So I would again, as I say, encourage this Assembly to support this motion. It does provide the opportunity also for those who are specialists in the provision of both of these cares, who don't all reside in the two major urban centres of this province, to be able to work in that area in the provision of care.

I happened a couple of years ago to chair the Seniors' Service Awards Committee, and one of the nominees there was a woman who did a variety of good deeds and was engaged in a number of volunteer efforts in her community. One of them that stood out most specifically was the fact that she drove many of the members of her

community to a renal dialysis centre, but she also asked that they all be brought together and that they then have the ability to experience the efficiencies of numbers in one location. The testimonies, letters that were written appreciative of this woman's efforts were wonderful, but the common thread through all of them was that she recognized neighbours in her community who had a need, and she responded by making their lives much more comfortable and certainly making much better use of their time than spending such a long time traveling to get these services.

So I want to commend the Member for Lacombe-Stettler for bringing this forward. I know it is something that she is very well acquainted with, but I also know that there are a number of other citizens across this province who would benefit greatly by virtue of time, by virtue of less exhaustion and discomfort to their own lives by being able to access these programs and this service closer to home.

So I urge this Assembly to urge the provincial health authorities to have the opportunity to provide these services close to home to those who need it most. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today in the Assembly as well to speak to Motion 508, and I'm doing so knowing that my colleague from Lacombe-Stettler – truly we've seen it in the Assembly in the past – has a very deep understanding and what I believe is a strong sense of what is needed for change in the rural community, especially when it comes to creating optimal health and well-being for the residents, which is why I know I have confidence in Motion 508 and why I'm hoping that members of the Assembly will be supporting the motion. [interjection]

I know, too – and the hon. member would be interested in this – that my colleague has really researched this thoroughly, and as we heard earlier, it demonstrates the importance of delivering local health services to the community. Quite frankly, that simply makes good sense.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it deals with one of the most important challenges that we've heard that faces our government today, and that is the equitable delivery of quality health care services in the province as whole. We also know that with our aging population and the accelerated introduction of increasingly advanced health care technology, the challenge is only going to grow in the future, and it's really crucial to deal with concerns we have about health care delivery and to deal with them now. Certainly we've heard in the Assembly, as well, about the Mazankowski report that's going to be coming forward. I know that that, too, may deal with equitable delivery and delivery of services on a more local basis. But the problem continues to grow, and I think it's becoming more expensive and it's becoming a problem that's very complicated to solve. I know that our hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler has tried to address this previously. Hopefully, as I said, the government will be urged to look at it more seriously in the future, based on this motion.

There are three key points in this motion, Mr. Speaker, that I'd like to make on health care delivery to areas that are outside of the large municipalities where acute, high-risk care is practised. It seems, from what I've heard from my hon. colleague from Lacombe-Stettler, that the delivery of provincewide services to many rural areas is done in a manner which is not always in the best interests of the patient. Although guidelines have been put in place in an attempt to try and make it an equitable process, functionally it simply hasn't been so. Guidelines need to be rewritten, and that's not a bad thing. They can be rewritten and they can be rewritten in a very practical, simple manner which would allow better access by

rural communities to services. The previous speaker mentioned about multiple sclerosis, but specifically I'm thinking in the area of renal dialysis, which is very much a part of the motion.

Yes, as one of the hon. colleagues mentioned earlier, the motion could have been rewritten or written in a different way, but I think that that's simply semantics. I believe that it's well crafted, and I'm pleased to hear that she did mention that you agree with the spirit and the intent of the motion and will be voting for it, because I don't believe that changing the guidelines is actually going to be a very costly thing to do. It's a very simple thing to do. Many reports have been written for our government that we've had before us in the Assembly in the past, and they've suggested that local health care close to home, in the community, is exactly what we need, Mr. Speaker.

Also, I wanted to talk a bit to the tremendous relief that access to local treatment can provide for patients that are sick with complications. When I think of complications, as we talk about renal dialysis, we know that renal failure is very chronic. It's a process that can be very time consuming, and over the course of time it can also become quite painful for patients. It really becomes essential to the patients' daily schedule and essential to their care. It can even, Mr. Speaker, be an emotional and financial burden to patients and their families.

So if we really are going to deliver true quality health care in our province, I agree with my hon. colleague proposing the motion that an even greater focus on local delivery of provincewide services is necessary for Alberta's rural areas. I'm not a rural MLA, Mr. Speaker, which is why, as I said earlier, I have confidence in the member who brought forward the motion, who understands the rural areas and the rural needs, but I do know a bit about the current regulations that are at work and the certain specialized health services that are delivered, and they're outside services.

My second point, Mr. Speaker, is that delivering specialized health services in rural areas may be more efficient than was previously considered. There are so many reports to our government in recent years that have emphasized that the local delivery of health care often saves money, human resources, and infrastructure, but the gains are made by allowing an increased role by the family and community members in caring for the sick. Mr. Speaker, the March 2000 report *Building Better Bridges* discussed the care in Alberta for people with developmental disabilities. It emphasized in its recommendations a focus on the benefits of community living. I was just talking earlier here in the Assembly to my colleague who happened to chair the writing of that report, my hon. colleague from Redwater. The report is *Healthy Aging: New Directions for Care*, and it actually became known as the Broda report. It was a fine, outstanding report, and we took great interest in that report as an Assembly, Mr. Speaker.

We have to realize, too, that the number one suggestion – and my colleague just reminded me of that, as I said earlier – is that a long-term policy should be to encourage patients to receive care that they need at home rather than at facilities. We say it so often as MLAs, and really it's something that we should be putting into practice in a far more forthright way than we do. That's why it's so critical that this motion be passed, because it emphasizes once again the benefits and goes back to that of making health care delivery local.

3:50

I'm not suggesting that making provincewide services more frequently available on a local basis would inherently save costs, but I definitely believe that there is the potential. It's an idea that needs to be evaluated. In fact, if it does become more costly, even that has to be balanced with the real benefits of what my colleague has put forward here. At the very least it cannot be assumed that promoting

local delivery of services will increase costs, but it seems to be the justification of our current regulations, which cause many patients outside of large municipalities great inconvenience and expense. Mr. Speaker, localizing health service delivery will certainly improve the quality of life for patients and their families as a whole, as we mentioned earlier.

Now, renal dialysis. I don't know if members here understand the importance of why that service is delivered on a daily basis, but having renal dialysis as a local-based service will create comfort, as we said earlier, to the patient and the family, because it's a process that introduces tremendous physical and emotional complications for the patient. The service places immense strain on friends and loved ones, but understandably the burden tends to be alleviated when the process is done closer to home and in a familiar setting. If patients do not have to confront the challenges of new people in a new city when they are in times of vulnerability, their health care experience is that much better. For the sake of patient-centred quality health care delivery, if the option of local delivery exists, it should be strongly encouraged. Mr. Speaker, I believe that the current regulations for determining the location of provincewide services such as renal dialysis should be changed.

Our colleague mentioned earlier, as well, that the Capital and Calgary regional health authorities seem to have too much influence in determining the priorities of the rural health authorities. That's because they're essential decision-makers when it regards the type of delivery of services offered and where. Part of having equal access to health care involves having equal access to localized health services. Hopefully, the regional health authorities do read the debates in *Hansard*. Perhaps the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler will be sending the debate from *Hansard* and they'll see really why you brought forward this motion, hon. member. Perhaps they'll include even the RHAs that are rural based in some of that decision-making.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, local health care delivery allows patients to confront challenges of health concerns, and this would allow for a patient-centred approach to health care. In my opinion, this is an admirable goal for health care in the province, and I commend my colleague for bringing it forward, because it will ensure a level of care delivery in Alberta that we can all be proud of.

Hon. member, I wish you well with this motion. As I said, I hope that you do take it out to the community and out to the regional health authorities, and good for you for bringing it forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great honour and privilege to be able to speak to this motion today. The hon. member that has brought this motion forward has certainly brought it forward for all the right reasons. Being a rural MLA, she sees what happens in rural Alberta. For those of you who haven't seen a dialysis patient, when they have to come every two or three days into the city and that city is two or three hours away and the patient is a chronically debilitated patient, I think there is a significant amount of problems.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, as the previous speaker has said, that there needs to be much more of a focus on bringing the service to the community, bringing the service to the client's own home. We see, for example, with the renal unit at the University of Alberta and at the Foothills hospital in Calgary, that we have such technology now as having dialysis units in motor homes. So the technology is certainly there, but what we have to do is find a better way to bring this technology to the patient's home, whether it's a hometown or

home itself. I don't think there's any doubt that patients do better when they're at home with people they love, in surroundings they're familiar with. Mr. Speaker, I believe that dialysis is certainly a critical component of this.

I think that the second part of the motion is extremely important as well and in many ways may even be more important. With multiple sclerosis we're seeing an incredible number of people that have this disease. There are more and more that are being diagnosed each and every day. We have to find a cure for this disease, and the only way that we're going to find a cure is to catch people early. You cannot expect a young, healthy, active person who has some episodes of multiple sclerosis to take time off from their schedule once, twice, three times a week to go into the city and have this treatment when they're actually living in the country. So, Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is saying, quite simply, is that there should be a way that these programs can be outreach programs to these individuals. These individuals are not debilitated. However, they do need to be involved in the treatment so that they do not become debilitated down the road. I think it's extremely unfair to expect these individuals to drive to the large urban cities when it causes them all sorts of problems.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'd just really like to commend the hon. member for bringing this motion forward, for addressing an issue that, albeit the numbers may not be incredibly high in the rural areas purely from the demographics of it, is a very difficult issue. It's a very important issue. We have to remember that a third of our population lives outside Edmonton and Calgary. These people, as it has already been said, deserve access to this type of health care as well.

Again, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member, thank you for bringing this motion forward. I would certainly urge all Members of the Legislative Assembly to support this. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand today to speak to Motion 508. This motion seeks "to prioritize restructuring of the parameters for delivering provincewide services such as renal dialysis." The motion also seeks to change the focus of these programs to reflect patient need and outcome, with the emphasis on service delivery provided "closer to the patient's principal residence." As I know, when you have a sick member of your family, you appreciate it, sir. Motion 508 would encourage looking at ways to provide outlying regional health authorities the ability to administer and offer these programs outside of the direct influence of the Capital and Calgary regional health authorities. The restructuring would effectively put the decision-making back into the hands of the individual regional authorities, who are ultimately responsible for the care and services delivered to the patients in their regions.

[The Speaker in the chair]

In 1994 the Regional Health Authorities Act established 17 RHAs to replace the more than 200 separate health wards and administrations. The establishment of RHAs greatly reduced administration costs and allowed more money to be directed to the provision of services for Albertans. The restructuring allowed for a more complete integration when delivering a broad spectrum of health services. Mr. Speaker, under this system the Capital regional health authority and the Calgary regional health authority do have broader mandates than the other 15 RHAs. In order to provide the expertise and facilities necessary to offer more specialized, capital-intensive

programs, this was a practical and necessary consequence. The Capital and Calgary RHAs are responsible for a number of province-wide programs such as transplant procedures and other sophisticated surgical procedures. Having these procedures offered in two major urban locations ensures that these services maintain continuity, effectiveness, and cost-efficiencies. In fact, recent studies have illustrated that the move to specialized centres of excellence for specific health care services enables patients to receive an even higher quality of specialized care.

However, Mr. Speaker, the Regional Health Authorities Act also emphasizes a shift from institutional to community-based care. Having decisions made at the community level about care and services that are provided to local residents is seen as a core benefit of this system. The caregivers in each region can best determine the services that their region requires. Mr. Speaker, Motion 508 is a reaffirmation of this stated goal.

4:00

Each RHA should be able to provide comparable levels of service to patients in their region and have the services available as close as possible to the patient's principal residence provided there's a level of demonstrated need which justifies the provision of these services. Because it's often not possible for smaller communities to have an adequate number of staple patients, the provincewide service program was created for certain costly specialized procedures administered strictly by the Capital and Calgary RHAs. The existing range of facilities, infrastructure, and expertise needed to provide these high cost services is readily available in these two centres.

Certain provincewide services such as renal dialysis are offered through a system of satellite service programs throughout the province. Yet even though these services are offered outside the Capital and Calgary regional areas, the Capital and Calgary RHAs still administer the programs and make the final decisions, not our local RHAs. In order to set up a satellite program, an area must meet the criteria developed specifically for that program by the two main health authorities. Based on these criteria, the Capital and Calgary RHAs decide where and how these services should be offered in the other 15 RHAs throughout the province. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the decision-making process for the development of a satellite operation is the sole responsibility of the Capital health region for the north of the province and the Calgary health authority for the south of the province.

Motion 508 will urge the government to allow provincewide services such as renal dialysis to be directly administered by individual RHAs providing strict program requirements can be met. By restructuring the current system for delivering provincewide services, programs such as renal dialysis and even multiple sclerosis therapy can be more focused on patient need.

Regional health authorities were created to administer and deliver health care services to the people in their regions. It is my belief that we should allow individual regional health authorities to determine their client needs and requirements as they are best positioned to serve the people of their region. Our ultimate goal should be to provide efficient, effective, and high-quality health care to each and every Albertan. The best way to accomplish this is by enabling the individual RHAs to determine if there is sufficient need to justify delivering certain services.

Motion 508 is not advocating the provision of all services in each and every community or region. The geographical expanse of the province makes this very difficult, and the requirement of specialized skills and facilities makes this prohibitively expensive and inefficient. However, Mr. Speaker, each local region should not be required to access these services through the Capital and Calgary

health authorities. For services such as renal dialysis it may be more effective to remove this additional administrative layer and enable the other 15 RHAs to administer and provide these services themselves. We should at least investigate this possibility.

As is currently the case, the Minister of Health and Wellness will ultimately retain the final say as to whether the application makes sense from an economic and program provision standpoint. This ensures that service duplication and effectiveness do not creep into the system. The motion will, however, move the decision-making and administration into the hands of the individual RHA.

Intuitively there are numerous benefits to having care decisions made in local communities. Empowering the local caregivers provides the decision-making authority to those who best understand the situation. Additionally, having services provided in the local community allows people to remain in or near their hometowns while receiving care.

Albertans in all corners of this province receive and require professional health care services. We should endeavour to provide all people with care and services in their local communities whenever it is practical and feasible as the benefits of receiving care in a local community setting are numerous. Financially it is less of a burden on the individual if you are able to receive care near your own home. Travel costs and time costs are much less when long, extended trips are avoided. Physically the ability to receive care in the local community lessens the travel strain that accompanies long journeys. Mentally and emotionally we are all more relaxed and comfortable in our own homes and communities, and the stress associated with spending extended periods away from home cannot be ignored.

Mr. Speaker, the benefit of receiving health and medical care in the community is not simply an abstract idea. This fact was borne out by numerous studies, and community care provisions are often included in recommendations in health reports. Alberta Health and Wellness has developed a document entitled Strategic Directions and Future Actions: Healthy Aging and Continuing Care in Alberta, which is based on the results of a stakeholder analysis, public response, and departmental analysis. These strategic directions are designed to shift the provision of health care services towards a new vision for continuing care.

The strategic directions outlined in the report reflect the implementation of the recommendations of the Broda report. The visions and principles section of this report outlines a society where all Albertans have choices in the care they receive and where they receive it. People will age in place and age in their own community. Communities and services will be designed in a way to make this vision a reality. Motion 508 speaks to this vision by making it easier for rural RHAs to directly administer satellite services such as renal dialysis. Patients are more comfortable in or near their homes, and transportation difficulties are reduced when care is provided in the local or a nearby community. Having care facilities near the patient's principal dwelling reduces the mental and physical stress on people who do not need further complications.

Once again, let me reiterate: this motion is not advocating the provision of all services in all locations. What it is advocating is investigating methods to allow all RHAs the opportunity to determine which services are required in their communities. Once these services have been identified, the individual RHA can make arguments directly . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must now say the following: on the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, will all those in favour of the motion please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:07 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Ady	Graydon	McClelland
Amery	Haley	Nelson
Blakeman	Hancock	Nicol
Bonner	Hlady	Oberg
Boutilier	Horner	O'Neill
Broda	Jablonski	Ouellette
Calahasen	Jacobs	Rathgeber
Cao	Klapstein	Renner
Carlson	Knight	Shariff
Cenaiko	Lord	Strang
Danyluk	Lougheed	Taft
DeLong	Lund	Tannas
Doerksen	Magnus	Taylor
Dunford	Marz	VanderBurg
Forsyth	Maskell	Vandermeer
Fritz	Massey	Yankowsky
Gordon	Masyk	Zwozdesky
Goudreau	McClellan	

Totals:	For – 53	Against – 0
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 508 carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

4:20

Private Health Care Contracts

509. Dr. Taft moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require regional health authorities to collect and publicly release information on private health care providers whom they contract with, including details regarding services provided, public funding received, and charges to individuals.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The background to this motion is such that the Health Care Protection Act, better known as Bill 11, allows for increased contracting out by regional health authorities to profit-driven health care providers. While the act and regulations make some accommodation for information on the operations of the profit-driven providers and require that some information be made public, they don't go nearly far enough.

The health care protection regulations do specify that the profit-driven health care operator provide a report to the regional health authority on a monthly basis regarding inpatient and outpatient information. The regulations also require that the profit-driven health care provider must provide information on ownership of the surgical facility to the minister. The minister is also required by regulation to publish this information. However, how it is published and where is up to the minister, plus the minister is also allowed to omit certain details if releasing the information could be considered a threat to the safety of a person.

Anyone who has gone to the web sites of the regional health authorities or who has otherwise examined the information released by the regional health authorities on their contracts with for-profit providers will soon realize how frustrating it is to get any meaning from these particular documents or from this information. They all

say virtually the same thing and the same phrases. Aside from a few useful bits of information such as the value of the contract, they give very little information for the public to assess the value of the contracts or to judge whether or not the public funds are being well expended.

I'd like to move directly to some reasons and some examples of why we believe more information is required to be released to the public. I'm going to quote various pieces of correspondence, some within the Calgary health region and some otherwise. The first one is actually written by the regional clinical department head of the CRHA to the CEO of the CRHA, and in it, among other things, he raises concerns that "patients are unfairly taken advantage of through enhanced service charges." In all credit to the government this precedes the legislation known as Bill 11, but it does raise for us and for the public the concern that we all need to have more information on the contracts with these for-profit facilities.

He actually goes on to give great detail that raised concerns. He talks about "2 well documented cases"

of ophthalmologists charging patients for medically indicated cataracts by bumping them up the list if they want to pay \$2,400.00 per eye and have the procedure called a refractive lensectomy as opposed to a cataract removal.

He goes on to express his concerns that this is "unethical, immoral" and "against the Canada Health Act." Without full public ability to examine the nature of the relationships between the for-profit providers of services and the RHAs, concerns such as this will arise unless we think that the concerns will automatically be dealt with through standard procedures.

I will also go on to quote the same senior physician, who says, "Regulatory bodies such as the Alberta College [of Physicians and Surgeons], AMA and the CHRA have so far failed to protect the patient from entrepreneurial capitalism." That's one example of the sort of issue that arises when these contracts are not fully open to public examination.

Within the current system in the Calgary health region there are five different for-profit clinics that provide eye surgery. They are the same five clinics that have provided eye surgery for the last several years, and all of them – no new ones, just those same five – have had their contracts renewed for another two or three years. The total value of the contracts – and this is available publicly – in this current year is just over \$5 million. But, again, public access to information is crucial. There is a concern that these five groups, these five private clinics, are operating as an oligopoly, controlling the eye surgery service in Calgary. There is virtually no opportunity in Calgary to have eye surgery done in the public system.

Again, I'm going to refer to correspondence that was written by an ophthalmologist to the minister of health last year. He compares the efficiencies in the public system with the efficiencies and the costs in the for-profit system: "Currently the Active Treatment Center Operating Theatre at the Royal Alexandra Hospital outperforms efficiency at any private center in the Nation." Then he goes on to raise issues about how public funds are being spent. This is a quote from an ophthalmologist:

The current cost allotment of \$515 per cataract to private facilities allows significant profit taking by parties with vested private interest. Through the Regional Eye Care Centre the average running cost per case is approximately \$150 . . . for instrumentation and equipment plus \$200 [for the lens implant].

In other words, he is providing information that suggests that we are paying significantly more for these eye surgeries to be done in the for-profit clinics in Calgary than we'd need to pay if they were done in the public system. How is the public ever going to be able to fully examine that issue and compare the efficiencies of one system to the other without more extensive disclosure of information?

THE SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member. I hate to interrupt, but the time limit for consideration of this business has now left us for today.

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 29

Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 29, the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act. I'm pleased to support this amendment because it makes sense. It's a simple change that will benefit Albertans.

The AMFC Act is legislation that oversees the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, or AMFC. The mission of AMFC is to provide local authorities within the province with funding for capital projects at the lowest possible cost consistent with the viability of the AMFC. AMFC is a nonprofit Crown organization which has both elected board members and provincially appointed board members. Like all good legislation, this amendment is prudent and realistic. It makes a modest change that allows regional airport authorities to become shareholders in AMFC thereby giving them access to financing for capital projects at competitive rates.

Three corporations have been incorporated under the Alberta Regional Airports Authorities Act: the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority, the Calgary Airport Authority, and the Red Deer Airport Authority. The Calgary Airport Authority has requested that it be allowed to become a shareholder of AMFC thereby allowing it to borrow from AMFC. It is not a big stretch for AMFC. As I mentioned earlier, airport authorities are very similar in nature to the current shareholders. Organizations such as villages, municipalities, water commissions are not for profit, and they all serve the interests of Albertans.

It's important to point out that both Calgary and Edmonton airport authorities are in full support of this amendment. They see this as an initiative that will help them provide better, cheaper service to Albertans, and I encourage my colleagues in this Assembly to support this proposed legislation. It is an opportunity that we in government have to make legislation that is truly win/win. Albertans win through improved airport service, and the airport authorities win because they can finance their projects more cheaply, all of this at minimal risk to the province.

By that I mean that the airport authorities, like all other AMFC shareholders, will have to apply and qualify for AMFC financing. If they have a solid plan and have demonstrated their ability to pay, they will be given access to this financing. This will be of great benefit to the airport authorities. Accessing financing through AMFC will significantly reduce their ongoing interest costs as well as related administrative expenses.

Earlier I mentioned that there is little or no risk to the province. Borrowing money through AMFC does not affect Alberta's bottom line. AMFC's interest costs are offset by interest revenue received from the borrowers. In terms of the province's credit rating I'm told that loaning money through AMFC does not have an impact on those ratings that we are so proud of these days. When the rating agencies decide on our provincial credit rating, they factor in total taxpayer-supported debt.

Regional airport authorities will have to present a solid long-term business plan in order to access the financing, and being an AMFC

shareholder does not mean easy access to cash. It's like any other major financial transaction. There are checks and balances built into the process, and the process is transparent. Risk to taxpayers is minimal. Consider the \$140 million in equity that AMFC currently possesses, and AMFC has a solid balance sheet that helps to minimize risk to taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, I ask members of this Assembly to join me in supporting this amendment for very simple reasons. I ask that they consider the mission of AMFC, which is to provide local authorities within the province with funding for capital projects at the least possible cost consistent with the viability of AMFC. Airport authorities like municipalities, water commissions, school boards, and health authorities fit in with the mission. This amendment will help airport authorities continue with aggressive plans to expand or upgrade. Improved airport infrastructure does enhance the Alberta economy, and granting bodies incorporated under the Regional Airports Authorities Act the right to become shareholders in AMFC poses little risk to Alberta taxpayers.

This is a prudent and reasonable amendment and one that I think all members of this Assembly should support, and I will move second reading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have an opportunity to put my comments on the record on Bill 29, the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001. In principle we're quite happy to support including regional airport authorities in the groups that can borrow and hold shares in the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation. Initially we thought there may be some concerns about this bill coming forward from Calgary, who is looking for some money soon, and thought perhaps that might give an unfair advantage over some of the other authorities who have just recently undertaken expansions and had to access dollars at higher interest rates.

In our review with those municipalities who won't be in line to access these cheaper dollars in the short term, nobody had any concerns with it at all. In fact, all the airport authorities that we talked to were very supportive of this particular amendment and felt that even though they weren't able to access the dollars immediately, certainly there would be long-term benefits to them, and they were very happy to be involved with the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation.

We agree with the Member for Calgary-North Hill, who talks about regional airports being an important part of Alberta's infrastructure. Certainly they are. They are a part of the Alberta advantage. It's particularly incumbent upon us, I think, to ensure that we have access to all major centres in this province and that that access is up to date and meets the needs of people and users of the system whenever possible. We would agree that it is prudent management to be able to have these different authorities access these dollars, so we're happy to support this.

I have to say that it is our practice when we get these bills or hear about these bills to send them out to a variety of stakeholder groups, consult with them, get their feedback, and so on. Interestingly enough, when we did that with this particular bill – we sent the bill out to the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation and asked for feedback from them. What we were told was that they were unable to give us any comments on the bill unless we first gave our questions to the office of the Minister of Finance. I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance could address the reason why we would have to access her, put any questions through her office before they could talk to us.

You know, most of the time we support government bills in this Assembly, and inquiries made out to organizations are for the purposes of sound and reasonable consultation. We're happy to support bills when stakeholder groups support them. We're happy to bring forward suggestions or amendments or promote debate when there are issues that stakeholder groups don't always agree with the government on. But we're not very happy when we consult with stakeholder groups and they tell us that we have to talk to particular ministers' offices before they will talk to us. I'm sure that that's not the intent of that particular minister in this case, but if it is, we would like to put the reasons for that on the record, Mr. Speaker. It seems like an unusual way to do business in this province. I think that we have shown that we are respectful of the process, and we believe that people should be free and available to talk to opposition members. Whether they want to talk to us on an embargo basis or on the record is their business, and we respect that, but we don't want to have to go through ministers' offices in order to get feedback from particular groups.

We will be supporting this particular bill. I'm hoping the minister will respond to my comments. We expect to see quite speedy passage of this bill through this Legislature.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, just for clarification as the hon. member opposite has raised a concern, if she would speak to me afterwards as to where that information came from, I can guarantee her that I will rectify it immediately. I expect that there is open access to these agencies. Questions that are asked by any members, no matter which side of the House they're on, should be answered. They don't have to come through my office; that's for sure. So I'd just like to clarify that on the record.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill to close the debate.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The debate is closed.

I would just like to point out that somebody said, "Can we all borrow money from AMFC?" I said, "You have to be nonprofit," and he said, "I've never made a nickel in my life." So he thinks he can borrow from them. Just as an aside.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a special visitor from the state of California, a former Albertan who has lived in California for a number of years, a land developer looking to do some further business in the province of Alberta. Seated in the members' gallery is Mr. Ken Mariash, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

4:40

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

(continued)

Bill 28
Agricultural Operation Practices
Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate November 15: Mr. Lund]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to address Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001. It's nice to see this bill in the Legislature. Many of us have been looking for this legislation to come forward for at least the last five years, as long as I can remember. This is one of those bills that crosses the boundaries of several ministries. Certainly I've had a keen interest in it from an environmental perspective for a number of years. It has an economic development perspective to it and certainly agriculture.

For the few years that we've been talking about this issue back and forth in this Legislature, we had some concerns originally that the bill wouldn't come forward with all the environmental issues identified if Agriculture was in charge of the process. I'd have to say that I don't think that that turned out to be true, Mr. Speaker. The government often doesn't go far enough in the areas that we would like them to go, but it certainly seems to me that the concerns that were brought forward from people in the environmental community and people at large who have environmental concerns on this issue were fairly dealt with, that there was a great deal of discussion around those issues, and that they got incorporated into the debate and the outcomes in a fair and reasonable fashion. So I would like to applaud the minister and her department on how it was handled and those associated ministries who worked in collaboration on this issue, an issue that can be intensely volatile in this province as people bring forward the kinds of issues that they have.

It doesn't mean that I like all of the outcomes that we see in this particular bill, and over the course of time both here at second reading, when I talk to it in terms of the principles of the bill, and then in committee, when we get down to some of the details, I'll be outlining the kinds of concerns that I have with regard to the legislation and with regard to outstanding issues around intensive livestock operations in the province as a whole, Mr. Speaker. Certainly the process seemed to work reasonably well, better than most of those that I have been associated with in my years in this Assembly. Perhaps with the exception of the climate change work that was done, this has been one of the best processes for collaboration and consultation that I've seen.

So in terms of the bill, what does it talk about? It talks about regulations for siting approval, authorization, and registration of confined feeding operations and for the manure management of seasonal feeding and breeding operations. It talks about the NRCB now administering the registration, authorization, and approvals and being responsible for compliance. It talks about the NRCB rulings being final and paramount to the land use planning of the municipality. It talks about the grievance applications as written submissions to the complaint, who may rule on the appropriateness of the complaint, or refer the complaint to a three-member practice review committee appointed by the minister. So a fairly comprehensive review of the changes to this particular legislation.

The question that needs to be asked, Mr. Speaker, before we talk about bills on intensive livestock and before we talk about changing the name of what we call intensive livestock operations in this province is whether or not this is really an industry that we want to

go forward with with what many people would say is reckless abandon. Intensive livestock is an industry that does bring money to the province. It provides some jobs. It gives us certainly export potential. But it comes at quite a high cost. It wasn't part of the process to talk about whether or not this industry should be expanded in this province as it stands. It's too bad that it wasn't, Mr. Speaker, because I would have liked to have seen that kind of a discussion happen.

We currently have some very good operators in this province on the intensive livestock side, but there is nothing that you can really do to minimize the amount of manure and the subsequent side effects of having that degree of manure in the province. So before we talked about changes to the regulations, I would have liked to have seen some debate on whether or not we want to increase this kind of industry in our province.

I fully understand how important this kind of industry can be to some regions in the province, rural regions who are facing increased kinds of pressures on them. I know that at the AAMDC conference last week I sat with some old friends from Coronation, and I asked them what they thought about this bill. What they had to say was that they wished they had the water in order to be able to be concerned about having intensive livestock operations in their region. The question was: why? Certainly because of the money that flows through the community and the increased number of jobs. Now, we know that there really are relatively few actual jobs created in an operation, but there's a great flow-through of dollars not only in terms of adding an economic development resource there in the community but the trucking and the other associated spin-off economic results that come with an operation like that. They would have liked to have had that up for consideration.

I asked them then what they thought the resulting issues were in terms of environmental concerns, and their concerns were very local in nature. Siting, they said, wouldn't be a problem because it's a sparsely populated area. They didn't think that anybody would have an issue with the air quality, which is the smell, which is the biggest concern that neighbours have about this issue. They felt that the manure could be used, as it is in many regions, for a variety of uses, and properly handled, there wouldn't be any problems.

Groundwater contamination didn't hit their radar screen at all. They simply didn't think it would be an issue and were surprised that it might be. We know, Mr. Speaker, that it is an issue, that particularly in relation to heavy metal issues we're looking at some long-term, outstanding, potential problems that could be significant in nature on this.

From a cumulative impact perspective they didn't have any concerns, which exactly pinpoints one of the key problems that we've had with this piece of legislation, and that is that the issues become very regional in nature and that we don't really have anybody taking a look at the wider umbrella issues that come with an operation like this which are on the cumulative impact side. I know we had some discussion about this in question period earlier in this session, and I'll go into more detail about that when we get into committee.

Certainly somebody needs to take responsibility. If we're going to increase the number of operations in this province – I expect it is the intent of the government and the ministry to promote and open up the boundaries for these kinds of operations – then we need to know clearly who it is that's going to be in charge of monitoring cumulative impacts on our communities, on our province, and on our neighbouring provinces on these issues. The minister referred briefly in her response to a question about what's being done on the soil and water side. I don't think that was a comprehensive answer. I would expect more detail from her either in debate on this bill or

at some point in writing as we move forward on it. She really didn't have an answer for the air issues.

4:50

It's more than just smell, Mr. Speaker. There are noxious gases associated with this and long-term kinds of problems associated with this. Cumulative impact is going to be a very important and very deciding factor when we talk about where this bill goes in the long run. So we expect, in fact we demand that this government address those outstanding issues. I would expect that the Minister of Environment would have the responsibility for this and that he will be taking a leadership role as we move forward on this bill. Those are some of the global kinds of issues I have in terms of the principle of this.

We have a starting point here that addresses some of the outstanding issues that we've been talking about, but one that we hadn't anticipated prior to this bill being brought to the floor of the Legislature was that they would change the name of intensive livestock operations. We now see this new jargon coming forward calling these operations confined feeding operations. Mr. Speaker, I have a real problem with that because I don't think that accurately describes what it is this bill promotes and supports. We're talking about intensive operations where you have many animals in a very small, yes, confined space, a very small space. Intensive, I think, is a proper descriptor of what happens in those locations. It gives some credibility to the magnitude of the operations. It is a descriptor in terms of feeding, accessing, and monitoring these operations that we don't get with confined feeding operations.

You know, my grandmother had a chicken coop. That was a confined feeding operation. You don't have anything like the kinds of issues resulting from the backyard chicken coop in the farmyard as you do for intensive livestock operations. It's to me a completely different ball game. Intensive livestock operations are an industry that is more like a manufacturing plant than it is a farming operation. So I think that that kind of distinction needs to be made, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask the minister why it is that they wanted to change this terminology.

We just got people really well aware of what intensive livestock operations meant, and people understand that concept. They can identify with what the parameters of an intensive livestock operation are, either for or against, whatever, but they understand. There's a complete understanding of what that is. To go to confined feeding operations, which is a much more general term, I think does not adequately describe what it is we are talking about. Perhaps that's where the ministry was going with this. They didn't want communities to grasp immediately what the ramifications of this kind of an operation could be. I hope that wasn't the intent. I hope that a very good, reasonable, and logical explanation for the name change can be given to us.

There is at this stage, in urban areas particularly, a negative connotation to intensive livestock operations, and maybe that's what they were trying to get away from from a marketing perspective. But a confined feeding operation really doesn't speak to density issues, which are the issues that cause the problems with these operations. So that really is the significant difference here, and I would expect the minister to be able to address that for us and give us some explanation.

We've been looking for a long time for a change in the approval process, Mr. Speaker, because as we traveled around the province and talked to different operators in different municipalities, there were a significant number of issues that came forward. Municipalities often were ill prepared to be able to handle the issues that arise out of intensive livestock operations: zoning issues, regulation

issues, the kind of money and time that gets spent in the public hearing process. There were all kinds of problems throughout the province on this. One, they didn't have the expertise in many cases to be able to properly address the issues. They didn't have the infrastructure in place to be able to properly address the issues. They didn't like the fact that they had to deal with neighbours hating neighbours on this issue and the subsequent results for them from a political fashion of them having to make decisions, some of which often felt arbitrary to both people who were concerned about the operations and those who were interested in expanding or moving into a region with a new operation.

From the operators' perspective, what they were looking for was a level playing field across the province. They didn't care what the rules were going to be particularly. They just wanted to know that the rules were going to be consistent for every operator so that if one region required a million or half a million dollars in infrastructure to be built on their location, it was the same for everyone in the province. Somebody down the road couldn't set up an operation for a small investment of \$50,000 or \$100,000, because if it isn't a level playing field, then those who have to find additional resources have a much longer payoff time before they can start making a profit. They didn't care if it was a huge investment at the front end as long as it would be the same for all the operators in the province, and that gave them an equal opportunity to make some money. It would be determined, then, by them being good operators, which is how we like to see the economics of all business investments play out in Alberta, not where one region has any kind of an advantage over another, that most things being equal, we're going to be taking a look at the same kinds of rules and regulations and enforcement issues and the same kind of infrastructure dollars.

So that's what operators were asking for. They wanted the rules to be consistent, the rules to be put in place and not be subject to change at what they felt sometimes were the whims of municipalities or lobby groups of people who didn't want them in the region, some consistency in the application of the rules.

I know that the minister and the committee undertook those concerns and worked on them in terms of coming up with some solutions. So we see now the NRCB being the umbrella group who will administer the registration, authorization, and approval processes. We haven't seen the proposed regulations yet. I think we are going to see those before this is passed. [interjection] Yeah. The minister is saying yes. We're happy to see those in a draft fashion. We know they can't be passed until the legislation is passed, but we're very happy to see those in a draft fashion, hopefully in time for us to make some comments about them in committee or in third reading. That'll be excellent. The minister is saying yes, so I look forward to that opportunity.

So in general terms, having the NRCB do the overview of these registrations and authorizations is good. Of course, every time you change the rules, there's going to be a downside to those rules as well, and there are some pitfalls with having the NRCB be the organization that actually administers this. We will go into some detail about what those pitfalls are, and hopefully the minister will be able to point out to us how they expect to remedy those kinds of concerns. So I'm looking forward to speaking about that kind of detail.

5:00

Some local communities didn't have the ability to actually come forward with regulations and their concerns to deal with those. What local communities do need in this kind of bill, Mr. Speaker, is a huge say in siting concerns. We think there has to be a process that can be put into place on this bill where local municipalities will

have a heavily weighted say in the kinds of zoning concerns that they have for these regulations. The current rules as they stand with the NRCB do not address this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are half a dozen or so significant points I'd like to raise at this stage of the debate. This is, as we all appreciate, a difficult bill. It's a difficult issue. I've been going out of my way to speak to farmers whom I know to get their opinions, and their opinions are as divided as I suppose all of ours will be on this. There is a sense in which the current situation we all understand is not sustainable. We do need a better way to handle these kinds of developments, but whether or not this particular bill addresses those is certainly open for debate, and it's a debate we will hammer away on here.

The first concern I had – and there's been mention of it here already, and I think all of us can see this concern. Certainly it comes through to me from people I've spoken to. At some point these operations are no longer agricultural operations. At some point these livestock operations become industrial operations, and they have more to do with a factory than with a farm. You know, I think of grain farmers selling their barley to a brewery if it's a good crop. It's much more what we're up against here with grain farmers selling their barley to an intensive livestock operation. The ILO is much more like a brewery than it is like a farm.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There's a basic principle, then, that has to be sorted out here. At what point are we not talking about agriculture anymore and are talking about industry? It's a difficult line to establish, but there's definitely a difference here. Then the implications of sorting that out play out through, for example, zoning, tax systems, and so on. My sense is that this bill should be establishing a threshold at which these operations are no longer agricultural, at which they are industrial and should be treated in that regard.

It also raises the question about our long-term trends with agriculture in Alberta and across Canada and throughout the world, but we'll stick to Alberta since that keeps us plenty busy. The nature of the family farm is something we're concerned about. The future of the family farm is something we're concerned about. Given that these are industrial operations often owned by major corporations that aren't even based in Canada, it takes the direction of family farming and shifts it substantially.

Is this a long-term trend we want to encourage in agriculture? Maybe it is, because these facilities do provide a very good market in some cases for our grain growers. The demand for barley, for example, in southern Alberta is excellent. The price paid for barley by intensive livestock operations in southern Alberta is very high. So if we're looking at it from that perspective, maybe this is the way to go. On the other hand, there is a threat here to the whole operation of the family farm, the local cattle producer, the local hog producer. Certainly there's evidence from some jurisdictions such as Manitoba that as these big hog operations get established, the number of local smaller hog operations actually diminishes. So there are principles here around the balance between agriculture and industry and the nature of how we should sort that out and whether this bill is actually really about an industrial operation.

A second area of concern actually simply has to do with the titling of the bill and the shifting of the designation of these operations. Just when the term "intensive livestock operation" comes to be

reasonably well known by people in the province, we shift to "confined feeding operation," which is a much vaguer term and one that's going to take years for the public to understand. It's going to cause no end of confusion. There's a principle there, I think, about integrity of language in legislation.

MS BLAKEMAN: Is it meant to confuse?

DR. TAFT: It does make you wonder whether or not it is actually meant to confuse. I've wondered if we might end up with something like a non hospital livestock operation or something like that.

Another principle that is of profound importance to all of us here, I think, is the question of local control. It's a good idea in this bill to have provincewide standards implemented and enforced by a provincewide agency that will have sufficient resources to look after them. I don't think any of us will dispute that, but my understanding of the legislation is that it at the same time diminishes the opportunities for local control. I know that's a real concern for people I've spoken to in rural areas, including farmers.

There are environmental concerns that we need to be probing here, and certainly as the debate goes along, we will be. When we're talking about millions of hogs in Alberta – 5 million, 6 million, 8 million, 10 million, or even potentially 12 million hogs – again, there's a scale of development that takes us into a whole different category than what exists now and raises concerns over environmental issues – water, air, and soil – and health not just of the animals in question but of the humans who are consuming that product. So we are needing to bring forward a different set of principles and a different set of considerations when we get into this scale of operation.

Questions come up around the use of antibiotics, for example, in feed. The application, of course, of manure on soil, all kinds of . . .

MR. DUNFORD: Nutrients.

DR. TAFT: Well, one person's manure is another person's nutrients, I guess. I don't know.

I mean, in some ways we're talking here about an environmental impact that's the equivalent of a major new city. If we're talking about 10 million or 12 million hogs in Alberta in the next decade, we're talking about the equivalent perhaps of a major urban city, far larger than either Edmonton or Calgary. Are we really ready to cross that threshold? Are we wanting our province to go in that direction?

So those are some of my opening comments. As the debate on this bill proceeds, I will be developing and exploring those further, bringing more evidence to the table. It's a genuine dilemma that we're in here. As much effort as has gone into it by the hon. Member for Leduc and undoubtedly many other people here, I am concerned that we are entering into a new era, a new level, a new quantum of operation in our agricultural industry in Alberta that we may not be wise to enter into.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there has been debate during second reading, that's been going on for some time. There's been good debate. I think the debate draws attention to some of the positive things about the bill and some serious negatives that need to be seriously addressed. Can they be addressed if we rush this bill through the Legislature is a real question. All these

questions have just been raised, and a day or so ago my caucus colleague, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, raised some very substantial and important questions. Some others have been raised right here. I've been listening to the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, in particular, his reservations and concerns. I think those reservations and concerns are shared by a very large number of Albertans and merit serious attention by us.

I would caution the House against fast-tracking this bill given the fact that there are so many concerns that are not confined just to a few of us in the Legislature but have been expressed to us through a large number of letters, e-mails, phone calls from Albertans all over the place. Certainly, as I said, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview eloquently put some of these before us just a few minutes ago.

The positives about the bill are the provincial standards that have been brought in with respect to some of the environmental matters. I think those are very positive steps, but the negative side outweighs, in my view, the positive features of the bill. The most negative part is the removal from local authorities, municipal and county authorities, the power to approve and permit the siting of these farms. There's no reason why we can't have both provincial standards that are enforceable and let the democracy at the local level work and leave this power with the people who'll be most directly affected by these operations.

A second point I think needs to be reiterated here. This has to do with the industrial nature of these operations. The title of the bill, Bill 28, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, frankly I think is quite inappropriate if not misleading. These operations really cross the line of agricultural activity and practice to industrialization of some agricultural products here; in this case, hogs and other animals. When you look at the size that's being proposed – the Premier the other day during his scrum referred to the fact that the experts have told the government that there's room in this province for raising as many as 12 million hogs, and we're only talking about hogs at this point. When you think about the amount of waste that would be produced by these, I think according to some estimates it could be the equivalent of 30 million people producing the waste. That's the other side of the story.

The whole question of the disposal of that waste, the whole question of production of the waste in the first place, is not appropriately addressed here in my view. The kind of arrangements, infrastructure, the processing of that waste and its disposal, these are matters that require serious attention.

There are questions, of course, raised by the AAMDC, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. I have a resolution before me that's proposed. I don't know if it's been passed or not, but I want to just read this resolution which indicates the kind of concerns that the AAMDC has.

Therefore be it resolved that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties urge the Government of Alberta to fully compensate municipal governments for any costs incurred by affected municipalities when providing assistance to the NRCB in relation to Intensive Livestock Operations.

Regardless of what the status of that motion is at this moment in time, the point made here in the motion is what I want to draw the attention of the House to, that there are financial implications for those very local counties and municipal authorities from which we are taking away the power to issue permits and have a say on the siting of these.

The other concerns. The industrial nature of these operations also raises the question of taxation. The taxation formula that's used is used for ordinary agricultural land, and if these operations are industrial operations, which is indeed the case, then that matter must

be addressed and is not addressed in the bill. A related point: industrial operations come under the labour standards code.

I'm not against pursuing economic development in rural areas so long as it meets certain standards, so long as local say and democracy in voice as well as environmental standards are met. Economic development is necessary, but I just want to remind the House that a single-minded pursuit of economic development at the cost of some other places is a dangerous pursuit. I don't need to talk about some historical incidents in other places and other times. The worst case scenario is, of course, in the former so-called eastern bloc, where the exclusive, single-minded pursuit of economic development led to environmental disasters completely. We need to be careful. We want to have economic development, we want to have wealth, we want to have revenues generated from these activities but not at a risk, not at a cost, not without asking those tough questions that we must ask. Those questions are not asked in this bill; they're not certainly addressed in this bill.

One other point, Mr. Speaker. I just came across a study which is a joint study done by the government of Canada and the government of Alberta. It was published in 1998. It's called *Agricultural Impacts on Water Quality in Alberta: An Initial Assessment*. There were 14 members of this working group, nine of which came from the government of Alberta, representing three different departments: the department of agriculture, the department of environmental protection, and the Department of Health and Wellness. Three different departments were represented on this working group in the joint study with the federal government. I just want to quote from the key study findings. Let me just read from this document. Again, let me repeat the title of it: *Agricultural Impacts on Water Quality in Alberta: An Initial Assessment*. It's a joint federal/Alberta study. It says:

Although nutrients and bacteria occur naturally in the environment, their concentrations in shallow groundwater and in surface waters in agricultural areas tended to be high, often exceeding water quality guidelines. Pesticides were detected frequently, sometimes in concentrations which exceeded guidelines.

Only rarely were agricultural contaminants found in any of the 448 deep groundwater wells monitored throughout the province. Where detections occurred, poor well design and poor maintenance were considered the major [sources], not primary agricultural activity.

But the punch line, I guess, is the next paragraph, and it's printed in bold letters. It says:

The risk of water quality degradation by agriculture is highest in those areas of the province which use greater amounts of fertilizer and herbicides, and have greater livestock densities.

Greater livestock densities. And that's the whole question. These are operations that are intensive livestock operations. This will put in one place, in confined places, huge numbers of animals, thereby creating precisely the kinds of conditions under which contamination takes place, and this is a study done by this government itself. I think that's a matter that needs attention, and therefore this bill, in my view, should not be rushed through, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

Should this bill be approved, intensive livestock operations will join a very short list of developments that are exempt from the requirement to obtain a municipal development permit. The only other developments that are currently exempt from the requirement to obtain a municipal development permit are roads and highways, oil and gas wells, and pipelines. The fact that oil and gas drilling and pipelines have been exempt from municipal permitting has contributed to their virtually uncontrolled proliferation throughout the province. With no municipal permits required for intensive livestock operations, will the same things happen with the ILOs? That's a question that I think was raised by the hon. Member for

Edmonton-Riverview as well. The vast majority of the groups and individuals who made submissions to the Klapstein committee wanted local approval for ILOs. The vast majority of letters, phone calls, and e-mails that the New Democrats have received from the public also want local control.

There are other matters not addressed in Bill 28. I mentioned the issue of finances there, and I would just not add to it.

Fast-tracking this bill through this Legislature, that will unilaterally take away significant decision-making authority from municipal governments, is not the right way to go. The AAMDC has really made this point quite clear. Imagine if the shoe were on the other foot. Imagine the outrage that would erupt on the government benches if the federal government unilaterally took away the power and authority from this provincial government, yet the provincial government is doing exactly this to municipalities through Bill 28. For example, we still don't know what kind of size threshold will kick in with the rules set in Bill 28. All of these vital details will be left to the regulations.

There are other policy details not addressed in Bill 28 that should have been. For example, the ILOs, that have generated virtually all of the controversy in rural Alberta, have been megafedlots and mega hog factories. These corporate-style operations should also be required to meet, as I said, the employment standards, labour standards, and should be taxed as industrial operations. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm putting forward the following motion for the House. I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 28, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 28, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Mr. Speaker, it took us three years to get to this point, and now the government thinks all of the . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, has the motion been circulated to our colleagues? [interjection] Okay; we should allow a minute or so for members to receive the motion.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you may proceed.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, it took us three years to get to this point, and now the government thinks all of the details can be worked out and legislation approved by the Legislature and proclaimed by the cabinet in short order, in a few days. Many groups and individuals have asked for more time to fully consider the consequences of Bill 28. The government has provided no evidence that there is broad support within rural Alberta for making these changes. A six-month delay would allow the government to bring this bill back in the spring session. I therefore urge all members to support this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment lost]

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a second time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 8 o'clock p.m., at which time we return in Committee of the Whole.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 20, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/11/20

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

The committee is reminded that we will employ the same rules that we have had for a long time; that is to say, only one member standing and talking at a time, that being the member that's recognized.

Bill 27

Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: We want to know whether there are any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill. The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do want to just open with a few preliminary comments, because there were some comments made at second reading that I felt I probably should respond to.

One of the issues that was raised at second reading was with respect to the question of the collapse rate. It wasn't directly on point, but I think it's important to point out that allowing judges to continue to sit will not affect the collapse rate of trials or preliminary hearings. One of the reasons I wanted to mention that point was not to point out that it wasn't relevant to the bill we're talking about but rather to indicate that improving the collapse rate doesn't really improve the quality of life of the prosecutors, because they prepare now in Edmonton courts for triple bookings, so collapse rates let them prepare for three trials and go ahead with one. So what we're trying to do is to get more on a real-time basis, and that's been a very difficult program. We're working with more early case resolution programs and the first appearance centre and those types of programs to assist with that. I appreciate, Mr. Chairman that that's not what Bill 27 is about, but I think it's an important point and worth discussing and worth clarifying.

Edmonton-Ellerslie asked about an expected dollar savings. I wanted to also point out that this bill is . . .

MS CARLSON: Liberals are fiscally responsible.

MR. HANCOCK: I've been left speechless. I heard a member opposite say that Liberals are fiscally responsible, and that would drive one's thoughts out of one's head. Let the record show that there was chuckling about that as well.

I should hasten to point out that this bill is not primarily aimed at saving money. It really is aimed at saving talent, keeping the good, capable judges available to the system. That does save us resources in the long run because it saves on training time. It gives us available people who are more effective just simply from the perspective that they know the routine, those sorts of issues. But we can't expect huge savings in terms of dollars with respect to the pension side. There will be, in fact, global saving to government over the longer term, and it will depend on how many judges and how long they serve.

The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona asked whether there was

any merit in the suggestion that recommendations for reappointment come from the Judicial Council. As you may recall in the bill itself, recommendations for reappointment of judges come from the Chief Judge, and recommendations for the Chief and the Assistant Chief Judge come from the Judicial Council. I think it's important to keep that distinction. Obviously, we couldn't allow the Chief Judge to recommend his own reappointment. Therefore it's necessary to go to some other group, and the Judicial Council is the logical group to make that recommendation. But the operation of the court is in the hands of the Chief Judge and must be in the hands of the Chief Judge. Therefore, it's quite appropriate that the recommendation for reappointment for the puisne judges, so to speak, is and should be in the hands of the Chief Judge, so we wouldn't propose to make a change to that.

Those would be, I think, all the questions that were raised in second reading. If I've missed any, I'm sure they'll be brought to my attention.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I did want to take the opportunity in Committee of the Whole to briefly review the sections that are available to us. I'll start by saying that overall, listening to the comments just now from the Minister of Justice, I think the purpose of this bill really seems to be taking the current pressure off the system. As I discussed in second reading, there are quite a few pressures on the justice system right now: the small number of Crown prosecutors in comparison to the cases they're trying to handle, the lack of courtroom space, and the 10 Provincial Court judge vacancies. We have a constitutional obligation to provide access to justice, so I think this bill appears to be one way of trying to address in a small way some of the pressure on the system.

When I look more closely at the first couple of sections, they really are clarification sections or minor changes to make things easier to understand. Some of it's about archaic language, I think, where we're talking about furnishing something as compared to sending it or mailing it, and addressing a judge that retires before the judgment is rendered being able to actually render the judgment, rather than have everyone go through a whole other trial.

The meat of this bill is really in section 4 and following from section 4 in the amending bill here, Bill 27, the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001. That is about allowing the retirement end date, which has been 70 up until this point, to be extended to 75. Then what follows is a series of methods and a process to reappoint and who does reappoint and how that's done. I'm pleased to see that there are criteria that will be established by the Chief Judge and approved by the Judicial Council that are used when a request is looked at to extend for another year the term of a judge that is up for reappointment.

This is a very straightforward bill. The minister did share the content with me prior to actually seeing the bill, although I have to state that the sort of three-column thing or the two-column briefer that one gets really doesn't give you the nitty-gritty of the language. Even those people in the legal community and lawyers that I consulted still want to see the actual bill to make sure that they haven't made a mistake, and I have to agree with that. I appreciate the briefing, and I still appreciate getting the bill with as much time before I have to speak on it as possible.

I don't have a problem supporting this bill. I said that in second; I'll say it in Committee of the Whole. I think we can proceed along with it. The Liberals have always said that they don't hold up

legislation unnecessarily, and I'm going to stand behind that.
Thanks very much.

[The clauses of Bill 27 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

8:10

Bill 29
Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation
Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Happy to speak to this bill in committee after having spoken to it this afternoon in second reading. This is a good example, in terms of a bill, of speedy progress through the House for legislation that we don't oppose. We're happy to support that kind of a process, but it also speaks a little bit to the lack of depth in some of the legislation that we've seen come forward in this fall sitting, which is a little disappointing to us, because it is very thin and there haven't been very many substantive bills. This is one, a great bill, one that we're happy to support, one that the stakeholders have expressed satisfaction with, with the exception of the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, who wouldn't talk to us. We had a discussion about that. The Minister of Finance responded this afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and I'm happy to tell her that I will find the names of the people who told us specifically that they couldn't talk to us without going through her department. No one has fessed up so far, but certainly we will get some more information and follow that up. I'm happy to hear her say that that is not her way of doing business on legislation and was not what we would expect.

So I'm happy to support this. I'm happy to see speedy process through the House, not quite so happy about the lack of depth of legislation, but we don't control that agenda, Mr. Chairman. The government does. We look forward to seeing better things from them in the near future.

[The clauses of Bill 29 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Bill 28
Agricultural Operation Practices
Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate November 15: Mr. Lund]

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Leduc. No? I've got two hon. members . . .

MRS. NELSON: Ladies first.

THE CHAIRMAN: Ladies first; okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister of Finance. I'm happy to stand up again today on this bill. We just finished second reading this afternoon, a little sooner than we expected because of the hoist that failed on the floor of the Legislature. We had a few people who would have liked to have had a few more comments on this bill in second reading, but they'll save their remarks for committee, so we can look forward to some fairly protracted debate on this one, I think, at this particular stage.

When I spoke to the bill this afternoon, I talked primarily in generalities, in terms of this bill missing the essential question on intensive livestock operations, which was: should we even have them in our province? That's never been debated. It won't be now with this bill. That was the first issue.

Secondly, of course, if we're going to have them, what kind of regulations are we going to put in place that are going to meet the needs of the people of the province? As usual with this government, there is some good news and some bad news, Mr. Chairman. What we see here is not mostly good I'm afraid. I can't decide if it's two steps forward and one step back or half a step forward and three-quarters of a step back. Anyway, it's some progress.

DR. TAYLOR: That's the Texas two-step.

MS CARLSON: Well, that's what this government does, Texas two-steps around every contentious issue, and this certainly is one of those kinds of issues. We see them passing off responsibility to the NRCB on this particular bill in some areas that are contentious, to say the least, and that certainly need some review and perhaps some cleanup. So I think I'll address those to begin with, some of the concerns that we have in terms of the NRCB.

What happens now is that the NRCB gets the responsibility for setting the regulations and approving and authorizing the registration of the newly named intensive livestock operations. The problem with that, in part, is part of the mandate of the NRCB. We have some concerns from local municipalities that they will have limited input in terms of the siting of intensive livestock operations in the future. I'm on record as having spoken in the past – and I stand by the comments I made – in terms of having more comprehensive decision-making criteria for siting. Certainly we knew that some of the municipalities didn't have the kinds of background they needed for the regulations, and we wanted a level playing field. So we stated that there needs to be a provincial code of practice and provincial standards that are enforceable, and that's right. We do need that. Well, they put that in place in part with the NRCB rulings, but the problem with that is that it doesn't give municipalities enough flexibility in terms of siting criteria.

So the application goes to the NRCB, and the NRCB looks at it. From what I've read so far and what I see here, if there is a permitted use by the local municipality in their land use plan, the local municipality has very little if any input into the decision by the NRCB. The NRCB will say environmentally, takes the decision-making criteria for that and decides yes or no based on those facts only, because it's only environmentally that they can make a judgment. So if this fits in all the criteria that we're going to see outlined in the guidelines and the regulations, then the NRCB can't say no, even if the municipality says: we don't want a siting here. That is a major, major flaw with this legislation.

I have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that I'm having a hard time deciding whether I can support this. If it means we're two steps ahead and only one back, then that's progress, but if it's half a step forward and three-quarters of a step back, then that isn't progress. So we'll see how this plays out in debate and the kind of feedback we get from people in the communities. If the NRCB is going to be restricted to just making decisions based on environmental criteria, while to me that is very important and to Albertans that's very important, it isn't enough in this case. Municipalities have to have some rights of refusal and a more expanded role in terms of what the regulations are going to be around discretionary uses. Right now we see it's just that they're in or they're out in terms of intensive livestock. That doesn't give them enough discretionary or nondiscretionary options within their land use plans.

What we need to see is what our leader talked about in his comments last Thursday when he talked about, as a minimum, three levels of agricultural development in terms of land use, a whole range of classifications for the commercial and industrial development of the land base, very similar to what we have in urban areas. We have to remember that intensive livestock operations are not farms. They're factories, so they should meet the same kind of criteria as we see when it comes to land use zoning. Municipalities need to have that flexibility within their planning structure when they make their applications to the NRCB. So if we see these regulations and siting decisions being made just based on environmental issues, it isn't enough. It's only half of the pie, Mr. Chairman, and it doesn't meet the needs of this community in the province. We definitely need the provincial level environmental standards, and I applaud that part of the bill. It doesn't just meet our needs; it exceeds them. I think that we will have some excellent standards, and they're an absolute must for this industry, but it's only one little piece of the puzzle. Still no focus on cumulative impact, no focus on what happens with general siting concerns.

8:20

What are we going to see in the regulations? The minister says that we're going to see them. I hope what's included in those are a couple of the issues that come up on a regular basis, and those are around how the standards are created. There are lots of nuisance issues around these intensive livestock operations, primarily around dust and odour. Now, in many parts of the province dust isn't a huge issue, depending on weather conditions and the amount of rain they get, but in others it is. Odour is a problem particularly when you're talking about hog operations and particularly when you're talking about the amount of manure that is produced by these. The kinds of piggy poo levels that we're going to see in intensive hog operations far exceed any expectations of any member in this Legislature. We could be buried under the stuff if it isn't properly handled, and that brings up several issues, not the least of which are manure application guidelines.

We are finding in this province as time progresses that the heavy metals in this manure are toxic for agricultural uses. If you take a look at some of the applications that have been used in the past, we see some interesting developments in terms of land use. Where the manure is injected into the soil, we see the toxic chemicals and heavy metals actually killing everything along the path of injection, and while the plants grow very well on either side of the injection line, there's a real issue with the injection line. So this is a big deal, and this government needs to be prepared to handle the heavy metals and metal compounds that are going to become increasingly a problem.

I haven't seen anything so far around soil testing. What are the expectations going to be there? I hope we see them in the regulations. Will the farmers be asked to do the soil tests, and what

standards are they going to be using to effectively make sure that the concentrations on the land don't rise to a level that becomes detrimental to crops or to livestock in the future? Are those applying the manure going to be the ones doing the soil testing? Is there going to be an overall branch of some department doing that? I doubt that. This government is not big on the enforcement issues. They like to see organizations self-police. So let's see how that's going to fall out in the regulations. I certainly hope that's addressed. Those are big deals.

What I haven't heard anybody talk about is something that is of keen interest to me in terms of handling quite a few of the issues, I think all of the issues except for the heavy metal ones, and that's the composting of these huge, vast amounts of manure that we're going to see as an output of increasing intensive livestock operations and is a management issue now in those areas that have intensive livestock operators. In Europe there are a few places that now take a look at in-vessel composting for manure, and it's a benefit in many ways. What happens is that the manure gets composted, so the output is readily sellable and usable. Because the gases separate from the manure within the in-vessel component of the composting unit itself, there is no smell. Particularly if you have an enclosed barn, the manure falls through the bottom of the pens and onto the top of or through the side of the composting unit and gets stirred or mixed within the composting unit. Then the gases rise and are captured. They're vented out into an enclosed area where they can take the methane or whatever else it is and use it for other purposes, and the dry output is manure. It's a good, practical solution, and it's value-added. No doubt about it. It takes care of the smell issue. It takes care of the transportation issue, spraying issues. You have a much more valuable product for spreading in cases where it needs to be. It's now a product that urban centres can use. So there's some real value to that.

Of course, there are some pretty heavy costs up front to put this kind of a system in place, but I think this is the kind of forward-looking strategic planning this government should be doing on this kind of an issue if they think that this is an industry they want to promote and support here in the province.

AN HON. MEMBER: You get what you pay for.

MS CARLSON: Well, that's right. You do get what you pay for.

It is becoming a standard in some European countries where there are extensive intensive livestock operations, and it's something that we certainly need to be taking a look at here. So I hope that the government is addressing this. I haven't heard them talk at all about how they're going to manage all this excess manure we have. Anybody who has read the papers in the last five to 10 years knows that this is an increasingly big concern in North America. What we hear particularly is that it has become a huge issue in Manitoba, where they've looked for diversification and found this style of diversification happening.

Some intensive livestock operators are composting now in an open-ground kind of system; that is, an anaerobic kind of system. That doesn't get rid of the smell, Mr. Chairman. It's not bad as an intermediate kind of phase in getting it out of the holding ponds or the lagoons and drying it out to get rid of the odour or the excess capacity in the lagoons. It's not a bad intermediary phase, but it isn't the answer at the end of the day. We need something that captures these gases, that gives us an output that is salable on a wider kind of stream. That still doesn't address the heavy metal issue, Mr. Chairman. I'm hoping that the government is supporting research in this area so that we find some answers to that in the long run and,

of course, on the soil testing, like I said.

You know, we've had quite a bit of feedback from people who don't like this kind of an operation and some overall concerns particularly on groundwater. I think that one of the issues that we need to talk about there is the conditions that must be met for water contamination to occur, and intensive livestock operations do present those kinds of conditions. We do see periodically that there have been fines meted out by Alberta Environment on these feedlots when, due to excessive rainfall or insufficient handling of the manure on lots, it's gotten into and contaminated the water system. There are certainly a number of places in central Alberta every year that we hear from where they have sloughs that are now so badly contaminated that nobody can use them, not even the critters. So those are issues that need to be talked about.

That the water table is at risk in feedlots is one statement made recently by David Schindler, who won the equivalent of the Nobel prize in the area of water science for his work in 1991. He's come out very recently, November 20, and stated that he wants to issue a warning that the provincial government's plan to expand hog feedlots could contaminate the water table. He says that if the province follows the idea of increasing the number of hogs produced in the kinds of quantities that they've been talking about, it would produce enough manure to jeopardize the water quality. I haven't heard the minister address this. He talks about how every place that they've had this kind of intensive expansion has ended up with water quality problems. Definitely he's right when he says that what we can expect from this are higher nutrients and lower oxygen in the water. He goes on to say that we could have more Walkertons. It certainly is possible. I know that this government has tried to take pretty good measures in terms of monitoring water quality, but it certainly is not impossible that that could happen, water quality issues.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Much more possible.

MS CARLSON: Well, the minister says: much more possible today. There's some truth to that based on current numbers of hogs and cattle in the province. These regulations are really good, I think, in terms of the environmental issues that are outstanding, and that's the part of the bill that I do really support. If we were to go from 2 million hogs to 12 million, is the same case still to be made?

8:30

We know that you can have all the rules you want in terms of environmental quality, but if we have water issues – extensive rainfall, a holding pond where the bank breaks – for whatever reason some kind of problem that occurs on the location, we know that every time we increase the number of animals we're handling we increase the potential for problems. So you can have all the great rules you want. When you're dealing with animals and people, with an exact science mistakes get made. When you're dealing with the weather, you're not dealing with an exact science. Mistakes can happen there in terms of anticipated outcomes. That is what happened in Walkerton. So we have to be very diligent that this couldn't happen here in the future.

I agree with the minister when she says: a better chance now than then, based on the same number of animals. But when we increase the number of animals, we have an increasing chance of there being problems down the road. I know the minister's on the record as saying that the new technology increases the safety of manure from feedlots, but it doesn't eliminate the risk, and it shouldn't eliminate this government from the responsibility of ensuring that they have got all of those requirements in place, that they have an action plan

that in a crisis they can deal with it very quickly and that they have municipalities participate in that process. So I think those are some of the concerns we have here that need to be addressed.

The minister said that this has just been going on for three years, but it's been a recognized need in this province for decades, Mr. Chairman. One of the reasons why I wasn't prepared to support a hoist amendment is because at least this puts this issue on the floor of the Legislature, talking about it in a manner that will start to more concretely raise the issues and move the process forward, I hope, and we need to do this. It's been a huge issue in this province since I've been the Environment critic, and that's for at least five years. So progress, yes, but still real problems mostly around the municipalities, that they'll still only be able to designate discretionary and accepted-use provisions for intensive livestock operations on agricultural land. This, Mr. Chairman, is because the NRCB is now the final authority on approval of ILOs. There's no appeal process with that authority, and that's a big, big issue.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think it's probably appropriate to do a little bit of a review as to how we got to where we are today, if it will help to put some things in perspective. The three-year time frame is one that I think needs to be recognized. There was a Livestock Regulations Stakeholder Advisory Group which had participation from a number of producer groups but also had participation from the two municipal associations, the Environmental Law Centre, and the provincial health authorities. This committee had the benefit of an expert committee which developed with them the standards document which will accompany this legislation. Just so there's an understanding as to how wide ranging . . . Pardon me, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I think we might be able to hear you better if you took off that machine or whatever it is that's covering the microphone. Thank you.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Okay. I had my binder flipped up against it. Okay? Good.

Anyway, I was just saying that there was a stakeholder advisory group made up of municipal associations, producer associations, as well as the Environmental Law Centre and the public health authorities. This stakeholder group had the benefit of an expert committee working with them to develop a standards document, which is part of this legislation. That expert committee included the Alberta Chicken Producers, the University of Alberta hydrology and applied soil physics department of renewable resources, Keystone Environmental Ltd., regional director of Chinook health authority, University of Alberta environmental risk assessment, University of Alberta department of biological sciences, University of Calgary microbiology and infectious diseases, University of Alberta agriculture, soil fertility management, University of Calgary department of geology and geophysics, Sunterra Farms, Thiessen Farms, and the chief administrative officer of Willow Creek MD. I'm mentioning that so you understand that the standards that accompany this legislation were done by an expert committee which included a wide range of interest groups. So it's not something somebody just picked out of a hat.

There has been a concern expressed about why there is movement of the decision-making in the absolute sense from municipalities to the NRCB when it comes to siting an operation. Well, up until 1994 the municipalities didn't have the final say. The Alberta Planning

Board did. So it's only since 1994 that they've had natural person powers, and our experience, when this has been dealt with by municipalities, hasn't been the greatest. To be fair about it, I don't know if it's reasonable to expect locally elected councillors, when they are dealing with their friends and neighbours and relatives, to make impartial and objective decisions.

When we looked at putting the decision-making process within the department of agriculture, then the environmental interests were really concerned that the department of agriculture was in conflict. They are the promoters and advocates of agriculture, so how could they be unbiased? If you move it over to environment, then the concern of the industry is that the environmental concerns will be met but that they do not understand the needs of the industry.

I have to point out to you that four of the five members of the committee that made this recommendation to government have municipal experience. I spent 15 years at it myself, and the past president of the AAMDC was on that committee. We unanimously recommended that there be an independent, quasi-judicial, arm's-length body that would deal with this issue and make these decisions so that it could be done on an impartial, objective basis. Now, that's the rationale behind it.

Mention has been made that, you know, we should allow municipalities to have a number of different categories for agriculture within their general municipal land use bylaw. Well, they've always had that opportunity. There's no restriction on how many categories a municipality can put into their land use bylaw. If they had wanted to do that, they could have done it. In the end municipalities wanted the government to be responsible for establishing the standards, doing the monitoring, and doing the compliance enforcement.

So what's left? Just siting it. We decided that it was better to have a one-window approach, where an applicant would go to one place and get an answer. Recognizing the role of municipalities, we gave municipalities status in the decision-making process, which they do not have in the AEUB or other processes. So the NRCB, when considering an application, has to take into account the municipality – the municipality automatically has input into that process – and they have to consider the general municipal plan, the land use bylaw of the municipality.

What is true is that in the end, when push comes to shove, the NRCB can decide and can in fact overrule a municipality's position if they see fit, but they have to consider the municipality, and they will take into account – and this is a very significant change for the industry too – that the voluntary code of practice and all the regulations that this expert committee brought into being will become law, and they'll have to live by it. It will be enforceable in ways that municipalities have not, could not enforce them. So I think it's a very positive step to move it into this NRCB quasi-judicial, arm's-length body. I look forward to having a better decision-making process that will be based on science and on fact rather than having emotion and political expediency get into the mix of making the decision.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to just maybe address a few comments in connection with the comments made by the previous speaker. You know, I find it surprising, quite frankly, that a former head of a municipal government in this province would question the competence of local municipalities to make decisions around these sorts of things.

I guess maybe they'd like to get my amendment distributed first, so I'll do that, but just some general comments.

8:40

Local municipal government in this province and across Canada has always been responsible for land use and has discharged that responsibility, in my view, competently in the vast majority of cases. Certainly I think they've done as well in that jurisdiction as provincial governments or the federal government have done in many of their jurisdictions. So I don't think we should be dismissive or patronizing towards the people that work in municipal government.

Municipal governments' control deals with many things, not just agricultural operations. They deal with industrial operations. They decide where large-scale petrochemical plants are going to go. They decide where great big shopping centres are going to go. They deal with rendering plants. They deal with all kinds of land uses that may or may not be compatible with adjacent land uses. That in fact is probably one of their best areas of competence. So it's not, in our view, right to say that their friends and neighbours may get in the way of an objective decision. It is precisely the local people that are affected by an offensive land use who need to be represented in that land use decision, and it is precisely the local jurisdiction that is set up to do that. The friends and neighbours and their quality of life and their wishes for their home and for the place where they may farm are critical to the decision. To say that some quasi-judicial body in Edmonton at a provincial level is going to take those kinds of things into account is absurd, in my view. They won't. Quite frankly, in our view that's exactly the objective of the bill here: to make sure that local people do not have the capacity to stop an obnoxious and offensive use immediately adjacent to their property which may affect their enjoyment of their property and may in fact affect their health.

I was just looking on the Internet, Mr. Chairman, and there are a number of sites where studies have been cited with respect to the impact on people's health of hog operations where there is a great deal of manure produced. The studies have shown that while cattle intensive feedlot operations do not particularly affect the health or the enjoyment of people's property, swine operations do, particularly those on a large scale, and there is an increased incidence of respiratory infection and a number of other indicators of poor health as a result of people living near large-scale hog operations, where there is a considerable amount of manure that might be present. So to say that local jurisdictions are not the appropriate people to deal with this I think is really an insult to the many, many thousands of fine Albertans that take their responsibilities in this respect very, very seriously.

I happened to have a conversation the other day with the president of the AAMDC, and I wouldn't want their position on this matter to be misrepresented either, because they're clearly opposed to the loss of jurisdiction by rural municipalities over these kinds of operations. They are, however, fully in agreement, as we are in the New Democrat opposition, that there needs to be strong and uniform regulation by the province of these kinds of operations. That does not mean the loss of local jurisdiction over permitting and the introduction of negative-option zoning authority with respect to these kinds of operations. I just wanted to make it clear that this bill does not apparently have the support of Alberta's rural municipalities or at least of their association. So I think that's a difficult thing.

Now, I've been quite interested in the Premier's comments that we need to increase the number of hogs in the province. I happened to be actually personally present this time at the news conference in which he indicated that there was a strong feeling that the capacity of Alberta to produce hogs was underutilized and that we could in fact accommodate up to 10 million additional hogs in this province.

AN HON. MEMBER: Ten million?

MR. MASON: Yes, 10 million additional hogs. I think we're somewhere between 2 million and 3 million at the present time, so you have an enormous increase in hog production for which this bill is the foundation. This bill clears the way for this enormous increase in hog production, which evidently is in the back of the minds of some people in the government. It's interesting, Mr. Chairman, just how much manure 12 million hogs can actually produce.

DR. TAYLOR: About as much as one NDP member.

MR. MASON: Well, I wouldn't flatter myself, hon. member, to think that I could come anywhere near your capacity.

We've done a little bit of calculation here, and according to the best information that we've been able to do – and admittedly this is our own calculation. We're not quoting anyone, so you may feel free to completely dismiss it. Even if it were in a learned study, I'm sure some members opposite would do the same thing. We calculate that 12 million pigs can produce 32.3 billion litres of pig poop per year. Say that three times really fast. That, Mr. Chairman, is enough to put the entire province ankle deep in the stuff. So we have a very, very serious problem. It's not only unpleasant; it is a proven hazard to the health of human beings – and there's plenty of evidence to show that – if not properly disposed of and treated. Obviously, the more that's produced, the more difficult it is to treat adequately. It has also been proven repeatedly to be a serious threat to groundwater and in runoff can actually kill fish and aquatic plants in streams and rivers. It is in fact a very, very serious problem.

Now, I said the other night that I appreciated the Deputy Premier and minister of agriculture's commitment to bring forward the regulations, but we haven't seen them yet. I had really hoped that we would have an opportunity to look at the draft regulations, recognizing that they need to be draft regulations, in the committee stage so that if we felt there were serious inadequacies in what the government had in mind, we might be in a position to propose amendments to the bill to cover that off, since we cannot of course amend regulations, or at least to make suggestions in this stage for the government in terms of what changes they might want to make in their regulations. So I regret that we have not yet seen those, but I can certainly say that as it now stands, the environmental protection afforded by any regulations with respect to agricultural manure are far, far less stringent than any regulations that apply to the disposal of treated human sewage, which is imposed on urban municipalities in their sewage treatment plants.

8:50

So I am very, very concerned that not only are we going to have an enormous increase in the nuisance factor, an enormous increase in the volume of manure, a threat to human health, a threat to the environment, a threat to fish and to plant life in lakes and streams, but we don't have the proper rules around the treatment, containment, and disposal of the up to 32.3 billion litres of pig manure that could potentially be produced in this province if the government plan proceeds as it's presently set out.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to now propose an amendment to the bill, and that is that Bill 28, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be amended by striking out section 8. Section 8 states that it is an amendment to the Municipal Government Act, and it adds the following in section 618 of the Municipal Government Act:

This Part and the regulations and bylaws under this Part respecting development permits do not apply to a confined feeding operation

or manure storage facility within the meaning of the Agricultural Operation Practices Act if the confined feeding operation or manure storage facility is the subject of an approval, registration or authorization under Part 2 of the Agricultural Operation Practices Act.

What this does in effect, Mr. Chairman, is strip from municipalities the authority to provide permits for the use of these confined livestock operations. Right now the things that the MGA does not apply to currently – in other words, the things that can be imposed on a municipality – are a highway or road, a well or battery within the meaning of the Oil and Gas Conservation Act, or a pipeline or an installation or structure incidental to the operation of a pipeline. So in other words, we are elevating these confined livestock operations to the same level in legislation as pipelines. Pipelines and roads are virtually the only things that the municipal government does not have control over in terms of land use planning and permitting. This amendment would delete the addition of confined livestock operations to this portion of the Municipal Government Act. So in other words, what section 8 of the act does is add to the activities which are exempted from local jurisdiction. It adds ILOs or CFOs, and what we're saying is we're going to take it back out again. We think this is the critical piece of the act.

There are a number of good things about the act. Certainly standardized provincial regulations are important and are widely supported not only by the agricultural industry and farmers but also by municipalities, and certainly I think every party in this House has indicated that they support strong and uniform provincial regulations with respect to this matter.

MS CARLSON: Which section 8 are you amending?

MR. MASON: The question is which section 8 I am amending. It is towards the end of Bill 28, which is on page 26 of the act. Are you with me now, Mr. Chairman?

THE CHAIRMAN: I think maybe for greater clarification we need to identify that the section 8 you're talking about is the part that refers to "Municipal Government Act is amended."

MR. MASON: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay, that's in part 3.

MR. MASON: Yes, it is. On page 26 of Bill 28.

THE CHAIRMAN: So that we're all on the same thing, this is amendment A1 as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. The section 8 that he is talking about is in the back part of the bill, the part which amends the Municipal Government Act.

MR. MASON: Yes.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. We're with you.

MR. MASON: As I understand it, section 8 of this act before us would basically add confined livestock operations to the list of things over which local municipalities do not have control. Our amendment is to take this out of this bill so that the Municipal Government Act is not changed, and the net effect of that is to retain control by municipal governments over the siting of confined livestock operations. I'm sorry if it's a bit convoluted, but we were looking for the key section of the act that stripped municipal governments of their authority over confined livestock operations,

and this is it. So we want this part taken out of the bill. That's what the amendment is about, and if the amendment were to pass, we believe municipal governments, rural municipalities in particular, would retain control over permitting of confined livestock operations, as they should be, in our view.

All the rest of this is just fine, Mr. Chairman, but I don't think it's right or proper that we should be taking away this authority from municipal governments. The government ministers go to AAMD and C or to AUMA and make speeches about partnership with municipalities. I was able to attend the speech at AUMA by the Minister of Municipal Affairs last week in which he proposed a partnership with municipalities, but it really seems that whenever municipalities exercise the limited jurisdiction they do have in a way that doesn't please the government, the government will step in in a paternalistic way and take away that authority from local authorities. That's no partnership, and it ought not to form part of this legislation.

Local authorities, if they're given the right resources and particularly if there are strong requirements for preparing environmental, health, and land use compatibility information on the part of the applicants – and this is supported and checked with research by the provincial government and provided to those local decision-makers – can make uniform, I believe, and competent decisions about these matters. But the problem is that nobody wants to live beside one, and is the government then going to force Albertans throughout rural Alberta to live next door to these hog operations, which destroy their quality of life? That's the question that needs to be decided in this Legislature, Mr. Chairman, and our party is coming down very clearly – and unfortunately it seems to be the only party that's coming down very clearly – in favour of the people in rural Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

9:00

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to just make a few comments and to encourage the House not to support the amendment that the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has proposed. To do that, I think we have to talk just a little bit about what we have now, why we need this legislation, and why it's important that the responsibility for siting, monitoring, auditing, and compliance rests where we believe this bill places it.

First of all, this is a very valuable industry to the province. There is no question. I don't think there's any argument. There may be some debate on the numbers the Premier laid out, because he might suggest that this was reported a little bit differently. But the fact is that this industry will grow, can grow, and should grow. Agriculture contributes on the value-added side \$9.2 billion to this province's economy in agriculture and food. Food and beverage processing: about 4 and a half billion dollars of that today is in the livestock industry. We're not talking about some little operation that has no potential or no contribution. So it should, could, and will grow, but it must grow in an environment that protects the soil, water, and air in this province.

How are you going to do that? Well, we've done a number of things. One, this government, as I indicated a few days ago in this House, initiated a groundwater study on intensive farming in this province some dozen years ago in southern Alberta. Why? People said: "Why are you doing this? This is kind of a risky thing to do." No, it isn't; it's the right thing to do. You monitor your water levels in your soil and your groundwater before you have a problem, not after. That way, you can identify if there is an emerging problem

and you can deal with it. We know that in parts of this province we have intensive farming. You have irrigation, you have applications of herbicides and pesticides, and you have application of waste. We don't call it waste anymore; it's manure. It's a very valuable commodity; it's no longer waste. So you should know what's happening, and we do. Today we continue to monitor about 23 sites to ensure that there is not an impact on our groundwater. That's important. That's why we should do this.

Well, if it were working so well today, we would not have Bill 28 in this Legislature. If you accept the amendment the hon. member put forward, you have to some extent what we have today except that we're going to take it a step further rather than having a voluntary code of practice, which we put out a year ago and which some municipalities accepted, put in place, some went further in their regulations, and some ignored totally. Now, I don't think that is a good, responsible way for this government to accept the protection of our air, water, and soil.

What's wrong with the picture we have today? We have one body responsible for siting. Then what happens? I talked to the municipalities and said, "Would you consider taking the responsibility for auditing, monitoring, and compliance?" They didn't feel that was possible, and I didn't disagree with them. They don't have the expertise or the resources to do that. So what you have today is one body that sites, and when something goes wrong, another body is expected to come in. I get phone calls today from municipalities saying, "Minister, you've got to do something about this operation." I said: "I didn't site it. Go to the municipality." "Well, we did." I say, "Well, go back." They say, "Well, we did." I'm still getting the phone calls, folks, and we didn't site it. Yet we're in there today using resources of the province to try and correct an issue.

Now, maybe the municipality that sited that operation isn't the recipient of the problem. It could be the town that's a few miles down the road that wasn't really consulted on the siting. Under this legislation today anyone who is directly affected or could be will be involved before a permit is given. Before. This process, if you examine it carefully, is very broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. Today what we have is something that's very narrow at the bottom.

Believe me, I live in rural Alberta, and in fact I live one and a half, one and a quarter miles upwind of a hog barn, a very large one. I can tell you that you can do it quite successfully if manure management occurs. So you can do it. But if you don't have somebody with authority to deal with these, you have the potential for all of the bad things that the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie was talking about and you come in after the fact and start trying to remediate them.

We had a conversation with the Leader of the Official Opposition on a remediation, and I think he understood quite clearly after that that the difficulty was that we could offer technical advice, but until something went awry and Environment would step in and try and remediate it, we didn't have the authority. We have a responsibility as legislators, I believe, to protect the air, soil, and water quality of this province. I believe we're prepared to take on that responsibility, but to do that, you have got to have the authority.

Now, to suggest that the municipal governments are not involved in a meaningful way I think is wrong. We have clearly asked municipalities to forward their agricultural land use plans, which they told me they had, and to designate in those plans areas where they would say that confined feeding operations should not occur and the reasons for that. It could be future residential development. It could be another type of industrial development. It could be because they want a park or there's one close, or there's a lake or a stream or something that they don't think should be impacted.

The NRCB will look at that when they have an application come

in. The next thing the NRCB will do is send the application to the municipality for their comment immediately. That is very meaningful. But somebody has to make the final decision. If you live in a rural area and you've been at one of these meetings where there are a thousand people – neighbours, friends, and family members – discussing one of these, it can be very unpleasant.

What we would prefer to do is to hear from the people who have concerns before the permit is given, address the issues they raise, eliminate as many of those as possible, and then come to an approval. If at the approval process the decision is made for approval, there is still an avenue of appeal. If it's the nuisance factor, which it sometimes is, as has been indicated – and I may disagree on which odour is the worst: a cattle feedlot or a hog barn – we'll ask the Farmers' Advocate, with a panel, to deal with that because the Farmers' Advocate has proven over the years to be a very good vehicle for dialogue between industry, producers, and community and has had very great success in resolving those issues.

9:10

Agriculture is a viable business in this province. It is considered a very important industry. We have land in this province that's considered for agriculture use. But when you ask a municipality if an agricultural activity is a permitted or a discretionary use and if you ask them if a country residence is a permitted or a discretionary use and you find out that in an agricultural community an agricultural activity is discretionary and a country residence is permitted, it is no wonder that the issue of land use and the use of agricultural land was one of the main topics at every ag summit meeting that was held in this province. Every one. So somebody needs to step up to the plate and take responsibility, and I think that in the interests of protection of the environment, of the soil, of the water, and of the air quality in this province, this process will do it.

The NRCB has the ability, with the expertise they will have in their cadre of people, to make sound, scientific decisions, and I think that is critical to this process. They are not Agriculture. They are not Environment. They are under sustainable development, Mr. Chairman, where I believe this fits very well, so you could look at it as a neutral body.

The one thing I totally agree with in a couple of comments, at least, from the Liberal opposition is that this is a matter of concern to the public, and rightfully so. It's a matter of concern to this government. I don't think we want to wait until we do have a wreck before we take an initiative and a responsibility. This is not something that we entered into lightly. It took several years of consultation and study. We had environmental groups working with us. We had industry groups working with us. We had people from the AAMDC and AUMA.

I fully understand and accept the concerns the AAMDC have over the loss of autonomy, but I believe that as we work through this system, they will see that indeed they are very much involved. We've had a discussion with them – I've had many – and they've talked to me about liability, if they could provide us input. I would suggest that they carry a huge liability today on potential problems on siting. So I don't think that's an issue that we should take lightly, but we should use as a reason not to go this route and to use their very valuable input.

I guess I have to come back to my first comment, Mr. Chairman, and I say, "What's wrong with this picture?" You have one group that sites. Who audits? That's a question today. Who is responsible for compliance? Somebody else? I don't think there are very many areas that you would say, "Well, you go ahead and you choose the place, but when something goes wrong, we'll come in and straighten it out." I think your chances of not having an incident are better if

those decisions are made with sound science, good information, and the best technology we have and if the flow-through is continuous.

The desire of this government in this issue is to protect the air, soil, and water quality in this province for all its citizens. Anyone who thinks that anybody who has one of these practices would intentionally pollute the soil or groundwater should go and live out there for a while and realize that they drink that water; they don't have an urban water system with water treatment plants. They drink that water and they make their living on that soil, so it's in their best interests to protect it as well.

Mr. Chairman, to ensure that we do the right thing, I urge members to reject this amendment. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on amendment A1.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As much on the minister's comments as on amendment A1.

I guess the issue that we really have to deal with here – and the minister has talked about it but hasn't really answered it in the sense that she talks about the issues of siting, monitoring, and compliance. I don't think there's anybody in Alberta right now that would not recognize that this bill does create a process that facilitates that in terms of the environment and the environmental issues of intensive livestock operations. Pardon me; confined feeding operations. I have to get this term. I just can't understand confined feeding. Intensive livestock means a lot more to me.

What we end up with here, the issue that comes up, is the idea that within a particular local municipality the municipality is supposed to submit land use plans and designate what they want to see or do not want to see. My major contention in connection with reading this bill – and we have not seen the regulations yet, even though a few days ago the minister promised they would be here before this bill was in committee stage. [interjection] This is getting to be a dialogue, Mr. Chairman, but it helps to make the discussion complete.

When we're talking about how to make this bill functional, if we don't know what the regulations are, it either limits or expands the opportunity that we need to have to make amendments to the bill. It would be much better to have the regulations so that we can see how they work together with the operational parts of this bill, so that we can make it work without having to amend the bill if the regulations handle it. Without the regulations we may be amending the bill in areas that would be dealt with.

The whole issue comes down to: how do we make sure that the flexibility is there for the local municipality to say, "We don't want an intensive livestock operation at this point"? Under the current rules, where all they have is the option to deal with agricultural land either as a permitted or as a discretionary use of that agricultural land, what we're going to see them doing is going through and under the discretionary part defining intensive livestock out of certain areas. Mr. Chairman, I made a suggestion the other day: give them broader land use classification under the Municipal Government Act so that they can do it in terms of their land use classification, just the way urban areas do when they develop different industrial levels. This would be creating equality among our municipalities, because in the end the practice or the experience, the track record of land classification by intensity of use, whether it's industrial or commercial, has been proven to work very effectively in zoning. We should give the local rural municipalities that same kind of opportunity here under this act rather than deal with some new process where we don't yet know how it's going to work.

The other issue that I wanted to address is in the context of how the minister was explaining the working of this. She talked about the base of consultation. She talked about it coming together up here with a good decision. I guess the concern that I've heard from a lot of the rural municipalities and rural residents is: how broad is that base? This comes to defining what constitutes an affected person or an affected body. That's where the regulations at this point would truly help us understand the degree to which the community would be brought in. The example the minister gave when she started talking was about the town that was three or four miles away. Under the current definition of an affected party, that town would have no say. Is she telling us that under the new regulations a town three or four miles away will have a say, that they would be an affected party? Can they count on that, that if they are three or four miles away from one of these, they will have input in the process of dealing with the NRCB approval? What about a farm family three or four miles away? Are they going to have that same say?

So, in essence, if we're going to talk about how functional this bill is as we pass it, we need to know that kind of thing so that we can make the comments, go out and talk to people. When I have to answer my phone calls at this point in time, I can't tell anybody. Under our current practice, affected persons or affected bodies are only those who fall within the minimum distance requirements. Is that what I tell someone? I guess what I'm saying is that we want to make this work, because it's got to work for the safety, the environmental protection, and for the livability of our rural communities. If the current situation continues, chaos will rule, and we can't have that. We've got to have a comfort level in those rural communities that will, in effect, give those communities a sense that we've got to have a plan they can feel part of.

So with those comments, just in direct response to the things the minister said in connection with the amendment, this is, I guess, one way we can look at making sure that local communities still have a chance to have a say by not taking the decision-making away from them, but if that decision-making is going to compromise our environment, we've got to have provincewide environmental standards, Mr. Chairman. We've got to have a process built into this that will allow for compliance, for monitoring, and, in the occasional case when it effectively doesn't work, some kind of penalty.

We have to support this bill, and I hope we don't pass the amendment. Thank you.

9:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands on amendment A1.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to, in closing, respond to some of the comments made by the hon. Deputy Premier and minister of agriculture. I think one of her major points was dealing with the difference between the power of siting such an operation and then the authority to set regulations for environmental quality for health and agricultural purposes and the enforcement of those regulations. I think the history of government in Canada and this province is replete with examples of these types of jurisdictions being divided and shared between different orders of government. Certainly for environmental regulation with respect to urban land uses, which I guess I know a little better than I know about agricultural land uses, those powers to regulate are in the jurisdiction of the provincial government and the enforcement thereof is with the provincial government, but certainly the land use and the permitting of industrial operations lies with the city, and these are not incompatible. They work just fine. As long as you

have a strong and effective protection on the environment side and it's enforced, the city is competent to make decisions about which land uses are compatible.

Now, I know the province has struggled with some of these operations that have not been well sited, but who is in the best position to make sure that one of these things is not sited in a way that creates a nuisance or a hazard even for surrounding residents? Is it in fact the bureaucrats in Edmonton, or is it best left with local people, who are responsible and accountable to their neighbours and their friends?

The hon. Deputy Premier also talked about the unpleasant public meetings that sometimes occur when these things are to be sited. Well, that's part of the democratic process that those of us who have served at the local level know very well. I've also had to face those kinds of meetings for the siting of shopping centres. The women's prison comes to mind and a number of other very, very hot and very large public meetings in my old ward, ward 3 in northeast Edmonton. I can tell you, Mr. Chairman, that in northeast Edmonton people take their politics very seriously. They don't take any prisoners. They let you know exactly where they stand on issues, and that's the way it should be. That is exactly what local municipal democracy is all about. If the people don't want it, who is going to say that they're wrong and they should be overruled? I think that seems to be what's being suggested here.

In terms of incompatible land uses between jurisdictions, I know that the hon. Member for Leduc and I originally served on the Edmonton regional planning commission. These planning commissions existed throughout the province and were very effective. Mr. Chairman, in harmonizing land use between municipalities and making sure that urban uses took place in urban areas and agriculture and rural uses took place in rural areas. It was the then minister of Municipal Affairs, Dr. West, who abolished these bodies and has created a real dog's breakfast when it comes to incompatibilities of land use as between jurisdictions. The system that was put in place subsequently has failed miserably, in our view, to ensure that harmonization of land uses between jurisdictions takes place and that we have good neighbours in place.

I don't think there's anything the hon. Deputy Premier has said to change our view that local municipal democracy and jurisdiction need to be respected by this government. You either believe in it or you don't.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I am glad to get the opportunity to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001. I was trying to speak in second this afternoon, and after the hoist proposal of course it got voted on and I wasn't able to speak. I've listened carefully to the speakers tonight, and I've read through some of the other speakers that came before me in second, and it strikes me that this debate is really about: is the glass half full or half empty? Is a compromise acceptable?

In this case we're talking about: does the province taking control of this intensive livestock process and offering environmental controls trump the fact that this legislation will take away a municipal government's ability to decide what their community looks like and what's in their community? That's why I'm struggling with this legislation. It's, you know, an A plus and a D minus. Is it acceptable that that averages out to sort of a B, or do I say no because I just

can't accept that it's too flawed and you need more work on it? In my experience with legislation it's not a good idea to pass something that's really flawed, because it takes a long time to get it back up on the boards again, and in the meantime you've condemned a whole bunch of people to probably 10 years of living with pretty flawed legislation.

Now, I'm back to the beginning of the argument again. I think that the environmental controls offered in this legislation are really important. It is a good solution to the problems we've been experiencing around intensive livestock operations, and that's important to me. It's really important to the people I represent in Edmonton-Centre. Environmental issues consistently come in at number 3 anytime they've been asked what their top three priorities are. Environment comes a consistent third no matter what. They're very environmentally aware in Edmonton-Centre. My second largest e-mailing list to people who have indicated that they want to receive information from me is the environment list that I've got, and they're all constituents. They pay attention, they read a lot, they think about things, and they're right on top of it. So when I'm standing in here representing them and scrutinizing this bill, I have to take very seriously the environmental solutions that are being offered by the government in this bill, and it carries a lot of weight. At the same time, I am really distressed by the loss of authority, the loss of control, the loss of sovereignty, if you want to put it that way, of municipalities to control the community around them, and I don't know that I'm willing to sacrifice one for the other here. [interjection] I did. You weren't paying attention. [interjection] Thank you.

So let me go back and look at this. We're in Committee of the Whole, so when we look at a sectional analysis, in section 2 we've got the definitions happening. You know, right away there are words that start to jump off the page at me, and it brings back many other discussions about legislation in this Assembly and, frankly, bad memories, because once again we've got that things will be decided by regulations. Regulations, regulations, regulations. This act is filled with: it'll all be decided by regulation. Frankly, I don't believe this government anymore, and I don't trust this government anymore, because nothing's been done here to make me believe that you're going to follow through on this. You can shake your heads sadly to me. I'm shaking my head sadly at you. I don't believe you. I don't trust you.

You know, the regulations that we were supposed to get for Bill 11 – just pick any bill that we've debated in here; we don't get the regulations. You refuse to send the regulations through to be reviewed by the Law and Regulations Committee even though we keep asking for it, and that would be a good way to review things. The regulations are not available to the public easily and sometimes not at all, whereas you can get legislation on-line now. Excellent idea; good transparent government. That's what I really mean by transparent government, but you can't get the regulations. My colleague the Member for Lethbridge-East has mentioned a number of times – I mean, how can we make decisions on this bill when we don't know what these regulations look like? Now, evidently there's been some discussion here or some agreement – and I hope I'm not putting words in people's mouths – from ministers on the other side to provide these regulations. Well, we're in Committee of the Whole. How much longer do we debate this bill without seeing the regulations?

AN HON. MEMBER: Third reading. That's their answer.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yeah, if we get them by third reading. No, that's not soon enough for me, and my experience in five years in here has

been to not give the benefit of the doubt, because it is not the best thing for the people in my riding and, frankly, I don't think it's often in the best interests of the people in Alberta.

Sectional analysis. That was the very first section, and I went off on a . . . The regulations in here – and the government keeps doing this. You know, the proposal is – now, this has got more substance to it than many of the other bills – “trust us; we'll do it all in regulations.” Well, I don't trust you.

Okay; moving on. When we look at what's available in those first couple of sections, in section 2 one of the things I think we need to note is that municipalities with a population of less than 3,500 are not required to have land use plans. There are other kinds of settlements, summer villages and stuff, that are also too small to have them. They fall below the cutoff for a land use plan, so some of the stuff that's in here that's supposed to protect doesn't apply. I think that there are a fair number of communities that are of that size in Alberta and need to be considered in this.

I find section (b.8) contradictory, frankly. What the heck is this? I'm still in section 2(c)(b.8). “‘Generally accepted agricultural practice’ means a practice that is conducted” and then it goes on to say “accepted customs and standards as established” and then jumps forward to saying “without restricting the generality of the foregoing includes the use of innovative technology used with advanced management practices.” Huh? Sorry; that contradicts itself, that we're supposed to go on age-old agricultural practices except we're gonna mix technology in with it. That doesn't give us anything.

Now, moving on. Oh, the nuisance provision in section 4. This is interesting. It provides limits to liability for the agricultural operator if the land use bylaws are not contravened and where the NRCB process approves them and generally accepted agricultural practices are followed. So as long as what the NRCB is saying is followed or their processes are followed, then nobody can complain about what the operator has decided to do or the agricultural operator is not liable, if I'm going to use the correct language there. So when the NRCB gives approval, then the NRCB prevails over the land use bylaw. Well, we were just looking at the land use bylaw and where it takes precedence, and here is the NRCB taking precedence again.

I've got in my notes here that the original press release said that the Farmers' Advocate would have the authority to establish the agricultural practice review committees, and I'm wondering what happened to that, because I don't think I've seen it in anything recent, and I haven't heard it talked about tonight. It looks like the minister is keeping control of that grievance process. That strikes me as curious.

This legislation does seem to be a struggle between authority of levels of government, and you've got the larger or the higher level of authority overriding with concerns about the greater good for the greater number. Then you have a lower or a local level of government, a smaller level of government, which is allowing for people to make decisions about their own life and what's around them.

Now, I think it's not too hard to look at the parallels between what happens between the federal government and the province and in this case the province and the municipalities. I note that this government acts in an absolutely contradictory manner. They believe, when they're in the argument and they're the smaller one, that everything should go their way, but then when they are on the higher level compared to the municipalities, they again think it should go their way. Maybe they're being entirely consistent. They just want their way all the time.

I think what's also contained in the discussions around this legislation – and there's been a lot of discussion about it. This has been out there for nine or 10 years and has come around a couple of

times on the committee circuit, with a number of people being involved in that. I think there are larger issues there that we've never really had the opportunity to discuss, issues like: what kind of a province do we want, are we willing to do anything for development, and are we willing to sacrifice anything for development and to make money? That's certainly where this government seems to come from many times, yet in this legislation there are some pretty good environmental controls being put into place.

9:40

In Alberta we've moved from being a rural agrarian society to being an urban society. Two-thirds of Alberta's population now lives in Edmonton or Calgary, so populationwise we're certainly the greater number. Does that give us the right to be dictating what's happening in the rural areas? I think that's a good point to be argued. I'd be interested in hearing what others have to say about it.

Then we get into some fairness factors. If we're willing to say, "No; we want rural Alberta exactly as it was; we want to protect the family farm," then we're into a lot of subsidies and insurance schemes and a lot of other ways to keep the family farm operating, because it's not terribly viable right now. The changes, what's happening with our rural centres as well, and how much money the urban dwellers really want to invest in rural Alberta: I think this would be an interesting discussion to have, because I think there's a lot of sympathy for people living in the rural areas and in rural centres and a lot of strong feelings about supporting a family farm as compared to moving to a corporate farm. This is what we're talking about in this legislation, corporate farming, in essence.

How much and how far are we willing to go with foreign ownership or ownership from outside of Alberta? As soon as we get into corporate farming, we've got shareholders or owners who could easily come from other places, and it's not easy for us to detect that or track it down. Do we have any laws about that? We don't. You know, all of Alberta could belong to somebody else and we wouldn't necessarily be paying attention or know. I think that, again, is part of that larger discussion about: what do we want Alberta to look like? What are our priorities? What's our criteria ranking to make decisions about what's happening in our province?

Now, when I look at the environmental controls, I think especially around water there are two issues that are paramount for me. One is safety and the other is quality. If we don't have safe drinking water, then we have failed miserably, and we certainly have to protect safe drinking water above all else. We need water to live. We don't have a choice about that.

Certainly when I look at pre-eminent scientists like Dr. Schindler, who just recently was in the paper, he has concerns about what's being proposed in this bill because he thinks that water quality could be impacted when we start talking about going from 2 million hogs to 12 million hogs. The size of that alone, to contemplate how much that is going to affect our province – how much manure can be produced, and how much can be safely composted or integrated or used in some other way? What's the likelihood that our water system could get tainted by that amount of manure being generated in the province or being generated in a small area in the province? That carries a lot of weight with me.

I'm back to the original argument: do you go for the environmental controls that are being offered, balanced against the loss of the autonomy or the sovereignty of the municipal areas? I was uneasy about that to begin with. When I start looking at respected scientists

and scientists that have spent a lot of time in this area and, frankly, have won some honking big awards for their expertise in this area and they have questions about what's being proposed in this bill, I hesitate even further.

This bill is just not good enough. It's not covering enough bases. It could be better. I look back to my constituents and their expectations of what I will do on their behalf and how I will carry their wishes forward. Environmental concerns are really important to them. For all of the sympathy and interest that's been expressed about overall Alberta and protecting our non-urban lands, the environmental concerns come first. In this case I think that what's being proposed is not good enough. For me the glass is half empty on this one.

It's been very interesting in this debate that in fact we've had two members, the Member for Leduc who's sponsoring the bill and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, get up and actually give information and debate in a way that I don't see very often here. It wasn't delivered to be cute. It was genuinely supporting their argument and their side of the argument with good information and valid arguments, I think. I'm struggling to remember, but I don't think I've ever seen that happen in here before. So this bill must be something pretty special, and I hope that everybody's paying attention to it because I think its impact or its potential impact is huge.

My time is up. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Given the hour, I'd move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 28 and report bills 27 and 29.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: bills 27 and 29. The committee reports progress on Bill 28. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:50 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 21, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome.

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

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Her Excellency Ambassador Garcia de Madero, ambassador of Mexico, and her husband, Mr. Manuel de Madero. This is the ambassador's first visit to Alberta since her recent appointment, and we are looking forward to a fruitful and beneficial working relationship with her. I also want to extend a special welcome to the Mexican consul general, who is accompanying the ambassador.

Mexico, Mr. Speaker, is a growing trade and investment partner for Alberta. Since NAFTA was introduced, the province's exports to Mexico have increased tenfold, and two-way trade totaled over \$750 million last year. Alberta and Mexico work together in many areas, including energy, agriculture, tourism, education, housing, and technology. This visit is a good opportunity to discuss ways to expand Alberta's relationship with Mexico, particularly given recent discussions about continental energy markets and forging stronger ties between Canada and Mexico.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recognition of national Family Violence Prevention Month I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a former MLA, Ms Pamela Paul, who is seated in your gallery. I'd ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour and my very esteemed pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special guests who are seated in your gallery. They are, of course, members of and workers for the world-renowned Ukrainian Shumka Dancers of Edmonton.

Shumka has been described as a shining jewel in the crown of Canada, a cultural icon of Alberta, and a great cultural ambassador for our city of Edmonton. I've had the great pleasure of being associated with this outstanding troupe in many different capacities for over 38 consecutive years. While the entire group now numbers over 40, I am so pleased that at least 10 representatives are here today in conjunction with their announcement a few days ago to establish a professional touring component as they embark on an even greater and wider world stage to benefit their group, our province, and our country in this their greatest effort ever. My colleague from Redwater will comment further on Shumka later this afternoon.

I would ask each of them to rise individually as I introduce and

announce them to you: Andrea Stelmach, president, current dancer, and niece of the Minister of Transportation and MLA for Vegreville-Viking; Mr. Michael Sulyma, producer and former dancer; Mr. Dave Ganert, associate artistic director and current dancer. Another list of current dancers: David Hayduk, Larissa Opyr, Corinna Crockett, Tara Wood, Douglas Howell, Murray Howell, Mykola Gauk. Their artistic director is Mr. Gordon Gordey, who unfortunately had another commitment and could not join us.

I know that you are a great fan of theirs, Mr. Speaker, and I know that you and other members will want to join me in giving them the very traditional, very warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to present a petition signed by over 50 Albertans urging the government to allocate additional funding to schools to allow teachers to better serve students and to allow an increase in teachers' salaries.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition urging the Legislative Assembly to in turn

urge the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in travelling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, this brings the total signatures to this petition to 1,000 today. Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in travelling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 219

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2).

This bill would enable the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development to ensure that the province's fisheries resources are promoted through the active management of habitat, the control of pests, and through rationalization of fishing licences. Bill 219 will

establish guiding principles for the natural sustainability of Alberta's fisheries.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 219 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings. The first is five copies of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund 2001-2002 second-quarter report, also the tabling of the first-quarter report for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, and the annual report of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund for the 2001 year-end. The heritage savings trust fund is a \$12 billion fund. It has served Albertans well over the past 25-year history, and I'm pleased to table these reports today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of the environmental protection security fund's annual report. The purpose of the fund is to hold security deposits as a means to ensure land reclamations on sites such as mines and oil development.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with this government's openness and accountability, I wish to table the proper number of copies of the answer to Written Question 1.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association annual report. I'm pleased to say that the Minister of Energy, in fact, was on many of those amusement rides between April 1 and March 31, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

1:40

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hon. leader of the third party suggested that we were closing our beds for children who were in need of care from prostitution. We have in fact not closed any beds. The beds are identified here as having been transferred to another facility, and the adults that were primarily occupying the facility known as Crossroads have been assigned to beds in 62 other places.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual reports for the following authorized radiation health administration organizations: the Alberta Dental Association, the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association, College of Chiropractors of Alberta, and the annual report from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table today five copies of the 2000-2001 Year in Review of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta. It's a review of activities of the council and their consultations with Alberta's seniors.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I provided the government's 2001-2002 quarterly budget report for the second quarter to all MLAs. We have also made this report public, as required by section 9 of the Government Accountability Act. I am now tabling this quarterly budget report as the amended consolidated fiscal plan. This revised plan is required by section 8 of the same act whenever a second set of estimates is tabled during the fiscal year.

I am also tabling the second-quarter activity report for the year 2001-2002. This document describes the major achievements of our government during the recent period.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today including the Health Disciplines Board annual reports for the years 1998 and 1999, the Public Health Appeal Board annual report for the year 2000, the 2000 Mental Health Patient Advocate office annual report, and for the mastication exercises of members of the Assembly, the College of Dietitians of Alberta annual report for the year 2000-2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today from constituents. The first tabling is a letter from Jean Thorburn, who points out that her rent has increased 36 percent in a little over four years and is asking for rent controls.

The second letter is from James Cribben, who also has concerns on the deregulation of electricity and its effect on renters and points out that he's experienced rent increases of \$100 or more per month.

My third tabling is a copy of a petition, which was not in order to be presented, from a number of people who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta "to put in a system of rent control."

The final letter is from a constituent who signs himself as Bernard, who's pointing out that his rent has increased from \$567 to \$695 in one year.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Ed and Sherry Horvath of Warburg to the minister of agriculture. Mr. and Mrs. Horvath would like to add their names to the list of people who see great danger to our environment, health, and rural farm sustainability if the government decides to allow numerous ILOs to establish themselves in Alberta.

My second tabling is the required number of copies of 45 requests from Albertans who want the government to support the class size targets bill to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics" and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd like to table requests from citizens in Dunvegan, Livingstone-Macleod, West Yellowhead, and Calgary-West urging the government to vote in support of the class size targets bill to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics" and "ensure that Albertans can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter that I received from the Minister of Energy on November 13 of this year assuring me "that announcements about the Regulated Rate Option for 2002 are imminent."

I'd also like to table the required number of copies of 20 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the required number of copies of 19 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," so that parents will no longer need to fund-raise for classroom basics, and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of an internal memo dated November 16, 2001, from a senior manager of the Ma'Mowe Capital region children's services authority. The memo lists 21 children's services delivery agencies whose contracts are being terminated and another five whose contracts will suffer contract reductions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a budget 2001 document that sets out the government's four-year plan to cut corporate taxes by \$1 billion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. I'm sorry, but I didn't notice you before.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the appropriate number of copies of requests from Albertans mostly from across southern Alberta who are asking for support for Bill 218, which gives appropriate funding for the education system of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly today a lady that has run the constituency office in Little Bow since I first became elected. It's with pleasure that I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. She's always greeted every

constituent with kindness, understanding, and in a really personable way. Mrs. Lois McLeod, please rise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, would you please join me in congratulating Mr. Speaker today as he celebrates his 22nd year as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock. Mr. Speaker was first elected to his seat in 1979. Well done, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: That's right. I forgot about that.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Congratulations, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a young man I have known since he was born, our godson Brenden Mallette. Brenden is from St. Catharines, Ontario, and is a project co-ordinator with a marketing company from Ontario. Brenden was the co-ordinator for two very exciting projects in the past year. In February of this year Hockey Day in Canada held the longest game of outdoor shinny on the Bower ponds in Red Deer, Alberta, with Don Cherry and Ron McLean. Two central Alberta teams braved the cold and the snow to play for more than 19 hours to set a new official record for the *Guinness Book of Records*. Brenden co-ordinated this project. Brenden also had the very unique and once-in-a-lifetime experience of escorting the Stanley Cup on a national tour across Canada. Brendan is presently in Edmonton working on another marketing project. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce today to you and to the Assembly two classes from Fort Saskatchewan's James Mowat school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Ted Fellows and Mr. George Sebest, as well as parents Sandie Thomson, Wanda Brett, Michele Regush, Betty Adam, Charlene Folkinga, Cheryl Babichuk, Linda Morin, and Heidi Shannon. They're seated in both galleries. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four elected members and the CAO of the municipal district of Greenview No. 16: three new councillors, Roxanne Perron, Tom Burton, and Ed Tollefson; the reeve, Mr. Tony Yelenik, who entered politics directly from primary school; and Mr. Gordon Frank, the premiere municipal CAO in Alberta. I would ask them to rise in the members' gallery to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce a sister board member, a new member, a trustee of the Catholic school board in Fort McMurray, Lisa Daviduck. She's here

today, and I'd ask her to rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. Today I'm very pleased to rise and introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly a really interesting delegation from my constituency. They've just been newly elected or acclaimed to the municipal district of Big Lakes. Present with us are Craig Bissell from Enilda, Randy Ehman from Gilwood south and Sunset House, Veronica Adruchi from Jousard, Joyce Dvornek from Gilwood north and Triangle, as well as Will Marx from High Prairie. They're seated in the members' gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly students from Mount Royal school in my constituency. There are four adults – Mr. Woelfle, Mr. Newby, Miss Osetsky, and Miss Chris – as well as 19 students. Mount Royal is only one of two schools in Canada offering a micro-society program. The program provides students with an opportunity to run their own society, including government, law enforcement, and business ventures. I would call on the Assembly to give them the warm traditional welcome if they've arrived in the gallery at this point.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My Sedgewick school group is to arrive a little bit later, and I would like to ask if I could introduce them later.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you the lady who manages my office in Taber, Alberta, Mrs. Angela Wolgen. Angela does a great job of helping and assisting me. Certainly I'm appreciative very much of her efforts, and I would like to tell my colleagues that the people in our constituency also appreciate her greatly. So I would ask her today to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly. She's seated in the public gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make two introductions. The first I make to you and through you to the members of the Assembly on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry is a group of 75 visitors from Bishop Greschuk school, and I would ask them to rise now. Their teachers are Mr. Esch, Mr. Tarulli, and Mrs. Madron, and the parent helpers are Mrs. Wilke, Mrs. Henriksen, and Mrs. Bennett. Would all members of the Assembly join me in giving them a warm welcome.

My second introduction is one that gives me great pleasure to bring to you and through you to all members of the Assembly: Mr. Tim Shantz, who I believe is somewhere in one of the galleries today. Can you please rise, Mr. Shantz. Tim has a master of music from the University of Alberta and is a rapidly rising star in Canada's choral community as both a singer and a conductor. Tim has

toured nationally and internationally. He's a regular soloist with Pro Coro Canada and Ensemble de la Rue in Edmonton and has been a soloist with Spiritus Chamber Choir and VoiceScapes in Calgary. He will be a feature guest with the Alberta Baroque Ensemble at their concert in early December. As well, this year he's conducting the Richard Eaton Singers, one of the country's foremost large choirs. Please join me in extending him a warm welcome.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the government released its second-quarter fiscal update. While this update projected a balanced budget for the government, it did not give any indication of the size and scope of the deficit that this government has downloaded onto the RHAs, the school boards, and children's authorities. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier claim that his budget is balanced when groups like RHAs, children's authorities, and school boards are running deficits?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the simple fact of the matter is that it is against the law in this province to incur or to run a deficit. If the hon. leader of the Liberal Party wants us to break that law and to borrow and borrow – I mean, we can spend as much money as the world demands. It's simple to borrow, and it's simple to raise taxes. All of those things are simple. What is hard and what is difficult is to challenge the boards, authorities, commissions, agencies, and government departments to find new and better and more effective and more efficient ways of doing things to curb expenditures. That's what's challenging.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: if you want to challenge these boards to make sure that they do what the law requires, why don't you do what the Auditor General has asked and include their budgets in your budget so that Albertans get a total picture of the position we stand in as a province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of accountability, that's why we have quarterly reports and we report to the Alberta public on a quarterly basis.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance report again publicly in this Legislature, as she did this morning, so that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition gets a clear picture and all Albertans get a clear picture of what our finances are all about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning when I released the second-quarter update, it was very important to assure Albertans that the situation in this province is still very, very positive. We will have the highest growth in our economy of any place in Canada, two times the national average. We have the highest consumer confidence of any place in this country, and we have the lowest unemployment rate of any place in this country.

All that being said, our government has a responsibility under the Fiscal Responsibility Act to meet the commitment we made to Albertans to have a balanced budget. That is exactly what we presented. In fact, the situation here is that because of the corrective

action that was taken in October as a result of our caucus and cabinet retreats, we are able to manage the global economic slowdown. In fact, I daresay we're the only jurisdiction in Canada that is able to go through this economic slowdown in a managed process. So we have struck the right balance, I believe.

In fact, when the hon. Leader of the Opposition referenced that we were going after areas such as health care, I would refer him to page 5 of the second-quarter update. Clearly, the budget for Health and Wellness, when we first entered the budget in April of this year, was for \$6,271,000,000. At the second-quarter reporting that budget had increased to \$6,390,000,000, so I'd ask him to read the reports before he sends out the wrong messages to Albertans. We clearly have, I believe, captured the priorities of Albertans. In this fiscal plan we're maintaining that balance and we're working under a prudent fiscal regime.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

2:00

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier again. You talk about a clear picture. Would it not be a clear picture if you included all of these other agencies in your fiscal plan and in your fiscal reports so that they can see exactly where we stand as a province instead of just picking on your budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're doing precisely that, and that is totally consistent with our policy of being open and accountable.

Relative to the picture itself, I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance respond.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm a little perplexed by the hon. leader's question. We couldn't be more open and accountable if we tried. We've already filed these reports. We had a press conference this morning, which he attended. We filed them in the Assembly. We report on a quarterly basis. Just a month ago I went and made an interim update to Albertans to let them know what the situation was within the province to alleviate unnecessary fears that may be in their minds that our economy was not going to be positioned to be able to deal with the global situation.

In this province – let's go over it once again – we are probably the best suited in this whole country, in fact possibly in North America, to deal with a global economic slowdown. Why? Because of prudent management and a good fiscal regime that allows us to take corrective action throughout the year through the quarterly updates. That's exactly what we do. That's the contract we have with Albertans, and we're sticking with it, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the Provincial Treasurer: can you show me where in that second-quarter update the budgets are that show the balances for the health authorities, for the school boards, for the children's authorities? Where in that report do those things show?

MRS. NELSON: I think, Mr. Speaker, I indicated to the House yesterday that the minister of health and I met the night before with the new chairs of all of the regional health authorities that have recently been appointed and/or elected in the last civic election to go over the fiscal situation. We work as a team. The Health and Wellness minister and the Finance minister met with the regional health authority chairs and said: we are a team together to deal with

some of the pressure points that will be there in the frontline delivery of service. We also put out a message to them and said: when you're looking at some sort of a tightening within your system, please be sure to focus on non frontline delivery. Yesterday I believe the Premier filed in the House one of the first press releases to come forward, from the Calgary regional health authority, where they were able to identify \$30 million that could be saved from non frontline services; in other words, from administration.

We were encouraged – and I think this is important – by the new chairs and that they were prepared to work co-operatively with the Minister of Health and Wellness and with myself, and we will be there to help assist them. They are very positive that we are staying the course and dealing with the contract with Albertans to have a balanced budget and not put this province ever again into financial jeopardy.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, again to the Provincial Treasurer: where in that report does it show the balanced budget for Albertans when they're now having to wait longer to get medical services, when their health care system is not delivering, when their education system has been shortchanged? Where is that balance in that report?

MRS. NELSON: You know, Mr. Speaker, sometimes my son says to me: hello? Well, hello, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. This is not rocket science. I just indicated to you that there was a news release that was filed yesterday by the Calgary regional health authority, which they didn't have to do, and it clearly identified that they effectively were able to save \$30 million in administration without negatively affecting any of the frontline delivery of services. They are committed to doing that, and we believe them to be responsible people to run those health systems for the benefit of all Albertans.

Insofar as the other deliveries, you heard at great length yesterday from the Minister of Children's Services showing that the co-operation with the regional authorities is delivering to those in need, and they will be taken care of. Now, if the Leader of the Opposition can't accept that, that's just too bad.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Premier on this one. Mr. Premier, will you commit that if the next quarterly updates show any kind of shortfall in revenues, you will transfer money out of the money that's waiting for debt repayment to sustain programs for this year and make the adjustments next year to replenish those dollars?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is having so much fun with this that I'll ask her to respond.

MRS. NELSON: Okay. Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. What the leader of the Liberal opposition is asking this government to do, in plain language, is to take the money that was allocated to debt retirement last year, pull it back – so effectively increasing the debt of the province – spend more, and put us into a deficit position. This is his idea of being fiscally responsible. It's the most irresponsible suggestion that I've ever heard come from that side. The answer is no.

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

Teacher Remuneration

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night Edmonton public teachers voted over 99 percent in favour of job action. They

hold this government, not the local school board, accountable for the current impasse. My first question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier made a deal with the AUPE president that kept everyone happy, why won't the hon. Premier take any responsibility for making a deal with the teachers? Why don't you say, "Hello, Larry Booi"?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I will say hello. I'll say hello in this fashion, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the hon. member that this government took the unprecedented step of putting in as a line item in the budget a guaranteed 6 percent raise for teachers, a guaranteed minimum with the ability to negotiate with the individual school jurisdictions higher amounts if indeed those jurisdictions deemed it the right place to spend those extra dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that while the Edmonton schoolteachers voted to seek a strike vote, by a proportionate amount in terms of percentage the Medicine Hat teachers voted exactly the opposite way.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. In the second-quarter fiscal update that came out this morning, there is a line item that the Department of Learning spending has been reduced by \$42 million. Why can't all or part of that money be used to settle this dispute now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to what we have put into education in this province, I will have the hon. Minister of Learning respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know and as everyone in this Assembly knows, there was a request come to balance our budget by putting in 1 percent. What the Department of Learning did was arrive at the \$42 million without touching any school board programs, without touching any university programs. What we did is we touched administration. We looked at what we were doing. We decided to cut back. We withdrew from some initiatives that we had, and we found the \$42 million without cutting programs.

I think we need to put this into perspective. The hon. member here is assuming that the \$42 million would solve the problems that are out there with the teachers. Each 1 percent of an increase for teachers' salaries is worth \$23 million. Mr. Speaker, there's about 1 and a half or 1 and three-quarters percent there.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is to the Minister of Learning. Given that teachers' salaries have increased by 12 percent since 1995, which is less than the rate of inflation, why did the minister claim yesterday that their salaries have increased by 17 percent?

DR. OBERG: Because they have.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Children's Services Funding

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On April 1, just

one and a half months after the serious cuts are scheduled to take place to children's services, the next installment of this government's corporate tax cutting program will take effect and cost the Provincial Treasury \$275 million. My question is to the Minister of Finance.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you sure you want to go there?

MR. MASON: I know she's on a roll today. Why does the Minister of Finance believe that frontline services to children are less important than cuts to corporations' taxes?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I don't.

MR. MASON: Then, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Finance find the money from corporate tax or anywhere else in her budget to restore the cuts to children's services?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister of Children's Services indicated in the House yesterday and on talk shows this morning that the frontline delivery for children in need is being met.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, a second supplementary question: will the Minister of Finance admit that important social services are not properly supported by Alberta's tax base and have become dependent on up-and-down cycles in oil and gas prices?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, what we do when we build a budget is we build a plan that has balance. We create a framework that tries to deal with all of the elements that have a part in a fiscal plan or picture for this province. Some of them deal with delivery of frontline social programs, others deal with taxation programs, and others deal with financing programs. The balance is there within this fiscal plan. I think it's quite clear. Insofar as this particular situation as it deals with the Children's Services budget, I'd ask the Minister of Children's Services to supplement my answer.

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite simply, Children's Services is facing a serious social problem because families are abandoning children: a 13,000 caseload last year, 15,000 this year. It doesn't take much thinking to understand that it's not this government that's leaving children in difficulty; it's the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I have already identified that 31 percent in one region are 11 years of age and over, parent/teen conflict. Does that sound like we're abandoning children? We are taking those children on in government because people out there aren't doing their job. Let's pull together and get it done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Long-term Care Accommodation Rates

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the government announced an increase in the daily accommodation fees for those residents in long-term care facilities. My question, though, is to the Minister of Seniors. Can you assure this Assembly and indeed all Albertans that no senior who cannot pay the increased daily fee will be turned out of a long-term care facility?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to point out that the long-term care accommodation charges in Alberta are the

lowest at the maximum end of any province in the country. Our current maximum is some \$860. One of the higher ones is in the \$4,700 range, in Nova Scotia. We also have an income-testing mechanism via the income tax for providing seniors' benefits, and that's not asset testing, I want to point out.

Getting right to the crux of the matter, these accommodation charges are roughly one-third of the total cost of being in these long-term care facilities, which are health driven. So the answer to the member's question – would any person, senior or otherwise, be denied accommodation to a long-term care centre based on their need? – is no. They will be accommodated regardless.

With respect to seniors specifically, which make up the vast majority – some 12,000 seniors are in there – we have made provision within our seniors' benefit plan to increase the support level to the seniors to minimize the impact of the increase on the accommodation charges.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member of Calgary-West.

Aboriginal Children's Services

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is living paycheque to paycheque. Yesterday the Minister of Children's Services indicated that she was cutting preventive social services for children even while the number of children requiring protection is, in her words, soaring. This month alone 21 agencies serving children in and around Edmonton have had their provincial contracts terminated. Most of these agencies serve native and Metis children. To the Premier: how can this Premier, who portrays himself as a defender of aboriginal interests, stand aside while his government pursues a policy that terminates so many services to aboriginal children?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that question is so unfair. [interjections] It is. My wife is totally committed as is the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development as is the Minister of Children's Services.

Relative to the specific question and what we're doing for Metis people and aboriginal people and children at risk generally, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Premier. I have the list of reductions and the list of terminations of programs. Let's be clear that almost 40 percent of the children that are served by our department are aboriginal children, but there was no implied targeting of children at risk that were aboriginal children. Quite the opposite, Mr. Speaker, and I would take exception to anybody that would suggest there was a targeting of aboriginal children.

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, anytime that we have aboriginal programs or projects that are on the chopping block, it's a concern. However, we have to also look at the fiscal picture in terms of what we're doing and making sure that everyone in this government has to deal with the fiscal situation. My recommendation to the Minister of Children's Services, who has responded, is that she will be able to make sure that when the fiscal picture changes, we will continue to do the work that we've been doing in terms of aboriginal children and the needs that they have requested, which is very important.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is to the Premier. Has this government done any assessment of the long-term cost increases

to the education, justice, and health care systems that will result from the cuts to preventive social services?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, numerous studies and programs have been brought into effect relative to this specific issue, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of Children's Services respond.

MS CALAHASEN: First of all, if you look at The Future: Meeting Priorities, Sharing Benefits, this fiscal update, as well as the second-quarter activity update, there are many projects and areas that we've been dealing with relative to making sure that the First Nations and the Metis people are going to be taken care of. Mr. Speaker, just to read a few. On page 2, Listening to Albertans, we participated in a First Nations Cultural Camp to increase their awareness of aboriginal traditions, spirituality and communities, and to promote culturally sensitive prosecutions. The camp was in direct response to a recommendation from the Justice Summit, "Increase sensitivity and cultural awareness."

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other areas that we've looked at. In fact, we've "consulted with the Grand Chiefs of Treaty 6, 7 and 8, and Alberta Assembly of First Nations Vice-Chiefs to address the Aboriginal Policy Framework and related activities." Also, Strengthening the Alberta Economy: we "led an initiative to create a coherent government approach to address Aboriginal participation in the Alberta economy." We've got quite a list here. As well, we've "promoted a northern Alberta-based pilot project related to career options through apprenticeship training."

2:20

Mr. Speaker, as we go through this list, you will see that throughout the whole government we have been dealing with issues that will address the concerns that have been brought forward by First Nations and Metis people, and we will continue to do that no matter what happens.

THE SPEAKER: I gather, hon. minister, that that document has already been tabled in the House.

MS CALAHASEN: Yes, it has.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development: how does the minister defend a government whose policies place an accelerated paydown of the debt above the interests of aboriginal children?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, hello? Again. If any government in this country has done anything to be able to deal with First Nations and Metis people, it is this province through the leadership of our Premier. Also, this is the first province that has an Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development ministry specifically allocated to make sure that we address the issues of First Nations and Metis people. It's those concerns that we have to bring to the table, and as minister it's my duty to be able to bring them to the table so my colleagues understand the concerns that have been expressed by First Nations and Metis people.

We've done some wonderful things, Mr. Speaker. On the aboriginal policy framework we've got some wonderful partnerships that have been working for the economic benefit of aboriginal people, mostly to be able to address the poverty issue that has come forward as a result of some of the needs that have been expressed. Those are the areas we have to deal with. If we don't have an

economic base for First Nations and Metis people, we don't deal with the social concerns. So it's through the aboriginal policy framework as well as a number of the concerns that I've brought to my colleagues that we've been dealing with. I'd like to commend my colleagues on the work that they've been doing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Cost of Living Indices

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Economic Development has received many requests from businesses and municipalities for information that would help them make cost-of-living and wage adjustments for employees. As a result, the department recently released a price comparison survey for 10 Alberta communities that measures price differences on 266 specific goods and services regularly purchased by Alberta consumers living in cities and small- and medium-sized towns. Edmonton's costs were set at 100 with the indices for all other centres set relative to that measure. The shelter index, for example, ranges from a low of 90.7 in Lethbridge to a high of 152 in Fort McMurray.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, preambles are meant to be precise. Question.

MS KRYCZKA: My main question to the Minister of Economic Development: what other uses or applications do you see for the indices in this survey?

MR. NORRIS: I'll attempt to be a little more brief in my answer than in the preamble, Mr. Speaker, but I want to thank the member for the question. The surveys we do are at the behest of the business community and other business agencies to look at what kind of activity is going on in Alberta. This was one of those reports. We use them as a marketing and development tool to sell the message of how under this government Alberta has become the absolute best place in Canada to do business. We see the use of this . . . [interjections] When it's such a good climate . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, thank you very much, but there is a reason why I'm here. If we talk through the chair, we don't have those interruptions.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Okay. My supplementary is to the Minister of Seniors. Acknowledging that the cost of basic goods and services such as shelter definitely varies throughout the province, what plans do you have to review the Alberta seniors' benefit program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated, we've looked at support to needy seniors through something called the seniors' benefits program, which was geared to the income tax that they pay.

Secondly, with respect to housing, the facilities that we manage are restricted to 30 percent of their gross income, which would equalize the housing wherever they are in the province. Yes, we are taking a careful look at the market-basket approach to determine cost of living across the province to see where we might be able to bring that into play without driving the cost of administration out of sight.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes. Thank you. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Have other provinces adopted the market-basket of goods and services approach, and have you considered implementing it for low-income Albertans?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the market-basket measurement is currently under review and development by Statistics Canada. All jurisdictions in Canada, including the federal government, are planning to use it once it is ready. I believe the kickoff date is likely to be the fall of '02, but preliminary calculations are being made available to provinces as we speak.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Children's Services

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For days the Minister of Children's Services has been telling the House that cuts will not be made to programs that directly affect children. Yesterday the minister seemed to backtrack, indicating that her responsibility was primarily child protection and other community agencies could now help to pay for other services. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given that most early prevention programs do not deal with child protection, will those programs now be cut permanently?

MS EVANS: Well, no, Mr. Speaker, they will not be cut permanently. Some are deferred. Let us again be clear about what we've got in our budget: \$647 million. I was asked to take a 1 percent reduction. Since that time, Treasury has added \$4 million back in for aboriginal programs that we get a refund for from the feds, and our Treasury has also recommended \$2 million from the national children's benefit.

Where we have family growth and caseloads in Alberta communities, we have squeezes on intervention programs. Deferral, delay, new partnerships, new strategies, administrative reductions: all of these are strategies so that we can in fact, number one, protect those children most in need and, number two, look after those children who have less risk at a different rate.

Mr. Speaker, we have had in some communities, such as region 15, no need at all to cut some of those programs because they are turning the corner on child welfare caseloads. They are doing family case conferencing with native communities. They're spending time with the extended community to make sure that the children are looked after. That's the very thing, the very transformation we need throughout Alberta: a genuine interest in communities, not in bashing each other for what we are or are not doing but in fact working together to get those children looked after in the streets where they live.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the same minister: is it fair to children to change the scope of the department's work three-quarters of the way through the fiscal year?

MS EVANS: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's the same thing when we use an adjective to describe children as poor. No child is poor. Children live in poor circumstances. Children have needs. We look after those with the greatest needs.

I gave a response today to the media that I will give in this House. If there are people that can illustrate that there are children who are seriously at risk because of any program that has been cut, then bring their names to me, because I will follow up on behalf of this government and make sure that no child is placed in a risk that would compromise their future safety and well-being.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Alberta Supernet

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has undertaken a number of important initiatives designed to promote a knowledge-based economy, one of the most important being the Supernet project. This high-speed, high-bandwidth project, bringing transfer rates of up to 5,500 pages per second on a regional network compared to maybe three pages per second on individual dial-up now, will create economic expansion through teleworking opportunities, for example, as well as bringing enhancements in a number of other quality of life issues such as telelearning, telehealth, and so on right across Alberta. However, there are a few questions that have arisen. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development. Now, considering that a large number of Alberta libraries are already using the Alberta public libraries electronic network, or APLEN for short, to interconnect their data resources, how will the Supernet project impact on APLEN?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. First of all, to be clear, we already have about 280 or 290 public libraries connected with the APLEN system. Basically, APLEN, which is the Alberta public library electronic network, is a system to connect these public libraries through the Internet. In doing so, our public libraries across the province will have the ability to communicate better and faster with each other. They will be able to share resources, do interlibrary loans on a more expedient basis. They'll be able to be provided with access to the worldwide web, and so on.

Now, specifically with respect to provincial libraries, the intention of the Alberta Supernet is actually to enhance what's already there, the APLEN system, and this will be provided as an option for those libraries who wish to participate. When all is said and done, Mr. Speaker, the libraries that are connected through the Supernet will be able to access more information. That information will be of a higher quality, and critically to them, they'll be able to access it in a much more speedy fashion. So that's where we're going, and that's what we're looking at.

MR. LORD: My first supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Innovation and Science. What is your department doing with regards to Supernet to specifically address rural Alberta libraries' needs?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, just today I noticed three news releases, each announcing different web sites: one on workplace information, one on learning information with schools and universities, and another one with a LearnAlberta web site. Access to this information is important to all Albertans, and the Alberta Supernet will provide high-speed access to every library in our province. What better place in a community for people who need access to information to come, to plug into the network, and to find that

information for themselves. That is what Supernet brings. It brings opportunity to every Albertan to access this kind of information.

MR. LORD: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Innovation and Science: could you give us a very brief update on the progress of the overall project?

MR. DOERKSEN: I am happy to do that. This is a three-year initiative which involves over 10,000 kilometres of fibre optics and 2,000 kilometres with wireless connectivity solutions. We are close to finalizing the build schedule. We've been negotiating with various players in this whole concept, Mr. Speaker, and we're moving ahead to make sure that this happens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Commercial Fisheries

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Does the minister support the Alberta Commercial Fishermen's Association's request for financial compensation for those who voluntarily leave the industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a very appropriate question, with Bill 219 being introduced today. It is a very good question because it is a very important issue, I believe, to all Albertans. As you are aware, there is a lot of pressure on our lakes as far as fisheries because Alberta, for example, only has a thousand fish-bearing lakes. When you look at Saskatchewan at 94,000 and Ontario at 250,000 and our populations has grown by 35 percent in the past, you can see where the pressure is at. We are definitely seriously looking at the proposal submitted by the Commercial Fishermen's Association. What we need to do is develop a policy, which I will be taking forward through the process in the very near future, to look at how we may rationalize the commercial fishing industry. The demand is high, especially for walleye and pike, and the population is growing. There are over 800 commercial fishermen in Alberta, and the plan from the commercial fisheries is to ask us to try and reduce that to about 200, or a manageable level, with some form of compensation program in order to reduce that industry.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Finance. Does this minister support compensation for people voluntarily leaving an industry that may no longer be economically viable?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the purpose of question period is to ascertain government policy, not to seek opinions. Now, if this question can deal with government policy, go ahead, hon. minister, but simply an opinion, one is forbidden.

The hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask the Minister of Finance again. Does this minister support this minister's policy on providing compensation for fishermen who are leaving a commercially viable industry?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may come as a surprise to the

opposition, but we have a process in our government called standing policy committees where policies are vetted, debated around the table as a group, as a team that ran under the leadership of Premier Klein, and when we make a decision . . . [interjection] I'm sorry. The Premier. Our Premier. [interjections] Well, it was called Ralph's Team. I'm sorry; I can't help it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Children's Services Funding

(continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government made a terrible miscalculation last year when it gave away billions of dollars of province of Alberta revenues by cutting corporate taxes in half over four years and reducing tax rates for the top 1 percent of taxpayers by over 40 percent. But corporations and the wealthy are not the ones paying the price for the government's miscalculation. Those paying the price are vulnerable children, including those who are victims of sexual exploitation. My first question is to the hon. Premier. How can the same Premier who a few years ago sponsored a flagship bill to protect children from being sexually exploited through prostitution turn around today and justify unilaterally axing 80 percent of the funding for the Crossroads outreach safe house in Edmonton? How can he?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly I'll have the hon. Minister of Children's Services respond, because the question posed by the hon. leader of the third party is not quite truthful. It's inaccurate to say the least. The Minister of Children's Services has become very innovative in her approach to this particular situation to protect the interests of the child and at the same time rationalize the delivery of service.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, as I identified in the tabling earlier, there are five beds at Crossroads. Most of those beds were being occupied by adults whose needs will currently be addressed by our Minister of Human Resources and Employment if they are of a social services nature. The one bed that was for treatment of children who had been affected by sexual exploitation has been assumed for use at Catholic Social Services' protective safe house. About a month ago, with the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, we toured that safe house. There was plenty of capacity there at that time, and I am sure that throughout Alberta we have a keen interest in adding capacity. The capacity at Crossroads for children exploited by prostitution is not necessary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the minister of aboriginal affairs. Given that our own government's fiscal decisions have allowed the axe to fall disproportionately on frontline programs in the Ma'Mōwe Capital health region that are delivered by aboriginal agencies for the benefit of aboriginal children, how can we help the minister to fight more successfully to defend those programs within her own government?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we are always concerned when we deal with the issue of programs or projects that would be on the chopping block. We are however

hopeful that with the fiscal situation improving, we will be able to get those programs back in place.

The other issue is that I think there are many other projects and programs that are available through the federal government as well as some of the people in the communities. There has been some capacity-building that has been occurring in the communities. It certainly would be very helpful to those projects to be able to talk to those people as well as to the foundations that are available for any help that's possible. In fact, anything that we can do to make sure that these programs and projects are going to be helpful for the students – we'd like to be aware of those to see what can be done to help them through the process. As was indicated, we have that possibility.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the Minister of Learning. How can the Minister of Learning defend a fiscal plan that's so patently unfair that over 99 percent of over 3,000 teachers who teach for the Edmonton public school board voted last night in favour of holding a strike vote? Are all of these teachers. . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, there has to be some continuity and symmetry with the questions involved.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Crop Insurance Review

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There have been many challenges in the agriculture industry in the immediate past and present. Farmers are having to cope with low prices, drought, and higher input costs. The crop insurance that is presently in place does not seem to reflect the security necessary to adequately insure crops against the elements. I understand that there is a review in place examining the effectiveness of crop insurance. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can you tell me the progress of this review?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, certainly there is no question, I'm sure, in anyone's mind in this Legislature how important the agriculture industry is to our province at \$16.8 billion. Quite a high amount of the processing sector comes from the crop sector, food and beverage processing. So indeed it's important that we work with the industry to have an insurance program that protects them from the risk that is there, primarily weather risk but also commodity price risk.

We've had a review that has been ongoing in different stages for about three years in this province, Mr. Speaker. Recognizing the importance of the industry and the need to move quickly, some changes were made this year, in this 2001 claim year. That was in areas of the index calculation, the creation of insurance for some different crops, which wasn't there, and a reintroduction of a harvesting allowance, which was important. One more important but maybe somewhat controversial program this year was the introduction of a pilot pasture insurance component.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Who was involved in the present review?

Was there industry input, and will there be any costs to the government on these crop insurance changes?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the review was headed by Mr. Charlie Mayer. It included Mr. Eugene Dextrase, who is from the Alberta Grain Commission; Pat Durnin of Kathyrn, also from the Grain Commission; and Dan Cutforth of Barons. Further to that and very importantly, consultations were held with producers through focus groups and general meetings throughout the province to ensure that we looked at the broad needs of the producers wherever they are in this province. We've recently completed focus groups again with producers in the various regions of the province, and we've said to producers: "This is our idea of how we could improve this program to more properly reflect the input costs that you incur to produce this crop. If you applied this program to your farm, would it indeed do the job?" This is somewhat novel, rather than doing it after the fact, and it's worked quite well.

MR. DANYLUK: My final question, Mr. Speaker: when does the minister expect the recommendations to be implemented?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there are three critical factors that deal with how quickly you can deal with this. One, it's a tripartite program, which means that it is partnered a tripartite way between the federal government, the provincial government, and the producer. That negotiation has to occur on agreed upon changes, so that timing of getting the changes agreed upon.

The other complexity to this is, of course, cost. The member asked in his previous question about cost. Mr. Speaker, the costs of implementing the few changes we did this year in addition to the program cost was about \$9 million. I would suggest that if we were to implement the other changes that have been discussed with the focus groups, it would be considerably more than that. Because the federal government is a funder in this program – the province and the federal government produce over 60 percent of the premium in this program and the producer about 38 percent – it is critical that we have agreement from the federal government to ensure that this program can go ahead.

head: Recognitions

Shumka Dancers

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, the award-winning Ukrainian Shumka Dancers have excelled in the preservation, promotion, and presentation of Ukrainian folk dance for 42 consecutive years. As Canada's oldest Ukrainian dance group they have thrilled audiences around the world and brought much acclaim to our province.

Mr. Speaker, one of our colleagues, the Minister of Community Development and MLA for Edmonton-Mill Creek, was a Shumka dancer for six years, a former president, and also the group music director for nearly 30 years. Last Saturday I joined him at a special gala fund-raiser for Shumka, where I also watched my niece's husband, Evan Zukiwsky, perform in their presentation of *Cinderella*. This fund-raiser officially launched Shumka on a new and exciting path. In response to public demand they announced the creation of a professional touring component from within their ranks. Volunteerism will remain an important part of their future direction, but a professional touring arm will result in this Alberta treasure being shared with even more international audiences.

We wish them every success as they embark on this exciting new direction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Capital Regional Health Authority

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand today to recognize – and it's appropriate today after the Minister of Finance's comment: hello? – the Capital health region for receiving the highest accreditation status possible from the Canadian Council on Health Services. This accreditation is a credit to all health care professionals who work in our region. It clearly shows that Capital health is not only meeting the national standards for excellence in delivery of health care services but in many areas is helping to establish those standards for all Canadians through the new services, new ways of working together across the system.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Neil Wilkinson, chairman of the regional health authority board, and Mrs. Sheila Weatherill, CEO of Capital health, for their leadership and commitment to health care in this region.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Pembina Institute

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the excellent research being done by the Pembina Institute. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the work being done by Mary Griffiths and Tom Marr-Laing on the detrimental environmental effects of coal-generated electricity.

The Pembina Institute has legitimate concerns backed by solid research about the damaging effects to Alberta's air and water quality that will come from the expansion of so-called cheap coal technology. By their calculations even if the province's economy remains strong and electricity demands continue to grow at 3 percent per year, there will be enough electricity from less polluting sources for at least a decade without adding the 2,200 megawatts of new coal plants being proposed. They believe that with emerging technology new methods of generating power will be economically viable in the very near future.

I agree that it is important to look for the best available technology. When we consider what makes one technology better than others, corporate profit and industrial expansion must not be the leading factors. Government standards must be set to protect humans, not dollars. If we are not careful, we will be dealing with long-term health and environmental impacts long after the money has all been spent.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

2:50 Shereen Ziegler, Miss Rodeo Canada 2002

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to recognize Miss Rodeo Canada 2002, Shereen Ziegler of Wainwright. For those members who don't follow the great sport of rodeo, she was crowned at this year's Canadian Finals Rodeo on November 9, having been chosen from a very strong field of candidates. Besides being a community volunteer and an excellent horse trainer, Shereen is a 4-H alumnus and a graduate of the agricultural production and business management program of Olds College.

Her responsibilities have already started. She represented Canada at the Regina Agribition, and she will represent our nation at the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas on December 5. Coming from a rural background Miss Ziegler will be an excellent spokesman not only for the great sport of rodeo but also for rural Alberta. She is a most deserving winner.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

**Pamela Paul Endowment Fund
for the Prevention of Family Violence**

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, November is national Family Violence Prevention Month. Today I am pleased to recognize Pamela Paul, former member of this Legislature and a member of my constituency and a survivor of family violence. Pamela has spoken publicly nationally and internationally to draw attention to family violence. I would also add that as a further measure of her courage and strength Ms Paul is a survivor of a brain tumour.

Undaunted in her efforts to educate communities about family violence, Pamela has established the Pamela Paul endowment fund for the prevention of family violence under the auspices of the Edmonton Community Foundation. In the fund's early stages interest from donations will defray the expenses of groups or organizations that deliver presentations to schools on family violence issues.

I wish to congratulate Pam for her courageous survival roles and trust her endowment fund will grow and prosper to the detriment and elimination of violence within the family.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Teachers

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was National Child Day. This is a time for us to remember the commitments we have to the next generation of Albertans. The commitment of teachers to our children is stronger than ever. Today I would like to recognize the dedication of teachers across the province. Without their enormous efforts children everywhere would lose out.

Teachers are currently working in some of the toughest conditions seen in a long time. Classrooms are overcrowded. Many teachers pay for resources out of their own pockets. I would like to commend all the teachers who continue to make children their number one priority. Teachers across Alberta show their devotion to children every single day. They continue working long after the students have gone home. They come in on weekends to work. Sometimes they aren't finished marking papers and exams until late at night. A lot of teachers take time out of their summer to update their professional skills.

Teachers give students all the energy they've got. We cannot calculate or put into money the value of this gift to our province's youth.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mai Ponath

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am truly honoured to recognize Mai Ponath, a truly amazing and upbeat Scottish Calgarian who succumbed to complications from open heart surgery on September 26, 2001. There is consolation in believing that Mai is now joined with Wee Jimmy, her dear friend and companion, who passed away in 1990.

Even at 79 Mai pursued her love for tai chi and swimming, especially in the ocean in Barbados, and I think that just maybe she still swam across Lake Windermere in early morning hours this summer. Mai was always a tireless volunteer. She loved her Beta Sigma Phi sorority, was a lifetime director of the Calgary-Elbow PC

Association, and recently volunteered in my Calgary-West provincial campaign.

Mai lived each day to the fullest, upbeat, with independence and with dignity. With her indomitable spirit she was always an inspiration to her beloved family and friends. The heavens can only be a brighter and happier place with Mai and her great big smile.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, did you rise on a point of order?

MR. MASON: No, Mr. Speaker.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 5.

[Motion carried]

Health Care Premiums

Q5. Mr. Mason moved that the following question be accepted. Of the \$690 million the government receives annually for health care premiums, what portion is paid by government and government-funded agencies such as school boards, universities, colleges and technical institutes, regional health authorities, regional children's authorities, and other government boards and agencies on behalf of their employees?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We accept Written Question 5.

[Written Question 5 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 14, 15, 16, and 17.

[Motion carried]

Alberta Treasury Branches

M14. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the April 30, 1997, document entitled Advice to the Provincial Treasurer re Alberta Treasury Branches as prepared by Alberta Treasury.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, sometimes you just get into deja vu all over again with the members opposite. This information was requested in December of 1997. In fact, it was requested

through a freedom of information request, and the then Treasury Department disclosed 55 out of 102 pages and partially or entirely withheld the rest on the basis, among other reasons, that the disclosure would be harmful to economic interests of the government and Alberta Treasury Branches.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, the Information and Privacy Commissioner upheld Treasury's decision, and through order 98-019 on January 4, 1999, he stated:

After carefully reviewing the records, I find the disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to harm the economic interest of the Government of Alberta or the ATB, and in particular, could reasonably be expected to result in financial loss under section 24(1)(c)(i) or prejudice their competitive position under section 24(1)(c)(ii).

The document requested in this motion is held properly under the Treasury and under the direction of the privacy commissioner. The members opposite know this, and I therefore would reject this motion and ask them to please refer back to their documents from the previous session so as not to ask the same questions again. So this would be rejected by the government.

[Motion for a Return 14 lost]

3:00

Alberta Treasury Branches

M15. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the nine-page document sent by the president and CEO (chief executive officer) of the Alberta Treasury Branches to the Provincial Treasurer on December 23, 1997, relating to a change in status and/or privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is part of the same type of request that we talked about in Motion for a Return 14, and the document has been properly withheld under the 1997 FOIP request, as was confirmed again by the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I'd ask that the hon. members opposite please review their documents from the previous session, because we are obligated to follow that act and not put ourselves and other interests in jeopardy based on our own privacy act within this Legislature. So we would be negligent if we did indeed release those documents.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I'm disappointed in the rigidity of the Treasurer opposite. Certainly we would be negligent if we didn't continue to pursue this information, and being as this is a request that's now four years old, it is perfectly reasonable that we request the information again. The minister keeps talking about a year ago. I'm pretty sure that 1999 was in fact two years ago and going on three years ago, so it's perfectly reasonable that we do request this information again, and we'll continue to request it. There's information there that the people of Alberta need to see. I'm disappointed that the Provincial Treasurer has turned down our request for this information.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 15 lost]

Alberta Treasury Branches

M16. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the

memorandum and supporting documents entitled ATB (Alberta Treasury Branches) Options sent by the Deputy Provincial Treasurer to the president and CEO (chief executive officer) of the Alberta Treasury Branches on December 16, 1997.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, once again the difficulty I have – and I refer back to when the hon. member on the previous motion talked about the disappointment of my office not releasing this data. We have a commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, who reviews requests for freedom of information and protection of privacy. It would be very difficult and negligent if this office ignored the ruling that came out of that position, because he is acting based on a piece of legislation that was put in place by this very Legislature and then became the law. Surely she is not suggesting that we ignore the very law that was passed in this House that resulted from an all-party committee coming forward with recommendations on freedom of information and privacy.

I will then again state the commissioner's instructions.

After carefully reviewing the records, I find the disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to harm the economic interests of the Government of Alberta or the [Alberta Treasury Branches], and in particular, could reasonably be expected to result in financial loss under section 24(1)(c)(i) or prejudice their competitive position under 24(1)(c)(ii).

Surely this hon. member would not ask the government to place the province of Alberta or the Treasury Branches in that untenable position. I hope that she's thinking this through a lot clearer than that.

So, once again, Mr. Speaker, the government must reject this motion for a return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I will make a correction to the Provincial Treasurer in that I'm disappointed in her rigidity, not as she previously quoted me for.

I think it's perfectly reasonable that we continue to ask for this information. Obviously it's of some concern to the government if they continue to be vexed by financial information that is four years old and counting. I think it's perfectly reasonable that we continue to ask for the information, and one of these days the government will be far enough away from it that they won't be afraid to let it out.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 16 lost]

Alberta Treasury Branches

M17. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the document entitled Alberta Treasury Branches: Alternative Business Outcomes prepared by Alberta Treasury on December 22, 1997.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to have clarification whether the hon. member meant my rigidity or frigidity. We weren't quite sure.

MRS. SMITH: Perhaps it was virginity.

MRS. NELSON: No, not virginity. Frigidity. The Minister of Energy asked for further clarification, Mr. Speaker.

I want to assure the hon. member. I don't think we're getting across to her that there is a law in this province. The government cannot break the law. The law should not even be in question in this House, particularly by members opposite, as it was their members that sat on the committee that came forward with the recommendations to create the law. Now when they don't get what they want, they all of a sudden want it changed. If you're anxious to change that, then you would have to bring forward amendments to amend the law. We have a law in this province that we must follow. We all agreed to put an independent body in place to review those requests. We accept the answer that comes back from the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Sometimes you don't like the answer. Well, that's unfortunate, but that's the way the law is written. It's there for the purpose of making sure that there is not any interference in the rulings that come forward, that we have to abide by his or her ruling.

Again, on this motion for a return, it pertains to the same package of information that was reviewed under the FOIP request. I've already read his answer twice, Mr. Speaker. It's obviously not sinking in. Therefore we must again reject this motion for a return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. The Treasurer has given me far more information about her personal life than I know what to do with. I would never, ever claim to say . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please, hon. member. Let's deal with the issue. But the chair would have to agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre that perhaps the House received more information than it really required.

Please proceed.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important and I acknowledge and recognize that the government asked for protection from the freedom of information and protection of privacy minister and received it in this instance, but we must all remember that classified information that's classified at one point is not classified forever. That is information that will eventually be released. There's nothing in that FOIP Act and there's nothing in the ruling from the freedom of information and protection of privacy commissioner that says that information will be so forever. So thank you very much for reading the document three times. I heard you the first time. We're going to keep asking.

Thank you.

[Motion for a Return 17 lost]

3:10

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 207
Alberta Personal Income Tax
(Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: We have an amendment, amendment A1, that we're on at this moment. Are there any further comments to be made with regard to amendment A1? The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Chairman, just for clarification. I'm presuming that on the notice of amendment there's an A and a B. Are we dealing with just the A first or A and B together?

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair does not recollect what was proposed at the time. It's my understanding of the document that they were together, so we would be speaking to and voting on A and B of amendment A1.

MRS. NELSON: Okay. Thank you very much for the clarification, Mr. Chairman.

I'm very pleased to rise in the House and speak to Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act, 2001, as proposed by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. I'd like to congratulate the member for bringing this proposal forward and for continuing to represent his constituents with dedication and commitment. I'd also like to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for proposing amendments that improve the bill and enable us to consider its merits.

All that being said, Mr. Chairman, I can't support the amendment or the bill at this time, and I can't offer my support to the amendment and the bill for several reasons that I would like to outline very briefly. Before I go into that, I'd again like to comment on the thoughts expressed by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan in committee yesterday. I firmly agree with him that tradespeople are indeed an important part of our growing economy, and I support the spirit and the intent of this bill in that it aims to benefit the hardworking people of our province, the same people that are playing an important role in building our future. I have no fault with that aim at all. In fact, the member rather eloquently expressed appreciation for tradespeople in the province, and I certainly share that sentiment with him. This bill also reflects a philosophy that I hold near and dear, and that is that keeping taxes lower and lowering them if possible is an important goal, a goal that this government remains committed to. That being said, there are some distinct reasons why I can't support the bill or the amendment.

First off, Alberta follows a broad-based low-rate approach to taxes. This means low taxes for everyone rather than incentives for certain tax filers. This is an approach that Alberta supports, and I am reluctant to really deviate from that. Put simply, tax credits for some taxpayers mean higher tax rates for others. In fact, the Alberta Tax Review Committee examined the question of special tax credits in depth. They recommended to our government against adding new tax credits to Alberta's personal income tax system. Once we start targeting certain groups with credits, we have to make up that shortfall elsewhere, so even with the amendment, this would be the case, Mr. Chairman. That means we would be picking winners in a sense, and that is something that our government does not do. This proposed credit is really a grant, a grant delivered through the tax system. That is the reality, and Albertans are firmly opposed to grants.

Mr. Chairman, I've looked across the country to see what has been happening. If we pass this bill even with this amendment, we would likely encourage interest groups to bring forward other targeted tax credits, credits that benefit a narrow group of taxpayers and even erode the principle of broad-based low tax rates further. Each time a concession is made to a particular sector, it becomes harder to say no to another sector.

Ontario is an example of a province that has followed a path of targeted incentives. The province has introduced a number of tax credits including an innovation credit, a book publishing tax credit, a computer animation tax credit, a television and film tax credit, an interactive digital media tax credit, a sound recording tax credit, a

co-operative education tax credit, a workplace accessibility tax credit, an equity and education tax credit, a property and sales tax credit. The problem is that these are one-off systems.

In the province of Quebec I think they have the all-time record for one-off tax credit systems. They have, of course, the tax credit for child care expenses, which the federal government already has. They have another one. They have a tax credit for adoption expenses, which the federal government has. They have another one. They have a tax credit for on-the-job training periods, a tax credit for job creation in the clothing and footwear industry, a tax credit for contributions to labour-sponsored funds, a tax credit for scientific and research experimental development, a tax credit for the taxi business, a tax holiday for foreign researchers, a tax holiday for the Quebec seamen, a tax exemption for employees with the International Financial Centre, a tax holiday for foreign specialists working in information technology development centres, tax exemptions for certain foreign specialists working in Montreal foreign trade zones at Mirabel, tax exemptions concerning the Montreal foreign trade zone at Mirabel for corporations, tax exemptions regarding income earned from the administration and management of new investment funds, research and development tax credits, tax credits for technology adaptation services, tax credits for design, tax credits for Quebec film and television production, tax credit for Quebec film and television production services, tax credit for shipbuilding or conversion, tax credit for railway companies, and on and on it goes.

The difficulty, Mr. Chairman, is that once you start the one-off, where does it end? So when we bring in this amendment, albeit it is narrowing the focus of the bill, the difficulty is that it doesn't deal with the issue of: how do you stay focused on having an overall lowest tax system that all Albertans can enjoy within this province?

Today in the province of Ontario, with this grouping of tax credits their finance minister is having to go back and all of a sudden realize, "We can't afford this." So once he put the tax credits in place, he now has to go back and pick which ones are no longer going to be able to continue. You start off by focusing on, "Let's give a special credit here and one there," and now you have to go back and say, "Well, we're going to pick that one to pull back and not that one," because they're going into the same fiscal situation in reality that we're faced with in the province of Alberta.

Now, in the province of Quebec their problem is even tenfold what Ontario's is. They aren't in the same sort of fiscal responsibility mode as Ontario and the province of Alberta are, so they're just borrowing from their savings plans at this point to try and keep this litany of tax credits in place. But the day comes, when you're running a debt that's \$110 billion and growing, when something has to give. So they'll have to go back and identify which of these one-off tax credit programs won't be able to exist. Fiscal reality eventually sets in. Choices have to be made between delivering core programs and one-off programs, even with this amendment that has been put forward, Mr. Chairman.

So while I think it would be great to have lower taxes and I'm a major promoter of that, I would hope that not only would we not accept the amendment but that we would not accept this bill. I'd rather see us review it in an overall tax policy as opposed to one-off. So, Mr. Chairman, I can't support the amendment, and I really would encourage the House not to support the bill. I'd rather have us go back and review this in a broader scheme of tax so that we can put credits that go back right across the province to all Albertans, instead of focusing on one group.

Those are my comments. Thank you very much.

3:20

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the comments of the minister. I listened quite attentively and did not find a great deal of reference to the amendment, which we are currently on. I thought for sure you would have intervened but didn't see it happen.

At any rate, Mr. Chairman, these amendments were carefully considered with the help of the department in charge of such things. The suggestion was made that this amendment would help to strengthen the bill and would help to prevent any sort of opportunity for somebody who wished to defraud the government, to not pay their taxes, to illegally beat the system, to get around the whole intent of the bill and somehow maximize their deductions by defrauding the government and not paying their fair share. So on the advice of the department I suggested that we would be glad to accept this amendment and that we would move it forward and help to strengthen the bill and protect it, because as I understand it, there is in the tax system some difficulty with trying to keep track of these kinds of things in the section that it falls into.

By introducing this limit to the amount of deduction, we'll be able to capture all of the individuals that are currently journeymen and most of the individuals who are apprentices, who in some cases perhaps even pay \$10,000 in their first year or two for the different tools required in their trade. Unfortunately, we can't broaden it beyond that; \$5,000 seems to be an appropriate limit. It will, as I say, capture virtually all the tradesmen, and it will also capture most of the apprentices.

Perhaps later in the debate we can talk further about the special credits that Ontario or perhaps Quebec have and the difficulties there. Suffice it to say, Mr. Chairman, that the tax credits that were mentioned are really interesting, mostly going to corporations that set up some kind of project of some sort, whereas this particular bill speaks more to the individual. The individual has to buy some kinds of tools in order to carry out his trade. In fact, if the person worked in his garage in the back alley, he could fully deduct all those tools, but if he goes to work for some garage downtown and he has to buy his own tools, he's unable to make that deduction.

This is a simple kind of approach. When somebody expends dollars to earn an income and he's required to do so to earn that money, then it seems appropriate to allow those deductions to occur, just like any businessperson is able to do. Perhaps later on we'll have members speaking to the inability of these mechanics to incorporate themselves and set themselves up as a little company, like they might be able to do if they were a dentist or a lawyer or a doctor or something along those lines.

That would conclude my comments, Mr. Chairman, but I would urge the Assembly to accept the amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:26 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Goudreau	Marz
Boutilier	Hancock	Maskell
Calahasen	Hlady	Mason
Cao	Horne	Massey
Cardinal	Hutton	Oberg
Cenaiko	Jablonski	O'Neill

Coutts	Jonson	Ouellette
Danyluk	Klapstein	Pham
DeLong	Knight	Rathgeber
Doerksen	Kryczka	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lord	Strang
Fischer	Lougheed	Taft
Fritz	Lukaszuk	VanderBurg
Gordon	Magnus	Yankowsky

Against the motion:

Amery	Herard	Nelson
Graydon	Melchin	Vandermeer
Haley		

Totals: For – 42 Against – 7

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

3:40

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to the Committee of the Whole today in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001, as proposed by the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Chairman, I believe it is important to support this bill as it is an incentive for people, especially our younger generation, to join the trades industry. As we all know, the province is experiencing a shortage of workers in the trades. There have been reports that we may have to look to workers from other provinces to try to find people to fill our booming industry. Bill 207 will be another added incentive for workers to come to our province or for young Albertans to step into it.

Statistics have shown that demand for employees in the trades industry is monstrous. In June the unemployment rate for the industry, which was stipulated as trades, transport, and equipment operating and related occupations, was only 3.8 percent. This rate was far below the overall unemployment rate of 5.7 percent. This low rate is a telltale sign of how busy this industry is and how we must take steps to ensure it stays that way.

Section 2(2) of Bill 207 lays out a formula by which a tradesperson would be eligible for a tax credit on the very expensive tools necessary to work in their industry. I believe this tax credit will attract many more people to the industry as well as being an attractive benefit for the workers already contributing to our vast infrastructure by building our highways and ensuring that our homes and commercial buildings have the heat and plumbing they require.

Mr. Chairman, in 1998 the Alberta Tax Review Committee provided recommendations which sought to enhance Alberta's control over its tax system. In the government's move to remove the burden that was faced by Alberta taxpayers, many changes were made to increase the Alberta advantage. However, a tax credit for tools was not included. Bill 207 now introduces this important amendment. We know how important the tradesperson is to our province, and Bill 207 will ensure they know that they are appreciated and recognized.

Bill 207 allows the province, which already has extensively reduced taxes as a means of spurring economic growth, to introduce another mechanism of tax relief to Alberta workers who must regularly purchase, repair, and replace expensive tools. This

government does not need to be reminded about the benefits of lower taxes. We have been promoting lower taxes for many years. We know that they put money back into the pockets of those who have worked to earn it. We know that lower taxes provide incentive for investment and growth. Albertans know how they want to spend their own money, and they do not need the government telling them how. This tax credit will ensure that there is money put back into the wallets of tradespeople in Alberta. We know the benefits, so let us now act on that knowledge.

Mr. Chairman, many apprentices and new tradespeople must have their own set of tools to begin working. This creates an initial barrier for new workers who do not have the money to invest in tools. Business owners often ask workers to buy expensive tools because it is very difficult to keep track of what workers need and what they don't need and who is using what. The amendment to the act will help these employers and their employees by providing some assistance with the high cost of tools. The burden of purchasing tools can be very, very large. Providing a nonrefundable tax credit for the benefit of tradespeople would remove that substantial initial barrier to entering this important and exciting career field.

There are approximately 50 accredited trades in Alberta. Electricians, mechanics, forestry workers, and oil field technicians are some of the tradespeople who are required to purchase a starter set of tools and then constantly upgrade them to remain competitive. For instance, if I was working in the oil industry as a battery operator for oil well sites and I had to buy my own tools, the cost would be astronomical. Some of the preliminary tools I would need are wrench sets – and those are both metric and fractional – hex-key sets, socket sets, bolt cutters, screwdrivers, pipe wrenches, and pairs of steel-toed boots. All of these tools would cost me in excess of \$700. The pipe wrenches alone may cost up to \$350.

People who are starting out in this industry need this tax credit, Mr. Chairman. I only gave the example of a battery operator, but imagine what the costs are for mechanics, when a good socket set alone could run over \$200. This is only one of the many tools that are required. With initial costs like this, is it any wonder we are having difficulties attracting young Albertans to a career in the trades? We need Bill 207 to lend a helping hand to those just starting out.

Another example is one of a plumber. This is, again, another incredibly expensive trade. The number of different tools that you need is immense. The price of these tools could be up in the thousands and thousands of dollars, and this makes it extremely difficult for those who are trying to start out in the business. Bill 207 would be an immense help for those in this industry.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 207 also ensures that the government of Alberta will not be taken advantage of by dishonest people. With the new cap of \$5,000 as outlined in the amendment to section 2, skilled workers who are using this tax credit will only be allowed to claim the capped amount. This will guard against people claiming tools purchased for other people that aren't actually used for work purposes. With Bill 207 we will attract skilled workers from across Canada, and we will be encouraging young Albertans to enter a booming industry that could very well face a worker shortage if action is not taken.

I want to emphasize that we are not alone in this crusade. As I have already mentioned, the federal government is spearheading an initiative to help the trade worker in Canada. We can now show our support for this industry by encouraging Bill 207. I encourage the committee to support Bill 207.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to be speaking today on Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001. I feel that implementing this tax credit lifts pressure off tradespeople who will in turn create efficient workers. I would like to briefly revisit some important advantages of Bill 207. If we follow the logic behind this bill, we'll be able to gauge the effectiveness of this tax credit for trade tools.

First of all, this Assembly needs no lecture about the benefits of general lower tax rates. We know that lower taxes put money back in the hands of those who have worked hard to earn it. We know that we can trust Albertans with their own money and that they don't need government to tell them how to spend it. We know that lower taxes provide a positive incentive for strong investment and growth. That is why over the past few years this government has brought in policies such as the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, which will give Albertans the most competitive income tax regime in the country. However, there are a growing number of Albertans that need incentive and opportunity to advance in their profession.

The trades professions, Mr. Chairman, are important careers that have a rare amount of independence and responsibility. This bill recognizes the importance of tradespeople, and it provides a means to improve the efficiencies of these occupations. Trades careers have a large amount of individual decision-making compared to other service careers. Tradespeople will determine how they will attack their assigned projects and to some extent what types and how much material will be used. Most importantly, tradespeople very often determine what tools they are going to use at their tasks.

Employers are increasingly placing the responsibility on the employees to purchase a personal set of tools because it alleviates their burden of purchasing, replacing, and repairing expensive tools. With trades increasing with technology, it is easier and more economical for the employer not to have responsibility for many sets of expensive tools that would be best cared for in the hands of the person who personally owns them.

In most cases tools are first acquired during the process of training in whatever specific trade someone might be pursuing, be it construction, plumbing, or welding. Especially in large shops tools are often owned by the worker for two reasons. First of all, personal ownership automatically encourages workers to look after tools to the best of their abilities. If they don't look after their tools, then the quality of the finished product suffers. The other important reason why tools are often owned by the worker is the difficulty for an employer to loan out tools to workers and have them returned as employees move from one task to the next. Availability is an issue, as is time.

3:50

In a sense all tradespeople, whether they own their own businesses or not, are entrepreneurs. Their skills and their tools are what they own and bring to the market. They are given a task and use self-direction and initiative to get the job done. It makes sense, then, that this government should recognize tradespeople as entrepreneurs and encourage them to fulfill their potential with self-initiative. The nonrefundable tax credit on tool ownership does just that. Like in other small businesses tax credits recognize the importance of having the best resources possible and the high cost of industry-specific tools.

Bill 207 would treat tools bought by tradespeople the same way it treats new tires purchased by a trucking company for its fleet. Just as with the owner of the new tires, the tradesperson, the owner of new tools for work, would now be eligible for a work-related tax credit. This credit would serve as an incentive to do more work and to do it better.

Alberta continually leads the country in economic growth, and

new jobs are being created every day. Many of these new jobs are in construction and numerous trade-related industries. These industries are expanding, and a staggering number of projects are being developed all across Alberta. As a result, demand for skilled labour is increasing at an alarming rate. Alberta needs to ensure that there are enough skilled tradespeople to meet the demands of our growing economy. In order to meet this increasing demand, we need to provide incentives for people to enter these industries. This is what Bill 207 seeks to accomplish.

Mr. Chairman, providing a nonrefundable tax credit for the benefit of trade journeymen and apprentices would remove a sizable barrier that many people face when considering the possibility of entering trades. From electricians to heavy-duty mechanics to employees in forestry and the natural resource industries, these people are required to have a basic set of tools when they enter the industry and to continue to upgrade them as they progress in their craft. These tools are expensive but are required to do these jobs on a daily basis. Many of these industries are pillars of Alberta business, and we cannot afford to ignore the issues faced by their employees. The economic prosperity of our province relies upon the strength of these companies and the employees that make them successful.

This bill is necessary because of the often excessive price of tools for most journeyman tradespeople and apprentices. We are all aware that the prices of these tools make it difficult for tradespeople who buy their own to enjoy Alberta's tax relief initiatives like other Albertans do. Passing Bill 207 would give them the opportunity to perform much-needed and appreciated jobs.

Mr. Chairman, I am reminded of the fact that when I proposed my bill earlier in this session, it was in response to young persons who wanted to go into the trades as apprentices and who found that it was very difficult for them to finance not only the insurance on their cars or their trucks, which were sometimes old clunkers, but also to finance their tools and their tuition and their living circumstances. That's why Bill 207 is so important.

I believe that this is an important bill which will spur greater economic growth in this province by introducing another mechanism of tax relief to hardworking Albertans who must regularly purchase, repair, and replace expensive tools. The creation of a tax credit for the benefit of trade journeymen would recognize the continued growth in our trade-heavy employment sector. However, various trade sectors continue to grow, which will require more workers. I have a concern that this initial cost for tools is such a barrier that it would deter new generations of workers into trades. I believe Bill 207 would provide just the incentive we need for a new generation to choose a trade as a career.

I'm somewhat relieved to hear that apprenticeship levels have been increasing over the last decade, specifically in the early training. We heard that last evening when I had the opportunity to speak with those who administer and teach at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, but I think there is still work to be done to increase these levels.

The chances for placement are substantially increased for those who have acquired tools of their own. This is often an unattainable expectation to have for new apprentices and workers but is becoming more the norm in the trade industry. As trades specialize more and more and as technology increases, there is a greater need for each employee to have their own tools and equipment necessary to do their respective job. Mr. Chairman, I fear that because employers have required those who work for them to purchase their own tools, the growth potential for new generations of trades workers in our province could be weakened. Bill 207 would help Alberta's chances to stop the widening shortage of workers in this sector.

I'd also like to say that I believe we have a responsibility here in

this Legislature to enable our young Albertans and Albertans in many industries, including the various trades, to facilitate their advancement in their particular trade and not to put up barriers.

Mr. Chairman, the value of stimulating new generations of tradespeople in our province cannot be overlooked. I believe that Bill 207 is an investment in the growth of future apprenticeship trade workers in this province. I know, because I have heard from several young people in the trades and in apprenticeship programs in my constituency.

To wrap up the importance of the tax credit reward proposed in Bill 207, I would like to compare the importance of this bill to building a home. In order to build a home that will last for a long time, it must rest on a stable foundation. The basement cannot be made from cheap Turkish cement and a fine sand or the walls will chip and crumble under the pressure from the house above. The concrete for the foundation must be heavy in order to withstand years of pressure. The tar and thick sealant necessary to prevent moisture from seeping in from the ground around the basement cannot be worn and dry or it will further weaken the foundation. The two-by-fours and two-by-sixes used to frame the house must not be rotten and twisted but rather fresh and straight in order to hold up the walls. The windows must also have a tight seal to keep Alberta's biting winter air from blowing in. In other words, the hardware and supplies used to build the home must be of a high level of quality in order to do the job right and ensure that the home lasts for a long time.

Tools for Alberta's various trade industries work the same way. In order to do an effective job to the best of their abilities, tradespeople must have quality tools to work with. Furthermore, just as better supplies make a better home, better tools help tradespeople do a better job.

As the cornerstones of Alberta's business expand, we must give Alberta's hardworking, dedicated trade industries the opportunity to do their very best. Let's carry out Bill 207.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to join in the debate on Bill 207 and pleased to say that I agree with my dear friend the Provincial Treasurer on her concerns with the bill. I agree with you.

4:00

There are several issues that I would like to raise with the bill. The first has to do, actually, with apprentice training and the impact of this bill potentially on demand for apprentice training or the training for trades. Certainly a great number of people work in trades who are not designated as journeymen. They may be accomplished carpenters or other workers, but they carry out their work without a formal designation as a tradesperson. Clearly, this particular bill would give a great incentive to people to achieve that designation, which in itself is not a bad thing, but I'm wondering about the impact on training for trades especially when apprentice training funding is basically frozen at current levels and technical institutions are not opening up their training opportunities for new apprentices, to expand the number of apprentices. So I'm concerned that we might see a surge of people seeking to complete their formal training as journeymen and actually jamming up the training system for new students.

I'm also concerned, as the Treasurer raised, with the precedent that this sets. It's certainly the continuation of a trend that this sets. I know there are a great number of tax credits both with the federal

system and with the provincial system, and they apply to all kinds of people, so if we just add one more tax credit, it could be argued: well, it's no big deal. On the other hand, I think we need to ask ourselves: where does this lead; is it, in fact, a slippery slope? And certainly it is one more step in that direction. Are we going to allow teachers to begin to deduct the costs of pencils or paper or computers? Are we going to allow nurses to deduct the costs of their uniforms and so on. The logic accumulates and each one of those is a complexity to the tax system and a cost to the tax base. If this were a tax break to assist people who are raising children, that would be a different kind of issue. I could certainly see that. But as a tax break or tax credit for tools I'm less enthusiastic.

I'm also concerned about the complexity this adds to the tax system, the need for more paperwork. All of us struggle, I think, to figure out the tax system at the end of the year, and I think there are full marks for moving the tax system to a simpler rather than a more difficult process.

I also wonder, as somebody that tries to keep an eye on the economic situation, if there's any – in fact, I'm sure there is a risk of an inflationary effect from this particular tax credit. We will almost immediately see the price of higher quality tools used by tradespeople rise because the retailers will fully realize that there's an incentive for tradespeople to consume more. I think there will then be an inflationary effect as a result of this bill that is at least worth considering.

Beyond that – and I'm sure this is where the Treasurer and I would see eye to eye – there is a cost to the tax base. This is in effect a tax expenditure, and at a time when government revenues appear to be tight, I don't think there's room for having an additional tax expenditure. I'm wondering how we can afford this kind of a tax expenditure when we're cutting elsewhere. You know, is a tax deduction for tools a higher priority than children's services, for example? Is it a higher priority than hospitals? That's what this amounts to. The money that will be forgone through this bill will have to be taken directly out of somewhere else. It seems that common targets these days are things like health care, children, and education.

Given that, there's just no moral way in which I can support providing a tax expenditure and eating into the provincial revenues at the time when we are actually cutting services elsewhere. So I will be opposing this bill on that basis.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Chairman, thank you. Unlike the previous speaker, the member of the Liberal opposition, I can't speak against Bill 207, as I must support the working people of my constituency.

Mr. Chairman, Alberta's economy has been growing at an astounding pace in recent years. Our industrial capacity is greater than ever because of innovation, hard work, and one of the best environments for business in the world. Low taxes have attracted extraordinary investment into the province, and Alberta companies are creating jobs faster than they ever have before. We need to explore new strategies to attract even more skilled workers into the province, and I believe that this bill could aid us in reaching that goal.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take a moment to speak to the amendment, which I fully support in making a good bill an even better bill. It's important to establish an upper limit, I believe. Although I can say without reservation that tradespeople deserve tax credits for their enormous expenditure on tools of their trade, it is equally important that this bill not open a loophole in the tax law that someone could

drive a truck through. Although I trust the tradespeople of Alberta . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the amendment has already been passed, so you can reflect briefly on it but hopefully not talk upon it. It's already been decided by the committee. That's all.

MR. LUKASZUK: Mr. Chairman, that was clearly the intention, but I appreciate your comments.

Low taxes are what make Alberta a far more functional, versatile, and resilient economy than most of the world. High taxes, on the other hand, would force an economy into inefficient rigidity. The higher the tax the greater the incentive for cheating, the higher the tax the less incentive there is for growth and innovation, and the higher the tax the less businesses are able to survive the occasional and inevitable downturn in the business cycle.

One particular aspect of low taxes, that of having a functional economy that operates fairly and aboveboard, is a particular Alberta advantage. It is unfortunate, Mr. Chairman, but true that high taxes force a great deal of the economy underground, including construction and other trades. If half of the profit from a job goes to taxes, it presents an opportunity for two individuals to agree to not report the contract to tax collecting agencies and split the difference in costs savings between them. Incidents of this type of underground market transactions have increased proportionally to the taxes that are levied against legitimate activity.

If we provide an incentive such as the tax credit proposed through section 2 of Bill 207, a greater amount of reported income will result. After all, if a tradesperson wishes to claim the tax credit, they must demonstrate at least as much income as the value of the tools they wish to deduct. This tax would stimulate two objectives: it would offset the high startup costs associated with the trades and also get new tradespeople into the habit of working in the mainstream economy as compared to the underground economy.

Mr. Chairman, the unreported transaction of tradespersons is by its nature very difficult to calculate. However, it has been well established that there are two ways to reduce the incidence of underground trading in the economy. One method is to increase penalties and enforcement for the, quote, unquote, for-cash transaction, and the other method is to reduce the cost of doing business in the regular economy through a tax cut. The first method requires bigger government. The other requires smaller mechanisms to calculate tax breaks but will then provide an income to government through the greater amount of reported economic activity. It has been borne out in countless countries and provinces that if taxes are low, more income is reported. The aphorism "you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar" seems to apply, and Bill 207 would sweeten the pot for tradespeople substantially.

4:10

When we examine the trade-off of costs and benefits in providing a tax credit for tradespeople in Alberta, I would say that the benefits are great and the costs are small. In fact, I would estimate that a great deal of cost would be offset by the economic growth that this strategy could produce.

Mr. Chairman, by helping tradespeople we help all Albertans. Tradespeople are the real producers in our economy. Without tradespeople in Alberta there would be no buildings for lawyers, professors, or accountants to work in, and no electric lights in hospitals for our doctors to operate under. The well-laid plans of an engineer or an architect would never get off the ground without the help of tradespeople. The trades are the key to accomplishing

anything anywhere. [some applause] Mr. Chairman, I am glad to excite that many members with those statements.

The sweat of the trades has been the lubricant of a great economy, and we need to recognize that these individuals provide an essential role. Just imagine our world without skilled contributors such as tradespeople. There is no doubt that these workers contribute far more than just their tax dollars to the well-being of Albertans. Their accomplishments stand the test of time, serving society after they have retired. The building in which we stand is unmistakably an example of that.

Anything that we can do to bring more highly skilled workers into our province should be considered very seriously. We are competing in an increasingly large market for skilled labour, and if Alberta is to maintain its advantage, we must develop the potential of our skilled workers to their fullest. This tax credit, Mr. Chairman, could result in there being a greater number of skilled tradespeople in Alberta than other provinces. I see nothing wrong with that. The trades are the backbone of the economy, and their contributions are not only valuable but integral to the continued growth and the prosperity of all sectors of Alberta's economy.

Mr. Chairman, as our friends in the opposition would I'm sure agree, we already recognize doctors, nurses, and teachers as the backbone of our society and provide them with more after-tax income than any other province. We also know that to recruit and retain skilled workers we have to provide financial incentives above and beyond other provinces. Bill 207 would make a statement that Alberta values our carpenters, electricians, mechanics, stonemasons, steelworkers, welders, and countless other professionals that would benefit from this tax credit above other professionals. This is because trades create real wealth, immeasurable by each and every member of our society.

Economic spin-offs from a highly trained workforce benefit all of society, and therefore there should be some recognition of this in our tax structure to encourage training in these trades. Real wealth, Mr. Chairman, is something you can touch and use, something that improves your quality of life just by being there. Tradespeople optimize what it means to create real wealth in society. Their labour can be seen for years, even decades after they have left the jobsite and goes on contributing to our lives at a value far beyond what can be turned off with a light switch or as large as the Legislature, but each represents assets that allow the rest of the society to function.

A tax credit for carpenters could result in us all having a greater number of buildings in which we could work or live, while a tax credit for electricians provides light switches so that we all may see better. A tax credit for mechanics would keep our cars running, while a tax credit for welders would help resource companies build pipelines to ship their products to the markets. Having more tradespeople operating in this province would provide greater productivity and productive capacity to create tangible wealth, and the whole society would prosper from the abundance of working capital that the tradespeople provide. All we have to do is formulate a strategy to bring them to the Alberta advantage to a greater degree, and Bill 207 accomplishes that.

Mr. Chairman, the Alberta advantage has become very clear in recent months. While economies are discussing how to manage an economic downturn, Alberta is in the enviable position of having to manage its amazing growth. Even with the downturn in oil and gas prices we have maintained a strong economic performance and can say without boast or undue optimism that the Alberta advantage will outperform the majority of other world economies by a comfortable margin and all other economies in Canada. We are recognized as an economy that thrives on innovation and diversification, supporting a high quality of life and opportunity to excel in countless sectors.

However, we must give serious consideration to how to best manage our growth and how to ensure that we have the skilled labour resources to build homes for new Albertans and construct workshops and factories for expanding industry.

Ultimately I support Bill 207 because it helps out the little guy, the hardworking tradesperson who is just starting out as an employee. This bill could provide the right kind of incentive for young Albertans to choose a career in the trades and to grow with Alberta's industry. Everyone wants a high-paying job, but if the start-up costs are prohibitive, what then? Bill 207 provides a step in the right direction to offsetting some of the high start-up costs for employee tradespeople and might even attract a greater number of young men and women seeking to start a career in the trades. This bill provides us with an opportunity to strike a new balance and a competitiveness in the labour market by attracting the right kind of workers to an economy that aims to create real wealth for all Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, I urge all of my colleagues to support this strategy for growth and a higher level of competitiveness for the entire economy of Alberta. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my honour to speak in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act. There have been a lot of speakers on this today, and it reminds me a little bit of Elizabeth Taylor's fifth husband: he knew what he was there for, but he knew there was a high risk of repetition.

The tools deduction amendment act could be very, very important to rural Alberta. I do know that we have people in this province that have worked hard and done a lot of things right. We've had a friendly tax environment. We have an expanded economy, and it has benefited us all. But there is one thing that I believe we have been lacking with this Alberta advantage that we have built, and this is in the area of rural Alberta. Many of our small communities have been lacking skilled workers in all of our trades. Mr. Chairman, I want to give a few examples.

4:20

Certainly when a farmer or anyone in the agriculture service industry that's out fighting against the weather and trying to get their work done breaks down and has to hire a technician or a service agent that's got to travel for 150 kilometres or more to come and get them going again, it is very, very frustrating. I do believe that this tax credit proposal of Bill 207 could help alleviate some of those problems. Now, when we think of all of the machines and the machinery that need repairing and need service, we have to have highly professional technicians that do this, especially now with all the electrical and computerized components that are on the machinery. So I would like very much to support this bill in that regard.

I do believe that the \$5,000 may not be high enough, because I do know that when my young fellow went to NAIT to take diesel mechanics, he had \$2,500 spent one morning before I even got up, and I get up at 5:30 in the morning. It is very, very costly for that, and of course employers do not provide tools for a lot of professions.

Mr. Chairman, what I'd like to say is that I'd like to support this bill. I do think that we could not proclaim it for a while, until the financial situation got turned around, and then it would be a great asset to our industries.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Might we have unanimous consent to introduce guests that are in the Assembly today?

THE CHAIRMAN: May we have unanimous consent to revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to introduce to the Assembly staff that are here from the Stollery children's hospital. They are here today to see if the debate on Bill 209, which is the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, comes forward, because they've actually had a lot of participation in the bill. We're pleased to see you with us here today, and I would ask that Mrs. Jackie Petruk, the executive director; Kathy Nykolyshyn; Lori Balch; and Laurie McCaffery rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Bill 207

Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001 (continued)

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It indeed gives me pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 207. I think what happens is we don't put enough emphasis and enough importance on the trades, and I would also like to suggest that to support the trades in the province is very important to all of us. We have to also understand the burdens that are faced by these young individuals who are coming into the trades. The high cost of equipment – the purchase, the rental, the maintenance, and the insurance of portable tools – is one avenue where there is an opportunity for a deduction. This opportunity for a deduction is not for individuals who go to a job that don't need, if you want to call it, extra expense or extra equipment to be able to perform their jobs. In most of the jobs that are performed by trades, they all do need their own tools.

I would also suggest that this is not a gift that is given, that there is a lot of credibility behind this bill. The individuals that would be able to have some opportunity to be involved in the opportunities of this bill need receipts, and they need a certificate from their employer stating where the tools were purchased, also ensuring that it's going to be used on the jobsite. I think that that adds a lot of credibility that this is not just a gift to some individual group.

I would also say that with the discussion of a \$5,000 cap in that amount to the tradesman is also accountability so that you don't end up in a situation where you can earn X amount of money and claim it all in tools in the first year, that you do have basically a cap.

I would also like to say that I do believe that it encourages young people to be able to get into the trades. When you are a young tradesman or, first of all, let's say, a high school student coming out of high school and looking for a vocation and knowing that there is some opportunity to be able to have deductions on some of the equipment that you may purchase, it may be a turning point in your decision. I stress again that we really do need the tradesmen. I mean, when was the last time one of you had the opportunity to look under the hood of your car and try to figure out what's happening?

MRS. NELSON: On Saturday.

MR. DANYLUK: On Saturday? And how was it? We're not supposed to discuss. I'm sorry, sir. I will carry on.

All we have to do, Mr. Chairman, is look around these halls and look at the work that tradesmen have done and we have been enjoying for many years.

Also, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that in Alberta the tradespersons play an important role in Alberta's economy, and it would be disastrous to experience a tradesperson labour shortage, as we presently are. If this bill helps in any way to encourage young Albertans to enter the trades and fuel the economy and if it assists with the current shortage of tradesmen and encourages youngsters to enter the trades, then I believe this bill has a very positive advantage.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity today to rise and speak to Bill 207. It is always an honour for me to speak in the Assembly to the business before hon. members, but today it is even more of an honour to speak to a bill that will see taxes lowered for hardworking Albertans.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin today by focusing my comments on section 2(2) of the bill, which outlines the formula by which the tools deduction will be calculated for tradespeople. I would like to commend the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for developing a formula that is both fair and simple. One of the guiding principles of the 1998 Alberta Tax Review Committee's report entitled *Future Direction for Personal Income Taxes in Alberta* is the idea of simplicity and transparency. In fact, the report indicated that the need for simplicity was a primary consideration for the committee. Submissions to the committee repeatedly stressed the need to keep the tax system simple. Too many Canadians and Albertans are confused by the complexity of the current system, and too few understand how their taxes are determined.

Well, the formula developed by the hon. member conforms to the spirit of the recommendations made by this committee and the new tax policy as adopted by the government through the Alberta Income Tax Act. It is simple, easy to understand, and easy to calculate. Some individuals have argued that this bill would increase administrative costs associated with the collection of taxes, that somehow this new deduction would be difficult to monitor. Mr. Chairman, that is simply not the case. I would like to point out that administrative costs are already being incurred in ensuring that filings with the government are accurate and honest. This new deduction would not unnecessarily add to the work of officials within the Department of Finance.

Secondly, Mr. Chairman, tradespeople, like all Albertans who make deduction claims, keep receipts. This is neither cumbersome nor an outrageous expectation. It is done on a daily basis by tax-conscious Albertans, who must do these sorts of things when paying taxes to our Liberal friends in Ottawa.

4:30

Other opponents of this tax deduction also point out that this law fails to recognize other occupations, that somehow by recognizing the tradespeople of this province in this manner, we would be ignoring the plight of other sectors of the Alberta workforce. Again, Mr. Chairman, this is not the case. This bill will benefit not an industry but rather an entire sector of our economy: plumbers, welders, carpenters, electricians, mechanics, journeymen tradespeople.

Basically, anyone who uses tools on a daily basis will benefit from this bill, and I wish to point out that most other occupations do not require at least \$500 in materials to facilitate work.

Finally, Bill 207 is important for Alberta because it will help us to address the growing gap between the success of our economy and our ability to supply qualified workers and tradesmen to fuel that success. One only need look through the paper to find the documented success of our markets. I appreciate, Mr. Chairman, that we are in the midst of difficult times these days, but Alberta more than any other province is well positioned to ride out the cycle. According to the Centre for Spatial Economics, Alberta's economy will not fall victim to an oil field bust in the next decade. Investment in our oil and gas sector will be strong with approximately \$42 billion being invested in the Wood Buffalo-Cold Lake region over the next 10 years. Alberta's gross domestic product will grow an average of 3 percent from 2001 to 2006 with employment up 2 percent a year and population growth up 1 percent in each of those years. Unemployment will remain at 5 percent or less. Mr. Chairman, the potential is here for tremendous growth, especially when you consider that the projects planned in the Wood Buffalo-Cold Lake region were planned to proceed based on oil being sold at \$17 or \$18 per barrel.

We don't need to look 10 years down the road to see the impact of growth on our economy. Alberta Finance reports that in August building permits were up 8.3 percent in Alberta. Who, Mr. Chairman, will fill these requests? The point of all this is that Alberta will need a skilled workforce to make these projects happen. Not only that, but we need a skilled workforce of tradesmen and apprentices who will be able to fuel Alberta's economy well into the future. We have seen over the last decade how specialized labour shortages can affect our province. For years now it seems as though with such a robust economy we have had to constantly play catch-up, trying to find skilled tradesmen and journeymen to facilitate growth.

Bill 207 will help our current workforce and encourage our young people to seriously consider entering the trades. The price of tools can be burdensome to a young person thinking about entering the trades. We talk a good game about encouraging our youth to consider other options than universities. Now is the time for us to back that talk with action. I appreciate that now is not one of the best times to be amending Alberta's tax code, but it's the proper time to seize the initiative to ensure that Alberta's workforce is where it needs to be. Tax relief is an achievement for all Albertans that want government tax policy to be fair and not penalize them for making good choices, good choices such as going into the trades as apprentices and journeymen. This province, Mr. Chairman, is no stranger to the benefits of tax relief.

We have an opportunity to encourage young Albertans to seriously look at the trades. We have an opportunity for adults to go back to classes and update their skills. We have an opportunity to provide the necessary support to current journeymen and workers across the province who fuel the engine of Alberta's good times. Bill 207 is not only responsible but is also reasonable with sections such as 2(2) and the basic level needed for tax relief.

Mr. Chairman, I encourage members of the Assembly to support Bill 207 and provide the tradespeople of this province with the support necessary to move this province ahead. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to speak in support of Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Deduction) Amendment Act, 2001. I am the representative for the citizens of Edmonton-Glenora. I grew up in the west end of

the riding when it was the town of Jasper Place. My father was a mechanic. My next-door neighbour was an electrician. The people across the street: there was a heavy-duty mechanic and a sheet metal worker. When I went door-knocking in January and February, I met with the people of the west end of my riding. These people are the next generation of the hardworking Albertans that we call the Alberta advantage.

When we examine the trade-offs and the costs and benefits in providing a tax credit to tradespeople in Alberta, I would say that the benefits are great and the costs are small. In fact, I would estimate that a great deal of the costs would be offset by the economic growth and strategy that it would produce.

I was at NAIT last night, Mr. Chairman, and I toured the facility, seeing the expansion of people that were moving into the trades in this province. We are seeing an incredible increase not only in our economy with the GDP, but we're seeing people going into the trades that are working 24 hours seven days a week, 365 days a year for the people of Alberta. Those are the blue-collar, severely normal Albertans that are out there, and they need assistance, that little bit of a leg up starting out in the apprenticeship program. I know that the tools my father had to purchase when he was working in his trade were not supplied by his employer. He had to set aside some moneys to buy a large number of tools that he required to work on cars and trucks at the dealership that he worked at for 25 years before his death.

The citizens of Glenora, whom I represent, would see this as a great bill for this government to pass, and I wholeheartedly support Bill 207, Mr. Chairman. By helping tradespeople, we help Albertans. Tradespeople are the real producers in our economy. Without tradespeople in Alberta there would be no buildings for lawyers, professors, or accountants to work in, and no electric lights in hospitals for our doctors to operate under, no Legislature lights.

MR. LUKASZUK: Or in the Annex for the Liberals.

MR. HUTTON: Or in the Annex for the Liberals, for that matter.

What we are looking at, Mr. Chairman, is the Alberta advantage. This fits in the tax policies of this government. This encourages young Albertans to enter the trades and fuel this economy. The engine of growth for this economy is the small operators, and that includes the blue-collar tradespeople.

I support Bill 207 for the constituents in my riding and the lower middle-income people that reside there. I hope that my colleagues in the House today that have stood up before me will continue to champion Bill 207 and that we will see this passed so that the citizens of Alberta that are moving into the apprenticeship programs can buy the proper tools so that they can do the jobs that will help this province's growth in the next decade or several decades.

I thank you for your time, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's nice to see how many people are so enthusiastic about the passage of this bill and how many people are so eager to speak on it. I'm certainly one that fits into the group that's eager to support this bill, and I commend the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing forth a bill that I feel has been long overdue.

I spent about 17 years as a quasi-employer, as a county councillor that employed a number of mechanics. I became acutely aware of how expensive tools can be and how quickly they have to be replaced due to a number of factors such as wear-out, surprisingly

enough, loss, and actually adding to your tool collection to adapt to new types of equipment that is out there that you have to work on. So there are a lot of new tools that have to be purchased, and your collection can become in the thousands of dollars after a short period of time.

I also believe that this bill as amended provides the adequate limits to prevent any abuse of the system. The \$5,000 cap instituted through the amendment would keep it to a limit that wouldn't allow people to purchase tools and pass them on through the black market, if that's a concern, and buy tools for someone else.

4:40

I believe it's ironic that the employers of the same tradespeople that Bill 207 refers to can deduct the cost of the tools that they provide to service their customers. The employers provide a certain amount of tools, say, in a garage or service station, but the mechanics that they hire have to provide the rest themselves. The employers can not only deduct the cost of those tools that they provide, but they also deduct the cost of the employment of the tradespeople themselves. So it seems to be an unlevel playing field.

I appreciate the comments of the Provincial Treasurer. It is a difficult time to introduce new tax deductions due to the downturn in our economy, but as I said before, I believe this is long overdue. We've got a labour shortage in this province. The minister of human resources has referred to this several times in the course of this sitting and over the past couple of years. We're on the move in this province, and the trades is one area where there is a shortage. Not passing this bill just creates a disincentive to young people entering the trades. I believe Bill 207 to some degree reduces that disincentive, providing a little bit of tax relief for the purchase of those tools.

Mr. Chairman, as I stated at the outset, I believe that this bill is long overdue. I'm encouraged by the number of people that have spoken to it. To speak any longer would become repetitious of things that have already been said, but I'd also add my encouragement to all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise just to ask an open question to the sponsor of the bill or anyone else. Has there been a cost analysis done for this bill?

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, and I'll answer the question for the hon. member. No, there hasn't been.

I thank the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for taking the bold initiative to introduce this bill to recognize the extraordinary expenses that Alberta tradespeople have. Just briefly, Mr. Chairman, I do want to congratulate the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for making the amendment. That reflects accurately the intention of this bill, and that is to provide a tool credit.

I'm a licensed tradesman and proud of it. I think there's only one other member in this Assembly. Many of my past co-workers and now my constituents have encouraged me to support and speak to this bill. Both owners and employees at our thousands of shops and jobsites across this province will finally get the recognition for their contribution to the growth of our vibrant province. The absence of the tool credit places many trades at a disadvantage when competing for the future work in our bubbling economy. I believe, colleagues, that by supporting this bill, we can again strengthen the Alberta advantage, as we've heard many others talk about earlier. It fits with

the low-tax philosophy of our government while leaving more cash in the pockets of Albertans. This tool credit may even encourage young Albertans to enter the trades and further fuel our economy. I'd thought that this credit coupled with further encouragement might even have some retired tradespeople put their coveralls back on. I thought maybe even the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky might consider that with this credit.

This province is very short of good tradespeople, and anything to keep and encourage a healthy, vibrant source of trained Albertans should be supported. I am proud to stand in this Assembly to support Bill 207.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In accordance with my responsibility to represent my constituents, I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 207. As some members may be aware, I have a background in the trades apprenticeship program in the province of Alberta. I received trade qualification in this program in the mid-1970s, and for 25 years I have indentured many young, productive Albertans as apprentices. These Albertans have gone forward in many cases as successful business owners themselves employing and indenturing apprentices to raise the number of qualified tradespersons in our province.

The technological advances in many trades have made it necessary for those involved to purchase expensive tools and test equipment on an ongoing basis to keep pace with requirements of their trade. A young lady, a constituent of mine, has expressed her concern in the following letter.

As per correspondence below, could you please provide any information as to the progress of Bill 207. Is there yet a chance of the bill going to third reading and being brought into law? For what it's worth, you have my support, and that of my boyfriend, in pushing to finally get some relief from the price of these tools. He is apprenticing as a heavy-duty mechanic and absolutely loves it; he is intent on being successful, and we will therefore deal with the cost as best we can regardless of the political outcome. We are not extravagant people – he is making do with a number of borrowed tools, and most of the new ones have been purchased either from Sears or Canadian Tire. Eventually he will need more specialized tools, some of which are apparently eight or nine-hundred dollars each. And if you cheap out on the toolbox . . . you can expect it to break within 6 months. A quality toolbox that will bear up under the weight is at least \$3,000.

Your success would take an enormous amount of financial stress (and therefore household stress) from us. Please accept our encouragement in continuing to push for Bill 207. Thanks very much for your time.

So, Mr. Chairman, you can see that we do have support in our communities and that constituents are interested in this endeavour. In addition to this, I have also tabled in this House an additional number of letters in support of this legislation.

On another point, it's been suggested that individuals could incorporate as business entities and get relief with respect to tax exemptions for capital costs. This, Mr. Chairman, is not an option for persons working as employees or contractors of a company. Revenue Canada requires such businesses to have more than one source of revenue. Single-source revenue businesses may be deemed to be avoidance schemes.

Mr. Chairman, Bill 207 has support from a broad range of tradespeople and is a credible means to put much-needed resources back in the hands of young individuals and families who will continue to strengthen the Alberta advantage. This bill will

encourage Albertans to join or in many cases to stay in the trades and is anticipated to benefit Alberta over the long haul.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

4:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our time is close to running out here. I just would like to make a final comment and first of all to express my appreciation on behalf of the constituents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and also other Albertans who are interested in this particular bill to those who have voiced support for it.

Mr. Chairman, when I have been campaigning and have been out in the community, anytime I come across a person who wishes to talk about taxes and things like that, I often mention to them that this bill is before the Legislature. Other members have expressed the same, that when they are talking with their constituents and they talk about this bill, there's one thing – it's never failed that I have the same reaction from all people, and that is that this bill just makes sense. It makes sense because they understand that businesspeople can deduct expenses to produce revenue, and as employees they are unable to incorporate, as has been mentioned by one of the speakers, and are unable to have many of the kinds of tax advantage schemes that all sorts of other people are able to take advantage of. In order to contribute to the economy of Alberta, in order to move ahead in their trades and have the best tools to work with that they can possibly afford, it's only appropriate that they don't pay for that with after-tax dollars.

This bill, Mr. Chairman and fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly, will help to do that, and I urge your support for Bill 207. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 207 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:53 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Gordon	Mason
Boutilier	Hancock	Massey
Calahasen	Hlady	Nicol
Cao	Hutton	O'Neill
Cardinal	Jablonski	Ouellette
Cenaiko	Klapstein	Pham
Coutts	Knight	Rathgeber

Doerksen	Kryczka	Smith
Ducharme	Lougheed	Snelgrove
Dunford	Lukaszuk	Strang
Forsyth	Marz	VanderBurg
Fritz	Maskell	Yankowsky
Against the motion:		
Blakeman	Haley	Nelson
DeLong	Herard	Taft
Graydon	Magnus	Vandermeer
Totals:	For – 36	Against – 9

[Motion to report Bill 207 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The bill shall be reported when the committee rises.

Bill 208 Alberta Official Song Act

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, I would like to thank the hon. colleagues in the House for having passed the bill at second reading. Secondly, my appreciation goes to a large number of Albertans across our province who have shown support for the idea and sent in their works on the Alberta theme song. For example, 93-year-old Emily Waggot of Edmonton came to my office the other day and gave me her lyrics. Her attending family member told me later that the Alberta song idea has kept this senior lady energized and lively like never before. Her lyrics go like this:

Alberta has lots of sunshine,
A friendly welcome there,
With lots of cities, that are so pretty,
Also has plenty of rivers, lakes, streams,
There're strong mountains, forests, hills and plains.
A delight to see.
Animals, people, birds, fish, wild flowers grow,
Trees of fruit that one can eat,
Mean so much to me.
We're proud of our Alberta,
Would like the world to see.

So that is from a 93-year-old lady.

Mr. Chairman, the recent horrific events of terror and their repercussions are now constantly on our mind. Sometimes it seems there is little room for respite from these events. However, there are still many good things going on in our lives. We have our families. We have our Alberta communities. We have a province of hard-working and innovative citizens. We have nurses and doctors, engineers and scientists, law enforcement officers, firemen, artists, teachers, and legislators too, among the best in the world helping to shape the future of our province. We have beautiful mountains, lakes, prairies, and wildlife. In fact, some good things may have been catalyzed by this event. I believe we have a renewed sense of community. I believe we have a greater impetus to give and to be with our families and loved ones. We have a new and bold perspective with which to seek to build our futures. This is something that should be recognized and celebrated to help us to move on with our lives.

That is why I believe that introducing an official song in our province, showing our proud community and the many great opportunities in our province, is more timely than ever. Now is the time to remind ourselves of our proud past and the great potential of

the future. Now is the time to rejuvenate our confidence. Now is the time to celebrate, and now is the time for Alberta to sing.

5:10

Mr. Chairman, I wish to address three major points today about the Alberta official song. First, I want to expand on how the bill proposes to seek out and adopt an official song for our province. Secondly, I want to talk about the value of music, how it can help develop the sense of identity and how it can motivate and inspire. I want to emphasize the qualities of music that make having an official song such a good idea. Finally, I wish to address the concerns that members of this Assembly may have that adopting this official song will seal Alberta's regionalism sentiment.

Mr. Chairman, this bill would establish a nonpartisan committee of this Legislature to solicit submissions of songs that could be adopted as an official song for our province. The bill is specific in citing that the membership of this committee should come from all political parties. This detail is included to reaffirm the objective of the bill: an effort to unite Alberta, an effort to find commonality that links all Albertans no matter what their background. Also on this committee will be members of Alberta's music community, hopefully including a wide variety of academic music experts, music industry specialists, and experienced musicians. These members will compose the majority of the committee and will back up the MLAs in whatever musical expertise they may not have.

This Alberta official song committee will seek submissions for songs and lyrics in any way it chooses. It may be performance; there may be subcommittees traveling across the province. The only certain rule is that the submissions must be open to all Albertans, giving everyone a chance to let the Alberta pride shine. When the committee has ultimately agreed on one selection, this song will be brought forward to the Legislature to be adopted as Alberta's official song.

I think it is important to note that the Alberta official song committee will not necessarily seek a new song. Already several well-known tunes exist relating to Alberta. Many less well-known songs that have already been written may surface in the selection process. The point of the committee will not necessarily be to seek the original work but to seek the work that could appropriately be deemed Alberta's official song. So, Mr. Chairman, that is how the bill works, plain and simple: no frills, no whistles, just a clear, open process to selecting an official song for our province.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I wish to elaborate on the value of music and why Alberta needs an official song. Billy Joel, an American rock and roller who has inspired generations of fans from the 1970s to today, once said: I think music in itself is feeling; it's an explosive expression of humanity; it's something we are all touched by, and no matter what culture we're from, everyone loves music.

You don't need to be a rock fan to understand what he meant. The power of music is enormous. When we hear music, it resonates inside us. I don't think any of us could explain quite how, but it evokes emotion. It helps us understand things in a way different than talking about something or seeing something. When a group of friends sing a song together, it is a symbol, a confirmation of action, that these friends have something in common, that they are truly bound by something greater than themselves. A song is a rallying point for people of a state, a province, or a sports club. Songs stir the dormant passion inside all of us, lighting up our sense of pride. This is why we ought to have a song for this province, so that at moments when we desire most to be united and inspired, we will have something to help fill this need. At sporting events and formal functions we will be uplifted by a mighty, invisible power, the power of music. I think ordinary Albertans understand this power of an

official song. That is why they have responded so enthusiastically to the idea of this bill.

Since last spring when Bill 208 went through its second reading, I know our offices have been flooded with the interest of Albertans living across the province. Schools and choirs have called to see if they can submit a song as a group. Chat groups have been set up on the Internet to look for possibilities. Recommendations for songs from a wide variety of musical tastes have been pouring in, from country and western to reggae. People have sent lyrics, CDs, and tapes, beaming with pride about what they have written, in the hope it will be considered to become a permanent symbol of Alberta. Clearly, Mr. Chairman, the response to even the idea of the song has been enormous. It has been overwhelmingly positive. For me it just proves why Bill 208 ought to be passed by this Legislature. The notion of a song has sparked the interest and enthusiasm of Albertans. Their spirit has been uplifted, and that is the main objective of this bill.

Alberta will not be the only province with a song if we adopt one in 2005. In fact, Newfoundland has had an official tune since 1979 as well. Almost all states of the U.S.A. proudly boast of having an official song. Some even have two or three. Rather than contributing to regionalism, these songs have promoted their identity within a nation. The same would be the case for Alberta. Moreover, by having the song adopted during Alberta's 2005 centennial anniversary, as Bill 208 stipulates, we are emphasizing the very innocent and celebratory nature of the song. In my opinion, in fact, I would like to see all provinces eventually adopt a provincial song. Perhaps Canada as a country is too young to have felt its provinces deserved a song, or perhaps Canadian provinces have traditionally been more shy than our friends in the south to sing out loud about how good it is to be here. In either case, these are not reasons why all Canadian provinces and Alberta in particular should not adopt songs now.

At 100 years of age Alberta is definitely mature enough to have had many important achievements, people, passions, and dreams to sing about. Well, yes, boasting is a bad thing to do, just like our mothers always said, but in the form of boasting like this, it is good fun. Hopefully in adopting a song, Alberta will be setting the trend, like we usually do, for the other provinces to follow. The decision to co-ordinate the adoption of the official song with the 2005 centennial serves to emphasize the celebratory nature of the song. Alberta is reaching a century of achievements, of extraordinary growth and development. Albertans have worked hard over that century to build a strong and dynamic province, to build a strong and dynamic country. This is something to be proud of, something truly worth celebrating.

Over the next three years the government will be encouraging and supporting Albertans as they plan to develop projects and events celebrating the centennial. The centennial legacy will provide funding for communities to build and renovate facilities to celebrate in. The centennial celebration program also provides support for rodeos, parades, and other events. In addition to this legacy and celebration project, the province will be involved in putting on a number of provincewide events and mementos. This might include the production of coins and flags in special edition. In this context, Mr. Chairman, you can see that adopting an official song will be as good as or better than a lot of other celebrations. The celebration of 2005 as our anniversary would stir pride in Alberta, but this pride would be in the context of a greater Canadian pride, which Albertans hold dear to their hearts. In selecting the song in the centennial, the uplifting, celebratory nature of the song would be rightfully emphasized, limiting room for misinterpretation. If we are going to choose an official song for Alberta, 2005 is the year to do it.

5:20

Mr. Chairman, I have outlined to you and my colleagues today that Bill 208 proposes to solicit and adopt an official song for our province. I have spoken about the tremendous potential the song has to help stir Albertans and how Albertans have already responded to this opportunity.

Before I conclude, I would like to share with you and the members here some of the musical lyrics from many Albertans received by my office. Our Premier's office and many of our colleagues' constituency offices have received and passed on to me a large number of Albertans' work on the Alberta song theme.

For example, Pat McIntyre of Spruce Grove wrote: "My parents and I have lived in Alberta all our lives. My Alberta song reflects how we feel about Alberta." The sample of her lyrics goes as follows:

Land that stretches out far as the eye can see,
No other place in the world I'd rather be.
Majestic mountains, gently rolling hills,
The call of the loon in a lake so still,
Patchwork of farmers' fields displayed for all to see.
Making me feel at home, making me free.
Alberta is where I want to be.
It's a great place to raise a family.
The pioneering spirit is still alive.
With each other's help we can all thrive.

Jack Sanderson of Peace River wrote, "My dad and his parents came here in 1906 from England, first settled in Stettler." His lyrics go:

Alberta, Alberta, the land of the rose,
Where from under the ground,
Our black oil flows.
With cattle and grain our fields abound.
Alberta, Alberta, we'll make you great.
Alberta, Alberta, you'll become first rate.
You'll be the envy of Canada to see.
Alberta, Alberta, for you and for me.

As the last but not the least example, I received from 97-year-old John Peets of Edmonton via the Hon. Lieutenant Governor, Lois Hole, and our Premier's office:

Alberta! You are where it's at
With mountains high, and prairies flat
With valleys deep, and lakes and streams
So beautiful, their luster gleams . . .
Alberta! You are where it's at:
It's where I like to hang my hat.
It is the place that's home to me
And fills my soul with ecstasy
Alberta's mine, I love you so
From the top of head to tip of toe
Your name enralls me mightily
It's where I always want to be
It throbs with life, and I like best
To sing its praises with great zest.

Mr. Chairman, having an official song is an excellent idea for Alberta, and it's something Albertans support. After passing through second reading, the idea of an Alberta song is known across Alberta.

Hon. colleagues of the House, passing Bill 208 will give our 25th Legislature a landmark for the Alberta song for our centennial. Your passing of Bill 208 and its song selection will give Albertans of all ages, of all walks of life, from all corners a celebrating spirit for a bright future. Now is the time for Alberta to search for an official song.

My hon. colleagues of the House, many Albertans and I are looking forward to your support passing Bill 208. For that, I thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Given the hour, I would move that the committee rise and report . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Report progress on Bill 208?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you. I would move that we report our business when the committee rises.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports Bill 207 with some amendments. The committee reports progress on Bill

208. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, November 21, 2001

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/11/21

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Transmittal of Estimates

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I have received a certain message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the 2001-02 supplementary estimates. These supplementary estimates will provide additional spending authority to the office of the Ethics Commissioner and five departments of government. When passed, these estimates will authorize a \$355,113,000 increase in voted operating expense and capital investment plus an \$80 million increase in nonbudgetary disbursements. The increase in government spending will be more than offset by the corrective fiscal actions announced on October 18, 2001. Also, \$2,797,000 will be transferred from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer to the support of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, section 8 of the Government Accountability Act requires that the government table a new and amended consolidated fiscal plan when there is another set of estimates. This afternoon I tabled an amended fiscal plan 2001-2002 quarterly budget report for the second quarter in this Legislative Assembly.

head: Government Motions

Referral of Supplementary Supply Estimates

18. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that the message of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2001-02 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 18 carried]

19. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 2001-02 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund shall be one day.

[Government Motion 19 carried]

Auditor General and Information and Privacy Commissioner Search Committee

20. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that

(1) A Select Special Auditor General and Information and

Privacy Commissioner Search Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed consisting of the following members, namely Mrs. Tarchuk, chairman; Mr. Ducharme, deputy chairman; Ms Blakeman; Mr. Friedel; Ms Graham; Mrs. O'Neill; Dr. Pannu; Dr. Taft; and Mr. Tannas for the purpose of inviting applications for the positions of Auditor General and Information and Privacy Commissioner and to recommend to the Assembly the applicants it considers most suitable for appointment to those positions.

- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most current Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (4) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of members of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly.
- (5) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (6) When its work has been completed, the committee shall report to the Assembly if it is then sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Amendments to Standing Orders

21. Mr. Stevens moved:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended as follows:

1. Standing Order 4 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 4(1) If at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m.
 - (2) If at 5:15 p.m. on Monday, the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, the committee shall rise and report immediately.
 - (3) If at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned until the next sitting day.
 - (4) If at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, the Chairman leaves the Chair until 8:00 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the next sitting day.
 - (5) At 5:30 p.m. on Thursday the Speaker adjourns the Assembly, without question put, until Monday.

2. Standing Order 5 is amended by adding the following after suborder (1):
 - (1.1) If, during a sitting of the Assembly, a question of quorum arises, the division bells shall be sounded for one minute and if a quorum is then not present, the Speaker may declare a recess or adjourn the Assembly until the next sitting day.
3. Standing Order 7 is amended by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

7(1) The ordinary daily routine business in the Assembly shall be as follows:

 - O Canada* (First sitting day of each week)
 - Introduction of Visitors
 - Introduction of Guests
 - Ministerial Statements
 - Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes
 - Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)
 - Members' Statements (Tuesday and Thursday)
 - Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees
 - Presenting Petitions
 - Notices of Motions
 - Introduction of Bills
 - Tabling Returns and Reports
 - Projected Government Business (Thursday)
4. Standing Order 8 is amended
 - (a) by striking out suborders (1) to (3) and substituting the following:
 - 8(1) On Monday afternoon, after the daily routine, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
 - Written Questions
 - Motions for Returns
 - Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders
 - (2) On Monday evening, from 8 p.m. until 9 p.m., the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
 - Motions other than Government Motions
 - (3) On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, on Monday evening commencing at 9 p.m. and on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:
 - Government Motions
 - Government Bills and Orders
 - Private Bills
 - (b) in suborder (4) by striking out "55 minutes of debate" and substituting "60 minutes of debate and 5 minutes for the mover of the motion to close debate".
 - (c) by adding the following after suborder (4):
 - (4.1) Before the mover closes debate on a motion under suborder (4), a member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that provides for the motion under consideration to be moved to the bottom of that item of business on the Order Paper.
 - (d) by striking out suborder (6) and substituting the following:
 - (6) Before the mover of a motion for second or third reading of a Public Bill other than a Government Bill closes debate, or the time limit is reached for consideration at Committee of the Whole under suborder (5)(a)(ii), a member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that the votes necessary to conclude consideration at that stage be postponed for 10 sitting days or the first opportunity after that for the consideration of the Bill, unless there are other Bills awaiting consideration at that stage in which case the Bill will be called after the Bills at that stage have been considered.
5. Standing Order 18 is amended
 - (a) in suborder 1(h) by adding " , except as provided under Standing Order 49" after "committee";
 - (b) by adding the following after suborder (2):
 - (3) In this Standing Order, "adjournment motion" includes daily adjournment motions and any motion to adjourn the proceedings of the Assembly for a specified or unspecified period.
6. Standing Order 20 is amended by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

20(1) In a debate on a motion, if a member moves an amendment, that member may only speak to the amendment and the main question in one speech.
7. Standing Order 21 is struck out and the following is substituted:

21(1) A member of the Executive Council may, on at least one day's notice, propose a motion for the purpose of allotting a specified number of hours for consideration and disposal of proceedings on a Government motion or a Government Bill and the motion shall not be subject to debate or amendment except as provided in suborder (3).

 - (2) A motion under suborder (1)
 - (a) that applies to a Government Bill shall only refer to one stage of consideration for the Bill;
 - (b) shall only apply when the Bill or motion that is the subject of the time allocation motion has already been debated in the Assembly or been considered in Committee of the Whole.
 - (3) A member of the Executive Council may outline the reasons for the motion under suborder (1) and a member of the Official Opposition may respond but neither speech may exceed 5 minutes.
8. Standing Order 23 is amended by striking out clause (g) and substituting the following:
 - (g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination
 - (i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence, including any appeals and the expiry of appeal periods from the time of judgment, or
 - (ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding, until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court, where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate;
9. Standing Order 29 is struck out and the following is substituted:

29(1) Time limits on speaking in debate in the Assembly on Government motions, Government Bills and orders and private Bills shall be as follows:

 - (a)(i) the Premier,
 - (ii) the Leader of the Official Opposition, and
 - (iii) the mover on the occasion of the Budget Address

shall be limited to 90 minutes' speaking time;

- (b) the mover in debate on a resolution or on a Bill shall be limited to 20 minutes' speaking time in opening debate and 15 minutes in closing debate;
 - (c) the member who speaks immediately following the mover in debate on a resolution or on a Bill shall be limited to 20 minutes;
 - (d) except as provided in clauses (a) to (c), no member shall speak for longer than 15 minutes in debate.
- (2) (a) Subject to clause (b), following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each member's questions and comments;
- (b) the 5 minute question and comment period referred to in clause (a) is not available following the speech from
- (i) the mover of the resolution or the Bill in opening or closing debate, and
 - (ii) the member who speaks immediately after the mover.
- (3) Time limits on speaking in debate on motions other than Government motions, public Bills and orders other than Government Bills and orders, written questions and motions for returns shall be as follows:
- (a) the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition shall be limited to 20 minutes' speaking time;
 - (b) the mover in debate of a resolution or a Bill shall be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time and 5 minutes to close debate;
 - (c) all other members shall be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time in debate.
10. Standing Order 30(4) is amended in clause (a) by adding "the debate proceeds and" before "the Speaker".
11. Standing Order 32 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
- (2.1) When a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells.
12. Standing Order 34 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
- (2.1) Amendments to written questions and motions for returns must
- (a) be approved by Parliamentary Counsel on the sitting day preceding the day the amendment is moved, and
 - (b) be provided to the mover of the written question or motion for a return no later than 11 a.m. on the day the amendment is to be moved.
13. Standing Order 37 is amended by adding the following after suborder (3):
- (4) For the purposes of this Standing Order and Standing Order 37.1, a tabling must be in paper form.
14. The following is added after Standing Order 37:
- 37.1(1) Documents may be tabled by providing the required number of copies to the Clerk before 11 a.m. any day the Assembly sits.
- (2) When the Clerk receives a tabling under suborder (1) that is in order, the Clerk shall read the title of the tabling when Tabling Returns and Reports is called in the daily routine.
15. Standing Order 39.1 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 39.2 and adding the following before Standing Order 39.2:
- 39.1(1) The sequence of motions other than Government motions shall be determined by a random draw of names of members who have submitted written notice to the Clerk no later than 3 days prior to the date of the draw.
- (2) The draw referred to in suborder (1) shall be held on a date set by the Speaker in the July preceding the session that the motions are expected to be moved.
- (3) Prior to a motion other than a Government motion being moved, members may switch the positions in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Speaker.
- (4) A member who has a motion other than a Government motion on the Order Paper may, upon providing 4 sitting days' notice, withdraw the motion before it is to be moved in the Assembly.
- (5) When a motion is withdrawn under suborder (4), the Order Paper shall indicate "withdrawn" next to the motion number.
16. Standing Order 48 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 48(1) and by adding the following after suborder (1):
- (2) Dissolution has the effect of nullifying an order or address of the Assembly for returns or papers.
17. The following is added after Standing Order 48:
- 48.1 A member of the Executive Council may, on one day's notice, move a motion to reinstate a Government Bill from a previous session of the current Legislature to the same stage that the Bill stood at the time of prorogation and the motion shall not be subject to debate or amendment.
18. Standing Order 49 is struck out and the following is substituted:
- 49(1) At the commencement of each session, standing committees of the Assembly must be established for the following purposes:
- (a) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, consisting of 21 members,
 - (b) Public Accounts, consisting of 17 members,
 - (c) Private Bills, consisting of 21 members,
 - (d) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, consisting of 9 members,
 - (e) Legislative Offices, consisting of 11 members.
- (2) At the commencement of the first session of each Legislature, the Assembly must establish the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services consisting of 11 members.
- (3) The Assembly must determine the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order by resolution which shall not be subject to debate or amendment.
- (4) The composition of the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order must be proportionate to the number of seats held by each party in the Assembly.
- (5) The proportionate membership of committees as prescribed under suborder (4) may be varied by an agreement among all House Leaders.
- (6) The Clerk of the Assembly shall post in the Legislature Building lists of members of the several standing and special committees appointed during each session.

19. Standing Order 52 is struck out and the following is substituted:
52 The Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund shall report to the Assembly on the Fund as prescribed in the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.
20. Standing Order 56 is amended by striking out suborders (2) to (8).
21. Standing Order 57 is amended by striking out suborders (1) to (6).
22. Standing Order 58 is struck out and the following is substituted:
58(1) In this Standing Order, "sitting day" means any afternoon or evening that the Committee of Supply considers estimates for not less than 2 hours unless there are no members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 2 hours.
(2) The number of sitting days that the Committee of Supply is called to consider the main estimates shall equal the number of members of the Executive Council with portfolio.
(3) The Committee of Supply shall consider estimates in the following manner:
 (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, and members of the opposition may speak during the first hour, and
 (b) any member may speak thereafter.
(4) Subject to suborder (5), the vote on an estimate before the Committee of Supply shall be called after it has received not less than 2 hours of consideration unless there are no members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 2 hours.
(5) On Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon, during the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall be called immediately after Orders of the Day are called and shall rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m.
(6) The Leader of the Official Opposition may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to noon on the day following the Budget Address, designate which department's estimates are to be considered by the Committee of Supply on any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon during the period in which the main estimates are to be considered by Committee of Supply.
(7) When the Leader of the Official Opposition fails to provide notice in accordance with suborder (5), the Government House Leader shall designate the department for consideration by Committee of Supply for that afternoon.
(8) The estimates of the Legislative Assembly, as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the estimates of the Officers of the Legislature shall be the first item called in the Committee of Supply's consideration of the main estimates and the Chairman shall put the question to approve the estimates forthwith which shall be decided without debate or amendment.
(9) In respect of the supplementary estimates and interim supply estimates, a member of the Executive Council may, with at least one day's notice, make a motion to determine the number of days that the Committee of Supply may be called, and the question shall be decided without debate or amendment.
23. Standing Order 59 is amended
 (a) in suborder (1)
 - (i) by striking out "Monday," and
 - (ii) by striking out "midnight" and substituting "11 p.m.";
 - (b) by striking out suborder (2).
24. Standing Order 60 is struck out and the following is substituted:
60 Committees of the whole Assembly shall rise and report prior to the time of adjournment.
25. The following is added after Standing Order 68:
68.1(1) The sequence of Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders shall be determined by a random draw of the names of members who have submitted written notice to Parliamentary Counsel no later than 3 days prior to the date of the draw.
(2) The draw referred to in suborder (1) shall be held on a date set by the Speaker in the July preceding the session that the Bills are expected to be introduced.
(3) Members may switch their positions in accordance with guidelines prescribed by the Speaker.
26. Standing Order 83 is amended
 (a) in suborder (2) by striking out "received, shall be read by the Clerk if the member so requests" and substituting "presented during the daily routine";
 (b) by adding the following after suborder (2):
 (3) Petitions must be submitted for approval by Parliamentary Counsel at least one sitting day prior to the petition being presented in the Assembly.
27. Standing Order 83.1 is amended
 (a) in suborders (1) and (2) by striking out "read and received" and substituting "presented";
 (b) by striking out suborder (3).
28. Standing Order 102 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 102(1) and adding the following after suborder (1):
(2) The Clerk shall be responsible for the printing of the Votes and Proceedings and the Journals of the Assembly.
29. Standing Order 109 is struck out and the following is substituted:
109 The Speaker shall, after the end of the fiscal year, prepare an annual report on the Legislative Assembly Office and lay the report before the Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.
30. Standing Order 114 is amended by striking out suborder (2).
31. This motion supersedes the House Leader agreement for the 25th Legislature dated April 10, 2001.
32. This motion comes into force on the first day of the Second Session of the 25th Legislature.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 21 is of particular significance to our House in that it deals with amendments to the Standing Orders of our Assembly. As you will be well aware, having been one of the authors of the last major revision of the Standing Orders of our Assembly, amending Standing Orders is a very important process, one that has significance to how we carry out our duty and our business in the House, and therefore is of importance to every single member of the House.

The Standing Orders are the orders which allow us to carry out our business in an appropriate manner and protect the rights of each individual member in the House, ensure that each individual member has the opportunity to be heard on issues and that rules of order appropriate to the doing of our business apply. So I'm pleased tonight to commend to the House the proposed changes in the

Standing Orders which have been put forward in Motion 21.

There are a number of changes, many of which are for clarification of the Standing Orders in some cases. Therefore, I will not dwell on each and every one of the changes being put forward. But there are some changes of considerable significance and import to the House and to the members of the House.

One of the first changes pursuant to these Standing Orders is with respect to the business done under private members' bills and motions. Currently, as you are well aware, we have private members' bills and motions conducted over two afternoons in the Assembly, Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday afternoon. For the period of time after the calling of Orders of the Day on Tuesday until 3:30, private members' bills are considered, and then we break and have an hour to consider private members' motions from 3:30 to 4:30, and then an hour for government business from 4:30 to 5:30. On Wednesday afternoon, after dealing with written questions and motions for returns, we deal with private members' bills for the balance of the afternoon.

This has been the subject of a great deal of discussion over the years that I've been here, a short number of years compared with the 22 years that you've served as of today, Mr. Speaker, but during the period of time that I've been here, that I've been House Leader, I've heard a number of concerns raised and comments about the disjointedness of having the two days for private members' bills, the short period of time and the effectiveness of the ability of private members to effectively use the short period of time on Tuesday afternoon. Those sorts of concerns have been raised.

The second concern that's been raised by members during the period of time that I've had the privilege of being Government House Leader is the number of people who do not get the opportunity to address bills before they have to vote on them. As you know, under the private members' bills procedure we have in fact closure on private members' bills. We have, I believe, a one-hour time period on second reading, a two-hour limit in committee, and one hour approximately in third reading. After that period of time the bills automatically come to a vote, which in essence is what closure is. It puts a definitive end to the time for the discussion of a bill.

In many cases, as I say, during the period that I've been here, there have been bills that have had some degree of controversy to them, as private members' bills are wont to have, and members have wanted to be able to speak to a bill, but because of the 20-minute speaking time and the one-hour speaking period, there's been a very limited opportunity for members to do so. It doesn't happen on every bill, but there are certain bills that come forward that people want to be on the record for before they vote because they feel that voting without being on the record can be problematic. Members want to be passionate about the bills that they bring forward.

8:10

Now, private members' bills are significantly different than government bills in that with government bills members at least on the government side of the House have had many opportunities to debate the issues. The issues have gone out for public consultation, they've come back, they've been raised through a standing policy committee, they've gone to cabinet, they've gone to caucus, and then they come to the Legislature. So often we see in the Legislature that it's primarily the opposition that is raising debate in the House on government bills. This makes some sense, because government members have had an opportunity to debate the bills, to effect the changes that they wanted in the bills, to effect compromises if compromises were necessary, and to deal with the issues that were raised. So when they come to the floor of the House, it's the opposition members who are seeing the bill in its bill form for the

first time and then have to go out and get input from their various stakeholder groups, the people that they consult with, and then bring that information to the floor of the Assembly. So it's not uncommon to see most of the debate on government bills in the Legislature coming from the opposition side. It's very understandable. I sometimes wish that I had more of an opportunity to explain to constituents why that process is as it is.

On private members' bills we don't have that same opportunity. Members have not had the opportunity to go out and consult. They're not assured that the department has gone out and consulted. The issues can sometimes be fairly narrow issues, but they can be fairly significant issues. I would raise, for example, the issue of putting kindergarten into the School Act. Regardless of which side you were on the issue, it was important to explain, because the bill itself may not exactly do what you wanted it to do. Because of the process it is necessary to be able to stand up in the House and distinguish why you're voting for or against a bill.

So all of that is to say, Mr. Speaker, that it's necessary to have the opportunity to afford more members the opportunity to speak on private members' bills. One of the changes being proposed for the Standing Orders is to move the speaking time from 20 minutes to 10 minutes so that more members will have the opportunity to speak, also, as I indicated, to reduce the fragmentation of dealing with private members' bills, to consolidate all of it on Monday afternoon, to have the full Monday afternoon for private members' bills, and then at 8 p.m. on Monday deal with private members' motions for an hour. By doing that, we reduce the fragmentation, we make it easier for members to develop a strategy to bring their bills forward, to talk to their colleagues and try to ensure passage. Essentially, we also reduce the amount of non-usable or noneffective time in the House. Sometimes we find that Tuesday afternoons from 4:30 to 5:30 is not really an effective time for government business because of the very short time that's available.

One of the first proposals being brought forward in the Standing Orders motion is to make those changes with respect to private members' business. It also will have the effect of increasing the time on private members' motions from 55 to 60 minutes. An additional five minutes may not appear to be significant, but when you only have an hour to deal with a motion like that and, again, sometimes on some fairly important questions that people want to raise which have not previously been vetted through a policy development process of government, it's important to have that time.

On the order of business in the House it's being proposed that we change the order of business under Standing Order 7. The rationale for that change really is to make it more certain for people watching the business of the House – and we hope that many people do – to know when question period is going to start. Currently, as we enter the House at 1:30, we have a Routine which provides quite appropriately for *O Canada*, if it's the first day that we're sitting in the week, Introduction of Visitors, and then Presenting Petitions, Reading and Receiving Petitions, tablings, and all sorts of other business of the House, which can be very short or can be quite lengthy. So visitors coming in, particularly school children, don't necessarily have a good predictable way of knowing when the question period is going to start and when it's going to end. People who are watching who aren't particularly interested in the preambles to question period really want to get on with watching question period. Sometimes, in discussions I've had with people, they get quite bored with the process before question period actually comes on.

So those are the things that we can accomplish by amending Standing Order 7 to reorder the process so that we start the day, again, with *O Canada*, if it's the first day of the week, then do Introduction of Visitors and proceed to Introduction of Guests,

Ministerial Statements, which I'm sure you'll agree, from at least my past experience in the House, do not come up very often, and then right into Oral Question Period. Immediately start the day with the issue that everybody is looking for, with the topics that everybody is looking for, get on with it, get that 50 minutes of holding the government accountable right on the table right off the bat and deal with it. Then after question period we can deal with the other issues, which are important but which do not command as much public attention. We'd do Recognitions, Members' Statements, presenting of reports, presenting of petitions, Notices of Motions, Introduction of Bills, Tabling Returns and Reports, and Projected Government Business if it's a Thursday.

It's proposed to do the reordering in that manner essentially to make it more certain. It won't make it completely certain because, of course, introductions of visitors and introductions of guests do take some flexibility, but it makes it more certain as to when question period will start and, therefore, more certain as to when it will end and doesn't preclude us from doing all of the other business which is necessary.

One of the things that members might notice in the proposed reordering of Standing Order 7 is that the reading and receiving of petitions no longer appears in that process. We have currently in our Standing Orders a process whereby members come forward with a petition and then come forward another day for reading and receiving of the petition, and the period of time in between would appear to be historically to allow the table to determine whether the petition is in fact in order to be read and received. In my humble submission, Mr. Speaker, there's a redundancy there which is not necessary and again takes up the time of the House without any useful purpose. There's nothing wrong with taking up the time of the House if we're accomplishing something, but in that case it doesn't have a useful purpose. So the revised Standing Orders, if approved, will provide that petitions should be determined to be in order through the Clerk's office prior to being presented in the House, and if in order then they're presented in the House, and there's no need for the redundancy of both the presenting and the reading and receiving.

When I was mentioning private members' bills, there's one item that I neglected to mention that is very important, and that is the provision of an opportunity for a member to make a motion before the mover closes debate that would provide for the motion under consideration to be moved to the bottom of that item of business on the Order Paper or a similar one for private members' bills to propose that the consideration of the bill be postponed for 10 days.

Again, these two amendments to the Standing Orders are being proposed in response to the submissions of many members to myself over my time as Government House Leader but also to the various rules committees that I've sat on and now the rules committee that was struck to look at these from the government caucus. The purpose of that, again, is to provide an opportunity when members are not ready to vote: not ready to vote because they haven't been able to canvass their constituents, not ready to vote because they haven't had an opportunity to speak to the issue, not ready to vote because it's an issue of some controversy that needs to be canvassed more, not ready to vote because they don't believe that the bill is in appropriate order. The concept of the bill is good, but the format of the bill perhaps might not be acceptable. For any one of those reasons, when a person does not wish to vote against a bill or for a bill but doesn't want to be forced to do that because of any one of those very good reasons, then they might move a motion which would move the bill off the Order Paper or down to another position on the Order Paper without having to take a position on the bill because they might not be in a position to do so.

There are two very significant changes to the bills which I think will enhance the business of the House, and one of them has to do with the time and the process of speaking to a bill. Essentially the amendment which is being suggested in the Standing Order changes before us tonight is that instead of having a speaking time of 20 minutes allotted to a member on any given piece of business that the speaking time, except for the mover and the person speaking immediately after the mover, be shortened to 15 minutes, but the remaining five minutes, Mr. Speaker, is not being taken away. It's not proposed that we reduce the amount of time available for people to speak in the House but, rather, that the last five minutes be utilized in the same manner as is utilized in the House of Commons of Canada for questions and comments.

8:20

Very often we see in the House – and I'm sure as Speaker you will concur – situations where people are moved by a speech to shout a comment across the floor . . .

MRS. NELSON: No.

MR. HANCOCK: It happens.

. . . to participate in debate in perhaps an unruly way. Sometimes people cannot hold themselves back from participating, and an evocative response from a speaker's comments is quite appropriate, but it would be more appropriate if those evocative comments could be put on the record at an appropriate time and in an appropriate manner. The five minutes at the end of a member's speech would allow other members in the House to ask appropriate questions in an appropriate way, to hold a speaker accountable for their remarks perhaps, to question remarks, to provide comments on those remarks. So they can talk in the time which would otherwise have been used probably inappropriately – or ineffectively would be better language – ineffectively not inappropriately, at the end of a member's 20-minute speech. As we all know or as we all should know, you can't speak for more than five minutes very effectively and continue to hold attention. In fact, I've heard it said – I can't attest to this personally – that after 10 minutes you lose your audience entirely, and after 15 minutes they start dreaming about inappropriate things, and I won't take that comment any further.

So what I'm trying to suggest to the House is that by reducing the length of speeches to 15 minutes – and I'm sure very shortly people will understand the reason for that – and then allowing a time for short, sharp questions and comments at the end of the speech, while it's still relevant to the comments that were made by the speaker, is a very effective use of House time and a very effective debate technique. In fact, if any of us have had the opportunity to observe modern debate through debate societies, what's happening in our high schools, you'll see that that's exactly what they've put in place with respect to the rules of debate in high schools. I've watched and I've judged some of those debates. It's a very effective technique.

That's one of the major changes and I suggest a very effective change for the business of this House which will encourage more members to get involved in the discussions in this House, adding to the debate in the House by encouraging more members to be involved and using that time, which, as I said before, is not very effectively used now anyway.

Now, there was another important change that's being made, but the comments that have been tossed at me have . . . There is a change being made to the sub judice rule. Although some have suggested that that's a difficult change, it's really only a change which closes the gap, Mr. Speaker. Currently the sub judice rule provides for a rule against discussing matters which are before the

courts, after a charge has been laid and before conviction if it's a criminal charge, and then after an appeal has been filed. There is a very short period of time between a conviction and the time for filing an appeal, and the sub judice rule as it's written now would not apply to that period, and it should apply to that period. So the change to the rule is very simply to close that gap, because it would be inappropriate to have comments made about a matter which was still before the courts but not technically before the courts, because the appeal hadn't been filed.

MR. MacDONALD: I've got two years to launch an appeal.

MR. HANCOCK: You have no appeal at all. [interjection] It's 35 days usually, 35 or 45 days depending on the case.

Now, the other major change which I'd like to address before my time is up . . .

MRS. NELSON: It is up.

MR. HANCOCK: Is it up? Unanimous consent to continue, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has asked for unanimous consent to continue his remarks.

[Unanimous consent denied]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: I'm recognizing you to participate. On a point of order?

MS CARLSON: On a point of order.

Point of Order Dividing a Motion

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in regard to *Beauchesne* 557(1) and page 478 of Marleau and Montpetit.

Beauchesne 557(1) says:

A motion which contains two or more distinct propositions may be divided so that the sense of the House may be taken on each separately. The Speaker has a discretionary power to decide whether a motion should be divided.

Mr. Speaker, we are asking for this particular motion to be divided because, in fact, it has many distinct propositions, 32 significant changes to our Standing Orders, and we believe they are more properly dealt with in this Assembly if we deal with them separately.

Marleau and Montpetit on page 478 say:

When a complicated motion comes before the House (for example, a motion containing two or more parts each capable of standing on its own) . . .

We have 32 parts capable of standing on their own in this case. . . the Speaker has the authority to modify it and thereby facilitate decision-making for the House. When any Member objects to a motion that contains two or more distinct propositions, he or she may request that the motion be divided and that each proposition be debated and voted on separately.

The final decision on this, Mr. Speaker, lies with you, and I am certain that you will find that Motion 21 before us is complicated and contains many distinct propositions.

Furthermore, you will find that there is a precedent for this in this House. Page 204 of *Hansard* from February 27, 1995, contains an

example of such a request being made by the Member for Red Deer-North at the time, and the Speaker then ruled in favour of dividing the motion in two parts.

While this decision does rest with you, Mr. Speaker, we would like to recommend a process for dividing the motion up. There are some natural divisions within this motion that would speed up and facilitate debate. I would ask you to consider grouping sections 1, 3, 4, 26, and 27 together. These all deal with interrelated matters concerning the daily routine and order of business. I would ask you to consider grouping sections 20, 21, 22, and 23 together, which all deal in some way with the budget process. We would ask that the rest of the parts of the motion be dealt with individually.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have to speak against the point of order and request that you do not divide the motion. I think the Standing Orders stand as a book. They are interrelated for the most part. Most of the issues that we're talking about impact on each other, and the Standing Orders are not complicated at all nor are the amendments being put forward to the Standing Orders. All parties have had access to the amendments for a considerable period of time and have had a chance to look at them. The committees have met with the House leaders from the opposition parties to make sure that they were aware of what was coming forward. Everybody's had a chance to look at them, so I would suggest to you that these are neither complex nor in need of separation, because in fact they deal with one purpose, and that is the order of business of this House and how we conduct that order of business.

THE SPEAKER: Any other members on this point of order?

The point of order raised by the Opposition House Leader is one that does come up from time to time, and it certainly does come up with respect to dividing a motion.

8:30

In anticipation of all possible points of order that might be raised during this particular debate, the table officers undertook some research with respect to this. So while this is unusual, to have this type of point of order, at the same time it is not unusual. The hon. Opposition House Leader has correctly pointed out some text with respect to this. We're guided, essentially, by the customs and traditions and actions of this House, plus of course learned practices found elsewhere. The Opposition House Leader has correctly quoted from page 478 of a pretty definitive document, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. I'll quote what it reads from pages 478 on to 479:

When a complicated motion comes before the House (for example, a motion containing two or more parts each capable of standing on its own), the Speaker has the authority to modify it and thereby facilitate decision-making for the House. When any Member objects to a motion that contains two or more distinct propositions, he or she may request that the motion be divided and that each proposition be debated and voted on separately. The final decision, however, rests with the Chair.

[In the Canadian House of Commons] in 1964, a complicated government notice of motion was divided and restated when the Speaker found that the motion contained two propositions which many Members objected to considering together. In 1966, faced with a similar request, the Speaker ruled against taking such action . . . In 1991, in response to a request to divide a motion dealing with proposed amendments to the Standing Orders, the Speaker undertook discussions with the leadership of the three

parties in the House, subsequently ruling that, for voting purposes, the motion would be divided into three groupings, in addition to the paragraphs relating to the coming into force of the motion.

So, in essence, in the case of three events in the Canadian House of Commons, on one occasion the Speaker ruled in favour of the division of the motion, in the other case the Speaker ruled against the division of the motion, and in the third case the Speaker undertook discussion and consultations with the House leaders and then came back with a ruling at a subsequent time. This really helps the Chair this evening. It makes it very, very clear.

Beauchesne, sixth edition, page 172, clearly states in 557:

A motion which contains two or more distinct propositions may be divided so that the sense of the House may be taken on each separately. The Speaker has a discretionary power to decide whether a motion should be divided.

The hon. member has done her homework as well because, without any doubt, in the history of the Assembly in this province not too many years ago a former Government House Leader rose on a point of order requesting that an opposition motion be divided into two parts. On February 27, 1995, on page 204 the then Government House Leader basically quoted what I've already quoted and asked that a motion being put forward by the then hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo in fact be divided into two sections and each one dealt with separately. Quite a few members of this Assembly were here to observe that particular procedure at that particular time. There are options, and there are opportunities.

Okay. What we have before us tonight is a really significant adjustment to the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta. In 1982 there was considerable debate in the session when there were major changes made to the Standing Orders. A certain procedure was taken. There was considerable procedural debate before anything happened, and then certain things took place.

In 1993 very significant changes were made to the Standing Orders. There was a minimal amount of debate in the Assembly because there was unanimous consent of all members of the Assembly for these very significant changes. The chair has no way of knowing what it will entail in the ensuing minutes as the Assembly chooses to deal with this particular motion. But the Government House Leader has helped me with respect to, I believe, the decision I'm going to come to.

The Government House Leader said in his opening remarks that these are "changes of considerable significance and import." Then he further said, "very significant changes . . . which . . . will enhance the [progress] of the House." Now, when one looks at the Standing Orders proposed changes before us tonight here in the Assembly, it would strike me that to expedite progress with respect to the resolution of this particular motion, it would be very much in order for debate to ensue on all of the clauses of the motion at the same time. Let there be a debate, and when an hon. member stands up, the hon. member basically will talk about and can talk about all 32 sections of the particular motion in the one discussion. It would seem to me that that would enhance the progress of the House.

The second point, the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to basically look at a division of votes. The hon. member has helped us with respect to this as well by basically saying that in a grouping of a certain number of them, they essentially dealt with the routine of the House; other groupings of them dealt with the budget. Then the member said that, well, then they wanted all the other ones dealt with individually. Well, if there are 32 of them and the Speaker extrapolates nine, that would mean there would be 23 other votes. That would be 25 votes in all. It would strike one that that wouldn't really ensure the progress of the House to the degree that one would hope to in the first part.

The chair would have no difficulty whatsoever perhaps suggesting

that there be three separate votes: 1, 3, 4, 26, and 27 might be in one; vote 2 being 20, 21, 22, 23; and the third vote, all of the other three together. That would allow a bit of focus with respect to voting, but it would also ensure that the focus of the debate on this particular motion be on the whole 32 clauses at the one time, that there are not 32 separate debates, that there's one debate on the motion.

The chair, to ensure the maximum amount of progress, would rule that the point of order is a valid one and, with the help of the Government House Leader's fine determination and definition of the significant changes, would rule that there be three votes along the order so requested.

The hon. Opposition House Leader on the debate now on the motion.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as a point of clarification as I start my debate time on this motion, we will all be speaking for a 20-minute period to the entire motion, and at the end we will have three distinct votes. Yes. Thank you very much.

So, Mr. Speaker, with regard to this motion we in the Official Opposition are very unhappy with several pieces of the motion, but particularly we are extremely unhappy with the process by which this particular change to the Legislature was brought forward. I remember in my first years here, in 1993, Mr. Speaker, when you were the Government House Leader and when you in conjunction with our House leader set about to revise the Standing Orders in a very significant fashion and in a fashion that facilitated the procedures within the House in a very commendable manner. Your approach was quite different than the approach we see now. Your approach was to get together with the Opposition House Leader and sit at a table and negotiate and, inasmuch as you could for the various issues, find a basis of consensus that wasn't: oh, well, I guess we have to put up with that to get this. It was a serious consensus agreement that was negotiated between the two of you. I remember that you and our House leader spent a great deal of time on this, and our House leader would come back at various stages to our caucus and state progress.

The manner in which that negotiation was conducted was that, first of all, we came up with a list of suggestions we had. You had your list. The two of you sat down together, dropped off the table those issues that there was absolutely no seeing eye to eye on, leaving on many actually relatively contentious issues where you felt there was some middle ground that you could find. Some really good work was done, some serious time was put in, but at the end of the day we got changes in the form of a House leaders' agreement and some changes to Standing Orders that were significant and were accepted by both sides of the House.

8:40

After the election in 1997 we entered into that process again with the then Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader. While the changes weren't so significant in nature, there was an excellent House leaders' agreement that was brought forward based on consensus, based on each caucus bringing their issues to the table, where the two House leaders discussed what they could find some middle ground on, took it back to their respective caucuses, talked that process through, came back again, and worked until they had some settlement. That was a fair and reasonable, democratic kind of way to handle changes to House procedures. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that is not what this government chose to do after this most recent election.

The Government House Leader and both opposition House leaders

had some discussion during the spring session that the government was quite interested in seeing some major revisions to Standing Orders and that we would be contacted at some point in time to start the negotiation process, that they would be striking a committee within their caucus and the matter would go forward. We thought that the matter would be dealt with, and I seriously was led to believe and to this day understand, Mr. Speaker, that the Government House Leader was going to proceed in a similar fashion, where we would bring our issues to the table with the three of us and see where there was some progress and where there wasn't and negotiate in that fashion.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that's not what happened this time. The Government House Leader repeatedly asked us for a list of the changes we wanted that he could discuss with his caucus. There was no give-and-take. There was no sitting down and finding out what was reasonable. Well, it is not the habit of the Official Opposition of any province to submit their ideas to a government caucus for approval prior to them hitting any kind of House leaders' agreement or Standing Order changes. This was to be a negotiated process, and repeatedly the Government House Leader or his representative, the Deputy Government House Leader, asked for that kind of submission, so that we could in essence give our ideas to the government caucus, they could yea or nay them within their caucus, bring forward their ideas, and it would be rammed through the House. Well, that's not a negotiated process. That isn't consensus-building. That is the heavy foot of a large majority government coming down and trying to stifle the voice of any opposition in this province. We do not think that serves democracy in any fashion and would not participate at that level.

What happened then was that the Deputy Government House Leader called a meeting to discuss the changes. If I remember correctly, both the other opposition House leader and I were under the understanding that this was where we were to bring our ideas, and we would start the process. Not so, Mr. Speaker. We sat down at the table in that room and were told in no uncertain terms that these were the Standing Order changes that were going to go through, that that member did not have the authority from his caucus to negotiate, that there might be some minor pieces of flexibility within the agreement but his direction was to ram these Standing Orders through. He wasn't interested in listening to what we had to say at that time. That was the most undemocratic meeting I have been in in all my years in this Legislature. It was deeply offending for a parliamentary and democratic process, and it won't soon be forgotten that the Deputy Government House Leader was smirking, no less, at his ability to use his majority government to ram through exactly what changes they wanted.

In subsequent meetings we did bring forward some suggestions that we had in terms of strengthening Standing Orders. We made some suggestions for changes in their position. Very few of the suggestions we made to their changes in Standing Orders were accepted. They were barely even countenanced in the meetings. In essence, none of ours were accepted, Mr. Speaker, and the deputy House leader didn't care. He stated that former meetings had not resulted in the kind of substantive changes that this government wished to see to Standing Orders, that they didn't have the tolerance to continue in that fashion, and that they were going to make the decisions as they saw fit. So here we see ourselves this evening with this motion before the House.

Both opposition House leaders suggested that some more time be taken on this to see if there weren't some areas where consensus could be found, where we could bring in a reasonable House leaders' agreement, but government wasn't prepared to do that. They wanted this motion before the House in this fall session and continue to proceed in that fashion.

Mr. Speaker, we have some real problems with some of the motions that we see here before us, not the least of which is the change to the speaking times. We see a huge majority government, 74 seats out of a total of 83, who wish to further stifle debate by the opposition parties in this province by reducing debate time from 20 minutes to 15 minutes. They state in their position that the five minutes of questions and answers at the end of the 15 minutes will encourage their members to speak and to ask questions, perhaps, I would say, to pay attention in debate. But what happens is that we don't actually have the ability to ask questions of those people who have the most information about the matters up for debate.

Mr. Speaker, when we heard from the deputy House leader that there was absolutely no room to move on the issue of the 15-minute speaking time, then we suggested a change in terms of the mover of the bill and the critic of the bill or the first person to speak to it in debate also having the ability to be asked questions after their 20 minutes of speaking time, because in fact they are the people most knowledgeable about the bill under discussion. Legitimately there are often questions to be asked of the mover of the bill or the critic of the bill that could strengthen and enhance the debate and sometimes, I am sure, diminish the amount of debate time overall on the bill as clarifications were made up front and early in the debate time. It has been customary in this House for the mover of a bill not to come back and answer questions on the floor of the Assembly. Occasionally there have been briefings or discussions by movers of the bill with critics after the bill has been introduced but not often. All members are not privy to those conversations, so there are some problems around that. We had asked at least for that kind of an amendment to be made, but the Deputy Government House Leader wouldn't move at all on that issue. It was 20 minutes and that was it. No questions for the mover or the first person to speak, just those subsequently.

Why is it, Mr. Speaker, that we would want to continue to have at least 20 minutes of speaking time for private members in this Legislature when in fact in this session we have seen some legislation flow through this Legislature at all stages in record time? There have been few bills that we have spoken our full 20 minutes to as an entire caucus, in fact not one single one this session. Why? Because for the most part those pieces of legislation were not hugely controversial. Most of them were minor housekeeping pieces of legislation and didn't warrant long, extended debate, but there are times in this Assembly when we see legislation that does warrant serious debate. Why would we want to prolong debate on a piece of legislation? It isn't because we want to be obstructive to the government, while members may think that's true. The fact of the matter is that as an opposition we have a responsibility to ensure that people in this province hear what it is the government is proposing to pass as legislation.

8:50

So we must give those stakeholders an opportunity to review the legislation, to digest the content of the legislation, to talk to other directly affected people about the legislation, and the time then to get back to us with any concerns or issues that they have. In fact, it has been the case since I was elected to this Legislature in 1993 that there are many times when we have protracted debate on a piece of legislation where the government will do one of two things. They will amend the legislation with some of our ideas or some of the ideas that they ultimately hear from stakeholder groups and strengthen the legislation or will postpone the legislation, send it out to the communities for further review and revision, and bring it back at a later time, or we will see the legislation disappear. All of those can be really good practices. This government always states when they

bring in a new bill that they have consulted the stakeholders and that they're very happy with the legislation. Often that is exactly how the piece of legislation rolls out, but sometimes that isn't the case, Mr. Speaker, and we see pieces of legislation that people have missed on the first, cursory glance or they haven't completely understood long-term implications, and further revisions are needed.

It is a responsibility for opposition parties in any province on contentious or potentially contentious bills to expand the amount of time that they are debated in order to give stakeholders time to consult. Now, if this government had a different process of bringing in pieces of legislation where they would share them with us and stakeholder groups in their drafted form before being tabled or would table them and then would extend the time period before they were debated by two or three weeks or we were in the Legislature for a greater number of days, which would give stakeholders more opportunity to review what's under debate, then we might not need that kind of a process where we use the committee stage and we use amendments to extend debate time on legislation. But that hasn't been the practice of this particular government, Mr. Speaker. So for that reason there are times when it is very important for us to be able to extend the talking time on bills. With our time reduced to 15 minutes and the question-and-answer periods, we have a reduced capacity to do that, so it reduces our capacity to meet the needs of Albertans. This government finds that entirely convenient for them, but in the long run it is not entirely convenient for Albertans, so we are not very happy with that particular motion.

Some of the other motions, Mr. Speaker, we are happy to agree to, reluctantly in some cases, and those are most of the housekeeping matters that we see in the Legislature. For instance, while putting all of the private members' business on one day is a good idea, we actually lose at least a half hour of speaking time to private members' business. So that's of concern to us. We heard the Government House Leader state that his members wish to debate more private members' business, but now we have less time to do that with this motion.

Also, they place the day on Mondays, Mr. Speaker. While the Government House Leader was quite happy to point out that this Legislature has not traditionally sat during time periods when there have been statutory holidays on Monday, in fact statutory holidays most often fall on Mondays, which means that we could lose additional time for private members' business. So that's an issue that needs to be also discussed in this particular matter. Those are certainly concerns for us.

There are many other issues that I wish to speak about, Mr. Speaker, but I also wish to introduce an amendment. So before my speaking time has expired, I will introduce our first amendment on this motion, and that amends section 7. I will send that to Parliamentary Counsel now to be distributed to the House.

THE SPEAKER: An amendment has been forwarded here, and it will be circulated to everyone. Hon. Opposition House Leader, it says, "Ms Blakeman to move that Government Motion 21 be amended by striking out section 7."

MS CARLSON: I'm moving it on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

THE SPEAKER: You're moving it. It basically says: "be amended by striking out section 7." That's what it is as it is being circulated. So the Government House Leader is aware of that, and other members will be as well. That's basically what it says. It'll come to you in a matter of seconds.

If you wish to proceed, then, with the discussion on your amend-

ment. So on the amendment, very focused: by striking out section 7. There'll be no discussion in this debate on the amendment about anything else but section 7.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Section 7 amends Standing Order 21, which is the closure Standing Order. The original intent, what the government wants to do here, is to replace the existing closure with a new form of closure called time allocation. This was not a change in the Standing Orders that the Official Opposition was in support of. We have serious concerns about this. If the government is going to bring in closure, then let them name it as what it is, which is closure on a bill. The government has indicated that no bill would have more than one motion on the Order Paper at the same time. That part about it is good, but the essence of having this in there is a very bad change to the Standing Orders as we see it.

The new closure would require that the bill or motion that will have closure must have some consideration at some point, so they'll give us some time to speak to it, but for the government to decide how much time the Official Opposition should spend debating the closure is truly an abuse of executive power and certainly nothing that we could agree to. This form of closure is basically, Mr. Speaker, a one-sided formalization of informal agreements usually reached between House leaders. We did not like it. We asked them to withdraw it, and they didn't want to do that. They wanted to go forward with it. It's certainly an issue for us.

Time allocation is not traditionally named as closure. Certainly we will be using that as a basis whenever we can when the government does bring this in. On an informal basis in this Legislature I think we have done a very good job over the past years, certainly while I have been the House leader, in terms of coming to informal agreements on how much speaking time we will have to a variety of bills. I would suggest that the Government House Leader could not disagree with me in terms of how that process has also worked this fall. If we have made an agreement about how many speakers we will have to a bill and the time that we will spend on it, we have kept that agreement, Mr. Speaker, and we don't see that this new formalized time allocation should be brought in at this particular point in time. We are also very concerned that this is the beginning of a very slippery slope where we will see all bills being presented with time allocation motions at the committee stage, which is the time when we have the opportunity to speak to it at length.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will close my debate at this time.

9:00

THE SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to deal with section 7, because I didn't actually get to it in my remarks.

I would first of all just like to confirm what the Opposition House Leader has said in one portion of her remarks, and that is that the business of the House normally works very, very well when all House leaders get together and determine how we're going to make progress, determine what bills are going to come up and how much time we need to spend on them. I'm sure the Opposition House Leader would also agree that the process works very well and that we're very accommodating to make sure that bills come up when they are going to be able to speak to them directly after having consulted with stakeholders, et cetera. One would not expect that that process would be changed in any way by removing closure from our Standing Orders.

In fact, it's really ironic that the opposition would move an amendment to this motion to delete section 7 when the whole proposal under section 7 is to remove closure, which the opposition has in the past found so offensive, from the Standing Orders and replace it with a much better, much friendlier, much more process-oriented way of dealing with those few bills that come forward which are the subject of a lot of debate and for which there does need to be a method to move them along after appropriate amounts of debate have taken place. It's only really in committee stage where it's most effectively needed. With time allocation instead of closure, rather than the Government House Leader or a member of Executive Council bringing in a closure motion which arbitrarily cuts off debate at midnight on the day that the motion is brought forward, we now with this provision would have a much, much better system, a much friendlier system, a much more opposition-oriented system which would allow us to discuss with the opposition first how much time should appropriately be given to the debate of the bill so that all parties in the House and all members in the House could have an appropriate time to get their arguments on the floor but also a finite time for debate so that at some point in time you move on. As I say, we don't see that happening tremendously often, but it does happen.

Now, it is very ironic that the opposition would want to retain closure under the Standing Orders that we have now rather than what is proposed, which is a much better way of dealing with House business in those certain times when there is disagreement, when there does need to be a way of ascertaining how much more time will be spent on a bill. It doesn't happen on a daily basis.

In fact, I would close my remarks on my opposition to the amendment being proposed by the Opposition House Leader by saying that at least in my experience in this House we enjoy a great deal of co-operation among House leaders on almost all the bills that come before the House in terms of how we deal with them. There are a few controversial bills where you never will be able to come to those sorts of agreements, and it's quite appropriate for both sides of the House and for all members of the House to utilize the rules of the House and the procedures of the House to get their points across.

Right now we have to deal with those utilizing closure, which is a sledgehammer approach, when under the proposed Standing Orders without this amendment we'll be able to use a much gentler process, a much friendlier process, a much more process-oriented process of coming to termination on a debate after an appropriate period of time. Even this provision as it currently stands in the motion would allow for a short discussion of the reason for putting time allocation on a bill, which is again better than the existing provision in the Standing Orders.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would urge members of the House to vote against this amendment and by doing so remove closure from our Standing Orders and replace it with a much better process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a particular amendment which was expected by us in the third party, and certainly we had a very good series of discussions between the House leaders on these matters. I'm inclined to agree with the Government House Leader that in this particular case it is a gentler form of closure. But it is closure, and one of the concessions obtained in the discussion was the elimination of the other, traditional form of closure, which is encompassed by the government's proposals. So we see this type of provision of time allocation replacing closure. The old form of closure is removed, and this is put in its place. That was not the original proposal from the Deputy Government House Leader. They wanted to have both weapons in their arsenal.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that it is closure with a smile rather than closure. There is a real fear on the part of the opposition, including here in the New Democrat opposition, that this will be used more frequently, more routinely than closure has been traditionally. Governments are reluctant to use closure because it is seen as a very undemocratic form of shutting down debate. While we appreciate the elimination of closure altogether, the difficulty we have with the proposal the government has made is that the government may be disposed to make use of time allocation much more frequently and make the argument that in fact they're allowing us one or two or three speeches before closure and that therefore the democratic requirements of the House are satisfied.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not convinced that we should go in this direction. I frankly would like to see closure eliminated altogether. I haven't had enough time in this place to make a really good assessment of what use the government will make of this new time allocation, and I am fearful about the state of democracy should it be approved. So, in that case, I think I shall be supporting the Official Opposition motion.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment this evening that was proposed by the hon. member from Calgary-Centre and presented to the Assembly this evening.

MS CARLSON: Edmonton-Centre.

MR. MacDONALD: Edmonton-Centre. Pardon me. I've got my centres confused. Perhaps I'm looking forward to another four years of better times.

This amendment that was presented by the Opposition House Leader: I think when we consider exactly what has happened in this Assembly in the last number of years and the frequent use of closure, one would have to say to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands that sometimes it's better to dance with the devil you know than the one you do not. This motion is closure in another form. The Government House Leader assured all members of this Assembly that we're going to remove closure, which in my view is a guillotine on democracy. It is a severing of debate, and each and every member of this Assembly has the right to debate. There will be many times in the future when we will be thankful that we supported this amendment, because we will know exactly, precisely what is going on.

9:10

Now to describe section 7 of Motion 21 – and I believe this was a quote – it's much “friendlier.” Closure is not friendly. It never was friendly, and it never will be. We think of Bill 11 and closure. [interjections] I hear groans, but Bill 11 is a perfect example of individual members of this Assembly exercising their democratic right, and finally there was the introduction of closure. Hon. members of the Assembly and members of the general public who were on the steps of the Assembly and out front in the plaza knew what closure was about. This is the reason why we have this current section 7. The government is now sensitive to the outcry. I believe the hon. Government House Leader actually felt guilty whenever closure was used. Now, Mr. Speaker, closure is going to be much friendlier. Closure is not going to be the sledgehammer that it was described as before. The former Member for Calgary-Buffalo was fond of saying that democracy is dying a thousand deaths. Death by a thousand cuts, he would say. It's a thousand clips.

I heard another member of Executive Council speak, Mr. Speaker, and in relation to this amendment "a member of the Executive Council" is mentioned twice. This Executive Council in my view – and it is reflected in this amendment – poses a threat . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: To democracy.

MR. MacDONALD: Exactly. They pose a threat to democracy.

Now, we all know that the executive enjoys tremendous power in this province, in this scheme of the government. We've seen tremendous growth in the role and the duties of the Executive Council. This is why the amendment presented here this evening is prudent, and this is why the hon. Member for Calgary-East should vote for the amendment. It's because the executive's effective control of this Assembly is perhaps going to be going too far.

We look, for instance, at the mysterious ruling in regard to the risk management fund. There are some people in this province who view that ruling on the risk management fund as an overstepping of the executive's power and not taking into consideration the Legislative Assembly Act. This is important, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not relevant.

MR. MacDONALD: It is relevant, and it is noteworthy because this practice will continue. Who knows but that perhaps a group of citizens will band together and take their government to court? Who knows? Perhaps that will happen if we allow section 7 to pass as it is. The Legislative Assembly Act has the utmost authority, not members of the Executive Council, in my view.

Now, we always seem to get caught up in this Assembly and forget that each branch of the government has a role to play. The role of the Executive Council or a member of the Executive Council is not to evoke some sort of silent closure or closure by another name. As one hon. member said earlier: the voters voted; there are now seven members of the opposition, and there are two members of the third party. There's this vast majority. I cannot understand why with this vast majority you need a silent form of closure so that the people, if they do come to protest a bill or a motion and they're on the steps of the Assembly or they're in the plaza, perhaps standing there beside one another with candles, a peaceful form of protest . . .

MR. MASON: Candles in the wind.

MR. MacDONALD: Candles in the wind.

Perhaps they'll be standing there in silence, and there will be no warning of closure. I'm sure there will be, because the Opposition House Leader is very diligent. But this is not in the interest of Albertans; it's not in the interest of any branch of this Assembly.

I would urge, in closing, that everyone vote in favour of this amendment. Mr. Speaker, it is important for me to remind all hon. members of this Assembly again, in particular members of the Executive Council, that they cannot overstep their boundaries, which are outlined in the Legislative Assembly Act. With this section 7 I'm afraid that they may.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to also speak to the proposed change in the Standing Orders and the amendment proposed to section 7 of Motion 21. My colleague the Member for Edmonton-Highlands has quite eloquently presented the position that we as a caucus take on that particular section of this motion to

amend the Standing Orders. To us this particular section reflects the general spirit of the overall amendments to the Standing Orders, which in our view would seriously weaken the democratic parliamentary process, which is so essential to protect in terms of health, in terms of vibrancy, in terms of vigor if Albertans are to benefit from the debates and benefit from the laws and the statutes that arise from that intense and prolonged debate. That's what this Chamber is about.

All of us on all sides of the House are here to serve Albertans, to serve their best interests, to serve in the best way that we know how. In my view, the best way that I know to serve those interests is by allowing a free and open debate on some of the bills that speak to the very essence of who we are: a democratic society, an open society, a society that will not tolerate imposition either through the conscription of the democratic parliamentary process or through other means. This particular section to which the amendment is being proposed in my view threatens to close debate without calling closure.

We were hoping that through negotiation among the three House leaders, which, as you so rightly pointed out, has happened so often in the past in this House, we would be able to come to this House with an agreement on the changes that we all thought would ultimately serve the best interests of Albertans and of this House. Unfortunately, we weren't able to come to that agreement. In fact, we weren't given the opportunity to take the right steps, to take the first steps that would lead us in the right direction. We were presented with a unilateral decision, presented with a decision of the caucus, not a decision that arose out of frustrations which were the result of a stalemate in negotiations among the three House leaders. There were no such negotiations. It was a unilateral action. A sort of ultimatum was served on us: take it or leave it.

9:20

Then, of course, there was some indication given: we are somewhat flexible on this and that, and we'll make some accommodation. It was in that sense that my colleague from Edmonton-Highlands said that we thought at one time we were making some headway, that if we could get rid of that closure with a fist and replace it with some new rules that were reasonable but would not amount to closure with a smile, we would have made some progress in this House towards opening up the parliamentary process to more debate, to more overall scrutiny by our electors and citizens.

This proposed change in the Standing Orders doesn't do anything like that. When I look at the amount of debate we will have before a member of the Executive Council would stand up in this House and propose a motion to limit the debate to a specified number of hours, we will have only five minutes each. We will not be able to speak for more than five minutes to say why we don't like the decision of the minister or member of the executive to limit debate to a certain number of specified hours. What those specified hours will be will also not be negotiable. They're entirely unilateral, at the pleasure of the minister, at the pleasure of the member of the executive, except that we'll have five minutes of opportunity to complain about it.

To me this is a terribly restrictive way of dealing with the opportunity to debate matters in this House. There is really not much opportunity here to debate such a motion. It is so important. It has such an important impact on how much debating time we'll have in this House. So it's a unilateralism. It's an exercise of majoritarian power. I would have thought that in the interest of protecting the noblest traditions of parliamentary democracy, a government that enjoys such a huge majority would in fact show generosity, would in fact show a greater tolerance towards the opposition. The opposition's job is to be in opposition, to present

adversarial argument, to challenge the government and, by challenging the government, help it refine the legislation that it brings before the Legislature. What this particular proposed change does is remove that possibility from the Legislature, from the opposition to play its role that properly only it can play.

This change as proposed in the amendment that I'm speaking to relates to this notion of inappropriateness that the Government House Leader allowed to slip out, that somehow when opposition parties and opposition caucuses stand up and speak, they use the time inappropriately. I would say that he did amend himself a little later to say "ineffectively." Well, Mr. Speaker, whether what we say is effective or ineffective, I think it's like looking at what's beautiful and what's not. It's in the eye of the beholder. What to the Government House Leader might be ineffective and might be a waste of time would be seen perhaps entirely in a different light by many Albertans and not only by the speakers in this House.

I guess there has to be some general recognition, a genuine recognition that there is a role for the opposition in a democracy, and that role must be respected and enhanced. There is an enhanced obligation on a government that has a massive majority to make sure that opportunity for the opposition is nurtured. It is through this kind of oppositional discourse that we enter into a process of negotiation. It is through negotiation behind the door sometimes that we accomplish things that we wouldn't be able to do simply through confrontation day in and day out. That's what seems to be missing in this proposed change in the Standing Orders, and that's why I'm opposed to the Standing Order and I will support the amendment before us, which is to strike out that number 7.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to add a few comments on this amendment. What I see with this proposed change in the Standing Orders certainly is a new form of closure. It reminds me of a statement we used to have on the railroad when I worked there: don't force it; get a bigger hammer. That's exactly what this is.

I think back to the days when we had Premier Lougheed here. In all the time that he was here, closure was used somewhere in the neighbourhood of seven times, but under the current Premier closure has been used somewhere in the neighbourhood of 25 times. I think what has happened here is that over time this current government just doesn't like the heat they're getting when it comes to using closure, so they want to use a much softer brand here.

I'd just like to point out to members as well what would have happened if this particular piece of legislation had been put into effect when we were debating Bill 16 last spring, a contentious bill that the minister at that time would have invoked, what powers this amendment would give him as a member of Executive Council. With Bill 16 we know that he had to chart his ship through some very rough seas, through some very rough waters. He took time out over the summer to continue consultation, to continue change, whatever. Probably the best comment that can be made about Bill 16 is that I hear that the Catholic boards feel they have won the battle of this bill and the public boards feel they have got the better part of this bill. Because legislation was given time, because we had input from the opposition, from the third party, because we had stakeholder consultation and closure was not used, we've come up with a piece of legislation that I think and I'm sure all members in here think and I know the minister thinks is a very good piece of legislation and one that will fit the needs of Albertans.

9:30

Now, then, what will happen if we leave section 7 in is certainly

that it will allow the abuse of the executive power, and what it will also do is it will limit the role of the opposition or the role of the third party. It will prevent us from questioning. It will prevent us time from seeking further stakeholder consultations. It will prevent us from having alternatives to suggestions which could be coming forward in legislation. So I would certainly urge all members present here in the Assembly this evening to support this amendment.

I don't think democracy is served, Mr. Speaker, when we can limit debate. We all know that democracy only works when the questions asked of government are answered by government, and by limiting, by shortening, by using these types of rules, we certainly do not enhance democracy in this province. We limit it.

I know that if the former hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo were here, he certainly, as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar had stated, would be musing that this is the death of democracy, that it is death by a thousand cuts.

I also have to bring up the point that the hon. Government House Leader said, that the process of consultation generally works very well in this Assembly. This is one case where there was a consultation. As the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie brought up, it's certainly a great diversion from what has happened here in the past. It reminds me of, you know, the two most famous lies: trust me and the cheque is in the mail.

You are asking the opposition, you are asking the third party to say, "Well, we won't use this very often," but we will use it, and if there is contentious legislation, certainly we will. We won't hesitate to use it. So if this is a friendlier process, then the friendliness is only to serve the government needs and certainly not the needs of the opposition and certainly not democracy.

So I would urge all members to vote for this amendment by striking out section 7.

Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The Assembly has before it an amendment to Motion 21. The motion moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is that "Government Motion 21 be amended by striking out section 7."

[Motion on amendment 1 lost]

THE SPEAKER: For our administrative records we will refer to this as amendment 1.

At this point in the discussion, on this particular motion, we have heard from the hon. Government House Leader, and we've heard from the hon. Opposition House Leader, so now we are back to the debate on Motion 21.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by registering on behalf of my colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona and myself the strongest possible protest to the way that this matter has been handled by the government. First of all, the norms that have developed for the dealing of the rules of this Assembly, which are not the rules of the government but the rules of the Assembly, have been violated in a way that I've not experienced.

Now, I'm not a long-serving member yet of this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, but I have read somewhat on the history of our system and familiarized myself to a small degree with some of the precedents of this place. The abandonment of a process of negotiation between House leaders and the introduction of essentially a fiat in its place is something that I don't think this place has yet seen, and I think that it's a very, very sad day.

First of all, our caucus, which is a small caucus in this Assembly, was asked to submit, essentially, proposals for changes to the rules to the government caucus, to the Progressive Conservative Party's caucus. We may not be equal in size, Mr. Speaker, but we are equal in status. Our caucus will not and will never submit proposals to the Conservative caucus with respect to the rules or any other matter, and I'm sure that that goes equally for the Official Opposition caucus. We are prepared to sit down and negotiate with anybody, and we will make proposals to the Government House Leader. We'll exchange proposals. We'll take them back to our caucus, and the government should take our proposals back to their caucus. I think that that is a fair way, which shows respect for all parties in this House. We will not now or in the future be making submissions for the disposal of any other caucus in this place. We will sit and discuss them as equals or not at all.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I want to say as well that the manner in which this was presented to us was offensive. It was presented in a way that there won't be negotiations around a House leaders' agreement, as we had expected, but that these decisions have already been made, more or less, by the government caucus, and that they will be imposed on you through the use of the majority which exists in this Assembly. We took very strong exception. You saw then the perhaps unique experience of a joint media conference between House leaders of the Liberal caucus and the New Democrat caucus, not because we necessarily have anything more that we agree about except that the role of the opposition needs to be protected, and it is really being under attack by the government in this respect. We need to stand up and be counted when it gets tough.

I think the process has been wrong from the start. It really put us on very bad footing. We did come back to the hon. House leader, and we did get some small concessions that he was prepared to negotiate a little bit around some of the points. We think that we did make some progress. In fairness, Mr. Speaker, I think I can say that, that after our initial protest we did make a bit of progress, but the fact remains that these rule changes have the cumulative effect of reducing the ability of the opposition to do its job, and they are going to be imposed by the majority in this Assembly. That is not really serving the interests of our parliamentary tradition or of the citizens of this province, and I think that is something that I would wish at least that members on the opposite side would think about or maybe ask a few questions about, because it's not a good precedent at all.

Now, I want to deal with some of the sections. Section 3 changes the order of business of the Assembly and essentially moves the tabling of documents in this Assembly behind the question period. I understand well why the government may wish to do that, because of course you can table things before question period. The public is watching, and it can delay question period. It can throw people's schedules off, and of course then the public is more likely to see what is being tabled. But there is a courtesy that exists around tabling, which we've tried to respect at least until this has been put forward, and that is, when you ask a question of a minister as it relates to some document, you table the document at a time before the question period. Usually the efficiency of the table officers and of government staff is such that the minister or at least the Premier gets the tabled document before he hears the question from the opposition, so he knows what the opposition is talking about when it asked its question. So how is that going to happen now in question period?

9:40

MR. SMITH: Just send a copy over.

MR. MASON: Well, we could as a courtesy, but courtesy is a two-way street, and that remains to be seen.

The proper way of dealing with it, Mr. Speaker, is to have the tablings first. That's why the tablings are first. The government may not always like the way the opposition has made use of the tablings, and I can certainly understand it from their point of view. Nevertheless, the tablings go before the question period for a reason, and I don't think that the government has thought through all of the potential consequences of making this change.

Section 4, Mr. Speaker, deals with the private members' business. I appreciate the sentiment that the Government House Leader expressed about allowing more people to talk to private members' business, and by making the change so that the speaking time is shorter, that may be the case, but if I were a member of the government caucus who's not a member of Executive Council, I would be concerned about a diminution in the ability of private members to bring forward their bills and get them dealt with and get them passed into law.

I will give credit where credit is due. In this Assembly private members have a greater opportunity to actually get their bills dealt with and passed into law than in many other Assemblies. I think it goes to some of the work that's been done in the past, including by the Speaker of this Assembly, that has allowed private members to have an opportunity to do that. But the changes here will reduce the amount of time by between half an hour to an hour per week on private members' business. As it stands now, the Assembly rarely gets through more than one-fifth of the private members' bills and even a lower percentage of motions, and we think that this rule change will make the situation worse.

With no government business on Mondays we're concerned that cabinet ministers might be less inclined to be present in the Assembly. That, of course, hurts our opportunities to ask the questions. Generally, we're concerned that the opportunities for private members may be reduced by consolidating it on Monday, reducing the total amount of time available, and allowing more people to speak, which is good on the surface, but we don't know the effect that that's going to have on the actual number of bills that actually come forward to a vote.

Now, we've come to the question of time allocation. We're not finished with that, although the Official Opposition's motion was defeated. The time allocation is a concern, and I spoke briefly about it in my remarks. The question here is: when does the government use closure, and when will the government use time allocation?

Now, the Government House Leader gave us a good definition of when the government would use closure. He said in one of our meetings that when it's clear that the opposition is in a filibuster mode, the government imposes closure. Well, we don't like it, we think it's undemocratic, but fair enough. The question is: when will the government use time allocation? I believe, based on discussions we had with the Deputy Government House Leader, that they will use it in anticipation of delaying tactics by the opposition and not just when those tactics are readily apparent. So we may have a very well-managed and efficient House, but if the opposition can't do its job, if it can't delay, then it has very, very little power indeed.

I want to talk about the opposition's role in delaying government business because I know that it's considered by many members opposite to be a nuisance, a waste of time, and something which really gets in the way of progress. But I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, that an opposition, especially an opposition of this small size, has very little power in an Assembly like this. But the power to delay a controversial or badly-thought-out piece of legislation is a good thing, and it's good not just for us; it's good for the government as well. There were many times in this Assembly when the

government for internal political reasons brought forward a bill that they had not thought through the consequences of. I think we saw an example of that with the education bill that did not receive its readings in the spring session. It went back, there was more discussion, and I think it came back a better piece of legislation.

Now, if it weren't for the opposition, there's no way the political dynamics on the government side would have allowed that bill to be held up, but the opposition played a role. Even in Bill 11 – and I know that the opposition tactics in Bill 11 still grate on many, many government members. But that was a bill of foremost concern to the people of Alberta, and it should have been held up and every opportunity given for the opposition and for the public to discuss and debate the bill. The government brought forward amendments. The government proceeded in its wisdom to pass the bill eventually, and you know, they won the election anyway. The fact of the matter is that it was a great change; it was a fundamental policy that the people of Alberta wanted to talk about. If we had just left it up to the government, if the people in the opposition here had just left it up to the government, much of that debate would not have occurred because they would have put it through expeditiously. So I argue that the ability of the opposition to delay is a necessary evil in terms of government business, and it's a very positive benefit, on balance, with the entire democratic system.

Section 8 deals with the changes to the sub judice rule, and I want to talk a little bit about that because we have a serious concern that many matters of considerable public import are tied up before the courts for extended periods of time, effectively preventing people from raising this in the Legislature. Particularly when a matter is not before the courts – that is to say in the interval period between the rendering of a decision and the filing of an appeal – it should not be beyond the ability of members to raise those issues in this House.

Section 9 I wanted to deal with a little bit, about speaking times. We had made proposals that the government minister and the critic should be subject to the five-minute question period after the full 20 minutes, and we regret the fact that that was not agreed to by the government. We have no problem with this five-minute rule at the end of people's speaking time. We thought that it should come at the end of the 20-minute speaking time on all the motions, but we were prepared to accept it on a 20-minute speaking time period for the minister moving the legislation and the critic, then the five minutes after the 20 minutes of speaking time, and go to the 15 and five for everybody else except for the closer of the motion. That would have been acceptable. We don't think that the mover of the motion and the person responding on the other side should be exempt from the five-minute rule, but we do believe that they should retain their full 20-minute speaking time.

9:50

Now, I want to deal last with a section that we did not discuss, as I recall, in any of the meetings with the Deputy Government House Leader or the Government House Leader, and I think this is perhaps the most dangerous, the most insidious bit in this regulation of all. That is in section 17, that when a bill dies on the Order Paper – suppose it's at committee stage or at third reading stage – then when the House again sits, on a day's notice it can be raised and put back on the Order Paper at exactly the stage of debate it was in the first place.

So you can image how that might affect things, Mr. Speaker. We could have a situation where a very, very contentious bill was debated, held up by the opposition, there was lots of public concern, and the government leaves it to die on the Order Paper. It takes time for the public to become aware of legislation before this House. It takes time for them to become clear on the implications of what that

legislation might be. It takes time for the opposition to reach out to community organizations, all sorts of organizations in the province and indicate that people should be concerned about a particular piece of legislation. That just doesn't happen overnight. So then the government lets the bill die on the Order Paper, takes a few months off, and recalls the Assembly. It's at third reading, and they can whip it through in a couple of days. Nobody really is going to be aware of that bill because the debate has died away. I think this is a very, very dangerous thing. It could permit the government to put contentious pieces of legislation through in two or three different sessions with no opportunity whatsoever for the public to become involved in the debate and no opportunity for members to actually canvass the public.

I really urge members opposite that if there's one piece that you're going to agree to take out of these rules, this should be it. This was not one we had an opportunity to discuss with the government or to propose changes or amendments to, yet I think it's one of the things that is the most onerous of all, the greatest threat to public debate and public discussion, and the greatest threat to our democratic process in this Assembly.

So, in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we in the New Democrat opposition do not oppose everything in here, and we are certainly not opposed to sitting down and having a discussion with government House leaders, with our compatriots here in the Official Opposition and working out ways to make this place function more democratically and more efficiently.

[The Speaker in the chair]

We do not accept the process that's been imposed on us for dealing with these Standing Order changes. We express our strongest reservations about some of the content of them, and we certainly think that it's difficult to accept a process where these kinds of things are imposed. We think that the opposition role is being gradually but steadily eroded, and it's being eroded by a government with an overwhelming majority. The question, Mr. Speaker, is why. Why do they feel the need to erode the opposition's ability to engage the public in democratic debate? I don't know. They certainly don't need it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been anxious to participate in this debate on the main motion, Motion 21, this evening. I never cease to be amazed in this Assembly.

Now, the hon. Government House Leader, perhaps a little over an hour and a half ago, maybe a little bit more time than that, was confidently assuring all members of this Assembly that if we were to limit time, it would allow more members time to speak. I have been listening, but it's only opposition members who have spoken on this motion this evening. I just don't understand how the hon. Government House Leader can make that statement, yet it's certainly not backed up – it doesn't have, I guess, the solidarity of this caucus, because none of them seems to be too anxious to participate in the debate, Mr. Speaker.

Now, the first item I would like to bring to this Assembly regarding this motion – and it was touched upon by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands – is the change in the rotation or the ordinary daily Routine in the Assembly. We're going to have a new list here. He talked about Tabling Returns and Reports. It was just yesterday that if tablings are done before question period, it gives the members of the opposition time to quietly read them at their desks.

If there is a deficiency or if there needs to be something that's brought to the attention of the government in one of those reports, well, they have the opportunity in question period, which is going to follow the minister's tabling of the report. For instance, yesterday there was a tabling of a report on AADAC, and it was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview that pointed out that there was a 37 percent increase in the salary of the CEO from one year to the next. Teachers, let alone school principals, could only dream of that sort of pay raise perhaps every generation, but this fellow received it in one year. AADAC also had a spin doctor listed there for the first time in that annual report. That could be the basis of a question from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Now, more importantly, and this is specifically for the Member for West Yellowhead who was in the Assembly whenever the bill was introduced – and I believe it was called the victims of sexual sterilization act. Any hon. member can correct me if I'm wrong. That was introduced before question period. With this new law bills will be introduced after question period, and members of the opposition will not get the opportunity to scrutinize the bills during question period. You are severing, you are restricting, you are limiting our effectiveness as an opposition.

The former Member for Edmonton-Highlands was the first member of any opposition party, to her credit, to bring this hideous

piece of legislation to the public's attention. It was followed by questions from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, the former Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and three other members of the opposition. There was a firestorm around this bill. The public was up in arms. It was the wrong thing to do, and the government, wisely, withdrew that legislation. But now what's going to happen with this new daily Routine? We as members of the opposition will no longer have the opportunity to bring that to the public's attention. This is done on purpose, Mr. Speaker.

With those remarks – I had certainly more to say on this motion, if you could call it that. At this time in light of the hour I would, please, Mr. Speaker, like to adjourn debate on Motion 21.

Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[Motion carried; at 9:59 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 22, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in travelling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have five copies of each of the 2000 and 2001 annual reports of the Alberta Securities Commission to table. The Alberta Securities Commission is the industry-funded regulatory agency responsible for administering the Alberta Securities Act. Its mission is to foster a fair and efficient capital market in Alberta and, together with other members of the Canadian Securities Administrators, develop and operate the Canadian securities regulatory system.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. In accordance with section 30 of the Gaming and Liquor Act it's my pleasure to table five copies of the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission's 2000-2001 annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report for the year 2000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with close to a hundred tablings. They have been delivered to your office, and they are the individual financial statements for all school jurisdictions, including charter schools, universities, college

foundations, and subsidiaries of the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the next tabling that I have is the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board's 2000-2001 annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have five different tablings. They are all tablings opposed to the Inland conversion to coal-burning cement production. One is from Mike Nelson, one from Verona Goodwyn, two from Elke Blodgett, and one from the Edmonton friends of the north society.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd like to table the required number of copies of 41 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the class-size targets bill, "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today, both very thoughtful letters from constituents concerned over education. The first is from Christopher Rymes, who is most concerned about the contract negotiations between Alberta Learning and the ATA and is upholding the responsibilities of teachers and their value.

The second one is from Al Johnson of Carstairs. He is most concerned that "the government spends significantly less per student for public education than the Canadian average."

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the required number of copies of 31 requests from Albertans who want the government to support Bill 218 to provide proper funding for education.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the required number of copies of requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill so that "classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the required number of copies of 19 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for

classroom basics,” and “ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children.”

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a document which shows that the Crossroads centre in downtown Edmonton over the first 10 months of this year provided services, 72 percent of which went to children 17 years and under and 93 percent of the services to youth 19 years of age or under, information that contradicts the information provided by the Minister of Children's Services yesterday to the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with two tablings. One is an article by John Burry, chairman and CEO of Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Ohio, in which he argues that the medical savings accounts “are the ultimate ‘cherry-picking’ scheme invented by some insurers to guarantee . . . large profits.”

The other is the required number of copies of 21 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill “so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded” and that we may maintain the top-quality teachers.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair would like to table the sufficient copies of three memoranda from three hon. members: first of all, from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, requesting that Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act, be given early consideration for third reading; the second memorandum, from the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, requesting that Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001, be given early consideration for third reading; and the third memorandum, from the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, requesting that Bill 207, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, 2001, be given early consideration for third reading.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly my pleasure to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly the members of the Northern Alberta Development Council who are in Edmonton today and tomorrow, partly for their annual meeting with the northern MLAs. Among them is Art Avery from Fort McMurray, Sandra Cardinal from Kikino, Berkley Ferguson from Athabasca, Gerald McIvor from Whitecourt, Pete Merlo from Grande Prairie, Michael Procter from Peace River, and Al Toews from Fort Vermilion. There are several staff members with them: Audrey DeWit, Pat Nelson – there is another one of those; she doesn't control as much money as the one we know a little bit better – Rita Phillips, Kathy Miller, and my administrative assistant, Gladys Gammon. They're in the public gallery, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 15 students from the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta who are enrolled in the course Legislative Process and Legislative Drafting, taught by Rob Reynolds, Senior Parliamentary Counsel, and Peter Pagano, Chief

Legislative Counsel. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you today 36 grades 5 and 6 students from the Dr. Elliott school in Linden, Alberta. Linden is the industrial heart of my constituency. I'm very pleased to have them here today. I'd also like to introduce the teachers that are accompanying them, Mrs. Mary Hughes and Mrs. Sherry Hempel, as well as parents that have come along to enjoy the trip as well: Mr. Mike Klassen, Mr. Ken Leinweber, Mr. Mike Ratzlaff, Mrs. Nancy Heyblom, Mrs. Pat Christiansen, Mrs. Brenda Schroeder, Mr. James Klassen, Mr. Darren Esau, Mrs. Chris Thurn, Mrs. Heidi Thiessen, and Mr. Kerry Eitzen. I would ask them to rise and please receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. I have two introductions today. On your behalf I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly visitors in the members' gallery, 21 students and two adults from Dunstable school, located in Busby and the constituency of Barrhead-Westlock, your constituency, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 13 students accompanied by their teacher Debra and parents Rita Vandenbrink, Annie Visser, and Inga Herbold. They are from the Christian Homeschool Fellowship school located in my constituency. They're sitting, I believe, in the public gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure and an honour for me to welcome representatives of Mothers Against Drinking Drivers. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Eloise Leckie, president of the Mothers Against Drinking Drivers, Edmonton chapter, and LeRay Witbeck, the assistant victims services manager of MADD, Canada western region. I ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a dedicated public servant, one who is adding immeasurably to the effectiveness of the Department of Energy and one who is here today in a job shadowing assignment with his son Evan. I would ask John and Evan Buie to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today and introduce to you and through you to all

members of the Assembly 27 students from the John Wilson elementary school in Innisfail, Alberta, where my constituency office is located. Along with them is their teacher, Mrs. Linda Pederson, and parent helpers Mr. Dennis Fehr, Mr. Greg Morris, Mr. Trent Porter, Mrs. Coreen Evans, Mr. Perry Randell, and Mrs. Leslie Quinton. I'd like them to rise if they're here – they are I think seated in the members' gallery – and I'd like the House to give them their warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on behalf of the hon. Minister of Seniors.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is rare that I get up to introduce my own group, so it's a pleasure to be able to do this on behalf of my colleague from Stony Plain. With us today from Forest Green school are 47 visitors, of which 42 students are joined by Mrs. Esposito, Mrs. Vanstratten, and Mrs. Lukey, with parent helpers Mrs. Burchaski and Mrs. Ashworth. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a well-known Calgary personality who is visiting us today. Among other things our guest was a candidate for mayor in the last election, and I understand that his campaign lapel buttons have become quite a collector's item. He is seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that Oscar Fech rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has over \$2 billion sitting in a bank account for future debt payment while cuts are being made to departments every day. That's like having \$10,000 in the bank waiting to make a mortgage payment two years from now while your children go without enough food today. My questions are to the Premier. Why is this government cutting preventative services for children when they have over \$2 billion sitting in the bank?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Finance supplement my answer, but it's quite clear. It has been no secret that the philosophy and the policy of this government is to dedicate what we can to debt repayment so that we can free up literally hundreds of millions of dollars to go to essential services in this province.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess we're going to have to replay the tape from yesterday, because I went through this with the hon. member opposite yesterday. So I'll do it again.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of last year, which was a banner year in this province, we were able to dedicate a huge amount of dollars to pay down the debt in this province, which did a number of things. First of all, we are now paying over a billion dollars less in interest expense on an annual basis for that debt. Those dollars are gone forever. Because of the banner year we had last year, we were able to commit that \$2 billion to pay off our debt to bring us over eight

years ahead of the scheduled debt retirement plan that is legislated for this province.

What this hon. member wants us to do is to go back to last year and say: we're going to pull back the \$2 billion that we have put to debt retirement in an account to pay off when those dollars come due. By the way, the interest on it is being used in general revenue to meet priority programs. He wants us to pull that out, increase the debt of this province, and increase spending at a time when everyone else is taking corrective actions to live within their means. So he wants us to increase our debt, run a deficit, and go after it and forget about the requirement and increase our debt service costs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: is the government waiting until after the teachers settle before dipping into this \$2 billion?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the \$2 billion that has been set aside for debt repayment has nothing at all whatsoever to do with the negotiations between the teachers and the various locals of the ATA and the various school districts, not the ATA and the government. I just thought I'd make that little correction.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

MRS. NELSON: And, Mr. Speaker . . .

THE SPEAKER: To supplement?

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Please, a short one.

MRS. NELSON: Let's be very clear. I thought I made it abundantly clear in the first answer. That money has gone already to debt retirement. It is not available to come back. He has to understand that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, money in a bank account is money in a bank account. It hasn't been spent yet.

My third question is to the Premier as well. Why did the government cut 1 percent from every single department but not from the \$2 billion that you're holding in the bank account?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't – no; I do know where the hon. leader of the Liberal party has been. He's been in this Legislature for some time. It is the law of this province – the law of this province – that we dedicate 75 percent of all surplus funds to debt pay-down. It is the law.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said: "It's simple to borrow, and it's simple to raise taxes. All of those things are simple." Well, it must be simple to cut and download the deficit on RHAs, school boards, and children's authorities. My questions are to the Premier. How can the government claim to have a balanced budget when the Capital health authority and the Calgary

regional health authority are running a combined deficit of \$50 million? They're your agencies.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition knows, the Calgary regional health authority has cut \$30 million from their budget. I understand the Capital regional health authority will be coming up with a proposal or an announcement soon indicating that they have made significant cuts. I would remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that these cuts are to administration. They have achieved finding efficiencies and more effective ways of doing things relative to systems management. The cuts have been made to corporate services. I want to make it quite clear, especially as it relates to the Calgary regional health authority, that they did not touch frontline services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But they still have a \$50 million deficit.

My second question is to the Premier. If the Premier is so confident that the way to contain costs is through efficiencies, then why are RHAs and children's authorities running deficits? Are they inefficient?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I wouldn't say that they are inefficient. That's why we have agreed to work together co-operatively with all regional health authorities to achieve efficiencies and to find better and more effective methods of doing things.

Relative to the specifics, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I should note that there was a significant increase and there will be an increase to the base funding for health in the current year. Even after our adjustment, even before the adjustment that was made to regional health authority funding, the 2001-2002 increase remained at at least 10.8 percent.* So we have invested significant dollars into health care authorities.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in reference to the hon. leader's question about the deficits, we are working with the regional health authorities both in Calgary and Edmonton and in other parts of the province. I should note that of the 17 regional health authorities, most have posted healthy surpluses. Our assurance from the regional health authorities in both Calgary and Edmonton is that they will work toward making sure that those deficits do not recur in future years and that they will have a way of rationally being able to eliminate the deficits that they are currently running in a way that minimizes the impact on services and makes their systems as effective and as efficient as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. They still are running a deficit based on the revenues they got this year.

My final question, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier admit that the one way the government has balanced its budget was on the backs of Edmonton and Calgary by withholding almost \$23 million from the fuel tax program?

MR. KLEIN: That is not true. We've asked all municipalities, all regional health authorities, all school districts, all departments of government to co-operate with the government in this period of restraint when the prices of oil and gas are down, Mr. Speaker, to see

us through this particular situation. If things improve, of course their situation will improve also.

The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition alluded earlier to a statement I did make yesterday. It's absolutely true. The simplest and the most mindless way – and that's why it appeals to the Liberals – of getting additional revenues is to raise taxes. I mean, that is a no-brainer, an absolute no-brainer. All you've got to do is pass the appropriate legislation during the budgetary debates and say: I'm going to raise taxes; I'm going to pick your pockets. Right? That's the easiest thing to do. It's mindless, it's dumb, and it appeals to the Liberals. Or you can borrow. You can borrow and go into a deficit situation. That also appeals to the Liberals because, again, it doesn't take any thought. It's a mindless solution. To find effective ways of delivering services and to achieve efficiencies, that's the right way to do it.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Contingency Plan for Schools

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday evening and summer school instruction for students are included in the government's contingency plan should teacher contract negotiations fail. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Under what authority would the minister force teachers to conduct these classes?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is quite simple, and it's called the School Act. Under the School Act the school boards are required to provide 1,000 hours of instruction time. The last time I looked, if the teachers go out on strike, that is not instruction time.

DR. MASSEY: My second question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Will this contingency plan, which would have to be approved by the teachers, not make reaching a settlement even more difficult?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the School Act does not have to be approved by the teachers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. My third question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister has again inserted the government in negotiations, will the minister be constructive and call a meeting of the teachers and trustees to prevent the situation from worsening?

DR. OBERG: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the School Act has been in Alberta for some 85 or 90 years. The hours of instruction at 1,000 hours have been in for a long time, so I do not believe that that is putting myself in the middle of the negotiation. It's simply enforcing the law. There tends to be a lack of regard for the law on the other side with the questions today. It is the law; 1,000 hours is the law.

I hope and I'm sure that everyone on this side of the Legislature hopes that there is no teachers' strike. Teachers should be in front of the classrooms teaching students. I hope that the school boards and the local ATAs will be able to negotiate a settlement, as they have done in Medicine Hat, where 92 percent of the teachers voted to accept the contract that was offered them. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the central ATA has not ratified that contract at the moment. Hopefully, that will occur. As I said in the Legislative

*see page 1212, left col., para. 2

Assembly before, that is a true slap in the face to the local ATA when the central ATA will not ratify that agreement.

Mr. Speaker, we are in no way in the middle of these negotiations. [interjection] These people laugh. What we did in the budget, as you've heard many times in this Assembly, was guarantee a minimum of 6 percent. There's another 3 and a half percent that has always been there to negotiate. It is up to the local school boards. It's up to the ATA to find out where that happy medium is, just as they did in Medicine Hat, where they put forward an offer with what they could afford, what both the Teachers' Association and the school boards wanted to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Children's Services Funding

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the 1st of November a number of Calgary agencies received letters stating that their contracts with the Calgary Rocky View children's authority would be terminated effective December 31. These well-established and well-respected agencies were told that the unilateral termination of their contracts was needed to make up an \$8 million to \$10 million shortfall in the authority's budget. To the Premier: how can the Premier justify giving deputy ministers and other highly paid senior officials 9 percent raises just before Christmas while giving lumps of coal to thousands of vulnerable children in Calgary that will suffer as a result of these brutal cuts?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the cuts are not brutal. Certainly the Minister of Children's Services, who has spoken in this Assembly before on this particular matter, has indicated that children in need of protection continue to be Children's Services' first priority. Like every other minister she has been asked to set her priorities, and her priorities, clearly, are children in need of protection.

Those agencies still exist. Not only do they exist, but there are other departments offering other services: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for instance, the Department of Health and Wellness, the Solicitor General's department, programs that involve early intervention, departments that also fund early intervention programs like early literacy initiatives and programs for pregnant women, which help before a child is even born. There are a number of services that are essential and are being fully funded by this government. Although the Minister of Children's Services is not with us today, perhaps we can have the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development supplement.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: We're just going to move on. We've got quite a list of questioners today.

The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the Premier: why is the government ignoring respected business-people like Bob Stollery, who even before these latest cuts accused this government of abandoning vulnerable Alberta children?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're hardly abandoning Children's Services and services for children. I would venture to say that the Stollery children's health centre at the University hospital is a marvelous example of how this government is working with the private sector to provide essential services for children. Indeed, the children who go to that centre are sick children. They need help,

and they're getting first-class help and care, probably the best in this country. I would say that that is a very poor example.

Relative to another statement, I think that there needs to be some clarification here. The salaries of exempt employees – that is, non-unionized employees in this government – were adjusted to give them the same rate of pay from a percentage point of view as the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Is this hon. member saying that because you're in mid management or because you're in senior management, you ought not to be treated the same as unionized employees? In other words, unionized employees can get raise after raise after raise and everyone else stays the same? That's hardly fair. That's not the way it works at his university. I know that for sure.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the Premier: why is the Premier still determined to push through the planned \$275 million in corporate tax cuts? Why is he refusing to do his part even if it means that thousands of vulnerable children in Calgary and elsewhere will suffer?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, children in this province will not suffer. It has been made abundantly clear that children are going to be looked after. In two departments – and I'll have both ministers, the Solicitor General and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, supplement if they will – we are looking after children in need. That is a priority, and I'll have both these ministers supplement to give the hon. member an outline as to exactly what we are doing in this province to protect children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, I'd like to indicate that we have a \$647 million budget in Children's Services. If we're talking about vulnerable children, we've got a number of areas that we've been working on: child care subsidies to help low-income families with child care costs; family violence prevention, including funding for women's shelters; child welfare and child protective services; programs to combat fetal alcohol syndrome; services for children with disabilities; early intervention, which is what we're talking about – and these are still ongoing because it's just a scale-back – early childhood development programs; mental health and student health programs for children; and of course the child financial support program that provides monetary assistance to caregivers looking after children whose parents are unable or unwilling to properly care for that child. These are just a few, and all 18 regional authorities are charged with setting priorities and living within the budget.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister.

I have a long list of hon. members who wish to participate today. We've now spent over six minutes on this exchange, and of course the principle is not that one member should dominate question period, so we're moving on.

The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Endangered Species

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal Species at Risk legislation was in the news again today. The federal government has defeated a motion that would have given fair compensation to ranchers and farmers whose property is occupied by an endan-

gered species. My question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. In what ways have you, Mr. Minister, and/or your department sought the co-operation of the federal Department of the Environment in achieving a fair and just way to protect endangered species in Alberta without serious harm befalling our farmers, ranchers, and acreage owners on whose property the organisms might be found?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a good, timely question. As you're no doubt aware, Alberta has been a driving force behind the national accord for the protection of species at risk. This agreement has brought together all provincial, territorial, and federal jurisdictions across Canada to build an effective approach in protecting these species. Of course, the proposed federal act includes penalties for those who contravene it, but Alberta's approach is to protect these species' habitat in a more co-operative manner. In fact, Alberta's active participation in the national recovery plans for species has worked very well because we do involve landowners, we involve land managers, we involve agriculture, and we involve industry in the process. This is the Alberta way.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Some environmental groups have criticized Alberta for not having specific species at risk legislation and recently awarded the province a D minus for its protection of species at risk. To the minister then: what is your department doing to better protect endangered species in the province of Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: Sorry. I caution the hon. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Deputy Speaker knows the rules as well as anybody. There are no preambles on the second question.

The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very, very important question. Alberta of course has been very active for over 25 years already to identify the species at risk through legislation, regulations, and a policy of protection under my department through the Wildlife Act. We conduct many initiatives to identify and restore species at risk. This may include a wide range of conservation strategies based on good science. We've had very good success, and this is very important. The white pelican is one example, and the trumpeter swan, the swift fox, the Peregrine falcon. I think Alberta has done very well.

In addition to that, of course, we have the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee here in Alberta, which was set up back in 1998 I believe. This committee involves industry, involves scientists, involves environmentalists, involves land managers in laying out a plan as to which animals may be endangered and recommends to me how we may restore those particular animals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you. Without preamble, Mr. Speaker, does this proposed federal Species at Risk act complement or duplicate Alberta's protection of endangered species, Mr. Minister?

MR. CARDINAL: This is very, very sensitive to our overall economy in Alberta. We are concerned that the federal legislation might intrude and probably will, once it's passed, into provincial

jurisdiction. We feel we are already very, very successful in that area. Therefore, we do not support the proposed federal legislation. Again, Mr. Speaker, we do not support the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Electricity Deregulation

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is planning on picking the pockets of electricity consumers in this province to get back the \$700 million that is owed. It's the largest power bill in the history of this country. Now, on Tuesday the Minister of Energy mentioned all of the various issues in the electricity industry he is looking into: "deferral accounts, prescribed rate, pool price deficiency regulation, export principles, [power purchase] arrangements, Clover Bar bidding arrangements," among other problems. My first question is to the Premier this afternoon. Why does the Premier continue to delay decisions or miss deadlines for such things as the regulated rate option, surely realizing that it denies consumers and industry much-needed information?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy answer the question, but in reply to the statement that was made, we are in not in any way, shape, or form picking the pockets of Alberta consumers. As a matter of fact, this government came to the rescue in a very, very big way of Alberta consumers, both corporate and individual consumers, so that they wouldn't have to pay exorbitant electricity and natural gas rates.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, just in the way that the Leader of the Opposition started out earlier today and said to dip into the \$2 billion, what the member who asked the question has said is: why didn't you just leave everybody out there to pay the highest bills ever encountered? Instead, what happened was that a load leveling occurred where these bills are spread over a period of time. It was the right thing to do, it was a prudent thing to do, and reflections from the last provincial election told us that is was the correct thing to do.

The member needs to know clearly that the Energy and Utilities Board for the jurisdictions they are responsible for will reflect the regulated rate option. In the areas of Calgary and Edmonton, where these are city-owned utilities, the recommendation for the regulated rate option is made to the cities. City council then approves these.

Mr. Speaker, the only piece of information that the member wants to know is if we will set a prescribed regulated rate option for the following year. That decision is going through the thorough and introspective examination of this government and caucus and will be reported in the fullness of time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy then: is it not true that the minister has as of last weekend missed three deadlines dating back to the end of summer for releasing the electricity restructuring review?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SMITH: No.

MR. MacDONALD: Again to the Minister of Energy: how is failing to get information out in a timely manner going to address what the Centre for the Advancement of Energy Markets points out as a

weak link in deregulation in Alberta? Consumer information: weak link.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, as invited and enticed as I am to make a comment about weak link or missing link, I will refrain from that and only suggest that if the member goes back to his reference material on the Centre for the Advancement of Energy Markets, he will find that that centre, the very centre he is talking about, rates Alberta as number one in North America in proceeding towards a competitive market.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Union Organizing Practices

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My office is receiving a number of calls from members of the construction industry about the practices of salting in Alberta. Although they are not of the culinary variety, it appears that they are giving the members of the construction industry some high blood pressure. Can the Minister of Human Resources and Employment explain to us: what do the practices of salting and MERFing involve, and how do they affect the industry in Alberta?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the term salting is a description that has come into labour relations in recent years. It indicates a situation where members of a union go into the job market, and they seek to be hired by usually a small contractor. They get hired because, of course, of the demand we have in this great province for skilled labour.

MRS. FORSYTH: And then they want a union.

MR. DUNFORD: All donations gratefully accepted to my answer.

Then, of course, they begin to attempt to organize that group of employees working for that contractor. Upon the vote, whether it's successful or not successful, then they move on to other employment matters.

In trying to deal with this situation as a government, because we are, of course, here to try to provide a level playing field between the parties involved in labour relations, the difficulty for us is complicated. First of all, it should be a right of any person to go and seek employment. Of course, it's been established as a human right that once employed, if a person wishes to have a collective bargaining agent bargain on their behalf, that again is a right as well. Where the difficulty comes in and it seems like the playing field might not be exactly level is that if the company is certified and these salts, as they're referred to, then move on to other employment leaving behind them the certification, the employer is somewhat restricted in timing as to doing anything with that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same hon. minister: are these practices currently legal in Alberta?

MR. DUNFORD: There have been a number of test cases with the Alberta Labour Relations Board, and of course I might add that there have been cases in other jurisdictions as well. The practice of salting has thus far been deemed as a legal activity within labour relations.

MR. LUKASZUK: My last supplemental, Mr. Speaker: since this

practice appears to be causing, as the minister has stated, a somewhat unlevel playing field, are you planning on introducing any amendments to the legislation to deal with this practice?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we currently have been meeting with various stakeholder groups, and of course salting is one of the areas that has come to my attention, and there is controversy surrounding it. What I've been saying publicly – and I'll say it again – is that we want to enter into a series of consultations with stakeholders in labour relations through the year 2002. We are not going to open the Labour Relations Code from section 1 right through the whole code, but I would be interested in hearing from all parties, both representing employers and representing employees, as to whether or not there are specific sections of that code that we might have a look at with the idea, then, of bringing forth amendments in spring '03.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Adolescent Gambling

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta gambling is endorsed and promoted as an industry of choice by this government. Today's children are the first generation to be exposed to widespread access to gambling, ubiquitous gambling advertising, and general social approval of gambling. My questions are to the Minister of Gaming. What percentage of the over \$1 billion in gaming revenue is directed to programs specifically designed to combat adolescent gambling addictions?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased that the Alberta lottery fund, which is the fund into which all of the gaming revenue in Alberta goes, is the source of funding for AADAC, through which all addiction programming in the province is done. Some \$4.1 million of the AADAC budget goes to gambling, and in my discussions with AADAC they tell me that \$4.1 million is the amount that is currently required to address the gambling problems in our province at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:20

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Given that a recent study indicates that 13 percent of Canadian youths have some kind of gambling problem, what steps has the minister taken to ensure that expansion of the gaming industry will not result in increased youth gaming?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, there are two aspects to this that I think are appropriate to address at this time. The first is that AADAC has a program of education that goes into our schools to address problem gambling that might be there. I think that problem gambling in large measure is best addressed through education, and they have an active program there.

I can also tell you that the AGLC has a very strict enforcement policy and that we are very concerned that no minors do participate in gambling in our casinos or in our lounges in this province, and I can tell you that there is not one charge this year associated with underage gambling in this province.

MS BLAKEMAN: Given that several studies show that lottery tickets are the pied piper of problem gambling amongst youth, how

can the minister justify the new hockey lottery directed at young sports fans in Alberta?

MR. STEVENS: We have very clear rules with respect to gambling and in particular with respect to participating in the purchase of lottery tickets in this province, Mr. Speaker. The rule simply is that minors are not allowed to purchase those tickets. We have in excess of 2,000 retailers. They're very well aware of that. We also, through the AGLC, ensure that that is monitored, and that is working very well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Kyoto Climate Change Agreement

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the biggest environmental issues facing Alberta and, in fact, the world today is the issue of climate change. This past summer and then again in recent weeks there's been a lot of attention given to the international talks relating to the Kyoto protocol and the global agreement to address this issue. My question is for the Minister of Environment, who I believe participated in some of the international discussions in July. What is the status of these negotiations, especially in terms of their impact on Canada and Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ten years ago at Rio the Kyoto climate change agreement was signed by about 170 countries. It's the biggest treaty the world has ever known. Since that time, there has been ongoing negotiation in terms of what rules will be set around the Kyoto agreement and how it will be implemented, and at Bonn in July those rules were agreed on. In Marrakech last month the technical details of those rules were agreed on. So essentially the agreement is in place, and the federal Minister of the Environment has announced that these two agreements, the Bonn and the Marrakech agreements, pave the way to ratification. It is his expectation that the agreement will be ratified either before the G-8 or at the G-8 next June in Kananaskis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. To the same minister: if Canada does proceed with ratification, what will that mean to Alberta?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. It's a very interesting question, Mr. Speaker. This agreement as it stands would have significant cost to Alberta, and the issue is that the federal government has no idea of what these costs would be at the present time. So that's the scary issue. Our estimate is that this could cost the industry in Alberta up to \$3 per barrel of oil to a total some place in the neighbourhood of \$6 billion per year out of our economy, and obviously that is a significant cost. The first one to be hit on that would be industry, and at the same time as industry is hit, the Alberta Treasury would be hit. So this is an extremely significant issue for Alberta, and we have to deal with it as a province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy to supplement.

MR. SMITH: Thank you. I just want to supplement this. The

dominion of Canada exports more oil and gas to the United States than the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Mr. Speaker, the United States will not be a signatory to this agreement. Those are our biggest customers in that country. Mexico and Venezuela are our largest competitors in that marketplace, and they will not be signatories to Kyoto. We are being taxed by putting one hand behind our back and trying to compete in a free market where export is the lifeblood of this province, and it's punitive to this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. My final question is to the Minister of Environment. Within that context, as stated by both ministers, what is the Alberta government's position on climate change? Do we have a strategy?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have a very clear position on Kyoto; that is, the federal government should not ratify Kyoto in its present situation. As the Minister of Energy has correctly pointed out, the U.S. is not a signatory. While Venezuela and Mexico are signatories, they do not have any compliance requirements, and that's the issue. We will have compliance requirements. Our biggest competitors, Venezuela and Mexico, will not have any compliance requirements.

As well, Canada only produces 2 percent, Mr. Speaker, of the greenhouse gas in the world. The U.S., China, and India produce approximately 50 percent. So my question to the federal government is: why do you take steps that could be disastrous to the Canadian and the Alberta economy for 2 percent of the greenhouse gas in the world? If we eliminated that 2 percent and went back to living in caves, which some people seem to want us to do, it would not have any, you know, main effect on the greenhouse gas. Until the U.S., India, and China are involved, it makes no sense to sign this agreement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Underground Petroleum Storage Tanks

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: why is your department jeopardizing the safety of groundwater in Alberta by cutting \$30 million from the underground petroleum storage tank program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely correct in the fact that we are deferring \$31 million of our program. But I think it's important to note this: it is the only program of its kind in Canada. Albertans have committed over \$80 million. Fifty million dollars of that work has been done, which has reached over 600 sites.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if protecting groundwater is a priority, why did this program take a major cut? Thirty million dollars is more than 1 percent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, the hon. member raises a very good point. In fact, today at the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, which many members here were at, I spoke to a member of the committee that is examining the issue of groundwater, the president of the Alberta association. I think it's also important to understand that the assessment that was done of the highest risk sites in this province is part of the 55 orphan sites and the 600 sites that have been remediated at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Leduc.

Homelessness

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is national homelessness action day. As I speak, hundreds of concerned Edmontonians are gathering in Edmonton's inner city on a provincial government parking lot that was previously zoned for affordable housing. Turning land zoned for housing into a parking lot is an apt metaphor for this government's housing policy, it seems. My questions are to the hon. Premier. Why is the government prepared to spend in excess of a million dollars to assemble land in Edmonton's inner city and build a paved parking lot there while it ignores the needs of thousands of low-income Albertans for affordable housing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I really don't know what we are assembling in terms of land. Perhaps I'll have the hon. Minister of Infrastructure or Municipal Affairs respond relative to that particular situation.

As it affects the homeless in this province, I think that the government has worked well with a number of agencies to accommodate the homeless and to deal with the homeless situation in this province. The agency that comes to mind – it's not here in the city of Edmonton, although they're doing a wonderful job here – is certainly in the city of Calgary, where they have taken significant steps to provide low-income housing. I was just reading the paper the other day, relative to the Canadian forces base land that was left vacant when the military moved to Edmonton, that there are rental units in some cases going for absolutely nothing based on the person's or the family's ability to pay. The rent in some cases is nothing.

2:30

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, in most recent times we haven't purchased any land in the city of Edmonton except for very specific needs, like where Transportation is going to be building some roadways.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How is the government planning to replace the affordable housing that was sacrificed to build this parking lot?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where this parking lot is. I don't have the information. I don't know if the hon. Minister of Infrastructure or Municipal Affairs or anyone else has the information, but if we own a parking lot somewhere, it is obviously for a purpose of government or for a future right-of-way or for something. We just don't buy land for the sake of buying land.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will get the information on this parking lot to the Premier.

My last question to him: will the Premier advise the House if his government will match the dollars that the federal government has agreed to provide for affordable housing over the next four years, and if not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are working with agencies in Calgary and Edmonton and indeed throughout the province to address the homeless situation. I already alluded to the situation in Calgary, where I know they're doing an absolutely marvelous job to deal with the homeless situation there. I understand they are doing a similar kind of job here in the capital region.

It's not just government. It's governments. It's the federal government, it's the Alberta government, it's municipal governments, it's the business community and volunteers, everyone working together.

MR. NORRIS: Just as a supplement, Mr. Speaker. An organization in Edmonton, the Rotary Club, which I'm sure everybody's familiar with, has partnered in downtown Edmonton with the provincial government and the federal government, each putting in \$800,000, to build a 26-suite low-income home for singles. It's in downtown Edmonton, and it ain't a parking lot. It's an action this government has matched with the federal government, and it's going to be opened in the spring of 2002.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Rural Electrification Associations

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Energy. My constituents are receiving bills, and quite frankly they don't seem to make any sense. There seems to be an ongoing problem associated with load settlement estimates used to prepare wholesale bills for rural electrification associations. These estimates appear to be unreasonable and do not reflect actual consumption. Is that the case?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker that is absolutely correct. It's a good question. It indicates that you have bills that come in that are not balancing with the charges that are going out. Action has to be undertaken to correct this so that people are in fact paying for what they used. In that line, we are undertaking a review of the rural electrification associations data collection process to ensure that we can use the load settlement data accordingly, and we are working with the Power Pool.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: So when can consumers expect to get a complete and accurate picture of their consumption on their bill?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, in fact, a committee has been put together called the Alberta settlement committee. It's a group consisting of representation from retailers, distribution utilities, the Power Pool, transmission administrator, the rural electrification associations, and the Department of Energy. We are completing our work after having set out the description of the tasks at hand. We expect to have a complete and accurate picture of the consumption in the first quarter of 2002 and at the onset will then take corrective action. Secondly, we will continue to monitor existing issues inside that marketplace.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

(continued)

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in response to an earlier question by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I cited an incorrect number. I earlier stated that RHA base funding for the current year would be increased by 10.8 percent. That was actually before the adjustment. The actual figure is in fact 8.9 percent, and I wish to make that correction.*

Thank you.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Impaired driving is the number one Criminal Code cause of death in Canada. Each holiday season Mothers Against Drunk Driving, better known as MADD, puts on the red ribbon campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving. The campaign was launched on November 15 with an open house at the MADD Edmonton chapter, which is in my constituency. Police officers, paramedics, taxi drivers, all levels of government, and many other corporate sponsors showed their support at the launch by wearing a ribbon or tying it on their vehicles. On average 4.5 Canadians are killed and over 125 more Canadians are injured daily in alcohol-related crashes. Direct and indirect costs of alcohol-related crashes are estimated at \$9 billion annually. Simply, more needs to be done about this serious crime.

At the campaign launch an announcement was made of Calgary opening its own MADD chapter in the coming year. It is great news to hear of more support but sad news in knowing it is needed. Impaired driving has killed far too many people in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, today MADD has provided red ribbons for all the Members of the Legislative Assembly to pin on their lapels in support of this invaluable campaign. My hope is that all members will tie them onto their vehicles. By tying on a red ribbon, we will make our own personal commitment to drive sober and promote the message that impaired-driving deaths and injuries are needless and preventable. We need to take a stand and make it clear that the members of the Assembly will not tolerate drinking and driving.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Public Accounts Committee is created by Standing Order 50, which refers the previous year's financial accounts and the Auditor General's report to the committee to review. By tradition, not rule, the committee meets only when the Legislature is in session. Each week a different department is under review, and the minister appears before the committee to answer questions. This committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. It has representation from all parties. At this time it has 13 MLAs appointed by government, two from the Official Opposition, and one from the third party.

I have sat on this committee for five years, and each year I become more alarmed at how the usefulness and integrity of the committee is being eroded. Even ministers' respect for this committee ranges from respectful to dismissive and unco-operative.

A case in point. As the government has the Legislature sit for

fewer weeks each year, the committee has fewer opportunities to scrutinize the accounts of ministries. Last year we were only able to get through nine departments of a total of 24. That's two-thirds that did not receive any scrutiny on behalf of Albertans. This year – who knows? – maybe we'll get through half of the ministries.

Every attempt to have the committee operate in a manner which would give greater latitude to question ministers in depth and examine their departments has been voted down by the Conservative majority on the committee. What are they afraid of?

Just this week I put forward a motion that the \$6,000 budgeted for the Public Accounts Committee travel budget, which was unexpended due to cancellation of a conference, be used instead to have the committee meet outside of session. This would have allowed us to at least examine a few additional ministries. I've seen this committee approve other changes in its budgets, so why not this?

Government members who spoke against the motion said that we should not expend the money to do what we are constituted to do but that, instead, the money should be returned to government coffers. Does paying off the government's debt come before everything, including our legislated mandate? Do they really think it's okay to leave our job half done?

Transparent and open government? I don't think so, not if the attempt to control, limit, and hobble the Public Accounts Committee is any indication of this government's willingness to be questioned on its management of money.

2:40

Dr. Noor Jaffer

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, November 21, 2001, YMCA Calgary presented the Canada Peace medal to Dr. Noor Jaffer. This medal is presented annually to an individual or a group that demonstrates commitment to work towards peace either locally or globally.

Born in London, England, Dr. Jaffer spent most of his childhood in Uganda and graduated from the University of London with a doctorate in dentistry. He practised in St. John's, Newfoundland, before taking up a teaching position at the University of Alberta, faculty of dentistry.

Dr. Jaffer's involvement with international service and community development started when he joined Rotary International at the age of 24. He has served as director of international service and president of the Rotary Club of Calgary Olympic. He has initiated and spearheaded many projects for Rotary, including the provision of equipment and beds to a hospice for terminally ill patients in south India; the provision of over 80 ambulances to the same region, for which he was awarded the prestigious Paul Harris fellowship of Rotary International; and the building of sanitation and clean water systems in Honduras and Guatemala, to mention just a few.

From 1991 to 1994 Dr. Jaffer served as the Calgary convener for Aga Khan Foundation Canada, organizing successful annual partnership walks that raise funds and awareness of international development. More recently he has served as the communications director for Focus Humanitarian Assistance Canada, that provides emergency relief, primarily in developing countries. In May 2000 Dr. Jaffer volunteered on a CIDA mission to Afghanistan and Tajikistan to evaluate and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian food aid to those in need. Currently he is a director on the board of the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to extend congratulations and best wishes to Dr. Noor Jaffer upon receiving the YMCA Canada Peace medal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

*see page 1206, left col., para. 8

Children's Services

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two events have occurred recently with respect to children. First, philanthropist Robert Stollery proposed to an awards luncheon for innovative charities and volunteer organizations that this province dramatically change priorities. Stollery challenged Albertans to reduce poverty in the province so conditions of poorer citizens could be at least as good as those of citizens in European nations, Australia, Japan, and even Poland. He went on to say, and I quote: we could show the world a stunning Alberta advantage by shifting our priorities, by making a real frontal attack on poverty of that 20 percent of Albertans, mainly children, who now live here below the poverty line.

Second, this week we celebrated National Child Day on November 20. On November 20, 1989, the convention on the rights of the child was adopted in the United Nations General Assembly. In a move to promote an awareness of this convention, the Canadian Parliament passed the Child Day Act in 1993, designating November 20 as Child Day.

These two events seem to have had little impact on government policy. The race to be debt free is more attractive than the race to end poverty. The fervour to balance budgets is more intense than the fervour to help children. Accelerating the debt repayment is more important than accelerating programs for children.

MR. MAR: That's horseshit.

DR. MASSEY: And it isn't bullshit, Mr. Member.

The Premier seems attracted to the . . .

THE SPEAKER: Sorry. Continue.

DR. MASSEY: The Premier seems attracted to the idea of being remembered as the Premier who returned Alberta to a debt-free status. Why not a different legacy? Why not the legacy of an Alberta family poverty free? Why not a province known as much for excellent people programs as for fiscal programs? Why not a province where Child Day is truly cause for celebration?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, one of the innovative provisions we have in this Assembly is an opportunity for hon. members to provide a statement during the week. It's called Members' Statements. Tradition has always been that members' statements are provided uninterrupted, and the Speaker would never accept a point of order or, in fact, even deal with an interjection. Unfortunately, during this last member's statement there was a statement made by an hon. member in the Assembly which was totally inappropriate. The hon. member giving the member's statement obviously heard it and responded to it. What I'm going to do now is ask the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to withdraw his statement.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it was not the hon. minister for human resources.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry. I apologize to the hon. minister.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: I so withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Would that be appropriate, hon. member?

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the Government House Leader to share next week's projected business with us at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Commencing Monday, November 26, in the afternoon we would anticipate second reading of Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2), proceeding with Government Motion 21 and Committee of the Whole on Bill 28. At 8 p.m. under Government Motions, Motion 21; committee on Bill 28; third reading as per the Order Paper; and second reading of Bill 30, the Appropriation Act (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2), if necessary.

Tuesday, November 27, we would contemplate introduction of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2), Bill 31, at 1:30 p.m. for first reading and then under Government Bills and Orders at 4:30 p.m. third readings on bills 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, and 29 and otherwise as per the Order Paper. Tuesday evening at 8 under Government Bills and Orders for third reading bills 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, and 29 and committee on Bill 30 and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, November 28, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading and Committee of the Whole Bill 31, miscellaneous statutes, and third reading of Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2).

Thursday, November 29, under Government Bills and Orders for third reading, miscellaneous statutes. I should mention at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, that while miscellaneous statutes are not normally debated in the House, having been agreed to by all parties before introduction, there is an agreement between all three parties that we would spend Thursday afternoon, before inviting the Lieutenant Governor into the House at 5:15, debating the portion of the miscellaneous statutes which refers to the change to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act.

2:50

head: Orders of the Day

head: Committee of Supply

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

head: Supplementary Estimates 2001-02
General Revenue Fund

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. minister.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will just make some very brief comments to the hon. members to explain the supply estimate. This supply estimate is really separated into three components. First, the request for \$73 million: this funding is required for the farm income assistance program 2001, native forage and honey components. This program, as members would recall

from the spring, provided much-needed drought relief for Alberta's livestock and honey producers who faced very severe difficulties due to the very poor pasture conditions across the province.

Secondly, \$20 million was allocated for the Alberta farm water program, which will assist producers to secure long-term supplies to help them deal with future drought conditions. Mr. Chairman, as I have indicated to members on other occasions and in conversation, we are very impressed with the innovative use of that program and the very valuable long-term water projects that we are seeing, which include co-operative projects, which include using solar pumping, cleaning out springs, underground pipelines, and just all types of innovative things that actually really provide some drought mitigation for the future.

Finally, on the third component, since the original estimates were approved for the Canada/Alberta farm income assistance program, an additional \$51.1 million of federal contributions have been negotiated. Approval of this portion of this supplementary estimate is required to allow us to spend this allocation. With this approval, the Canada/Alberta farm income assistance program expenditures will total \$318 million, which are offset by federal contributions of \$177.9 million. We have of course received approval for these programs earlier in the year from Treasury Board.

The supplementary estimates total \$144.1 million and are offset by spending lapses of \$14.581 million, and I'll identify where those were for members: \$12.5 million in energy rebate funding that was not used or required and \$2.081 million, or 1 percent of the department's budget, pursuant to the October 18 announcement of the Finance ministers's request. Therefore, hon. members, our total supplementary estimate request is \$129,519,000.

It has been an extraordinary challenge for the agricultural producers in this province this year. Challenge is not unusual or uncommon in that industry. We have peaks and valleys; we have things that happen. But in talking to a number of producers who have been in the province for a long number of years in this industry, this has been the year probably of the greatest challenge. I must say, Mr. Chairman, that the producers in this province have I know indicated to many of you as members and certainly to me as minister their thanks and appreciation for what they feel was a very serious consideration of the challenges they faced that were far beyond their control. On their behalf I thank the members of the Assembly for considering these supplementary estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before calling on the hon. leader, I wonder if the committee would agree to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to again rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special guests that we have visiting us today. We have, I believe, 21 young ladies and gentlemen and future voters in my constituency, I might add, from the Calgary Waldorf school in Calgary-Currie along with six parent helpers, Denise Hare, Jan LeRoy, Geli Hamilton, Colette Mactaggart, Stuart Watson, and Kevin Marjoram, and their teacher, Stacey Kaban. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask that they all rise, and I hope they receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

head: Supplementary Estimates 2001-02
General Revenue Fund

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (continued)

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a real privilege to stand this afternoon and work with the minister of agriculture on trying to deal with the issues of the crisis that our sector has faced this year. It's been really important to the province and to a lot of the people in rural Alberta that we have programs in place that will provide them with some kind of certainty or some kind of stability in a time of crisis. Not only have we been faced with low prices on the world markets, but we've had drought and a whole series of other setbacks in terms of the environmental issues in our own geographic area, not just within our province but the whole western agricultural area.

I guess if I comment on the budget allocations here and some of the numbers that the minister gave us as she was making her presentation, the one question that I would have, just to make sure I got the number written down right: was it \$177.9 million from the federal government on the farm income disaster assistance program? This is part of one of the programs that we have that runs with the federal government so that we end up with a balance in terms of the responsibilities. The normal process has been that these are kind of 50-50 funded or 60-40 funded. This gives us the sense of where that balance came out, if it runs into that 60-40 range that is there in terms of the federal/provincial cost share.

I put this on the record for the minister to respond to at probably a later date, because I'm sure the data will have to be looked at, but a lot of the farmers keep asking in terms of the dollars that are allocated to the programs: how are they in the end distributed? Who are the recipients? How does it divide up in terms of the farm sector? This is a farm income based program, but farmers still want to have some kind of a demographic or characteristic breakdown of it. So that kind of information just for the public's perspective might be useful when Ag Financial Services does their annual report or something like that. I'm not asking the minister to give us that information right now, because that's too much detail to expect to be readily available, but say in an annual report or something like that so that farmers get a sense of where the dollars are going.

I guess the other question that comes up is that historically we've had a number of times when the dollars have been allocated in the budget, and they're calculated based on an expectation of need, yet by the end of the year farmers don't qualify. We end up not paying out under these programs, and there will end up being dollars left that haven't been allocated. So with the long downturn that we've had in prices, the margin that works in the FIDP program now is gradually ratcheting itself down as we get further and further away from that five-year-ago period when prices were more reasonable. I guess that's a question that comes up in terms of: how has that affected the effectiveness and the distribution of these payouts? You know, a lot of farmers now are finding themselves in the situation – and this is really characteristic of the farmers in the area a little bit east of here and out to the Saskatchewan border – where they've had four or five years now of what would be considered below-average yield because of the weather and then compounded by the down cycle in the prices. They've really, in effect, ratcheted their margins down to the point where they're not getting much support from a program like the farm income assistance program.

3:00

This is where I will recognize the minister and the efforts that they

put into the acreage payments that came out last spring at planting time so that those farmers would have the money to be the optimistic farmer: you know, this is the year. It's always going to be this year that the big crop comes. That acreage payment in the spring really gave them a chance to get that crop in the ground, to get their expenses under control to start the season.

We can see that there are some reasonably good signs now in the ag sector. Some of the commodity prices are starting to show a little bit of strength. If the trade negotiations that were started in Qatar a couple of weeks ago now will actually do something for agriculture – the Europeans have promised to open up the agriculture subsidy programs, maybe two or three or four. I hope it's not the 11 years that the Uruguay round took. That could give us some insight and some optimism three or four or five years down the road. If we can get some of those subsidy programs changed, then maybe the need for something like the farm income assistance program might not be so critical.

I guess the other thing is that, you know, a lot of farmers are asking how this program could be adjusted or if it needs to be adjusted to reflect more a cost of production base rather than just dealing with the issues of how they go about getting some kind of an insurance on a margin that they don't have any longer. They'd like to have some reflection of it in terms of the cost of production. I know that the minister has been dealing with this but more in terms of the crop insurance program rather than the direct farm income assistance program. I guess I would say that you're doing the right thing, Madam Minister, because we've got to make sure that when we make options available for the farmers, they should be made available in a way that they have to undertake an active decision for their risk management. So should they buy crop insurance, or should they not buy crop insurance? That's the kind of active participation in risk management that we should be asking the farmers to undertake.

The farm income disaster program is kind of an after-the-fact program where if they didn't get the income they were hoping for, then we as a public step in and give them some support. That, in effect, doesn't encourage them to be active participants in maybe diversification or some other kind of activity that will actually deal with the risk management that's so important. You know, these are the kinds of signals that we need to be sending as we modify these programs. We have to make sure that as the public discussion comes up about the benefit of these programs and whether or not they work well and really suit the needs of our community out there, can they work and can they be improved?

I guess one of the other questions that's come up a number of times – and I always can come up with a response for these things, Mr. Chairman. You know, it's been like some of the ag sector is basically price negotiated or price controlled under our supply management. Well, why do we, in effect, have them eligible for this as well? You know, it's the cropping sector that they have in along with their supply-managed part of their operations. The supply-managed price adjustments reflect the input costs, so why are we actually paying them for their input costs when it's being reflected in their prices? You know, this is the option that you end up with. You talk about, well, if you are only going to subsidize part of the enterprise, what they end up doing is categorizing the enterprise and spinning off a corporation over here that does the cropping and another corporation over here that does the supply management. There are ways around it, and we need to look at these kinds of manipulations and whether or not that should be taken into account. The thing that we need to look at is also how the program comes out.

The other comments on the \$75 million – or \$73 million. These glasses kind of blur things once in awhile, and I've got to get used

to them yet. So it's \$73 million in connection with the livestock and the honey producers. The money that went out on the \$4 per acre for native pasture, Mr. Chairman, is an interesting comparison between the way the two programs were put together in the sense that the \$4 per acre on native pasture was paid on an input to an agriculture commodity production. Pasture is an input to the cow/calf operator or to the other grazing operators in the province, where the \$4 per operational hive is based on a capital facility or a capacity measure. What you see is that if you pay it on the operational hive, most of the hives around the province are based on a standard size of capacity, the number of bees in it. So what we're basically doing is making sure that everybody around the province is getting about the same amount of money per unit upon which their income is based to deal with their support.

But when we look at the native pasture payment, we look at that in the context of the variation that that created in terms of opportunity across the province. In this area, say, north of Red Deer on up, it's not quite as noticeable as it is when you get into the southern part of the province. If you compare the western part of Alberta to the east, where the carrying capacity for a cow is so much different, effectively what we're doing when we get out into the eastern part of Alberta – and the carrying capacity out there might be as high as sometimes 30 or 40 or 45 acres per cow. They're getting essentially \$4. Let's just make it easy and say 30 acres per cow. They're basically getting \$120 per cow. If you go to the eastern slopes of the foothills, there the carrying capacity is down maybe 10 or 12 or 15 acres per cow. They're only getting half of the money, so they'll be getting \$50 or \$60 per cow. Now, what you've got is the eastern cow/calf operator with \$120 per cow to bid for the forage. The cow/calf operator in the foothills area has only \$50 to bid for the forage.

In essence, by our program we've created a disequilibrium in the ability of each of these individual operators to sustain their animals over the drought period. What I would contend, Mr. Chairman, is that when this program was put together, we should have used the same concept that we did for the bees. We should have made the payment on the basis of the income unit, which is the cow or the cow/calf unit. By doing that, what we could have done was given operators a matter of, say, a couple of weeks or three weeks or a month to in essence file their record with Ag Financial Services or an ag office in the province somewhere, to bring in some data that showed that these are our historic levels of the number of animal units that were owned. Then the payments could have been made on that. It may have delayed the payment two or three weeks, but it would have made it accurate. It would have made it so that we're truly dealing with market conditions, where the market is the factor that determines the decision-making rather than an inequity created by a government program.

It's really important that as we put our programs together, we don't disrupt market forces. Mr. Chairman, I think most of us in this House believe that in terms of allocating commodities and making economic decisions, the market has to be the place where we let that happen. When we develop programs that create disequilibrium disadvantages in that market system, we should be looking again at whether or not those programs are right.

3:10

I know a number of these producers had their herd sizes already registered when they were dealing with the farm income disaster program or some of the other programs that were associated, because they had to report as they filed each year, you know, the size of their operations. It wouldn't have been really difficult to have made that

based on an income unit rather than an input unit. I think that would have made the program much better, and we could have made much better use of the money that we allocated when we look at it from the provincial point of view.

The final comments that I have on this, Mr. Chairman, deal with the Alberta farm water program, the new program that was announced this year in response to the drought. I will commend the department on this, because it was so much better than the old program that we had. It provided farmers with the option to take these dollars and really deal with the crisis situation that they were facing in more than just the let's fix it up right now, the band-aid solution kind of approach. What we were doing – and the minister spoke about this for a little while when she was talking about some of the innovative ways that farmers took to implement and to put in place new water acquisition programs that basically were going to guarantee on a year-to-year basis their access to water rather than just kind of fixing it up and hoping for next year. There are a lot of places in Alberta now that have found that hoping for next year just compounds the problem. So this was a great program. The Alberta ag staff that came up with this, the people in all of the government agencies that put this program together should be recognized for it.

It'll be interesting, you know, as we get some feedback from the producers out there, to see whether or not it continues and does give them the support over a number of years that this kind of thing would provide. I guess the question that comes up yet is how they can be using that to improve the quality of the water as much as the access to the water. In a lot of places now especially groundwater sources are becoming more and more saline. So basically they're not high-quality waters any longer for livestock production. We have to start looking at some of the mechanisms that are there to kind of purify that water and make sure that that water is in a level or is in a quality that is effective and contributes to good animal husbandry.

Mr. Chairman, you know, in the context of these programs I think it's important we recognize that these \$129 million are dollars that were allocated because of the crisis the sector was in. I think it's imperative now that we ask the minister to make sure that we're looking at programs that create sustainability in the sector so that we're not ending up with these kinds of up-and-down swings in terms of public funding. We can basically put in place programs that will give us some long-term stability in the sector. I know from the comments I've had around rural Alberta that Albertans really appreciated the role that the public played in this. There are always questions about how the dollars were allocated and whether or not they were allocated fairly. I've raised a few of those questions now on behalf of those farmers and those citizens who have contacted me, but in the end I think this \$129 million is needed for the sector, and I hope we deal with it appropriately.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the comments made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I'm going to be very brief in just answering a couple of questions. One was on the figures, and yes, it was \$177.9 million. However, it was a \$126.8 million contribution, if you would recall, that the federal government allotted to Alberta for its share of a program for crops. The \$51.1 million are some dollars that we were able to negotiate with the federal government that really were owed to us from past times. Members would recall that this government provided \$10.29 per acre to producers last year with no assistance. So the 60-40 probably carries but a different way than it might be thought here. I wasn't sure if I'd been clear on how that came about.

Comments on the program of the \$10.29 and the \$4 an acre and whether it's done the right way. I think everybody would agree that

if you can go to a productivity or that type of a program, it probably is fairer. It's probably fair to say, too, that nobody would have cheques yet. We would still be trying to implement it or they would just be going out, instead of concluding it. The second thing would be that our administration costs for the program would not be less than 1 and a half percent, which they are for that one. The other one, which the member recognized, is that this was an emergency. It was a disaster, and we needed to respond quickly. The best answer is the one that he went on to talk about and that we have been working on, and that is an improved safety net program. Certainly I have appreciated the assistance and support that we've got since we did the drought tour with Minister Vanclief. I think his eyes were quite opened on really how serious it was in Alberta, particularly southern Alberta.

I'm going to ask for further assistance in impressing upon the federal minister that it's absolutely integral that they contribute on the safety net side to improve that program to more properly reflect the costs of production without distorting markets or without, as much as we can, encouraging bad management practices because of the safety net program. So we've been working on that makeup, trying to strike that balance and provide producers with a safety net that they can buy. They can insure themselves. They can buy it. They will have the certainty, their lender will have the certainty, and they will make the decisions themselves. Producers do not like to work with ad hoc programs. As appreciative as they were of this money, they do not like to work with that, and we're really hopeful that we can strike that balance.

The water program. We would never have been able to implement that in such a short time if it hadn't been for all the work that had been done by the PFRA; Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; and Alberta Environment. As I have indicated in the House before, we have been working on a drought mitigation plan for this province for some time. Thanks to that work we were able to pool some elements of that program and bring it into effect very, very quickly and respond to a very, very serious need.

There is no question that we have to continue the drought mitigation, and it would be my hope that we will bring forward to the members a plan that will work on an ongoing basis. We regret that the PFRA has not been able to be a participant in dollars in a meaningful way in recent years, but we certainly are appreciative of the expertise, the engineering technicians and so on that the PFRA brings to our province and certainly their work with all of our municipal leaders or fieldmen, with us in all of our district offices, and with us here when we're trying to put forward something that will respond to good water management and mitigation of drought.

So, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for allowing me to just respond very briefly to a few of the main areas that the hon. member commented on. Again, thank you for consideration of these estimates.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to have an opportunity this afternoon to respond to the 2001-2002 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund, initially talking about Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. I'll make a few comments about the Ag estimates, and then I'll make some more general remarks about supplementary supply estimates in general, specifically to do with the process and concerns that we in the Official Opposition have with some of those.

3:20

Mr. Chairman, in terms of the dollars that the Minister of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is coming back to the House for, I also support the request in terms of the actual dollar amounts and support the dollars in the specific programs that she has asked for here. We have a couple of points, primarily on process, on this.

One is in terms of the \$20 million for the Alberta farm water program. It's very good that the government is undertaking to help farmers develop long-term, on-farm water supplies to better prepare for a drought in the future. What isn't quite as good about that is the process. They're coming now, asking for \$20 million in supplementary supply, when drought is not a new issue for this province. It has been I think the biggest issue that certainly I have ever heard farmers talk about in all the years that I've been around, and I come from a farming community, a dryland farming community, in fact the very same one the minister comes from. So she will believe that certainly the first things I ever heard out of a farmer's mouth were: when's it going to rain, and how are they going to get the crops in, how are they going to get them off, and what are they going to do when they dry up and blow away? So this has been a problem forever in this province, no two ways about it.

So why is it now, in supplementary estimates, that the government, if they're planning on putting together some support or long-term solutions, have to come for the money? This is a very natural kind of item to have been integrated into the general budgeting plan and focus of this government if they were taking the long-term strategy, and we would have seen it in the budget in the spring. If they weren't ready to spend the money or didn't know if they were going to be ready to spend the money, they could have put that in as a note to the financial statements without there being any problems, and we would have congratulated them on their ability to plan for the future and to anticipate the kinds of needs that are out there. So this is really a planning issue, and we see it as a problem.

It comes in here as a onetime amount. We don't see any explanation in terms of whether or not it will be one time. Will they come back again next year? Is there going to be some ongoing funding? How come there's no debate about the need for ongoing funding? It would seem to me that this is the kind of plan that may require those kinds of dollars, so let's talk about it at the first opportunity, Mr. Chairman, rather than the last opportunity, which is what we see here.

In the minister's opening comments she provided some great detail and a great number of dollar figures that explained why the dollar amount that we see in supplementary appropriations was what it was. Some funds came from the feds, some they pulled from other programs, and this is the net outcome of all of those. A problem with supplementary supply estimates is that we only see a total gross figure in these books at this particular time with no detail on what the breakdown is of those dollars, and that's the real downfall of the system. The government might like that because they may think it's less easy to criticize or comment on, but it's also very much less helpful for anybody who's associated with this process, including the end users who are the recipients of the funds.

So we would like to suggest that the government take a little more proactive action. Here we have a minister who does the right thing when she comes in here and explains the dollars. She gives us the detail, but it would be even better, Mr. Chairman, if we could see that kind of detail come in these supplementary estimates, if we could see it on the actual page that explains the program funding or could see it on the page opposite that, where they give the reasons that the supplementary estimates are requested. We have a very condensed form of information here, and certainly that detail could have been put in place.

If the information isn't available prior to the printing of these

supplementary estimates, then certainly the minister could table the information in the legislation or at the very least have the courtesy to supply it to the appropriate critic in the opposition at a time when we're taking a look at reviewing these. The information is helpful. I think there isn't a member of cabinet who would disagree that for the most part, when the dollars they come and ask for in supplementary supply are unusual items or new additional items based on new additional information, we support the request for the dollars. It's only when there's a blatant case of mismanagement or an improper kind of planning that we have a problem with supplementary supply dollars. The process often we have huge problems with but not the actual request for the money. If we could ask, then, this minister to lead the rest of cabinet in terms of supplying that detail in a written form prior to these estimates being debated, that would be very helpful.

I would like to know at this time if there are any other long-term water projects that are in the works for this government. If so, will we see those budgeted amounts coming forward any time soon? Even just in terms of strategic planning as opposed to actual on-the-ground dollars that are going to be expended in the near future, that kind of information is very helpful to us.

Also in terms of the water supply situation for the droughts, what is this minister doing to work with or to apply for or to develop R and D projects that will help to address this problem and other water issues that we see throughout this province? It has just recently come to our attention that there was another as yet unconfirmed but potential problem with the water supply in southern Alberta this week in the Picture Butte area, where there seems to be some correlation between young children developing rashes and blister outbreaks on their skin, with the potential for water contamination. In fact, the information provided to us would indicate that it was quite serious in nature and that they were testing for E. coli bacteria in the water supply.

Those are the kinds of issues that we're seeing increasingly happen throughout this province, and they need some attention. This is not to cast any blame on the government in this particular instance. This is to raise the issue that it is a time for us to seriously look at finding solutions to water quality problems in this province. For the most part, we have excellent water quality, but there are spots in the province, not just in southern Alberta but along the Alberta/Saskatchewan border and in the Peace block, where we have had recurring serious water problems. It isn't enough to try and solve those after they happen, Mr. Chairman. We need to be way more proactive in that. We need to start to see some serious R and D money go into finding solutions for these kinds of projects.

Recently in my office and in my colleagues' offices we have seen people come forward with what would seem to be very bright ideas about water quality solutions, Mr. Chairman. Not the least of those are discoveries or inventions that are finished, in the process of being finished, or being tested, and the people have a hard time getting funding for them and a hard time carrying on in terms of the testing and development. One of those is one that many farmers would be interested in, I'm sure. That is a system that's relatively cheap to install and operate that takes the ozone out of the air. You pump it into your lagoon or the dugout that you've got your water in, and it cleans it up. That would be a replacement for using chemicals like chlorine or any of the other kinds of chemicals that people are now using for water treatment in small facilities or, in fact, in small towns. It solves two problems for us. It solves an air pollution problem in terms of excessive ozone in our air, and it cleans up the water to a point where the testing that they've done so far would indicate that the water samples, regardless of where they come from, are quite potable after the injection of the ozone.

3:30

So those are the kinds of developments that are very interesting, but the problem is that even if people are prepared to pursue these inventions on a part-time basis after work hours and on weekends and put in their own dollars to develop them, at the stage when they feel that they're marketable and need to be tested, they have to find some entry into the market, Mr. Chairman. Most of these kinds of inventions require approval by health departments and sometimes agriculture departments, and there aren't the right kinds of windows for these people to get in at this time.

So I would urge this minister, who very much understands the process of how to get R and D doors opened, to think beyond the box a little bit on this one and think about how we can solve some of these water issues by supporting research and development, not just at the up-front stage, when they need dollars, but all the way through to the outcome stages, where they need to go to various departments to get licences and approvals to make them market testable or even at least to the point where they can start to get approval to consumer test products prior to their actually hitting the market. It's a niche in development that this government is missing, and perhaps the Economic Development minister would be quite interested in getting involved in this too, because of course once these inventions are marketable, there's revenue to be had and spin-off to be had for all Albertans, and he seems to be quite keen to pursue those kinds of interests. So this is one of those integrated issues that many ministries could get involved in.

Now, I'd like to broaden my comments a little bit in terms of our concerns about supplementary supply estimates in general. We've had as the Official Opposition, Mr. Chairman . . . [interjections] You guys can get up and speak any time you want. It'd be nice to get one of you on the record just once before the session is over. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm sorry, but the frat boys continue to annoy us on a regular basis.

My comments are about supplementary supply in general, and they're about the serious issues, about the lack of explanation we get of how new spending will contribute to meeting defined outcomes and performance criteria. We know that the Auditor General has repeatedly brought concerns forward about that very issue, that dollar spending particularly in supplementary supply estimates doesn't meet defined outcomes and performance criteria. In fact, the Auditor General is on record as saying that this one-off kind of spending that we often see in supplementary supply estimates is a real problem for this government in the long term. It does a few things. It raises expectations for ministries that they can access onetime funding, which expectation, then, is raised that that funding is going to be ongoing on a regular basis when, in fact, often the dollars they dedicate are not sustainable and not available in any kind of a long-term fashion. It raises expectations of the recipients of those dollars that if government gives them money once, then it's not going to be as hard to get it again the second time. But, in fact, as we've seen happen in this year, that doesn't happen; it's not the case. So those are the kinds of issues that we would like the government to address.

Planning within the government's budgeting process is a problem. I spoke a little bit about that specifically to the agriculture estimates. There is no way that a government should have to come back more than once a year, which is what this government does, Mr. Chairman. As you well know, they come back once in the spring for sure, sometimes twice in the spring, for supplementary supply dollars and once in the fall. There is no way, if they were planning properly, that we would see this happening.

They come back at this particular time for a huge amount of

dollars. Why couldn't they budget for these amounts? Most of these expenses are recurring expenses every single year. Now, I know we're going to hear from the ministers that for the drought program nobody can anticipate how many dollars. That's true. The exact amount of dollars you can't anticipate. Can you anticipate in this province that there is a high likelihood that there will be some drought relief required? Yes. If you took a five-year average, you would see that in three out of five years there is some sort of drought assistance required at some point in this province. So what they need to do is start taking those long-term views. Take a look at what has happened historically, project what's going to be needed, and put funds in place to adequately fund these kinds of problems when they occur.

Exactly the same issue with fire – and I'll talk about that when we get to Sustainable Resource Development. Has there been a time in this province when we haven't had a fire? No. So figure out on average how much that is going to cost you, build it into the budget and build those kind of funds like we talked about in terms of the stability fund so that they can be addressed.

It isn't rocket science, Mr. Chairman, no matter what this government thinks. Industry has been doing this for absolutely decades. If we had a board of directors or CEOs of companies coming back to their companies two or three times a year with requests that totaled more than 1 percent or 5 percent or 10 percent of their annual budget, those people would get turfed out of their jobs, because that is not performance in any kind of a fashion. It's unacceptable. Why people accept it from their government is completely beyond me. Governments probably operate in that fashion because they can get away with it, but it isn't responsible, it isn't accountable, and it isn't the manner in which this Premier leads us to believe that he would like to operate this particular government. Yet we see this happening two, three times a year.

I think that one year we had a record. They came back three times in the spring, if I remember correctly. So that's a real issue. When the government should be doing what they say they do and what the Government Accountability Act says it does, which are the three-year plans, we see a government who actually plans on a three-month plan. Every three months they need more money.

It's a huge problem with the way the government operates, and it is not just us who are concerned about this, Mr. Chairman. We have it outlined, actually, in the Auditor General's annual report in the year 2000-2001 when he talks about the ministry business plans and the problems this government has in meeting them. We see that happening right here. He states that there are problems with costing core businesses and that "approximately one third of ministries did not adequately link costs to ministry core businesses." This is exactly what we have here when we take a look at the agriculture estimates that are more specifically up for debate right now.

The Auditor General goes on to list, Mr. Chairman, what those deficiencies are, and what he talks about there is "not identifying costs for some core businesses." [interjections] I hear a little chirping in the Assembly, Mr. Chairman. I know that we have got some accountants in this crowd, and I'm sure that they'll be happy to leap to their feet and join me in stating that this is not the proper way for businesses to run.

So he says, "Not identifying costs for some core businesses," which we saw in the ag estimates. He states that a problem is "presenting cost information for businesses other than the stated core businesses." I don't remember that Agriculture said that one of their core businesses is water/drought control. That isn't one of their core businesses. They are facilitating that process, and that is quite different.

I'll return, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the supplementary estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

3:40

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just make a handful of comments again reflecting my travels around the province and talking to people in various rural areas. It's pretty obvious that the drought conditions that have been the primary stimulus for these increases in expenditure are unevenly shared across the province and are concentrated in a handful of areas. These are areas that certainly in the last few years and in some cases for many decades have been prone to drought. It raises the question for me: how are we managing our predictions of this when we get caught having to bring in another \$130 million or so in funding a mere six months into the fiscal year? Clearly, it's difficult to predict weather, but in some ways we should be able to predict climate.

I know that in speaking to farmers around the province, farmers who are in areas that are generally successful most years, say, farmers in areas of central Alberta or through the Edmonton/Calgary corridor and so on, after a while raise concerns about the ongoing subsidies going to dryland farmers or farmers in drought areas, not that they're feeling resentful, but there is a concern that at some point we're sustaining production on land that should not any longer be in production. Is there any consideration going on in the longer term to taking some of this land out of production so that we are not faced with, say, six or seven years out of 10 having to provide drought support?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

So the main thrust of my comments on the agricultural side are having to do with how we get out of this ongoing requirement to support farmers in a drought area. Are we looking at getting the land out of production? Are we looking at changes in production? Should we be looking at, as some farmers have suggested to me, simply letting the unviable farmers go under. I think that's a pretty harsh and unthoughtful approach to take, but I know that there are people in this province and, in fact, people whose opinions on agriculture I respect who would say simply: after a certain point let these farms go under. I'm not prepared to take that position right now, but if we are in a period of tightening fiscal constraints and if we find that year after year the same areas of the province are requiring subsidies, I think at some point we're going to have to say: do we want to continue, or do we want to get ourselves out of this?

MS BLAKEMAN: Wouldn't that be priority setting?

DR. TAFT: It is a matter of setting priorities. Certainly farmers are priorities for us, and farm communities are a priority, and they have suffered badly in some cases under policies that have closed down health care facilities, consolidated schools, and generally weakened those communities. So there are many sides to this issue.

For the moment in this debate I'll stand with probably the majority of the rest of us and support this supplement, but in the longer term I would really encourage the government to look closely at ways to break this pattern, either by bringing the farms up to a sustainable level or taking the land out of production.

I'll save the rest of my comments on the entire process for later in the debate, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary

estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$129,519,000
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THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Health and Wellness

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'll make my comments brief. In aggregate the supplementary estimate being requested is \$118.7 million. This is made up as follows. After the April budget announcement the 9.6 percent increase in health authorities' base funding did not appear to meet population growth and aging and the higher cost of staff and equipment, and \$200 million in onetime funding was set aside for such authorities. New business plans are being developed on how health authorities will be able to meet their responsibilities without this additional funding in the coming fiscal year. Also, \$10.9 million is being requested for the immunization program that was applied for meningitis. Following that, there was a \$92.2 million fiscal adjustment, where on October 18 Health and Wellness adjusted expenditures by this amount as part of a governmentwide fiscal adjustment. That \$92.2 million is made up as follows: \$40 million from the health authority base budgets, \$12.2 million from the department base budget, and \$40 million from onetime energy rebates, for a total of \$92.2 million. Accordingly, if you add \$200 million plus \$10.9 million for immunization and take a \$92.2 million adjustment out, the net amount is the \$118.7 million being requested, and that is what is before us for consideration.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a privilege to rise to discuss these supplementary estimates for 2001-2002. I will make a range of comments on these, starting with the general concern of how quickly we have seen the fiscal ground shift in terms of the provincial government's management of its money. There is almost a sense of crisis – not crisis; I don't want to overstate it – a sense of very serious, serious concern about how resources are being managed by the Department of Health and Wellness and by the regional health authorities and a sense that there is nothing reliable anymore in terms of predicting expenditures or managing expenditures or predicting or managing revenues.

On the revenue side, after so many years of surpluses – I can't remember what it is now, seven or eight consecutive years of surpluses – within a very few months of tight times arriving in the province, we are into constraints and, indeed, cuts in health care, and it's exasperating. I think the citizens of Alberta are tired of government living from paycheque to paycheque and having a sense that so quickly people's requirements for health care are affected by events

that unfold, say, in the Middle East or in other parts of the world, how the length of time somebody is left on a waiting list goes up and down with the price of crude oil and natural gas.

3:50

So there's that context for this document and the estimates that we're debating today, and so much of it has been predictable. I know that I was at a one-day conference at the University of Alberta on September 7 at the business school there. It was organized by the economics department at the U of A. The theme of the conference was: Alberta managing in an era of postdebt budgets. The idea initially seemed to be that there was going to be so much money for all kinds of projects that we wouldn't know what to do with it, but it was apparent from the very first paper presented that times were tightening, that there was an unsustainable combination of policies in place from this government, a combination of hurried debt pay-down and accelerated debt payoff, falling energy royalties, corporate tax cuts, flat taxes, and spending increases, and that these combinations of things were not sustainable. So these kinds of problems were being foreseen even in the academic community – which, I'll admit, is often a bit slow to respond to things – some months ago.

There is a difficult context out there generally, and more specifically I am concerned with the trends relating to this department and the management of this department. As legislators we voted on the budget here on I believe it was the 31st of May. We gave final approval to the budget. Then six weeks later or thereabouts there was a \$200 million increase to that budget, and then in late August there was an announcement by the major regional health authorities that they were going to be running deficits. Then in early October, as the minister explained, there was a cut, and now today we are debating supplements. So in a period of five months or so there have been four substantial changes to the budget, and it really does raise for me serious questions about budget control in the department.

I've worked in the health care field off and on for, I hate to say it, close to 30 years, 29 years, something like that. One of my first professional jobs was working on planning for new health care facilities and doing the population projections. We weren't quite using slide rules then; we actually had calculators. We would spend hours – this was as a consultant – with calculators doing the population projections: breaking the population down by age groups and projecting various migration levels, high, medium, and low migration levels; working in the inflation rates; and then projecting health care demands and health care costs on that basis. I'm not sure who's doing that function anymore, whether it's the regional health authorities themselves or the department, but when a mere six weeks or so after this Assembly approves a budget there is a requirement for a \$200 million increase because of failing to take population growth or aging or migration into account or failing to take inflation into account, it tells me that something in the budget control process either at the department level or in the regional health authorities is not working the way it should.

There was a time when hospitals, hospital boards, or hospital facilities that looked like they were going to be running into a deficit were monitored closely enough by the department that the management actually was called into the budget bureau at the department of hospitals in those days and was put on the spot well in advance of deficits actually appearing and told: if you do not take corrective action, you're going to be running a deficit. Now there's a concern that in some ways the regional health authorities, especially the two major ones – and don't take this as an outright attack on the regions; I think they're in many ways very good organizations – have become so big and so powerful that there's a sense that the Edmonton and Calgary regional health authorities are driving the system and that

the department itself is struggling to keep the regional health authorities accountable.

This is, I think, compounded by things that have occurred within the department over the last several years. For example, in the last eight years there have been seven deputy ministers of health, and there's a loss of continuity there that really creates problems. There's a failure for a reliable and trustworthy or predictable management structure to settle down. There's a failure for leadership to be able to take hold in that department. As a result, we end up with the kinds of fiscal questions that are here today. There have been at times changes in the management of the department that go much beyond the deputy minister. They go down through the assistant deputy ministers and even to the director level so that after the debates on Bill 11 we saw a large number of managers in that department simply replaced. As a result, the department lost its corporate memory. Certainly some very strong people left the department, and those who were brought in didn't have the experience, the history with the issues to be able to stay on top of them.

So when I listened today and in the last few days to a policy being developed that will allow the regional health authorities to accumulate deficits from one year to the next and put forward plans to pay those down, I think that people with a longer term memory of the system will look back and say: that's exactly what was allowed to be done in the 1970s and early 1980s. The result is that the regional health authorities just allow their deficits to build and build and build, and sooner or later the provincial government is on the hook for those deficits. That's a policy that's developing today that I think history will teach us and indeed can teach us is a mistake in policy. Sooner or later taxpayers pay for it. It's a cost that arises, I feel, to some substantial degree from a weakness in the management of the department.

As we begin to zero in more specifically on the \$118 million appropriation, I think everybody here is going to say: "Well, good. Good for the department for taking the initiative and supporting the inoculations for meningitis." Any of us who know people who have had meningitis or have followed the course of that disease with any care at all realize it's a terrifying disease with very high mortality rates. Tragically, people who survive are often seriously, seriously disabled. I know of cases where children with meningitis have survived but have had to have all their limbs amputated. Well, that's a terrible, terrible situation, and there are all kinds of other complications from meningitis. So I would fully endorse and I'm sure everybody here will fully endorse that sort of initiative. Indeed, it may well be that investing that \$10.9 million in immunization is in fact saving us all kinds of money in the long term, so I think that's a terrific expenditure.

4:00

When we look at the remaining, as the minister explains it, increases and decreases and ultimately the remaining \$107.8 million, my concern is not that that's too much money or that we're going above budget. My concern is more that I don't feel confident that we really know whether that's too much or too little, because we don't have and we haven't established a solid baseline. There have been so many changes in funding for health care over the last eight years that we don't have historical norms by which we can judge today's level of spending. In fact, I would take that back. We do have historical norms, but they are from the years before the current government took hold. Say, if we look at the 10-year interval from 1983 to 1992, we will see that health care spending, adjusting for population and inflation, was moving up and down in a pretty narrow range. Indeed, I would put forward to the minister that that's

about the level at which a well-managed health care system for Alberta should be sustained and can be sustained.

I'm not going to say that this money shouldn't be spent. It may well be spent, and it is in the overall scheme of things a fairly small percentage on a \$6 billion budget. So whether we use per capita spending as adjusted for inflation and go back to, say, the 10 years before the current government was in place or whether we use health care spending as a percentage of GDP, which is a standard level – by either of those measures we are in this year's budget more or less within normal ranges. I'm not going to be saying that we shouldn't spend this money or that we should. I'm going to say that it's within normal ranges, so I would support it. I guess I will be saying that we should be spending it.

I won't go into discussing in any depth my concerns for the future levels of spending. I'm sure the minister is motivated to manage within levels of funding that are currently available. Assuming those are adjusted for a growing population and for inflation and with a very small adjustment for aging, maybe 1 percent a year or 1.4 percent a year, we should, if we are disciplined and strong in our management, be able to keep a viable and vibrant and effective health care system going in this province indefinitely.

That exhausts my comments on these estimates. I will say that I'll be supporting this bill and encourage the minister to keep the system on track so that we're not back here with another round of supplements six months from now.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased this afternoon to have an opportunity to make a few comments about the estimates for Health and Wellness that are before us and before the House. One of the items that I have a great deal of sympathy for, of course, is the almost \$11 million that has been put into the budget to extend the immunization program for children under 24 months in terms of meningitis. I think it's just a great move, and I say that with a great deal of self-interest, having a grandson who was able to take advantage of that program and is now protected against meningitis. I think that you'll find broad support across the province for supplementary estimates being used for that kind of expense.

It was obvious for some time that there was concern about getting a vaccine that was safe, and it took some time to develop. I'm not sure, but I think it's the case that at budget time there was no way that the government or the department could have known that this opportunity would present itself and that a vaccine would be made available and that it would be in place as early as it is. So I really support the \$11 million.

The Auditor General made some comments about the Health and Wellness budget. One of the criticisms he made is that the department continually spends more money on our health system without knowing the value of the extra spending. I think this is an exception to that criticism. This is an expenditure that we certainly do know the value of, not only in prevention but in terms of ease of minds of parents and family members who are concerned about meningitis and the kinds of outbreaks that we've had in the community and now having protection for young children that was not previously available.

One of the concerns, of course – and it's a concern that's raised every time the supplementary estimates are before us – is the concern about business plans and the value of business plans. We spend at budget time a great deal of time poring over budget plans and trying to understand them, trying to take in the kinds of

objectives that the departments have and match those objectives with the dollars that they are projecting. It's work that, I think, most members of the House take very seriously. We expend a considerable amount of resources on our research staff poring over those plans, trying to assure ourselves that the money is being well spent and that, in fact, we are raising the kinds of issues that should be raised in budget consideration, only to find that supplementary estimates come along and those plans in some part are cast aside. It does call into question the business plans.

I think it's, again, something that the Auditor General has commented on. One of the comments he made was that he doesn't think it's management that's thwarting the business plans from being useful. He doesn't go on to say whom he does think it is, but I think the implications are rather clear. The number of supplementary requests for money has been considerable over the time that I've been in the Assembly, and as I said, every time one of those comes forward, it really calls into question all the hard work that's been done in budget preparation and trying to understand the budget.

The onetime transitional funding to health authorities: I was listening, but I'm not sure I'm clear as to exactly what that money is going to be used for. Again, it's going to be interesting to see how the new health authorities with elected boards approach fiscal management, whether the election of people at large makes a difference in terms of how those boards are managed and the impact eventually on supplementary estimates. Will it result in better planning at the local level and hence at the central budget? Certainly one hopes that that might be the case, that the introduction of public members to those authorities will be a healthy thing in terms of the operation of those authorities and their ability to match costs and revenues.

One of the other comments, Mr. Chairman, is some concern or some question about the criteria that the government uses in determining whether or not unbudgeted spending is necessary. I think, as I said, that the case here for the immunization program is clear, but the rest of it in this budget and in other estimates that are before us this afternoon are not nearly as clear. So it would be interesting to have the criteria that is used by the government made explicit. I'm sure there has to be within departments something rather than ad hoc arrangements for making requests, that it is based on criteria that are defensible. [A beeper sounded]

4:10

DR. TAYLOR: Ask for unanimous consent to continue.

DR. MASSEY: I don't need it. I still have 10 minutes. But thank you. Sorry, I was interrupted, Mr. Chairman.

So making that criteria explicit I think would be useful to the Assembly, particularly when we have before us budgets such as this. I think I'll conclude with those comments.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. [interjections]

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, thank you. Thank you for the support. I'm pleased to get an opportunity to comment on the supplementary estimate for the Department of Health and Wellness. This is an issue that touches every elected official, I think, particularly those in the provincial and the federal spheres. It's been interesting in my five years watching the progression of what's being offered through health care in Alberta and people's attitude towards it and even the government's attitude towards it.

When I first started, it was possible for people to be recognized as

being really in need of assistance and through some misunderstanding they hadn't gotten to the place they should be on the list. As MLAs you could try and help them there, and my office was very successful. I'd say that about two years ago the ability to do that stopped. As it was very succinctly put to me: "Look; you know, all 15 people on this waiting list are as sick as they can possibly be. They're all an emergency; they're all urgent. Your person is no sicker than the other 14, so there's no moving them around on a list. They're all really sick." What we've ended up with is a system where by the time people get into it, they are so ill that they're all in there together. So our attitude towards the health care system has changed, and what we think it's for and at what point health care comes into people's lives has changed.

When I'm looking at this supplementary budget, there are two areas that are being covered here. One is the almost \$11 million for the meningitis immunization program. Then there is sort of money in, money out, money around, and we end up with a shakedown figure of \$118.7 million, which is going into general health, I would say. But it's arrived at by extra money that was put in, then some was taken out, and then the energy rebates that were promised didn't happen, so that money was withdrawn. That's money going into the general health care system, and I think this is where there are a lot of lessons to be learned. Certainly the Auditor General has repeatedly used the Department of Health and Wellness as an example of what not to do and is expressing real concern about this because we have this repeated onetime funding, this repeated: well, we'll just put money in to cover this. The Auditor General's point is that you keep doing that and it becomes expected.

On the other side of this I look at – and we had a question today in question period about it – the downloading of the provincial deficit onto the RHAs and the school boards and the children's authorities, and that in fact is what is happening.

Let me take a step back here. When this particular government came into power in the early '90s, they were going to restructure health care, and I was looking forward to that because I think we did need a restructured health care program. What we got from it was another layer of bureaucracy, called the regional health authorities, that also allowed the government to take a step back and to shunt off responsibility. So for quite a long time when we asked questions in the House here, the response was: that's not us; that's the RHAs; ask the RHAs. Well, we did ask the RHAs, who went: well, sorry; that's the best we can do because that's the only money that we're getting. So back to the government and ask the government why they're not giving them so much money. Okay? So we would duly follow that through, and despite the number of times that the government tried to sort of say, "It has nothing to do with us; that's the RHA decision-making process," it isn't, in fact. If you're not given enough money to budget properly from the beginning and to do three-year plans and long-range plans and performance measurements and targets and outcomes, if you don't have enough money to provide the service that you are authorized to do or expected to do, yeah, you're going to have trouble and you're going to be running a deficit.

I think it's odd that the government had to pass a law to keep itself from racking up a deficit. I would have thought that was obvious, but this government needs to have a law to restrain itself. So, okay, they passed a law, and in doing so, they have to get rid of that deficit somewhere, so they end up squeezing these second-layer organizations, in some cases delegated administrative organizations, but second layers of responsibility: the regional health authorities, the children's authorities, school boards. Municipalities are the other place it's happening.

So we didn't get a restructured system except for this extra layer of responsibility-taking, which they really couldn't do because they

weren't getting enough money. They have consistently since '93 been unable to budget appropriately and have needed I think every year – I'm sure the minister would know and can correct me on that – additional funding to be injected into the budget to take care of it. You know, we've had a lot of figures thrown around here about whether health care spending is in a crisis and is spiraling out of control, and this is all sounding really early '90s to me. In fact, then we found out that health care costs weren't spiraling out of control. They had been reduced in the budget every year since 1986, so where was the spiraling out of control? Nonetheless, we had massive cuts.

Now we're being told again that we're approaching the 50 percent mark of the total government budget that could be spent on health care. Or what's the other figure we hear? Thirty five?

4:20

DR. TAFT: No. Even 100.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, 100 percent. Okay.

In fact, we've also got other figures that show that we're not out of control here. We're just not using the resources in a very efficient manner, and that does have to do with having some sort of consistency and stability to allow you to plan so that we don't have to keep injecting this, you know, \$118.7 million. Now, that figure, again, is arrived at by some sort of interesting financial alchemy. Nonetheless, it turns up in the budget as \$118.7 million. So we don't have a health care department or a health care system that is capable at this point of planning for the future, of dealing with its responsibilities now. It's not structured in a way that lends itself to that, and we have a public who's very unhappy with the way health care services are being delivered.

Now, let me stop there and talk a little bit about performance measurements. One of the things this government started out to do – and I think it's a good thing to do – is to set itself performance measurements to measure its progress. So you're going to have a benchmark of where you start and then measure your progress in accomplishing your goals, and you've got to have some targets about how you're going to do that. Over and over and over again this government sets its performance measurements by opinion poll, which I find really odd. So you get these surveys about, you know, how satisfied were people. Well, of course, ask somebody coming out of the hospital: how satisfied are you with health care? "Oh, you know, it's good. I didn't die." "Okay. Great. I'm glad you're so satisfied with it."

But that's not giving us a realistic picture of how long it took the person to get into the hospital, how long they waited in the corridor to get a bed. Were they able to get the appropriate tests? Were they seen by the correct specialist within a given period of time? Were too many tests ordered? There are all kinds of other performance measurements that can be used to describe whether someone is receiving appropriate care and whether there's good value for money in the health care system beyond an opinion poll of whether they were satisfied. Of course anyone that makes it out of the hospital is satisfied. Well, yeah. They got out of the hospital. So, yeah, you're going to score high.

The Minister of Justice is speaking to me, and I'm sure he'll leap to his feet and help to debate on this budget as soon as I'm finished.

So I'm talking about a business plan that needs to be followed and adhered to. We need stability in funding and consistency in funding for a good plan to be developed, and you need those measurements and targets to be able to test how you're doing and look at how you're doing in delivering that particular service. We don't even

have those performance measurements. We've got opinion polls, which isn't helping us with anything.

One of the other things that's occurred to me recently is that when the cuts first happened sort of in '93-94, a lot of people that were involved in the system – and I'm talking the health care system and other departments that were cut fairly dramatically at that time – really worked hard to pick up the pieces, to go the extra mile, to put in 150 percent. Eventually they stopped doing that, and I'm going to be really interested to see whether this time when there is another so-called crisis – and I've yet to be convinced that there is another crisis here – those people will step in again, and I think they won't. I think they've figured out that they are just disguising the problems the government is in. When you've got people that will work undocumented overtime hours, when they go that extra mile and the system is not aware that that time is being put in, that that money is being spent by a person and donated back into the system, you don't have a true picture of the cost of what's going on.

I know from speaking to some doctors that at that time they'd stay late every night. They'd phone around to all the hospitals and clinics and they'd try and get their patient in, the one that was sitting in the corridor or whatever. One guy said: "You know, I just realized that I could do this forever, and I stopped doing it. I just go home to my family now. I work my full day. I even work more than that, and then I go home, because I am never going to be able to get all of my patients in anymore. That time is gone. It's past. All I'm going to do is make myself sick and be less of a good doctor because of all this time I'm spending chasing after beds for my patients." So he just decided that that's it. He's not going to do that extra work, that hidden work, that hidden time and money that's supporting the system but is never accounted for.

I'm interested to see what's going to happen this time, and I think the people that are in the system are not going to support it again. They're not going to cover up. They're not going to put in that overtime anymore. Maybe, as a result of that, we will actually see what the system costs and we can actually get down to some realistic planning and understand exactly how much time and money this system costs us.

Now, I look at this additional money that's going into health care. We've really had quite a spiking of money going into health care over the last 10 years.

DR. TAFT: Yo-yo.

MS BLAKEMAN: A yo-yo effect. Thank you. That's probably more accurate.

We have been putting more money into the system in the last couple of years, but are we able to measure whether this is giving us a better system? I would contend that it doesn't. It's all the more puzzling when we now hear that despite all that money going in, we have the two largest regional health authorities with a combined deficit, after all of the accounting has been done and all of the ins and outs and the financial alchemy have been done, of \$50 million. That's astonishing, absolutely astonishing. It is a downloading from the provincial budget onto these RHAs and the children's health authorities.

That's one of the things that I'm most interested to not see – and I'll underline not – in this 2001-2002 supplementary estimates for the general revenue fund, that there's no money in here for Children's Services. We're putting extra money into Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Health and Wellness, Justice, Learning, Sustainable Resource Development, and then a number of areas under the Legislative Assembly. Support to the Legislative Assembly: I suspect that must be the additional pension money. Office of

the Chief Electoral Officer: well, that makes sense; we had an election. Office of the Ethics Commissioner: I think that's because the Ethics Commissioner and the FOIP Commissioner were split, and there would have been expenses in separating the administration of those two offices. There's no Children's Services on that list, so how important are children in this province? I guess they're not. We've got children's authorities that are running deficits as well, but for some reason the government is not going to put money in there. Interesting comment.

So I'm going to support this money going in because I think – you know, I really don't want to do this. I don't think it's right to support time after time after time this kind of shabby management, and every time we approve one of these supplementary estimates, we allow that poor management. We allow this: "Whoops; got it wrong; just a sec; let me shovel some more money in there to make it all come out so that we've got a balanced budget." Well, that's not balanced budgeting. It isn't, not if you can go and dig money out of some pocket and stick it back in to give yourself a zero-base budget. It's poor management. This is our health care system, and I expected better.

This government has been in power 30 years. You guys are supposed to know how to do this. It seems to me you get worse every year. Let's look at what's happened over the years with however many supplementary supplies we've had. You know, between '86 and '93 the Treasurer of the day had seven special warrants, for a total of \$2.1 billion. When we look between the 1992-93 fiscal year and '96-97, six different special warrants authorizing – oh, that's a bargain. That was only needing to authorize a total of \$611 million. Then between 1996 and the '99-2000 year we, again, had seven extra moneys. Look at this: there are two that were called for in '97-98, two that were called for in '98-99, and two that were called for in '99-2000, for a humdinger total of \$2.9 billion. They're not getting better; they're getting worse. Wait for this. In the last fiscal year, for the 2000-01 year – and we'd had two different Treasurers – we're at \$1.4 billion. That's amazing. We're at almost half from two appropriations compared to six or seven appropriations from other Treasurers. Astounding. We're not getting better at this; we're getting worse. We need more and more money to dig ourselves out of the lack of planning and management that's happened.

So you know what? I don't think I am going to vote for this. I know that this is money in health care and we all want to support that, but frankly I can't support this kind of shabby management and shabby budgeting.

4:30

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Shame.

MS BLAKEMAN: Shameful. Absolutely. I agree with my colleagues from the government side. It is shameful. I can't support that year after year after year, and I'm not going to support it.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, obviously you don't support it because there are only seven of you and 74 of us.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, it's interesting that the Minister of Environment is wondering why the government side gained more members and the opposition side lost members. I would have been very, very interested to see what would have happened in that election had the government members actually fessed up to what their mandate was. If the government had actually been out there on the campaign trail talking about how they were going to vote

themselves a pension package or talking about how they were going to cut money from social services and preventative . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the allocated time has run out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd also like to make a few comments today on supplementary estimates. As the Member for Edmonton-Centre was doing such a fine job when her time ran out, I'd also like to point out the same observations when we talk about special warrants between the years of '86 to '93. We talk about appropriations from 1992 to '97. We talk about the Treasurer of the day from 1996 to 2000, who had supplementary estimates of close to \$3 billion. Here we are in the year 2000-2001 asking for supplementary estimates in the neighbourhood of \$1.4 billion. As the Member for Edmonton-Riverview said earlier, this is a matter of serious concern.

Now, when we look specifically at the Department of Health and Wellness and see that there is a \$6 billion budget there and they are requesting an additional \$118.7 million, I certainly would never not support this money going to these programs, where they are so desperately needed. It is a situation, Mr. Chairman, where we certainly can look at the needs of our health authorities and their money requests. At the same time I think we also have to look at what has been said over the years as far as the way we do business in the Department of Health and Wellness.

I look first of all at the Auditor General's report, and I'm quoting here from page 6, Mr. Chairman. This is from the 2000-2001 annual report. In this particular paragraph the Auditor General goes on to say:

In this year's report, you will read that the Department continually spends more money on our health system without knowing the value of that extra spending. The primary risk for the Department, regional health authorities, and physicians is that costs will escalate but results won't improve. Although the health budget continually and rapidly increases, supplementary funding is commonly used and one-time funding is now chronic. The principle that we follow as individuals, of managing within the resources we have, does not seem to apply.

Those words were from the most recent Auditor General's report about this particular department.

Now, then, earlier today a number of us were at the AAMDC convention, where we heard the Premier talking. The Premier was talking about the Mazankowski report and how they had a number. In this particular case, Mr. Chairman, he did indicate that the Mazankowski report was compiled by authorities from all over the world. Yet this report, that was supposed to be so great – and perhaps it is; I don't know. I haven't been able to see a copy of it yet. Certainly a copy was leaked to the *Calgary Herald*, it's my understanding, and it isn't there. I guess the thing that concerned me most about the Premier's comments today was how he's indicating that there is going to be a quick implementation of the recommendations of that report.

Now, then, if we had anything, Mr. Chairman, absolutely anything – any cost analysis, anything that shows we're going to have an improvement in services to Albertans, anything that indicates that the health of Albertans is going to improve, and anything that indicates that the demand on our health care system would be reduced by following these recommendations – if we had anything in regards to this, then certainly Albertans would support this. But to certainly go ahead and indicate that we are going to have massive changes without the analysis, without the studies being done, is totally wrong.

It seems that I am not the only one that has these concerns. Again I want to go back to the Auditor General's report. He took a summary, and I'll just refer to this summary: "For example, the following summary is taken word for word from my 1997-1998 annual report. What I said three years ago still applies." Now, doesn't this give you great concern when this department has had three years to react to the Auditor General's report? After he quotes what he had said three years ago, he goes on to say: "I do not believe that management ignores my audits and recommendations. Management agrees with recommendations and tries to implement them. However, progress is unsatisfactory."

4:40

So we have here recommendations, in fact 25 pages of recommendations in his report on this particular department, and we find ourselves back here again asking for more money. Certainly this is a tough situation from our point of view, that we are continually being asked to approve supplementary estimates for departments that haven't budgeted properly, particularly when we see the yo-yo effect that has happened since our budget was released in March and since it was approved at the end of May. We do have a serious problem here. We do have a serious problem when the two largest health authorities in this province are running deficits. Of course, as we continue to cut back departments and if the price of oil and natural gas continues to fall and we get back to the days when Dick Johnston was our Treasurer and trying to deal with oil at \$10 a barrel and meet the costs that seem to be escalating, then what is going to happen at this particular juncture? How is this government going to deal with that? Are we going to see more and more cuts to our health care system?

I also was quite interested in another issue, *The Future: Meeting Priorities, Sharing Benefits, Budget 2001*. This is the second-quarter activity report. I notice on page 6, *Promoting Health and Wellness*:

Health care is important to all Albertans. That's why the Alberta Government continues to search for innovative ways to improve the health system and address the needs and priorities of Albertans.

In the Second Quarter, the government continued to focus on the health of Albertans.

And if we look at the third bullet in this particular issue, this is one thing that disturbs me. It "provided emergency response support for the BP Canada Fort Saskatchewan ethane cavern storage fires and the Barrington blowout west of Zama." Now, why is this department absorbing those costs?

MS BLAKEMAN: A blowout in Zama here under health care?

MR. BONNER: A blowout, yes, in this particular report. Now, why are we covering the costs that should have been covered by the private provider? So, yes, there are, Mr. Chairman, serious problems here with this whole idea of supplementary estimates.

It's also quite interesting to note that some of the members on the opposite side have increased their vocabulary.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, have they?

MR. BONNER: Yes. They're up to one signal now.

Now, then, I also noted that when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre was talking, she referred to the fact that here in Alberta we cannot run a deficit. The Liberals fully agree with that, and we never would, but what we seem to forget, Mr. Chairman, is that it wasn't the Liberals that created this enormous debt.

MS BLAKEMAN: Who did?

MR. BONNER: Who did? Well, you know what? It wasn't this present government, but it must have been the government before this government, because we just don't seem to be able to say that this enormous debt that we are still working hard to pay off—and as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East and Leader of the Official Opposition pointed out today, we are sitting on over \$2 billion to pay off the debt, to pay off issues that are coming due next October. We are sitting on that kind of money when in fact we have programs that are being cut, when in fact we have supplementary estimates that are asking for \$1.4 billion.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I have to say that we haven't done a very good job this year, not when we are coming back to this House and asking for \$1.4 billion, which is half of what other governments in this province that have used supplementary estimates have asked for. So it is time for this government to seriously look at these recommendations of the Auditor General and certainly to follow the talk that they give us about good management and to certainly be better caretakers of those hard-earned dollars that Albertans supply to this government.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With all that clapping, I wish I had more to say, but what I wanted to put on the record was that I think my colleagues have done a very commendable job and a very thorough job of discussing the health care estimates. I won't add anything to that, but I would like to point out that it is Natalie the page's birthday, and we would like to wish her a very happy birthday.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I listened very carefully to the comments made by the hon. members for Edmonton-Riverview and Edmonton-Mill Woods and noted also the birthday greetings from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

I heard a number of words that caught my attention, particularly from Edmonton-Riverview, when he talked about the combination of factors that are challenging the sustainability of government programs, including health care spending. I'm glad that he recognizes that sustainability is an important factor that we must consider in drafting our policy. I should say that sustainability is often used in talking about health care but not often defined, and I would suggest that the definition of sustainability is that it is to employ our finances and our human resources in health care in such a way that we meet the needs of current generations of Albertans, in such a way that we do not impair the ability of future generations to do the same thing.

I noted also that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about the Auditor General's comments on ensuring that we get value out of our health care dollars spent, and he noted, as did the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, that the immunization program for vaccination against meningitis was indeed a very cost-effective measure. I trust that we can expect from both these members future reforms that may come forward that will focus on outcomes as opposed to merely activity in our health care system.

I should note also that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre commented on the need to look at outcomes and not simply patient surveys of satisfaction rates. While those types of surveys are

important, Mr. Chairman, I should note that they cannot form the only basis for the development of policy, and to that extent I agree with her. I listened also to the constructive comments put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Mr. Chairman, having taken note of those comments, I would now like to call the vote on the supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: After considering the supplementary estimates for the Department of Health and Wellness, are you ready for the vote?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Operating expense and capital investments, \$118,743,000. Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:48 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

5:00

For the motion:

Bonner	Klapstein	O'Neill
Calahasen	Lord	Ouellette
Cardinal	Lougheed	Pham
Ducharme	Lukaszuk	Rathgeber
Fischer	Lund	Renner
Forsyth	Mar	Stelmach
Friedel	Marz	Stevens
Fritz	Masyk	Taft
Gordon	McFarland	Tarchuk
Graydon	Melchin	Taylor
Hancock	Nelson	VanderBurg
Hutton	Norris	Vandermeer
Jonson		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Carlson
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Totals	For – 37	Against – 2
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Agreed to:

Operating Expense and Capital Investment	\$118,743,000
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THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Justice

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The supplementary estimates that were tabled in the House really say almost all that needs to be said about the Justice supplementary estimate. We're looking for an extra \$9 million, and as members will know, those are divided into two areas, the first being extra supply for justice of the peace compensation.

Members will know that there was a justice of the peace compensation commission, as we're required to do. That compensation commission came in with a compensation level which was higher than we had quite frankly anticipated or believed was necessary. As we're entitled to do, we brought forward compensation levels which were less than recommended by the commission with appropriate reasons therefor. In any event, the compensation levels that we brought in were higher than we anticipated, and therefore we needed the extra dollars. The \$2.518 million are essentially to provide for those necessary funds. We were not expecting to have to pay at that level, and that's why the supplementary estimate is necessary and was unbudgeted.

The other \$6.5 million, as members will well know, are for the compensation for legal officers, increased legal officers' compensation for hiring additional Crown prosecutors. While some might say that could've been anticipated and should've been budgeted, I would point out to members that it really only came to a head at this point in time because of the improved economy which resulted in both the federal government getting into additional hiring and paying at a level that was higher than we were paying and, as well, an arbitration award in Ontario that increased prosecutors' salaries by about \$30,000.

So while it might've been argued that we should've budgeted for these supplementary dollars, I think it's reasonable to suggest that we didn't budget for them for those reasons and that it's quite appropriate to come back now and ask the Assembly for supplementary supply in those areas to accommodate the necessary increases to legal officers' compensation and hiring additional legal officers.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's an interesting argument that's been put forward by the Minister of Justice about why he needs to be coming back and seeking out an additional \$9 million for his department.

You know, overall I'm sympathetic with the position that the minister finds himself in, because I think that justice is one of the most important things that a government provides to its people. I think that the government needs to be carefully prioritizing how it approaches the different services and programs that it offers, because this department I think has come far too close to the line of failing to meet its constitutional duties. We are obligated to make available access to justice. If access to justice is delayed too long in this country, the cases get thrown out of court. You're supposed to be seen in a timely manner; your case is to be heard in a timely manner.

One of the things that the Department of Justice is to be providing is public safety. It's not public safety if we have people that are charged with a crime — perhaps they're guilty; perhaps they're not. We don't know, because they're never going to get their court case. It gets punted because it's taken too long to get there. Why would it be taking too long to get there?

Well, let's have a look at the situation that this department has

found itself in in the last year, and I'll come back later to talking about why this should have been anticipated. In the last year we've had dozens of Crown prosecutors leave, and I've heard from them. Many of them are my constituents. They've phoned me, written to me, stopped me on the street and talked to me, just stopped me in a bank lineup and talked to me once, saying: "Look. I really, really, really love my job. I love doing this. I don't mind as a lawyer being paid substantially less than my colleagues or the students I graduated from university with. I don't mind that. I love the work. I love doing the right thing for people, but I've got to be realistic. You know, I'm carrying a caseload of 500 cases when the average across Canada is 342, when I'm paid substantially less than anybody else, and if I'm going to work that hard, I need some help here. I've got to hire someone to clean my house and walk my dogs and pick up my kids after school. I can't be there to do it because I'm working 500 cases. I'm working 40 percent more cases than is average in Canada." So these Crown prosecutors were getting coaxed away. Well, it hardly took any coaxing. They were walking across the street to the next federal job that came open. They were going back into private practice. We were losing our Crown prosecutors.

Now, part of our system of giving access to justice is you get a lawyer. One is appointed for you if you don't have one, and there's a lawyer on the government side that brings forward the case. If we don't have a lawyer on the government side that's bringing forward the case, it's not coming forward, so we need those Crown prosecutors.

The second thing that's happened is that there are now 10 vacancies in the Provincial Court, and we're responsible for that. Ten vacancies. There are courtrooms where there are no judges sitting, so they can't very well hear cases; can they? Even if we had the Crown prosecutors to bring the cases forward, we don't have the judges that are sitting in the courtrooms.

Courtrooms are the next thing. We don't have enough courtrooms. This, in particular, has been a long-standing problem that should have been anticipated. That's showing up on all levels of our court system and could certainly have been anticipated two or three years back.

I think we should have been able to anticipate fairly easily what was happening to our Crown prosecutors. They started leaving here a year ago. Well, we are well into our budget planning process for the budget that's going to come out in the spring of 2002. So a year ago the minister should have been able to figure out that we were going to have a problem with Crown Prosecutors. They were already starting to leave a year ago when the minister was well into the planning process. He should have been able to anticipate that, even looking across Canada and going, "Hmm; gosh, look at the workload that these guys have got; I think I might have trouble with them soon," or even looking and comparing the salary levels. Of course, it was obvious this was going to happen.

5:10

So three things were all conspiring against us there: the Crown prosecutors leaving because of their pay scales and their workload; the lack of judges and the vacancies on the bench; and, literally, the lack of courtroom space to hold trials in and to have your cases heard in. That was truly jeopardizing Albertans' access to justice, and if that is one of the things that the government must provide to its people, I think this is an appalling example of not being able to run a good business plan and anticipate this.

When I look at what the Auditor General has to say — something can dig this ministry out, for heaven's sake. No. We have huge points being brought forward about accountability for legal services and the fines. This department cannot figure out how much money

it's collecting. This recommendation has come forward from the Auditor General in the '99-2000 report and in the '94-95 report, a recommendation to "determine the results and costs of its fines collection activities." The department still hasn't done it. We don't really know how much money.

The Auditor General here is saying that "the Department collects about \$100 million from approximately one million fines," but we don't really know that. "The Department needs to understand the success of its collection activities. The Department should determine the number of fines levied, collected, outstanding and written off." We don't know that.

On the one hand, we've got a government going: "Oh, we're in trouble. We've got to cut back. We're going to shovel our deficits down the line onto the municipalities and regional health authorities and children's authorities." On the other hand, they don't know how much money they're supposed to be collecting. This is a revenue source. We're not sure how much it is.

So the minister of this department has my sympathy, because I don't think he gets the support and the prioritization from his colleagues that he should. If the government is not providing public safety to its citizens, then many of the other things that government provides don't even come into the mix. The minister has my sympathy in that.

At the same time, I'm going to take him to task. I think he's probably a good administrator. I don't know how it works, but he needs to spend more time looking at how his department is administered if he's got these kinds of problems coming. These are huge problems. I hope he's not telling me that he missed these and didn't see it coming, because that doesn't speak very well to management and planning. You know, when I go and I look at the past and go, "Okay; how have we done in the past with management and planning?" whoops, we've got repeated recommendations from the Auditor General going: hey, folks, we don't know how much money we're supposed to be collecting from fines. We don't know how much we did collect, and we don't know how much we missed or lost or it was canceled or whatever.

So am I willing to support this additional money that's going into this supplementary supply for 2001-2002? In this department I am willing to support it. I'm not willing to support it in health care anymore. That department has got to do this better. I have some sympathy for the Minister of Justice, for what he's trying to do here, and I will support that. The money is going to the things that are most needed. It is going to the Crown prosecutors. It is going to justices of the peace compensation and professional allowances for provincial judges. I don't know – it's certainly not in here – if it's going to fill some of those vacancies that are on the bench, but I would hope that . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, but pursuant to Standing Order 59(3) and Government Motion 19, agreed to on November 21, 2001, I must now put the following question. Those members in favour of each of the resolutions not yet voted upon relating to the 2001-2002 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions and reports as follows. All resolutions relating to the 2001-2002 supplementary supply estimates for the general revenue fund have been approved.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a list of those resolutions voted upon by the Committee of Supply pursuant to Standing Orders.

Supplementary estimates for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2001: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, operating expense and capital investment, \$129,519,000; Health and Wellness, operating expense and capital investment, \$118,743,000; Justice, operating expense and capital investment \$9,018,000; Learning, nonbudgetary disbursements, \$80,000,000; Sustainable Resource Development, operating expense and capital investment, \$97,691,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, operating expense, \$142,000; amount to be transferred from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer to support to the Legislative Assembly, \$2,797,000.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Bills.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Bills

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Bill 30
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2001 (No. 2)

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2). This being a money bill, her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a first time]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 p.m. Monday, November 26.

[Motion carried; at 5:19 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 26, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back. At the conclusion of the prayer would you please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Now will you please join Mr. Paul Lorieau in the singing of our national anthem.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 1,273 Albertans urging the government of Alberta to support the establishment of the Chinchaga Wilderness as a legislated protected area where . . . the natural landscapes are preserved in a wilderness park for northwestern Alberta for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege and my pleasure today to present 1,243 signatures on a petition, bringing the total to 2,516 people throughout the province who support the Chinchaga wilderness, urging the government to support it as a legislated protected area.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would like to file with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent earlier today from the Premier to Wally Buono, coach of the 2001 Grey Cup champions, the Calgary Stampeders. With your permission I would just read two short excerpts from the letter.

Congratulations, Stampeders, on your Grey Cup victory! It was a championship hard fought and well-deserved . . .

Again, I join with all Albertans in congratulating the Stampeders on their thrilling win, and for representing the city [of Calgary] and the province with such dignity and class.

I'm sure all members of the Assembly would want to join the Premier and I in congratulating the Stampeders for their victory and for representing the province with such class at the Grey Cup.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I rise today pursuant to section 22(4) of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act to table the appropriate number of copies of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities 2000-2001 annual report. The PDD community governance and delivery system in our province provides very highly valued supports and services to almost 8,000 Albertans with developmental disabilities. This annual report is actually an accountability document of that work, and it provides a provincial perspective along with summary information from the six PDD regional boards and from the facility board for Michener Centre.

Thank you.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to today table five copies of a letter from the Premier to the Prime Minister outlining our desire for free trade and a long-term solution to the softwood lumber dispute.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the requisite number of copies of the 2000 annual report of the Alberta Propane Vehicle Administration Organization.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Once again in the spirit of openness and co-operation I'm really pleased to table five copies of the questions that arose at a previous committee meeting.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table booklets. They're called X-treme Safety, and they're safety tips for rookies in the workplace.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the required number of copies of 19 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table 108 requests from Albertans who want the Legislature to support Bill 218, which provides a mechanism to properly fund education.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have four tablings from constituents today. The first is the appropriate number of copies from Jeanette O'Brien, who is bringing forward her concerns regarding the status of education in Alberta.

The second is an e-mail from Carol Marcellus. Again, she's

deeply disturbed by the government of Alberta's policies in education and health that seem counterproductive to the health and well-being of citizens.

There's also an e-mail from Arlene Sittler, who raises some very good points about education and teachers and respect for teachers in Alberta.

The last one is an e-mail from Steve Baba, who's wondering why it is taking so long to process applications for the special-needs benefits program. As a senior not being able to chew for an extended period of time because he can't get dentures, it is a real hardship.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from teacher Marcel Tremblay, who writes a very detailed letter about his concerns and states to the Premier that he can complete his teaching career "without you or your government's approval. However, I cannot stomach or tolerate your government's and the public's disdain of my profession any longer."

The second letter is from a parent of five children who is very concerned about the situation developing in Alberta with the teachers and hopes the government will support teachers.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I have two tablings. The first is the required number of copies of a parent fund-raising survey, a study conducted by the Liberal Official Opposition in Alberta.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the required number of copies of 40 requests from Albertans who want the government to "vote in support of Bill 218," to "end the need for parents to fund-raise," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

1:40

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table, please, the required number of copies of 26 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table five copies of a letter from Heather Fraser dated November 19, 2001, addressed to all MLAs and outlining severe cuts in children's services in Calgary.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling today. I am tabling five copies of a backgrounder on teacher

compensation prepared by the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association showing that Alberta teachers have significantly lower salaries than teachers in many other provinces.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 25 grade 6 students and their teacher, Mr. Terry Gietz, from Westbrook elementary school in my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Accompanying them today are parent helpers Mrs. Carol Ceroici, Mrs. Karen Chiu, Mrs. Velvet McSheffery, and Ms Deanna Crozier. They're here today to observe and learn with keen interest about our government, and they're also participating in the School at the Legislature program this week.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I may, there are three significant things about this school that I want to bring to your attention. First and most important, I attend this school on a regular basis and answer questions, and the grade 6 students of Westbrook school typically ask the best questions of anybody that I've run into, and I commend them for that. Secondly, the daughter of Calgary-Nose Creek attends this school and is in attendance with the class. That would be Lauren. Thirdly, this is the first school picture that I've had taken with my new glasses.

I'd ask the class to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Oh, how the chair would like to say something, but go ahead, hon. member.

MR. LUKASZUK: Well, Mr. Speaker, one is always tempted to say something good about Edmonton-Castle Downs.

I will take this opportunity to introduce to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, to this Assembly 67 bright faces from Edmonton-Castle Downs. Those are students from Lorelei elementary school. They are today accompanied by teachers Mr. Mark George and Miss Lori Howden and principal, Mr. Mike Cooper, as well by parent helpers Arlene Mickelsen, Allison Davies, and Gary Rudyk. I believe they're sitting in the public gallery. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To you and through you to all members of the Assembly it is my great pleasure to welcome from the constituency of Edmonton-Rutherford a group of 33 students from Richard Second elementary school led by their teacher, Bryan Rosychuk, and parent helpers Theresa Rupp and Chris Beebe. I'd ask them to stand and accept the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Dr. Fawzi Morcos on the occasion of his retirement from active practice in obstetrics and gynecology, having served some 32 years right here in Edmonton's Misericordia hospital. Dr. Morcos

and Mrs. Morcos, along with their daughters Theresa, Camila, and Rebecca and son-in-law Harold Visser, along with my wife, Katherine, are seated in the members' gallery. I would like to ask them to please stand and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to introduce to you and through you four members of the 14-member Seniors' Advisory Council for Alberta. They are meeting to work on an ad hoc project for the Minister of Seniors, the hon. Member for Stony Plain. From my left to right, I must start with Carol Ching, who is our very important co-ordinator from the Seniors Department; Carol Blyth from Calgary, who represents the Calgary and area region; Margaret Health from Grande Prairie, who represents the northwest region of Alberta; Peter Portlock from Edmonton, the Edmonton and area region; and Dennis King from Lethbridge, who is representing the southern Alberta region. I would ask these advocates for Alberta seniors to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon and introduce to you and through you to all hon. members of this Assembly a group of Strathern elementary students. They're currently touring the Legislative Assembly and are going to join us in the public gallery at 2 o'clock. There are 20 students and two adults. The students this afternoon are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Vivian Bell, and parent helper Mr. David Cole. I would now ask all hon. members to please grant them the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two introductions today. I'm very pleased to introduce two sets of visitors. The first are three visitors from the Old Strathcona Youth Co-op, that operates in my constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona less than 50 metres from my own office. The Old Strathcona Youth Co-op is a street-level, multi-agency team established to provide services and support to the youth around the Whyte Avenue area. With us today are Karen Ramsey, the director of the co-op, and two co-op supporters, Gen Sloan and Fenx Spaed. They're seated in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second set of guests, whom I'm also very delighted to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly, are seated in the public gallery. They're members of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, known as CPAWS. CPAWS was founded in 1963 and has helped protect over 40 million hectares of Canada's most treasured forests and other wilderness places. CPAWS currently has 11 chapters with hundreds of dedicated volunteers and 20,000 active members across Canada. We're pleased to have six of their members with us today seated in the public gallery. I'm going to name them now and would request them to then stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. They are Jill Sturdy, Tracey Smith, Gordon Eadie, Kim Smith, Leila Darwish, and Jay Moore. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to acknowledge the presence of 30 members of the St. Albert Catholic high school who are present in the Legislature Building now and will be coming into the gallery at 2 p.m. They are accompanied by their teacher, Tamie Bentz. I would ask the Assembly to extend a warm welcome to them.

1:50

head: Oral Question Period

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

School Fund-raising

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Learning. Why do parents have to fund-raise through bingos, casinos, and other fund-raisers to provide basic educational requirements for their schools?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the very short answer to that is that they don't, but what I will do is go a little bit into what money is fund-raised and what exactly that money is used for. The last reconciliation of dollars that we have on the school-generated funds occurred in the 1999-2000 year. I apologize for not having 2000-2001, but we have not yet fully tabulated that.

Around 9 percent went to donation-specific programs. This would be where a group of parents and a group of students raised money and, say, donated money to the Kidney Foundation or something like that. Another 7.2 percent went into cafeteria and lunch programs. Another 14 and a half percent went into athletics or field trips. The largest portion of the money that was fund-raised, 42.9 percent, went into general school activities, and I'll break that down, if I may. They are things such as yearbooks, graduation, student's union, bookstores, PACs fund-raising.

MS CARLSON: Textbooks.

DR. OBERG: No. Yearbooks, Mr. Speaker.

About another 11 percent went into some non core resources such as band, such as choral, such as supplies and printing, fine arts. The last, about 15.3 percent, went into capital equipment such as playgrounds, computers, vans, and field trips.

There's one other point that I would like to raise, and that is that this is an issue that was looked at by the Alberta School Boards Association about a year ago. I certainly have no trouble in tabling this whole document, but if I may just read the first two points, because I truly believe that they summarize the intent of the document. The first one says that "funds raised should complement – not replace – public funding for education." The second one says that "fundraised dollars should not be used for instructional purposes or basic education items, those being items required to complete a core course." Mr. Speaker, that's the Alberta School Boards Association, and it goes on to roughly seven or eight other points.

If there are schools out there that are fund-raising for textbooks, I would urge the hon. member to tell me which ones they are, and I personally will investigate it, because they are going against the Alberta School Boards Association policy and going against what our documents are telling us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What do you say to the parents, then, who constantly tell us that they are fund-raising for textbooks, for library materials, for educational aids? How do we deal with them when you tell us they aren't doing it?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, that's a little bit of an enigma that I've been dealing with myself, because when I sit and talk to them, I say: "Tell me exactly what you are fund-raising for," and they go through a litany of things. I say, "Are you fund-raising for textbooks," and they say yes. I then go to the school boards and ask the school boards, and they tell me no. That's why I need specific examples from the hon. opposition, and I personally will take a look into these, because they are not to be. There are plenty of dollars in the school budgets to pay for textbooks, and I will not accept any school board that says they do not have the funds to pay for textbooks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is again to the Minister of Learning. Did you ever think that these parents may be afraid that if they tell you that they're raising money for basics such as textbooks, they will lose that and their children won't get a proper education because they don't have the textbooks?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. Leader of the Opposition has just said is a huge indictment of our education system. If they feel that there will be repercussions because they actually tell the Minister of Learning what might be going on, I think that's a huge indictment of the school system. The parents that I know and the letters that I get are quite free in telling me all sorts of things, and I would encourage them to continue.

If this is occurring, Mr. Speaker, I certainly will personally look into it, but again I go back to the Alberta School Boards Association directive which states that there should be no fund-raising for basic educational items.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to studying the issue of fund-raising, looking into why the public is saying that they're fund-raising for basics yet your data says that they are not?

DR. OBERG: Sure, Mr. Speaker. In all fairness, I did look into this about a year and a half to two years ago, at which point the Alberta School Boards Association came out with this document. I said at that particular time to them: "We have two options, ladies and gentlemen. We can sit down and you can bring out directives for your school boards, or I can bring down regulations when it comes to fund-raising." The Alberta School Boards Association categorically stated that they would put recommendations forward on guidelines for their own member school boards, and that's exactly what they did.

Again, Mr. Speaker, if there are any school boards out there that are not following these guidelines, I'm sure the Alberta School Boards Association will want to hear about it, and I want to hear about it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will you tell the schools not to fund-raise? It's clear they have to fund-raise because the model that you use for funding doesn't provide the basics.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I take offence with that question, because there is no way that every taxpayer should pay for uniforms for my child who takes athletics, and they shouldn't necessarily pay

for field trips. They shouldn't necessarily pay for a lot of things that occur. So I'm not going to tell parents that they should not fund-raise if they want to build the extras within their school. If they want to fund-raise for uniforms, if they want to fund-raise for various things, I'm not going to tell them not to fund-raise, but I will tell them that I do not want them fund-raising for textbooks, because that is not acceptable.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, you tell them not to fund-raise for textbooks, yet they don't have enough textbooks to go around for every student in the classroom or for every classroom teaching the same subject. Why not?

DR. OBERG: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that was raised a couple of years ago. At that time I did look at school boards and I asked them: "What's going on here? You have enough money for textbooks." They all gave me various answers as to why an individual student would not have one textbook. Many of them said: well, they don't need one; they can share it between classes.

Mr. Speaker, what I will say, though, is that this department and this government plans for the future. One of the things that we are very close to announcing is that our textbooks will be on-line, so rather than even worrying about this textbook issue, they will be able to go and print these textbooks from the Internet. I will be making the first signature on this later on this week. I think that that's a truly exciting development. That's truly the way that the Internet can be utilized to help our school system. Hopefully, these questions about fund-raising for textbooks and all the other questions that have been raised will become moot points over the next couple of years.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Learning has insisted that parents in the province are not fund-raising for basic classroom materials. Parents tell us quite a different story. How can the minister maintain that fund-raising for basics is a myth when parent groups on behalf of 110 schools across the province report that they are?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, no offence intended, but what the hon. member did was write them a question and said basically: do you fund-raise for basic necessities at school? He did not define it; he did not say what exactly it was. So a lot of parents, for example, when they answered this, would say, "Yes, we do" or "No, we don't." When you actually take a look at his document, with all respect to the hon. member, there are some comments in the back such as: what exactly is basic?

Mr. Speaker, my same response is there. If there are people out there who are fund-raising for textbooks, I personally will take a look in to it and find out what's going on, because there is money there and they should not be fund-raising for textbooks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: have the government claims to funding equity not been destroyed when, depending on where you live in this province, thousands of extra dollars are funneled into your school?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just hit on the whole

rationale why you cannot have school fund-raising going into basic curriculum, going into the basic core mechanisms of education. This goes back to the same issue that we had when we had taxation that would be delivered out to the various communities. He's absolutely correct: if you live in an affluent area and can raise a million dollars or \$100,000 or \$5,000 and nonaffluent areas cannot, then what you run in to is this inequity. That is why the Alberta School Boards Association came out with a report that said: don't do it. That's why I unanimously have said: don't do it. And that's why they don't do it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. My final question to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how can the minister expect parents to report to school boards or to the government when the Learning ministry's web site threatens to investigate them?

2:00

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the prerequisites, according to the Auditor General, is that the schools list all school-generated funds, and that includes fund-raising. This has been something that has been there for the last two or three years, and yes, it's absolutely an imperative that any money that is generated in the school is reported. We have to do accounts. The hon. opposition has been talking about deficits. If we don't have accurate accounting of how many dollars are raised in these schools, I think we'd have huge problems.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Children's Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services is presiding over a bloodbath of cuts to frontline children's services. These cuts, contrary to the government's rhetoric, will hurt thousands of the province's most vulnerable children. Earlier I tabled a document outlining draconian cuts in the Calgary-Rocky View region designed to make up an \$8 million to \$10 million budget shortfall. To the Minister of Children's Services: how can the minister justify the unilateral termination of contracts of respected Calgary agencies effective December 31, thereby abandoning thousands of vulnerable children right during the middle of the upcoming holiday season?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, for the last few days in the House we have been talking about the need to place priority and emphasis on those children who have need for protective services. Many of the other services, it's true, we would like to be able to support, but presently we are looking at that inordinately high caseload growth, which is similar to caseload growths throughout almost every province in Canada. We're asking why at this time we have the need to service more children for child protection. The agency supports that are being provided to certain programs in most cases have simply been reduced, have not been totally eliminated. Where they have been eliminated, we have through the authorities taken very careful accounting of whether or not these are duplications of other services that are being rendered through other agencies. The most important principle of all is that it is the programs for those children who are least likely to become statistics in the child welfare registry that are being affected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: by closing the Connect program at the Salvation Army Children's Village, which has served as a home to these children in Calgary, how can the minister justify putting eight children 12 years and younger out of their home and back into an already overburdened foster care system?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, once again, my invitation to all members of the House is that if there is evidence that any child is in jeopardy with any of these agency realignments, then please let me know, and by the end of December I'm very confident that Calgary Rocky View will have alternatives in place to deal with those children.

Mr. Speaker, last week in this House we heard about an agency that was going to reduce five beds. We had at that time 62 other bed options through 19 other placements or group homes that could be available. An open invitation to any member of the House that has circumstances that we should investigate: this is a case where, if they will turn it over to me, we'll look into it and assure the hon. member and indeed the people of Alberta that we will take care of those children, that alternatives will be found.

DR. PANNU: My final supplementary to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: will the minister either protect these children by reversing these draconian cuts or perhaps resign?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I would assume that the hon. member is seeking accountability for the children of this province, and I am prepared to be accountable, as Minister of Children's Services, for the care and protection of those children that we serve under the Child Welfare Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Medicine Hat Teachers' Negotiations

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a great deal about negotiations between teachers and their school boards recently. While teachers in Edmonton public schools are taking a strike vote later this week, I understand that last week teachers in the Medicine Hat local of the ATA voted on a memorandum of agreement presented to them by their school district. My question is to the Minister of Learning. Can the minister please confirm this, and would he tell the House what the outcome of that vote in Medicine Hat was?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last Monday night the local of the Medicine Hat ATA voted more than 91 percent in favour of accepting the contract that they had been negotiating with the Medicine Hat school board. This contract basically had an 11 percent increase in it, albeit 4.3 percent was effective September 1 of this year and another 6.4 percent was effective April 1, making an overall effect of 7.5 percent. I just want to say that although this was over the 4 percent and 2 percent that we had allocated, this is what we've been talking about the whole time: local people sitting down and finding local solutions to their issues. There's no better example of this than what just happened in Medicine Hat.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is

also to the Minister of Learning. You indicate that the agreement was tentative, and if the Medicine Hat school district and the teachers in the Medicine Hat local ATA have agreed to these terms, why don't we have a done deal?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess that's where the fly in the ointment comes in, in that the provincial Alberta Teachers' Association has to ratify this agreement. It is my understanding from media reports and my understanding about what has been said that the provincial ATA has chosen to go against their local ATA and go against the local school board on this. I don't know how they can do it when you have the local school board and the local ATA sitting together and arriving at a contract. Two signatories to the contract and they've decided not to ratify it.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's where it's at today. I hope that calmer heads will prevail. I hope that the Alberta Teachers' Association local in Medicine Hat has arrived at a deal they can live with, and I hope that it becomes ratified soon, but my understanding is that it will not.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given what the Minister of Learning has just told us, my final question would be to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Are there any other options or processes that are available under provincial labour legislation that the Medicine Hat school board and the teachers could pursue to enable them to successfully conclude these negotiations?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the board and the teachers would actually have two options. Now, both these options involve the Labour Relations Board. I want to affirm to the hon. member that the Labour Relations Board is independent from government, so it's not the government that can avail itself of any of these options. It's going to have to be one or both of the parties as it might apply. So the first option is that the parties could apply to determine whether or not there was a collective agreement actually in force, and the Labour Relations Board would then be asked to first of all review the ratification process in the context of the ATA rules – the minister commented on that in his previous answer – determine whether or not the rules had been followed, and then of course rule whether or not a valid collective agreement was in effect.

The second option would be an application to the Labour Relations Board for a proposal vote. If the Medicine Hat school board applied, the Labour Relations Board would conduct a vote of the employees. Now, if that application were granted, this vote could determine the will of the Medicine Hat local. It would not be subjected actually to the same ratification process as the recent vote that has been conducted by the teachers. The results of the vote, if held, would be binding on the parties.

Now, when we get into these kinds of situations, again I want to affirm that we always encourage all the parties to an agreement to come to a negotiated agreement, but if they cannot, then of course there are options that are available under the Labour Relations Code.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

2:10

Palliative Care

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Palliative care programs allow people to die with dignity under the care of compassionate staff who assist with everything from pain control to pastoral issues. These

programs can be as important to the family as to the patient. I think all MLAs recognize they are a sign of a society that cares. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: given that these programs are by definition not long-term care, can the minister explain why some regions are charging long-term care rates?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I wish to say at the outset that I agree with the preamble as set out by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and I do believe that all members of this Assembly would agree that palliative care is indeed the expression of a great deal of compassion for people who are nearing the end of their life. The palliative care programs throughout this province, while good, do differ from regional health authority to regional health authority, and that is recognition of the fact that there are different needs that reside in different communities. We provide dollars to regional health authorities to deal with their health care needs, but of course there may be different demographics in different parts of the province. Accordingly, that matter is something which is left to the decision-making of regional health authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain why the charges for hospice care in Calgary are 50 percent higher than in Edmonton and why the same service is provided without any charge in Lethbridge? Why does it cost so much to die in Calgary?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there are different methods of delivery of palliative care throughout the province. There is a mix of both public service as well as not-for-profits, and I cannot answer the particular question with respect to what the hon. member was asking. In Calgary I do not know the specific nature of the contract that may be held by a not-for-profit group with the regional health authority to provide services. But I can say that those services are provided, as I said in my earlier answer, by regional health authorities, and they may differ from place to place throughout the province, depending on policies as established by local regional health authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister ask all regional health authorities to eliminate this user fee on dying?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I will not do any such thing except that I will undertake to review the particular contract arrangements that have been established in Calgary and ask good questions about why there is a large differential. There is probably a good reason for it, and I will endeavour to find out.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Human DNA Patenting

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are on a subject which I believe has profound public policy on health issues. The subject is human DNA patenting. Right now there is a company which is reportedly demanding a \$2,500 U.S. per person access fee before they will allow women to be tested to see if they have the gene linked to breast cancer. People are being discouraged from doing even basic medical gene research on a number of human diseases because those diseases have now been patented. There are

now over 100 companies involved in the human DNA patenting gold rush, and the U.S. department of health has even reportedly applied to patent the entire cell line of a human being, a tribesman from New Guinea. It appears that the U.S. Supreme Court and the patent laws are on the side of these companies. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister tell us whether or not the health department is monitoring, and actively monitoring, the discussions surrounding the patenting of human genetic material?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the hon. member's question is yes. It is worth pointing out that the whole issue of patents is constitutionally within the responsibility of the federal government. Companies do apply to the federal government for patents, and the federal government then decides whether such patent is issued. But I can assure the hon. member that Albertans and my department are both very concerned about the patenting of human genetic material in Canada. This type of patenting does pose a serious concern for all Canadians as well as specifically on the issue of future sustainability of our health care system, and that is the reason why we follow this closely and do work with our provincial counterparts across the country and the federal government to examine the validity of such claims in one particular case as it relates to a particular company that was referred to by the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is again to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister tell us whether or not the department is currently paying any royalty or access fees to any companies as a result of patents on human genetic materials?

MR. MAR: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is no, we are not. It is worth noting that we have been contacted by one American company, Myriad Genetics Inc., who claim that some of the testing being done by Alberta's Cancer Board violates their Canadian patents. The same company has contacted provincial health authorities in both the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia with a similar claim. Because this is a legal issue and involves a very complex patent, my department has enlisted the services of a professional patent agent who is currently reviewing the claim being made by Myriad. The results of this review by the patent agent will determine what our next steps in this matter will be, but in the meantime we will continue to fund the Alberta cancer genetics program to provide Albertans with affordable access to genetic testing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess my last question is just whether or not the minister could confirm that access fees and royalties emanating from these patents would become a major health care cost driver in the future if this stands.

MR. MAR: Yes, I can confirm that. We believe that the patenting of human genetic material poses a serious concern for all Canadians and, as I said, the sustainability of our health care system. Regardless of jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker, I can assure Albertans that we will continue to monitor the issue closely, working in collaboration with our provincial and federal counterparts as we are committed to protecting the health care interests of Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Low-income Review

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. Acknowledging that all reports are complicated and take time to go through, when can Albertans, who have not seen an increase since 1993 in AISH or SFI rates, expect a response on the low-income review report? What is taking so long? What is so complicated?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we have received two reports from the low-income review committee, and once again I would like to thank the chair and members of that committee for the fine work they have done. It is an extremely thorough report. The information that's been provided appears very comprehensive. This is not an idle issue. There are many Albertans that are extremely concerned about what the future is to hold in terms of assistance to Albertans, so we're looking at the report and working our way through it as best we can. While some people call for an expeditious review, I for one minister will not be held to other people's timetables. I will develop a timetable that I feel is prudent and responsible, and that is the timetable that we will deal with.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: will the recommendations from the report, which is expected to call for the first increase in assistance rates since 1993 to at least compensate for inflation, be exempt from the current round of budget constraints?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: I'm not sure if I said it previously here in this House, Mr. Speaker. If not, I will do so now. In meeting the current objectives in terms of the adjustments we're making to our budgets, we've made the commitment that there would be no decrease in any of the programs to low-income Albertans.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Again to the same minister: this minister has spoken about flexible federalism, but why is the government clawing back assistance from families who receive funding from the national child benefit, money directed at young people, the poorest of the poor, those in dire need who are not old enough or able to be out working for themselves or their families? Why are you persistent in clawing back this money from another level of government?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I believe that most members of this House would agree that children within our families are of the utmost importance and in some cases of the utmost urgency. The Department of Children's Services has excellent programs in which they provide assistance as they need it. In our mandate, of course, we are concerned about social assistance for adult Albertans, but those adult Albertans in many cases are single moms or in other cases are families. We know that a way to deal with poverty wherever it might exist, a way to deal with difficulties or challenges that low-income families might encounter is really in helping them make a transition from wherever they are, wherever we find them, and moving them into the workplace.

I think the hon. member, based on what I understand to be his previous experience, would recognize the value of work. That is

why under the flexible federalism that we have, that's called the national child benefit program, we have used dollars that became available to us to provide for what we believe to be excellent opportunities and benefits for low-income Albertans to move into the workplace and to remain there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

G-8 Summit in Kananaskis

MRS. TARCHUK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many Albertans, particularly those that live and work in Calgary and some of the communities in Banff-Cochrane, are concerned about next year's G-8 summit in Kananaskis. Constituents have passed on concerns about the safety and security of citizens and property, concerns about the protection of the environment as well as the costs associated with such an event. My questions are to the Solicitor General. What security precautions has the Alberta government taken to ensure the safety of Albertans and visitors during the summit?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. I'd like to let the Assembly know, first of all, that this is a federal initiative and it's a federal responsibility. The federal government is responsible for all aspects of the G-8. Officials from my department, the minister of intergovernmental affairs, and myself have been meeting on a continuing basis with the federal government, the RCMP, the Calgary police, and other departments in government to ensure that the necessary measures are in place. Obviously, for security reasons I can't go into a lot of details, but I can assure this House that the needs of the community will be provided for and Albertans will be safe.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you. Again to the Solicitor General: what agreements are in place to ensure that the province of Alberta and Alberta towns and cities will not be stuck with the cost of the G-8 summit security?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government is responsible for covering a hundred percent of the costs of the security at the G-8 summit. Our position is that these costs must be negotiated and agreed on before the summit takes place. On November 6 the federal government announced that it agreed in principle with our position. The city of Calgary has recently announced that the agreement with the federal government for security costs has been ratified and agreed on at a cost of \$34.3 million. We don't have all the details yet on our agreement on security costs, but officials from my department will be meeting with the RCMP this week to discuss our costs so we can build them into the details of our agreements.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. TARCHUK: Well, thank you. My final question is to the same minister. What guarantees can the Solicitor General give that security measures will use appropriate force with demonstrators and protesters so as to not turn our communities into war zones?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal government, as I indicated earlier, is responsible for all aspects of summit security, including a police response outside Calgary. Within the city of Calgary we have the Calgary Police Service, who has the lead responsibility of working very closely with the RCMP and G-8 organizers. My role is to ensure that the agreements for security costs are in place and that the provincial police have the resources they need to do their job right.

Planning for an event of this nature is not easy. Security must plan for the worst possible scenarios and be flexible enough to moderate its response appropriately. Peaceful protest is part of a democratic society, and we must have room for that in the G-8, but I will say that we will not put up with any threat to life and that destruction of property is unacceptable. We don't know what protesters to expect, and we don't know if they'll be peaceful or destructive, but, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure this Assembly that the RCMP is trained and highly disciplined and will respond appropriately to them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Genetically Modified Food

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are on genetically modified organisms. Our environment is more than a collection of genetic resources to be seized, owned, and improved. My questions today are to the minister of agriculture. What studies has the government done on the environmental consequences of the wind-spread production of genetically engineered crops?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there's a fair amount of debate around the issue of genetically modified crops. I think it's safe to say, though, that very few varieties of crops that we have today have not been modified in some way over the years to bring them to their productive value and, of course, strains that have improved many aspects of the crop. However, more recently there is a rising concern in the public with genetically modified crops.

This government, through the leadership of our Premier along with the western Premiers, has asked that we work with scientists to have some information based on science as to the concerns that could arise around this whole area. There is some work being done at the federal station in Lethbridge in this area, and of course there is a report that was released in Europe, and the conclusion was that, in fact, genetically modified foods could be as safe or even more safe than nongenetically modified foods.

MS CARLSON: But, in fact, Mr. Speaker, given that modified foods may have adverse health effects, does this government support labeling foods so that consumers can make informed choices as the European commission is now proposing?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting subject, and of course I am sure the hon. member knows that there's a private member's bill before the House of Parliament in Ottawa on this whole issue of labeling. She probably also is very aware that this is very complex because the degree of information that you might want to put on that could be fairly substantial.

I think what's more important to the public and certainly to me as minister is that the information that we have that the public has available to them is based on sound science rather than hearsay or

emotion or hysteria or, in fact, is being used as what can be a nontariff barrier to trade. Those are the issues that are out there today, and those are the issues that we need to deal with, and those are the issues that we're going to deal with on sound science.

MS CARLSON: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, at the very least has the government studied the effects of transgenic pollenation on Alberta's plant diversity?

2:30

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the hon. member knows very well that the government of Canada has the responsibility first of all in those areas, as the government of Canada has the responsibility for labeling food products. What we do is work with the government of Canada, whether it's Ag Canada or Health Canada, to ensure that the interests of Alberta producers and consumers are addressed in that. We have been in fact interacting with them, but it is the government of Canada through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency or through Agriculture Canada who deals with companies who have those trials or plots and deal with such things as pollen transference.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

Postsecondary Tuition Fees

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the 1990s tuition fees in Alberta rose over two and a half times, a greater increase than in any other province. These enormous fees contribute to record levels of debt for Alberta students. Clearly, this affects the opportunity for many potential students to pursue a postsecondary education. My question is to the Minister of Learning, who today is certainly earning his pay. Will he tell the House how many Albertans abandon their dream of a postsecondary education because of high tuition and astronomical levels of debt?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, the hon. member has a very good question there. One of the issues that we have been trying to deal with is to get out the actual facts about what our tuition is, what the levels of debt are. In conjunction with ACTISEC and CAUS, the university association and the college and technical schools association, we did a questionnaire to find out exactly what some of the beliefs were out there about tuition, about levels of debt. The average cost of tuition on this questionnaire was something like between \$5,000 and \$6,000, I believe, and the average level of debt was quite astronomical. In Alberta, realistically, when it comes to colleges and technical schools, the average tuition is in the \$2,400 to \$2,500 range. When it comes to the universities, we're in the \$4,000 to \$4,300 range, which is very consistent across Canada. When you take a look at all the universities across Canada, of the some 45 universities, somewhere in there, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge sit right in around the 22nd to 25th or 26th level of tuition amounts.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister continue to allow a policy which supports tuition increases when a study his own department has done, the Ipsos-Reid Post-Secondary Accessibility Study, done in April of this year for Alberta Learning, shows that 70 percent of the respondents said that the high cost of education "can act as a barrier" to getting a postsecondary education?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the study was actually the same study that I was just alluding to. That's one of the disconnects in those

studies: 70 percent of students say that the high cost of tuition or the high cost of university is the element that keeps them from going to university, but they also predicted the wrong amounts for those. We have sat down with the students' association, again, with CAUS and ACTISEC to publicize exactly what the costs are for postsecondary education.

I will remind the Assembly that in the past two years we have increased by 44 percent the aid to students who need the aid. We have brought in automatic remissions. So the remissions are automatically taken off. The most that you will owe after four years of university in Alberta is \$5,000 per year. The rest is given back. You can get a student loan up to \$10,400 and owe only \$5,000 at the end of it. So the taxpayers of Alberta are footing the bill for some \$5,400 plus interest over that time frame.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. minister: does he actually believe that the maximum debt that students can obtain under the programs his government supports is only \$5,000 a year? Why is government debt bad but student debt is okay?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, when a student gets a student loan, the most that they will have to pay back is roughly \$5,000 per year. So I will reiterate: a student that receives \$10,400 per year will pay back \$5,000. Are there students who have higher debt? Yes, there are. These are students who have not accessed our student loan program. The average amount of debt after a four-year program in Alberta is around \$17,000. I would like that to someone who starts a new business. If they could start a new business for only \$17,000, the world would be an ideal place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Softwood Lumber Trade Dispute

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The softwood lumber dispute with the U.S. has been going on for some time, and I have concerns about the fate of this valuable part of Alberta's economy and those who work in this sector. The potential payment of the U.S. duties has already had a negative effect in my riding of Whitecourt-St. Anne on the softwood lumber producers, the workers in the mills, and the communities that are dependent on this industry. My first question is for the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. Can the minister tell this Assembly how the province is working to resolve this harmful trade action and how the Alberta softwood industry is being impacted?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and I have been working with our departments to defend the industry in this particularly important sector of our economy. As members of the Assembly know, I think, this very important industry makes up export values of about \$500 million to \$600 million from this province to the United States, or about 21 percent of all the wood exports that we have in this province. My colleague and I are aware of the economic impact of a possible additional duty. This is something, of course, that the industry has experienced before and, combined with the overall economic slowdown, is certainly creating very significant problems for the region of the province that's affected here.

We are, though, working very hard with our departments to defend against the allegations that have been brought forward by the American industry. As well, of course, we're considering and looking at the possibilities of negotiating some kind of agreement

with respect to this overall dispute. We're certainly giving it a very, very high priority in our work. It is, I think, the top file, as you'd say, for both of our departments, and we're working hard on both fronts, in terms of defending against the allegations and looking at solutions, at this particular point in time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: can you please tell me and my constituents if the province is contemplating changes to the province's forestry management system because of this dispute?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are a number of other provinces involved in this particular dispute along with our own, and British Columbia, which is the largest exporter of softwood lumber to the United States, is contemplating certain changes in their particular forestry practices. We here in Alberta are working with the industry with respect to looking at possible changes, but up to this point in time our efforts have been focusing upon defending against the overall charges or claims of the American forest industry that we are in fact subsidizing our production here. Certainly we are also looking at the possibility of a negotiated agreement here as well, and we're working with provinces such as British Columbia, Quebec, Saskatchewan, and so forth to come up with a set of acceptable but nevertheless good recommendations that would be mutually beneficial to the United States in terms of being able to continue to get our softwood lumber and, of course, would allow our industry to survive.

2:40

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Calgary Stampeders

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How about those Calgary Stampeders? The Deputy Premier, the Finance minister, and I were fortunate enough to attend the game in Montreal yesterday, and let me tell you that the Canadian Football League is alive and well in Montreal. Sixty-five thousand wildly cheering fans, the second most in Grey Cup history, as well as people across Canada and around the world were treated to an exciting football game that came down to the last play of the game. With time running out on the clock, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers were looking for the end zone when the Stampeders defence produced a quarterback sack to end the game in heart-stopping fashion. The 27-19 win was a great way for past owner Sig Gutsch to end his time with the Stamps and a great way for the new owner, Mike Feterik, to take over. It is also rumoured that Mark McLoughlin, the second highest scorer in the history of the CFL, is about to announce his retirement, and I can't think of a better way for him to go out. Congratulations to the whole team, the coaching staff, and management in bringing the cup to Calgary and making all of Alberta proud.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Crystal Kids

MR. MASYK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to recognize a very special group here in Edmonton that works hard to keep our children off the streets. Crystal Kids at the Gordon Russell youth centre is a place where kids can read, do their homework, play sports, and just

generally hang around with friends. It was founded in 1992 and has grown considerably since. It's located on 118th Avenue, and over 10,000 kids have passed through the centre, which is a great indicator that they really know how to reach out to Edmonton's youth.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize each individual that participates in this wonderful program: Crystal Kids president, Mr. Phil Klein; vice-president, Louise Tod; secretary, Dorrene Belair; directors Henry Budnitsky, Kelly Cable, Brian Kearns, Henry Mah, John McDougall, Barbara York, Jack Macintyre, Tarig Chaudry, and Constable Dan Jones. In addition, I'd like to recognize the executive director, Frances Russell; treasurer, Shannon Smid; adviser, Gordon Russell; assistant, Franki Fairfield; program directors Patty Lymes and Dakota Basset; as well as the custodian, Linda Mount-Young.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Edmonton Viets Association

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the Edmonton Viets Association, which is a community group located in my riding of Edmonton-Centre. This is a wonderful organization to have in my community. They promote tolerance and understanding and do an extraordinary amount of work to teach others around them and to teach members of their own community better citizenship. In September I was invited to attend an event which was about promoting religious freedom in Vietnam, and it was a unique opportunity for me. They had a special guest, who spoke to a capacity crowd that was in attendance, and the special guest was Le Huu Nguyen. He's the executive director of the committee to promote religious freedom in Vietnam. In fact, he was allowed two years off from his Catholic parish in Australia to travel the world. I really appreciated being able to listen to him.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Fawzi Morcos

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour Dr. Fawzi Morcos on the occasion of his retirement. Dr. Morcos obtained his specialty degrees in the United Kingdom before immigrating to Canada in 1969 and joining the Misericordia hospital with the department of obstetrics and gynecology. Becoming department chief in 1978, he continued to promote childbirth education and family-centred maternity care. Recognizing the importance of maternal infant bonding, he was instrumental in changing the policy where healthy babies were admitted to the nursery instead of remaining with their mothers. Dr. Morcos introduced midwifery to the hospital, a project supported by the hon. Dave Russell.

Dr. Morcos organized and chaired 33 obstetrics and gynecology conferences, presenting numerous papers at national and international conferences. His many awards include recognition from the department of hospitals and medical care, American Medical Association physicians recognition, teacher of the year, Physician Management Institute certificate of achievement, and Capital region medical staff outstanding physician award.

May God bless you, Dr. Morcos, and your wife, Corry, with a long and healthy retirement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Cam Tait

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This being the Interna-

tional Year of Volunteers, I'd like to take this opportunity and recognize a gentleman who has overcome great odds to excel in many areas of life. Mr. Cam Tait of the *Edmonton Journal* is a national journalist, an international comedian, and a much sought after speaker. Mr. Tait is an inspiration to many and a huge advocate and promoter of volunteerism and philanthropy in Alberta. Thank you, Cam Tait.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Old Strathcona Youth Co-op

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and recognize an outstanding agency that operates in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. The Old Strathcona Youth Co-op is a street-level agency concerned with securing the safety, self-worth, and dignity of youth. I've visited the co-op a number of times and have seen firsthand the dedicated hard work that takes place to achieve their goal of mobilizing and securing resources that are easily accessible to youth. In addition to the support given to youth via a plethora of programs such as resume writing, youth leadership, and computer workshops, the co-op operates a job board to assist youth in acquiring employment. I'm very impressed with the work that this agency performs. The most important part of it is that they're there for youth and bring to these youth not only valuable information and resources but a sense of community, connectedness, and hope.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make this introduction. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two members of the Learning Resources Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association. The Learning Resources Council is a professional development arm of the ATA for teacher/librarians, and as all members appreciate, the library is the heart and the hub of the school. April Tilson is president of the Learning Resources Council. April is also teacher/librarian at Lord Beaverbrook high school in Calgary. Lois Barranoik is president elect of the Learning Resources Council, and Lois is a part-time teacher/librarian at Centre High here in Edmonton and is working on her PhD in school libraries at the University of Alberta. Would April and Lois please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 30 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I move second reading of Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2).

This bill provides funding in some very critical areas for our government: Health and Wellness, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Justice, Learning, Sustainable Resource Development, and in the office of the Ethics Commissioner. It also provides for some operating expenses that are in the nonbudgetary disbursements that are listed and in the Legislative Assembly support.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I move second reading. As per the discussions with the opposition, we will return to this bill apparently this evening, and therefore I move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

21. Mr. Stevens moved:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended as follows:

1. Standing Order 4 is struck out and the following is substituted:

4(1) If at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m.

(2) If at 5:15 p.m. on Monday, the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, the committee shall rise and report immediately.

(3) If at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned until the next sitting day.

(4) If at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, the Chairman leaves the Chair until 8:00 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the next sitting day.

(5) At 5:30 p.m. on Thursday the Speaker adjourns the Assembly, without question put, until Monday.

2. Standing Order 5 is amended by adding the following after suborder (1):

(1.1) If, during a sitting of the Assembly, a question of quorum arises, the division bells shall be sounded for one minute and if a quorum is then not present, the Speaker may declare a recess or adjourn the Assembly until the next sitting day.

3. Standing Order 7 is amended by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

7(1) The ordinary daily routine business in the Assembly shall be as follows:

O Canada (First sitting day of each week)

Introduction of Visitors

Introduction of Guests

Ministerial Statements

Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes

Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)

Members' Statements (Tuesday and Thursday)

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

- Presenting Petitions
Notices of Motions
Introduction of Bills
Tabling Returns and Reports
Projected Government Business (Thursday)
4. Standing Order 8 is amended
 - (a) by striking out suborders (1) to (3) and substituting the following:

8(1) On Monday afternoon, after the daily routine, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Written Questions
Motions for Returns
Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders

(2) On Monday evening, from 8 p.m. until 9 p.m., the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Motions other than Government Motions

(3) On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, on Monday evening commencing at 9 p.m. and on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Government Motions
Government Bills and Orders
Private Bills
 - (b) in suborder (4) by striking out “55 minutes of debate” and substituting “60 minutes of debate and 5 minutes for the mover of the motion to close debate”.
 - (c) by adding the following after suborder (4):

(4.1) Before the mover closes debate on a motion under suborder (4), a member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that provides for the motion under consideration to be moved to the bottom of that item of business on the Order Paper.
 - (d) by striking out suborder (6) and substituting the following:

(6) Before the mover of a motion for second or third reading of a Public Bill other than a Government Bill closes debate, or the time limit is reached for consideration at Committee of the Whole under suborder (5)(a)(ii), a member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that the votes necessary to conclude consideration at that stage be postponed for 10 sitting days or the first opportunity after that for the consideration of the Bill, unless there are other Bills awaiting consideration at that stage in which case the Bill will be called after the Bills at that stage have been considered.
 5. Standing Order 18 is amended
 - (a) in suborder 1(h) by adding “, except as provided under Standing Order 49” after “committee”;
 - (b) by adding the following after suborder (2):

(3) In this Standing Order, “adjournment motion” includes daily adjournment motions and any motion to adjourn the proceedings of the Assembly for a specified or unspecified period.
 6. Standing Order 20 is amended by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

20(1) In a debate on a motion, if a member moves an amendment, that member may only speak to the amendment and the main question in one speech.
 7. Standing Order 21 is struck out and the following is substituted:

21(1) A member of the Executive Council may, on at least one day’s notice, propose a motion for the purpose of allotting a specified number of hours for consideration and disposal of proceedings on a Government motion or a Government Bill and the motion shall not be subject to debate or amendment except as provided in suborder (3).

 - (2) A motion under suborder (1)
 - (a) that applies to a Government Bill shall only refer to one stage of consideration for the Bill;
 - (b) shall only apply when the Bill or motion that is the subject of the time allocation motion has already been debated in the Assembly or been considered in Committee of the Whole.
 - (3) A member of the Executive Council may outline the reasons for the motion under suborder (1) and a member of the Official Opposition may respond but neither speech may exceed 5 minutes.
 8. Standing Order 23 is amended by striking out clause (g) and substituting the following:

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination

 - (i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence, including any appeals and the expiry of appeal periods from the time of judgment, or
 - (ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding, until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court,

where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate;
 9. Standing Order 29 is struck out and the following is substituted:

29(1) Time limits on speaking in debate in the Assembly on Government motions, Government Bills and orders and private Bills shall be as follows:

 - (a)(i) the Premier,
 - (ii) the Leader of the Official Opposition, and
 - (iii) the mover on the occasion of the Budget Address

shall be limited to 90 minutes’ speaking time;

 - (b) the mover in debate on a resolution or on a Bill shall be limited to 20 minutes’ speaking time in opening debate and 15 minutes in closing debate;
 - (c) the member who speaks immediately following the mover in debate on a resolution or on a Bill shall be limited to 20 minutes;
 - (d) except as provided in clauses (a) to (c), no member shall speak for longer than 15 minutes in debate.
 - (2) (a) Subject to clause (b), following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each member’s questions and comments;
 - (b) the 5 minute question and comment period referred to in clause (a) is not available following the speech from

- (i) the mover of the resolution or the Bill in opening or closing debate, and
 - (ii) the member who speaks immediately after the mover.
- (3) Time limits on speaking in debate on motions other than Government motions, public Bills and orders other than Government Bills and orders, written questions and motions for returns shall be as follows:
 - (a) the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition shall be limited to 20 minutes' speaking time;
 - (b) the mover in debate of a resolution or a Bill shall be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time and 5 minutes to close debate;
 - (c) all other members shall be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time in debate.
- 10. Standing Order 30(4) is amended in clause (a) by adding "the debate proceeds and" before "the Speaker".
- 11. Standing Order 32 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
 - (2.1) When a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells.
- 12. Standing Order 34 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):
 - (2.1) Amendments to written questions and motions for returns must
 - (a) be approved by Parliamentary Counsel on the sitting day preceding the day the amendment is moved, and
 - (b) be provided to the mover of the written question or motion for a return no later than 11 a.m. on the day the amendment is to be moved.
- 13. Standing Order 37 is amended by adding the following after suborder (3):
 - (4) For the purposes of this Standing Order and Standing Order 37.1, a tabling must be in paper form.
- 14. The following is added after Standing Order 37:
 - 37.1(1) Documents may be tabled by providing the required number of copies to the Clerk before 11 a.m. any day the Assembly sits.
 - (2) When the Clerk receives a tabling under suborder (1) that is in order, the Clerk shall read the title of the tabling when Tabling Returns and Reports is called in the daily routine.
- 15. Standing Order 39.1 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 39.2 and adding the following before Standing Order 39.2:
 - 39.1(1) The sequence of motions other than Government motions shall be determined by a random draw of names of members who have submitted written notice to the Clerk no later than 3 days prior to the date of the draw.
 - (2) The draw referred to in suborder (1) shall be held on a date set by the Speaker in the July preceding the session that the motions are expected to be moved.
 - (3) Prior to a motion other than a Government motion being moved, members may switch the positions in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Speaker.
 - (4) A member who has a motion other than a Government motion on the Order Paper may, upon providing 4 sitting days' notice, withdraw the motion before it is to be moved in the Assembly.
- (5) When a motion is withdrawn under suborder (4), the Order Paper shall indicate "withdrawn" next to the motion number.
- 16. Standing Order 48 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 48(1) and by adding the following after suborder (1):
 - (2) Dissolution has the effect of nullifying an order or address of the Assembly for returns or papers.
- 17. The following is added after Standing Order 48:
 - 48.1 A member of the Executive Council may, on one day's notice, move a motion to reinstate a Government Bill from a previous session of the current Legislature to the same stage that the Bill stood at the time of prorogation and the motion shall not be subject to debate or amendment.
- 18. Standing Order 49 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 49(1) At the commencement of each session, standing committees of the Assembly must be established for the following purposes:
 - (a) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, consisting of 21 members,
 - (b) Public Accounts, consisting of 17 members,
 - (c) Private Bills, consisting of 21 members,
 - (d) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, consisting of 9 members,
 - (e) Legislative Offices, consisting of 11 members.
 - (2) At the commencement of the first session of each Legislature, the Assembly must establish the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services consisting of 11 members.
 - (3) The Assembly must determine the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order by resolution which shall not be subject to debate or amendment.
 - (4) The composition of the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order must be proportionate to the number of seats held by each party in the Assembly.
 - (5) The proportionate membership of committees as prescribed under suborder (4) may be varied by an agreement among all House Leaders.
 - (6) The Clerk of the Assembly shall post in the Legislature Building lists of members of the several standing and special committees appointed during each session.
- 19. Standing Order 52 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 52 The Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund shall report to the Assembly on the Fund as prescribed in the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.
- 20. Standing Order 56 is amended by striking out suborders (2) to (8).
- 21. Standing Order 57 is amended by striking out suborders (1) to (6).
- 22. Standing Order 58 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 58(1) In this Standing Order, "sitting day" means any afternoon or evening that the Committee of Supply considers estimates for not less than 2 hours unless there are no members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 2 hours.
 - (2) The number of sitting days that the Committee of Supply is called to consider the main estimates shall equal the number of members of the Executive Council with portfolio.

- (3) The Committee of Supply shall consider estimates in the following manner:
- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, and members of the opposition may speak during the first hour, and
 - (b) any member may speak thereafter.
- (4) Subject to suborder (5), the vote on an estimate before the Committee of Supply shall be called after it has received not less than 2 hours of consideration unless there are no members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 2 hours.
- (5) On Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon, during the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall be called immediately after Orders of the Day are called and shall rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m.
- (6) The Leader of the Official Opposition may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to noon on the day following the Budget Address, designate which department's estimates are to be considered by the Committee of Supply on any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon during the period in which the main estimates are to be considered by Committee of Supply.
- (7) When the Leader of the Official Opposition fails to provide notice in accordance with suborder (5), the Government House Leader shall designate the department for consideration by Committee of Supply for that afternoon.
- (8) The estimates of the Legislative Assembly, as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the estimates of the Officers of the Legislature shall be the first item called in the Committee of Supply's consideration of the main estimates and the Chairman shall put the question to approve the estimates forthwith which shall be decided without debate or amendment.
- (9) In respect of the supplementary estimates and interim supply estimates, a member of the Executive Council may, with at least one day's notice, make a motion to determine the number of days that the Committee of Supply may be called, and the question shall be decided without debate or amendment.
23. Standing Order 59 is amended
- (a) in suborder (1)
 - (i) by striking out "Monday," and
 - (ii) by striking out "midnight" and substituting "11 p.m.";
 - (b) by striking out suborder (2).
24. Standing Order 60 is struck out and the following is substituted:
- 60 Committees of the whole Assembly shall rise and report prior to the time of adjournment.
25. The following is added after Standing Order 68:
- 68.1(1) The sequence of Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders shall be determined by a random draw of the names of members who have submitted written notice to Parliamentary Counsel no later than 3 days prior to the date of the draw.
- (2) The draw referred to in suborder (1) shall be held on a date set by the Speaker in the July preceding the session that the Bills are expected to be introduced.
 - (3) Members may switch their positions in accordance with guidelines prescribed by the Speaker.
26. Standing Order 83 is amended
- (a) in suborder (2) by striking out "received, shall be read by the Clerk if the member so requests" and substituting "presented during the daily routine";
 - (b) by adding the following after suborder (2):
 - (3) Petitions must be submitted for approval by Parliamentary Counsel at least one sitting day prior to the petition being presented in the Assembly.
27. Standing Order 83.1 is amended
- (a) in suborders (1) and (2) by striking out "read and received" and substituting "presented";
 - (b) by striking out suborder (3).
28. Standing Order 102 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 102(1) and adding the following after suborder (1):
- (2) The Clerk shall be responsible for the printing of the Votes and Proceedings and the Journals of the Assembly.
29. Standing Order 109 is struck out and the following is substituted:
- 109 The Speaker shall, after the end of the fiscal year, prepare an annual report on the Legislative Assembly Office and lay the report before the Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.
30. Standing Order 114 is amended by striking out suborder (2).
31. This motion supersedes the House Leader agreement for the 25th Legislature dated April 10, 2001.
32. This motion comes into force on the first day of the Second Session of the 25th Legislature.
- [Adjourned debate November 21: Mr. MacDonald]
- THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.
- MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very anxious to continue my remarks on Motion 21. There is a lot to cover here in the limited amount of time that a person has left. However, again I would express my disappointment in this motion. I certainly don't see any need for further limiting, in my view, or restricting the opposition, whether it's the Official Opposition or the opposition provided by the third party, in keeping this government accountable.
- This press release, for instance, that came out on October 24, 2001: I don't know whether this is an abuse of the executive power of the government or it is an example that the government perhaps doesn't understand the role of the executive branch in the legislative process. I certainly hope it is the latter, Mr. Speaker, because when you have a look at this press release, it states that it's the government of Alberta, and this is the furthest thing from the truth. It is the Progressive Conservative caucus who has come up with this proposed recommendation for changes to the Standing Orders, Motion 21. This isn't government legislation. This isn't a government motion. This is a mechanism or a motion to deal with the rules of the Legislative Assembly. It has absolutely nothing to do with government.
- 2:50
- There are certainly individuals within that government that want to restrict and limit the role of the opposition in this Assembly, and if these rules unfortunately do pass, these proposed recommendations are going to further erode democracy as we know it in this province. There's no way around this. Now, if we look at this and we look at question period and we look at the minutes that are allocated to question period and we compare ourselves to other jurisdictions, well, in some jurisdictions, it is only members of the Official Opposition . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: In most jurisdictions.

MR. MacDONALD: In most jurisdictions; I'm corrected by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. In most jurisdictions it is up to the opposition to ask the questions, but here in this Assembly I believe it's a tradition or a change in the rules that goes back perhaps 20 years that government members get to ask questions. So whenever people talk about changing the rules and rearranging the minutes and looking at our time, that is one thing that I do not believe has been considered.

Now, we look at some of the reasons, perhaps, for wanting this Motion 21 by hon. members across the way. It is two years ago that the Premier of this province stated that there was no justification for the Official Opposition, and here's the quote: no justification for the Official Opposition Liberals to exist.

AN HON. MEMBER: What's wrong with that?

MR. MacDONALD: Now, an hon. member over there says: what's the matter with that? This is a reflection of this government. For instance, out in the constituency of I think it's Drayton Valley-Calmar in the last provincial election there was even a sign, Mr. Speaker, that it was un-Albertan, I believe it was quoted, to vote Liberal. What's the matter with that? That is antidemocratic. That is what's the matter with that.

Now, we have this attitude, as I expressed earlier, that reflects over two years ago, Mr. Speaker, and this attitude is again reflected in this motion. It is antidemocratic. It is a further erosion of the democratic principles from which this Legislative Assembly works.

Again, it is noteworthy that one of the proposals would eliminate Standing Order 49(1), which requires a striking committee at the beginning of each session to determine the membership of the various committees. Now, earlier in the remarks from the spokesperson from the government there was a comparison done with the federal House of Commons. Well, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly that in the House of Commons in Ottawa – and surely the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has a great deal of experience with this one – all hon. members of the Assembly, regardless of which party they belong to, get to play constructive roles with committees. Here we have committees that don't meet. We have committees that certainly don't allow opposition members on them, and we are now looking at eliminating, as I understand it, two committees . . .

REV. ABBOTT: That never meet.

MR. MacDONALD: As the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar has correctly stated, they never meet. Well, perhaps they should meet. Perhaps it's time that the standing committees on Public Affairs and Law and Regulations were to meet and have a comprehensive review of electricity deregulation in this province. I'm sure the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar's constituents are concerned about the high cost of electricity in the province and this whole boondoggle that we call electricity deregulation. Instead of taking a standing committee and eliminating it, perhaps we should put it to work.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment earlier this afternoon was talking about putting all Albertans to work, the clients of AISH and the clients of SFI, and how beneficial it is to put those individuals to work. Well, perhaps with this large majority an all-party committee could be struck under Law and Regulations to exam this issue of how we have squandered, how we have gone from one of the lowest prices of electricity in North

America to one of the highest and now are settling back into the middle range with this electrical deregulation. That is only one purpose that the Committee on Law and Regulations could be used for.

For the members of this Assembly, the powers of committees should be noted. When we're thinking of doing away with two committees, I remind members that Standing Orders of the Assembly are largely silent on the powers of standing committees. In effect, these committees function in accordance with the provisions of section 14 of the Legislative Assembly Act. I'm not going to go into any more detail on that, but I would encourage all members of this Assembly to have a look at that, the Legislative Assembly Act, and perhaps there would be a better understanding of the differences between the various levels of government and the independence of these levels of government, whether they be the executive, the judicial, or the legislative branch.

Mr. Speaker, another curtain on democracy, in my view, is the section that is dealing with sub judice, section 8. Earlier an hon. member of this Assembly replied to me that there is a period of about 35 days in which members of the opposition could perhaps raise a question in this Assembly between different filing dates in court cases. Thirty-five days may seem like a long time, but when a Legislative Assembly such as this one sits so infrequently, that perhaps is not the right thing to do. There was a very, very interesting conversation at our caucus meeting this morning regarding this, and there were many, many good issues in regard to section 8 brought forward.

So at this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring forward an amendment to the Assembly. If I could ask one of the pages to please bring it to the attention of the table officers and have it distributed to all members.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, while this amendment is being circulated, it simply reads that "Government Motion 21 be amended by striking out section 8." That essentially is what the amendment is.

Hon. member, you have approximately five minutes still in your speaking allocation if you want to proceed. You're on the amendment now.

3:00

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. The amendment is to move that Government Motion 21 be amended by striking out section 8. As I said earlier, this restricts the Official Opposition's role, and it is a muzzle to prevent us from doing our job, which is to hold the government accountable.

For instance, if this section is not to be removed and it is to go ahead, this would essentially render this House, this Legislative Assembly, incapable of inquiring about issues such as West Edmonton Mall or the Jaber case or any other criminal case for the years that it may take them to be resolved. This narrow window, this little opening in the window, this 35 days as it is described, would be gone.

Research indicates that this section is tougher than in any other jurisdiction. Now, why shouldn't members be allowed to ask the tough questions? What is being hidden? What exactly is being hidden? There are limited resources on this side of the floor, Mr. Speaker. There may be more to this than meets the eye. We do not have the opportunity, the research resources to have a look at every issue in detail. When we stand up in this Assembly, whether it be a government member or one of the members of the opposition, and ask one of the hon. members in Executive Council a question and

they stand up and they say: oh, Mr. Speaker, I can't comment; it's before the courts – we will hear this day in and day out in the future.

Not only is that a poor reflection on this Assembly and the members in it, but it is a poor reflection on all of the province, because the public, whenever the statement "I can't comment; it's before the courts" is made, is immediately going to become even more suspicious of their elected officials, and we have to be careful of this. This amendment is a way for everyone to ensure that this does not happen. What is the matter with the existing Standing Orders? Why do we need to go even further? That is my question, and I would ask all hon. members of this Assembly to please support this amendment.

Now, I see the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore smiling, and I don't know whether that's a positive or a negative. I hope the hon. member certainly supports this amendment, but in light of the time that I have left, Mr. Speaker, I would be very anxious to hear the arguments from the hon. member about why we need to limit even further the ability of the opposition to ask the tough questions that need to be asked in order to hold this government accountable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the amendment.

MS BLAKEMAN: Absolutely. And thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to have the opportunity to rise and speak on the amendment as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Briefly, the amendment is proposing that section 8 be struck from these proposed Standing Order changes. What's being suggested in section 8 is quite a widening of the understanding and interpretation of sub judice and gives it a very wide scope, indeed, as it relates to our business here in the Assembly.

Well, what does that really mean to us? There needs to be a separation between what's done in the Assembly and what's done in the courts. Often I get people phoning me, and they'd like me to be able to phone the courts and say that this person's son is a good person – or so they tell me – and this shouldn't go against them, and can I do something to help them. I always explain to these people that it's important that there is a separation between what we're doing in the Assembly and what happens in the courts. The reason that it would be equally wrong for your neighbour to phone another MLA or the same one and have them phone the courts and go, "We think this particular person is really bad, and the sentence should be twice as hard on them" is the same reason why I can't be interfering. There has to be a separation so that we do have an unbiased court system. Our job in this Assembly is to write good legislation which can then be clearly interpreted and implemented by the court system.

We have had a sub judice rule in place under our Standing Orders for some time, and the interpretation of that sub judice has been that it included criminal proceedings. This change would be including civil proceedings and any appeals and any notices of any motions, which extends the prohibition of speaking or of questioning around any case that's active in front of the courts to cover the whole thing now, which could be a very long period of time.

My colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar had talked about that window of opportunity, of the 35 days before an appeal had to be filed, I think, that gave members of the Assembly an opportunity to ask questions of the government around a case that in fact had been decided, and that 35 days before the last possible opportunity for an appeal to be brought forward was an opportunity for the House to ask questions. The way this is being suggested now essentially

renders the House incapable of inquiring into issues that are before the courts in any way.

Let me be specific here.

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination

(i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence including any appeals and the expiry of appeal periods from the time of judgment, or

(ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding, until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Now, I mean, notices of motions can be filed on anything for all kinds of reasons, and in fact multiple ones can be filed, which severely limits the ability to question the government on issues that are so serious that they have appeared before the courts. I think that there is probably a reasonable use of sub judice, but I don't see what's happening here as being reasonable in any way, shape, or form. It is really muzzling the ability of the opposition or in the case of the Alberta Legislature any private member to ask questions of the government.

3:10

Where does this have other effects? I'm in my second term in this House, and I have already seen where commercial interests or other interests can attempt to control MLAs by throwing a suit at them and charging them, usually in a civil suit, with something. That has a pretty chilling effect on MLAs, and really it would be possible to shut down discussion of just about any issue that an MLA was bringing before this Assembly. If an outside interest decides to sue them or bring a charge against them in whatever way, that's the end of the discussion of that issue in this House. So it's a very interesting way to put a lid on just about any issue you can think of.

Now, obviously there would have to be a working in concert between what the members of the government did not wish to discuss and partners in the community that would be looking to bring forward the charges, but frankly I think we've seen that in the past. It puts a severe onus and a difficulty upon the MLA who now has this charge against him, because you have to try and go and find a lawyer and you've got to come up with the two or three grand that's going to get you into court just to answer that first motion or that first charge.

There's always a question about how this risk management fund actually works in this House and whether, in fact, nuisance suits that are brought against members of the opposition would be covered by the risk management fund. You would think that they would be, but given the way this government operates, that's not a for sure thing. Even if it does, we have a situation where in wanting to muzzle an issue from being brought forward in front of the Assembly, we have a charge being brought by private interests out in the community, and then, in fact, taxpayers' money has to be spent if there's an approval by the risk management fund to cover the cost of the MLAs going into court to defend themselves against whatever charge this is. So we're now limiting the discussion in the House of a number of issues, pretty wide issues, anything that anyone can think to bring a suit forward on, and we're incurring additional costs for the taxpayers by having to pull in this risk management fund.

Where have we seen this before? What's possible here? Without looking too far back, there have been a number of issues that have come before this House that have involved some of the issues and points that I'm raising here. We had the Principal Group. That's

fairly far back but certainly involved the government's choices and policies in how certain things were regulated, and there were some questions that were able to be asked. Under these changes there would be no discussion on that. That affected an awful lot of Albertans and even wider than that, people across Canada. We wouldn't be able to have questions asked or answered on that under these new rules.

We still have cases ongoing right now around the involvement of government policy with West Edmonton Mall and Alberta Treasury Branches. We don't know what's happening there. We can't ask the questions, but there's another example of taxpayers' money being involved in something, choices and policies of the government that may have enabled private interests to benefit, conflict of interest. We don't know what all is involved with that, because we can't examine it.

Here's one. We had a seniors' report that was commissioned by the government which was then shredded, and we weren't able to get any information on that. Now, there wasn't, in fact, a court case brought forward about that, but there could have been very quickly, which would have prohibited anyone from discussing that in this Assembly. So you can see that very quickly just about any issue one can think of someone could bring a suit forward on, and that would be verboten to be discussed or questioned in this Assembly.

What about Bill 11, the privatization of health care? Certainly there were a number of private interests there who were itching to shut that discussion down as quickly as possible. It's not hard to imagine something coming forward from that. Or let's look a little further back when we had the Hotel de Health, which brought a charge against a member of the opposition which shut down that discussion and that member's ability to go forward and question the government any further on Hotel de Health. Now, that was an issue that really got Albertans hot under the collar, and they wanted to hear more about this. They wanted the questions asked and answered in the House. It certainly put a chill on that MLA when they had a suit brought against them, and then of course under these circumstances they now would be totally shut down and wouldn't be able to talk about it.

Here's another one. It may not even be where there's a suit or a charge directly against a member of the Assembly, but what about other cases that are brought up out there that affect government policy or perhaps should affect government policy? An example there is the Jaber case that was up last spring and brought forward questions about a lobbyist registry and whether the government had considered that and whether it was appropriate and whether they'd be working on it. In fact, we've never heard back from the government on that, although we were told that we would hear back in two weeks, but that was two weeks an awfully long time ago. Because that case went on and then there was consideration of an appeal and there were a number of notices of motion in there, that would have been the end of that. No more questions could have been asked around that.

So now I've talked about the kinds of issues and how the change in the sub judice rule could be used by others to severely limit what's being discussed in this Assembly and what the government is questioned on and can reply to. Around that I've talked a little bit about the risk management fund and whether it's accessible to members, and we don't know that. There are still questions out there. In fact, there's a court case out there about whether it was appropriate for that risk management fund to have been used by a previous member of this Assembly. Now, here I'm starting to watch what I'm saying very carefully because . . . [interjections] Oh, I'm being cautioned with good advice – I hope it's good advice – from the members across the way. But right now I'm having to think very

carefully and tread very carefully on the words that I choose to put this issue before this House. How appropriate is that?

Now, I think it's perfectly appropriate that one does not sling people's names around and drag them through the mud, but if this is a legitimate issue that is of concern to taxpayers, is of concern to citizens in Alberta, we should be able to be discussing it in here. That's why we have privilege as members. That's part of our job as members, to be bringing those issues into this House. Our ability to speak about things without being limited and censured is about to change in many ways, but this is one of the ways specifically that it's going to change.

This has been an interesting process overall, because as the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar was pointing out, there does seem to be an attitude that this Assembly is a department of the government. When we're talking about changes in Standing Orders that are affecting this Assembly and it comes out on government letterhead – it doesn't come out on letterhead from the party caucus. No. It comes out on government letterhead. This is not government business. It is the business of the Legislative Assembly, and that's always interesting.

I know that the Speaker has been very careful when he opens this Assembly – and he speaks to new members who are elected about being very careful – when talking about members of Executive Council, which are members of cabinet, and private members, which would be everyone that isn't in cabinet, including the opposition. Those distinctions are being made, and in fact that's appropriate. We do have members of Executive Council, private members, and members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. What happens in here is that we're all supposed to be equal. That is the setup of that, and that's not what I see.

I even have the Minister of Environment shaking his head somewhat sadly at me as though I don't understand the principles of parliamentary process in the Commonwealth.

DR. TAYLOR: That's because there are 74 of us and seven of you, and that's not equal.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, the Minister of Environment is pointing out once again . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Through the chair, please.

3:20

MS BLAKEMAN: Of course. I'm happy to speak through the chair.

The Minister of Environment is speaking once again about a particular party, one with 74 seats, and the fact that that made them government. It may have made them government; it did not make them God. It did not. In this Assembly there are still private members who are supposed to have equal standing, and we're having that eroded.

Now, let me pull back in to be specific to the amendment that we're discussing, in which the rule of sub judice is being expanded to the point where any issue could be made out of bounds and off topic. The time period that is involved in this also stretches almost a lifetime, because when you look at some court cases – and let me look at the West Edmonton Mall/Alberta Treasury Branches court case and whatever the heck is happening in there. Now, that court case has been up the entire time I've been elected – that's five years – and I don't think we've even gone into the appeal process on that. But, gee, come next spring when we're back in session and these amendments to the Standing Orders kick into place, I won't be able to talk about it anymore even in the times between appeals. I'm saying this to underline how long a period of time it takes certain

issues out of this House and takes away from the ability of the opposition to question the government on its involvement in these cases. I think it puts the government's actions and involvement out of bounds. It insulates them.

I don't know, but government may well have been intimately involved in decisions that enabled or allowed companies to do things, and they're now before the courts as a result of it. I'm not being specific to any given case here. My point is that it puts government actions out of bounds, and therefore there's a lack of accountability to the people. The accountability now is only coming through the courts, and that's not the courts' job. They're not there to hold the government accountable – that's what the members in this Assembly are here to do – and all they can do is make a decision on the facts of law that are before them, but that isn't about whether government policy enabled this bad thing, whatever it is, to happen.

When I looked at all of the amendments that are being made to the Standing Orders, it struck me that the government had set out to change everything that had been done in the last seven or eight years that irritated them. I've been able to sort of go through and pick out memorial amendments or attribute different amendments back to individuals who have made use of parliamentary process to do something. I think this one I'm going to call the Howard Sapers memorial amendment, because in fact he was a member who was involved in a suit from an outside source around private health care that did muzzle him in this House. He tried very hard to bring the government to account and to get information on whatever the government's involvement is around West Edmonton Mall and the Alberta Treasury Branches. So this is the Howard Sapers memorial amendment.

DR. TAYLOR: Do you see where Howard is today?

MS BLAKEMAN: The Minister of Environment is wondering how I say that this is possible. It truly is. I think the amendments that are being proposed here are punitive, and they're meant to be punitive. I can go through and identify in each case what action they are trying to stop that in fact legitimately had been brought forward, usually by a member of the opposition.

So this particular amendment I will note as the Howard Sapers memorial amendment change in the Standing Orders, and I do ask people to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take this opportunity to speak on the amendment before the House. The amendment proposes to move that Government Motion 21 be amended by striking out section 8. Section 8 in the government's motion is an attempt to replace a subsection of Standing Order 23, which at this time is effective and is used to govern the business of this House. The Standing Orders currently in place and in use were updated and became effective on April 23, 2001, so that's the copy I'm speaking from.

When I look at the proposed change to the existing Standing Order 23, I find that it's subsection (g)(i) that is being replaced. The replacement means that this Assembly will lose the right to ask questions and engage in debate with respect to a matter that may be before a criminal court from the time that the charges are laid to the time that the final decisions in the appellate court are made. This time may extend to years and years.

All of this already, the way the Standing Order currently stands,

I think is sufficiently restrictive to protect the rights of people charged, because charges in criminal court, when they're laid, are laid along with the presumption that the person who is being charged is innocent until proven guilty. So we do have to be careful about what we say about such cases when they are being heard in the court. The existing Standing Order 23 and its subsection (g)(i) I think are sensitive to the need for us to stay out of saying or doing anything that might prejudice a trial when it's under way. But when a trial comes to a certain stage and it ends, from that point to the time when a notice of appeal may be issued, there is that interim period during which the present orders allow us to ask questions, to raise questions that may be relevant with respect to the accountability of the government or the conduct of a member of the Assembly, whether that person is on the government side or on the other side. All of this is done.

When I read the last provision there, which is the concluding paragraph of subsection (g), it says, "Where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate." So the existing Standing Order recognizes the clear division of powers between the three important branches of government: the executive, the judiciary, and the Legislature. I think those powers, the ability of each branch of the government to maintain its control over its jurisdiction, is an exceedingly important principle. The proposed amendment from the government side as part of Motion 21 I think in a sense questions the separation of powers and the principle that the Legislature, unless absolutely necessary, must never surrender the powers that it is given by the citizens, by the electors, by the voters in a democratic society. So that's the principal issue involved here.

3:30

There is the question of whether or not these changes are needed, the manner in which they have been proposed and brought forward. There are clearly other issues on which we will continue to express serious concern and reservation. Examples of particular cases before the courts have been given where this Assembly has had the opportunity and has used that opportunity in the past to ask questions on matters in which the conduct of the government or a particular decision of a minister or someone else has been put to question; I think rightly so. The government has not in proposing this change in the existing Standing Orders – I think one thing that will be required of us is to make a persuasive case, hopefully a compelling case, for a change in the rules which have proven more or less helpful in both respecting and protecting the rights of this Assembly, the rights of the Legislature, the rights of each one of us as members of this Legislature.

The case has to be made on the grounds that the use of those rights by this House or by a member of this House have in fact in the past prejudiced the dispensation of justice, the trial that might have been under way. No such evidence has been produced. In my more or less five years in the Assembly there are several of those cases, when they were concluded after the first charge was laid and the trial was held and the decision was given by the court – from that point on until the notice of appeal was given, there was a period in which questions in this House were raised, and at no time, on no occasion did the raising of those questions in any way prejudice the system of justice or the procedures of judicial function and activity. No person has been harmed. No principles of, quote, procedure have been compromised.

Given the fact that the existing rules have worked to protect the rights of the Assembly, the rights of the Legislature, and have at the same time not caused any harm whatsoever either to the authority of the courts or to the interest of the accused, I ask the question: where

is the need? Where is the problem? Where is the need to do this? If there is no such evidence and we can't demonstrate the need for this change in terms of the harm done to the parties or doing anything that will harm the rights of the courts and the judicial system, then one is led to ask: why is it being proposed at all? Is it poor judgment, or is it motivated by some other concerns?

Mr. Speaker, I'm led to speculate that there may be other reasons, that the reasons are such that they're more to do with taking away from this Legislature, from this House, the opportunity to ask legitimate questions, questions about accountability for particular actions or of particular persons, whether they're on the government side or on the other, for having done things that in the judgment of the person asking questions require scrutiny, require public challenge, and require debate. To me, to take away that right, to take away that opportunity is to undermine the very process which we all value and seem to want to say is desirable. Otherwise we wouldn't have this on the books.

An issue like this, where changes in Standing Orders may affect the rights of the Assembly, the powers of the Assembly, the powers of each member of this Assembly, should not be seen in partisan terms. It is true that it's our obligation as members on the opposite side, in opposition, to ask those tough questions that sometimes are unpleasant to ask. It's not always terribly enjoyable to ask a member on the other side of the House questions that may reflect on the conduct of the individual, but those questions must be asked. That's our public obligation.

If one occupies this office that we all occupy, I think we have certain obligations. Those obligations compel each one of us to ask those tough questions.

DR. TAYLOR: Not to cast aspersions.

DR. PANNU: Whether they are seen by some as casting aspersions is a matter of judgment, but in my view the principle that must prevail is the ability of each member in this House to be able to raise those questions so long as in the judgment of the person who's asking those questions the questions being raised are crucial to the protection of the integrity of institutions, protection of public interests. Clearly, these are matters of judgment. All of us can't always agree on those matters of judgment. So given that we're all human, that we're all fallible, we should be modest enough to at least say: well, there can be mistakes made.

Nevertheless, because mistakes are made, the right that we all have as elected members of the Assembly must remain primary. That should never be challenged, and in my view this amendment would challenge that right. It challenges the right of the Assembly. I, therefore, ask all members to reconsider this. I ask the House leader, the deputy House leader, and members of all caucuses, including the government caucus, to reconsider this. I think it's going in the wrong direction to take away what's in Standing Order 23(g) and replace it with the proposed amendment, and that's why I guess the amendment that's before us seeks the striking of that section 8 in the motion.

I did refer very briefly to the fact that the existing order, Standing Order 23, works. There's no place that it has failed us or the government. Therefore, changing it in a way which may restrict the ability of us as elected members to raise questions, to hold the government accountable isn't justified.

So I speak, Mr. Speaker, in favour of this amendment being proposed, and I would hope that I have succeeded at least in part in persuading members on all sides of the House to vote for this amendment on which I've just concluded speaking. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton Mill Woods on the amendment.

DR. MASSEY: On the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to speak in support of the amendment, which asks that Government Motion 21 be amended by striking section 8. Section 8, of course, is all about sub judice. One of the concerns that we have with sub judice is the balance that we have to strike between freedom of speech and the due process of law, and that's at the heart of the sub judice rules.

Freedom of speech is a cornerstone of our democracy, Mr. Speaker. It's the hallmark of most democracies. It's such an important principle to us that we have fought wars to protect that freedom, and we're not alone. There have been many around this world who have fought and died to protect that freedom of speech. There's been a whole body of law developed around free speech and challenges to those that would in any way curtail freedom of speech, and most democratic governments' constitutions make mention of freedom of speech, including our own. So it's a freedom that is at the heart of democracy, and I think that if you were to ask most laypeople to name the freedoms that they value most, freedom of speech would certainly rank high among those.

3:40

It's a bit of a two-edged sword, because freedom of speech allows people to say anything they want, within limits of course. They can talk about the untenable. They can talk about things that just don't seem to make sense to the mainstream population. They can talk about the unorthodox, and they can talk about things that are unpopular. They can make proposals that people take offence with. They do that without fear of punishment from the government, and that's at the basis of freedom of speech and concerns around freedom of speech, that you be able to say what you think and what you feel without fear that there'll be retribution.

Again, as I said, it's really critical to democracy and the way that our democracy works. The intent, of course, is that people will be able to say what they want and that it will allow ideas in our society to develop, that through that freedom our culture is refined, and it's through that freedom that arrogance or the abuse of power is controlled. So it's something that is essential to not only democracy but the growth of our culture and democracy, and it's a check on those that would abuse the benefits of living in a free and open society.

As we've seen in the discussion this afternoon, freedom of speech is not absolute. There are times when there are other interests that outweigh that freedom of speech. If there's a chance that speech may prejudice a particular case, then there are constraints put on freedom of speech, and that's based on some assumptions about court cases, of course. The assumption is that jurors and witnesses who are exposed to material that's not part and parcel of a court case, that hasn't been tested in a court will be influenced. I'd like to come back a little later to talk about a number of studies that have looked at just that question in terms of how influential media stories and comments that are made in Legislatures are on the behaviour of jurors and the kinds of decisions that they make.

There's a concern that impartial verdicts are impossible without some constraint on information prior to a trial being undertaken, and I guess the other assumption is that you have to curtail the things that are said prior to a trial. It might not be neutralized in the court with the use of evidence or judicial warning or mechanisms that are available within the court. So the fear for the kinds of damage that people speaking freely about a case might do in terms of the accused are used as reason for sub judice.

There are other reasons, of course, why freedom of speech is set aside. We've seen some discussions in the last number of weeks as we look at some of the terrorism legislation. When state security is at risk, there have been actions taken by people to protect them through curtailing freedom of speech. If there have been instances when public order has been, again, at risk, there have been some restrictions placed on the freedom of speech. There have been restrictions put on freedom of speech when individual citizens and their reputation could be damaged. So that freedom of speech is not an absolute freedom that is unfettered and not interfered with in our society, yet I think we're very, very careful and pause before we do anything that would interfere with that freedom.

[The Speaker in the chair]

That freedom was hard won, Mr. Speaker. It has its precedent in England, of course. The right to free speech stems from the right to freedom of the press established in England in the 17th century, and that's really where the notion of freedom of speech came about. Free speech was only extended to Members of Parliament initially. At one time, in the late 1600s, all the presses had to be licensed, and it was only when those press laws were not renewed that freedom of speech became more generally available and became a matter of principle. So freedom of speech has a long history, and as I said, it's been long, long defended and fought for.

I guess the question we have before us as we look at this amendment, Mr. Speaker, is: can justice be done and be seen to be done in the absence of sub judice? If we look at the amendment this afternoon, the government is saying no, that without sub judice justice in the province and elsewhere won't be done. From the perspective of the opposition, of course, the answer is the opposite, that sub judice and extending sub judice or interpreting it even more broadly than it already is does not serve us well and is an unnecessary restriction of freedom of speech.

I think there are a number of concerns we have with the sub judice rule and our reasons for not wanting one. One, of course, has been alluded to before, and that's time limits. Time limits for those of us in the Legislature, of course, are of the essence. When events happen that are of concern to this House, the faster they can be raised the better in terms of serving the public interest. The effect of extending sub judice, of course, is to postpone those debates and to drag them out. In many cases I would suspect that the effect is to put topics off the public agenda until court proceedings are completed. That can have some political benefits for a government, in particular when they can rest easy that any involvement they may have with public issues that are before the courts will not be raised or will be postponed for some time, and sub judice becomes a bit of a shelter. So for the opposition the time limits are of considerable concern.

3:50

One of the concerns, of course, is the influence of the media and the claim that the media will be reporting on items that are raised here in the Legislature or there'll be the publication of issues raised here, questions in *Hansard*, so that the debate becomes public. The charge is always made that that publication by the media or by *Hansard* is going to influence jurors. There are some counterarguments to that. I think the most common argument is that media stories tend to be quickly forgotten and that maybe – and I think it's certainly the case here – we tend to overestimate the public's awareness of news and issues that are being discussed here. I think it also ignores the fact that many people are fairly critical readers of news reports and of things that are said in this Legislature too, I suspect, Mr. Speaker. Most readers are fairly critical. So the charge

that it has an undue influence on jurors I think is one that is really open to question.

It also, I think, is based on the assumption that jurors come to a trial without prejudices and preconceptions, that it's sort of a tabula rasa, this blank slate that they walk into a courtroom with, that you have to make sure that you don't do anything to disturb that slate. I think that's fairly hard to defend. I think it's really difficult to think that jurors would be wholly unacquainted with the facts of high-profile cases in this province. I think that's really an unreasonable expectation. I think the fact that they'll come to a jury with a diversity of opinions also speaks against not trusting them to be able to listen and to hear information about a case without being unduly influenced. Most jurors are average people, fairly well informed, and if there's something high profile happening in the community, they're going to know about it and even have some opinions.

There have been some American surveys for and against, I have to admit, the hypothesis that prejudicial pretrial publicity can lead to bias in jurors. A number of groups have looked at that. The conclusions, as I said, are contradictory:

Although jurors were more likely to believe that a defendant was guilty after reading a "sensational" story than a conservative story, there was no difference in how the jurors who had read the "sensational" story and those who had read the conservative story would vote for conviction.

So the kind of profile that a story had, sensational or not sensational, didn't seem to end up influencing their decision.

There's evidence from some of the studies that there may be stories before a trial but that the trial process itself takes and eliminates any of that prejudice that might exist. There are indications that those "persons not exposed to pre-trial prejudicial news coverage found the defendant guilty more often than those who were exposed to such coverage." So there's a discrepancy in the findings in terms of the coverage that we have.

Mr. Speaker, when you put it all together and you look at what's in the balance – and that is the balance between freedom of speech, in this case freedom of the opposition to raise matters in the Legislature, versus a broader interpretation of sub judice – I think that the amendment before us makes good sense, and that's that we should make sure we don't err on curtailing the kinds of questions and issues and speeches that can be made on issues in our province.

With that I conclude. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview on the amendment.

DR. TAFT: On the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My understanding of sub judice rules in many other jurisdictions under the British parliamentary system is that they are not handled in specific Standing Orders but that they are handled by convention. The effect of this amendment would be to achieve that same outcome for our Legislature here, to remove sub judice issues from the Standing Orders and to leave them to convention. Now, I suppose the crucial question would be: is convention adequate? If we pass this amendment, how would things work? I take it on the experience of British parliamentary systems throughout the world, not just in Canada but throughout the world, that it would work just fine. In fact, a great deal of the British parliamentary system relies on convention, relies on precedent, relies on an ongoing interpretation of the current circumstances and how those can be judged by historic events. So I think that the effect of this amendment would be simply to bring us into line with what's done elsewhere.

One of my concerns if we don't proceed with this amendment is that the sub judice clauses under Standing Order 23 – one of them in

particular is poorly worded. I think everybody would agree to that. The first section – and I'm here referring to section 23(g)(i) – referring to "criminal nature," I think is pretty clear. Anybody reading that is going to be pretty clear. But if you refer to the subsequent paragraph, that relates to civil issues, it reads:

Of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court.

The confusion and what worries me particularly about this clause, if we do not pass the amendment, is that it could be interpreted to mean that civil proceedings are sub judice from the moment notice of motion is filed onward, and notice of motion can be filed at the very beginning when a statement of claim is filed. At least that's my understanding. So there is a risk with the wording that sub judice rules will be greatly extended, and I think we would all share that concern.

I think some of the members in the gallery are with environmental groups, and I'm thinking of a situation in which a civil matter could be raised on an environmental issue, a statement filed, and depending on how this clause was interpreted, suddenly that particular issue would be out of bounds for us to raise in question period or for us to raise in other forms of debate in the Legislature. That's just one very simple but immediate example of why I am concerned about this particular proposal and why I would support the amendment to strike it.

Indeed, I think there is more generally a risk to good parliamentary debate that this sort of precedent could be extended to all kinds of nuisance lawsuits or SLAPP suits. So if a particular issue were to be raised or deserved to be raised in the Legislature and some party outside the Legislature did not want it raised, I would be concerned. Indeed, although there is debate on this, we certainly have had some legal advice to confirm this concern that a SLAPP suit could ultimately shut down all kinds of meaningful debate, meaningful questions in this Legislature.

Now, there are two sides to this, and I've got legal views arguing: yes, you're right to be concerned. I've got legal views arguing: no, there's no need to be concerned. The variance is a result of the awkward wording of clause (g)(ii) under Standing Order 23. I do notice that the proposed amendments actually add one comma to this clause. I've read it without the comma and then I've read it with the comma, and it's not clear to me why the comma is being inserted.

4:00

MS BLAKEMAN: Punctuation is important.

DR. TAFT: Yes, punctuation is indeed important. Shifting a comma around can fundamentally alter the meaning of a sentence.

So we've inserted a comma in a location where it doesn't seem to have any particular effect at all except that maybe it heightens my concerns. So it might be useful if anybody here, the House leader or anybody else, has a view on that to enlighten us as to why the comma was inserted there and why not elsewhere. That simply illustrates the confusion that's raised by this clause, and I think it confirms and supports the idea that we should perhaps just strike the clause and rely on convention. As we need to draw on precedent, we can draw on precedent from other Legislatures.

Due process is not an inconvenience. Due parliamentary process is crucially important for us to respect. It has arisen over centuries and centuries of debate and, as other hon. colleagues have raised here, even war. Wars have been fought over the proper way to handle parliamentary debates, and the due processes of the Legislature versus the courts are inevitably from time to time going to be in tension, going to be in conflict. Certainly the courts need to be

concerned that what occurs in this Chamber not prejudice their proceedings and prejudice the administration of justice. If, for example, somebody was standing trial or some charge had been laid against an individual on a particular issue and we were to raise that in a particularly inflammatory way or particularly irresponsible manner in this Assembly and the media were to proceed, perhaps conceivably that court case could be affected and the administration of justice could be affected, although some evidence was brought forward here earlier that casts doubt even upon that. Nonetheless, we do have to be extraordinarily sensitive to the administration of justice.

At the same time, we need to be very sensitive to our own rights and indeed responsibilities as MLAs to raise issues that deserve raising and to ask the tough questions that need to be asked and to be free to pursue that and free to speak our minds and free to raise the issues as we see them. There certainly are a number of cases that come to my mind, just sitting here making notes over the last several years, that would raise concerns that there may be moments and maybe, indeed, prolonged periods when we cannot raise particular issues because of lawsuits before the courts.

Some suits have been raised here that may or may not have affected debate but certainly easily could under an interpretation of the sub judice issue. Probably the biggest case that has affected the most people in this province was the Principal Group case. There was a case around West Edmonton Mall. There was a case involving the former Treasurer. There was a case from a private health care company against the former leader of the third party. There's a case by another private health care company against a previous member of the opposition caucus. So we're not just talking theoretically here. There are lots and lots of cases that could be brought forward to stifle debate in this Legislative Assembly. We need to have the maximum flexibility to interpret those and to decide when a stifling may be justified and when it isn't.

Now, on the possibility that this amendment is not passed – and I have to be conscious that some of our amendments may not always succeed.

MS BLAKEMAN: We live in hope.

DR. TAFT: Yes, we live in hope.

There is some consolation to me in the final clause of that particular subsection, assuming it is interpreted in the way I think it was intended. It reads: "Where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate." So it seems to me that if this amendment does not pass, we will need to then ultimately rely on the interpretation of this final clause. "Where there is any doubt as to prejudice" – in other words, if there's any possibility that prejudice will not be visited upon people in a criminal or civil case – "the rule should be in favour of the debate." So we will in fact be able to proceed. My unease around this is that this is not how the rules have always been interpreted. The sub judice clause could be invoked and frankly, I'm concerned, could be used to shut down legitimate debate here.

These days I think we all need to be particularly conscious of protecting the freedom of speech, and when I say "these days," I'm meaning in this period after September 11. Certainly there is a concern about improving security within our society and monitoring for so-called terrorist activity or activity that could become terrorist activity, but as we are seeing in public debate in the last several weeks, it is not always a clear line between what's terrorism and what's legitimate dissent. My concern is that as we expand the so-called antiterrorism legislation, more and more criminal charges

could be applied to more and more groups, who before September 11 would simply be regarded as participating in a legitimate dissent but now run the risk of being charged as terrorists. Even though the charge may ultimately be dropped, throughout that entire process it seems to me that there's a clear risk under this Standing Order that we could not then address the issues related to that charge in this Assembly.

We need ultimately to protect and to stand for freedom. We need to stand for our ability to raise issues, to hammer them out, to agree to disagree, to argue, to even heckle. That certainly happens in here. Ultimately those are freedoms that we have to cherish and freedoms that we have to stand on guard for. I am concerned that as time unfolds and as the personnel of this Assembly change, the people responsible for the operations of this Assembly change, the sub judice rule will be used to inhibit those freedoms, to constrain our ability to raise issues, and that it could ultimately be abused.

So I am going to be voting enthusiastically in favour of this amendment, as I'm sure many of the rest of us will be also. I think I've made my reasons clear. I think it will be a vote for freedom.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

4:10

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you've already participated in this amendment.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few words that I'd like to say this afternoon. I listened with interest to the varied and wide-ranging opinions expressed by the members opposite. So I think it's important to go back to what exactly we're talking about so that the many individuals who are following this debate in the galleries and on the Internet and, I'm sure, those who read *Hansard* will have some clarity.

The amendment put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is that Government Motion 21 be amended "by striking out section 8." Now, section 8 says that "Standing Order 23 is amended by striking out clause (g) and substituting the following," and the words follow. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview has said that the effect of this is to have us revert to a convention. The fact is that that is not correct. The effect of this is to revert to the existing Standing Order 23(g). Convention has little to do with this. This Assembly has a history of having a Standing Order dealing with sub judice, and we will continue to have a history of dealing with an order of sub judice regardless of how this amendment is dealt with.

Now, in dealing with what actually is done in section 8 of Motion 21, there are some words added to the existing sub judice rule, and they are the words that deal with the expiry of appeal periods from the time of judgment as it relates to matters "of a criminal nature." As a number of the hon. members have noted, there is a purpose to the sub judice rule. *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, 6th edition, at pages 153 and 154 contains some comment about that, but I'd like to simply refer to paragraph 505, which in general terms sets out what the purpose of sub judice is.

Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals which are courts of record. The purpose of this sub judice convention is to protect the parties in a case awaiting or undergoing trial and persons who stand to be affected by the outcome of a judicial inquiry. It is a voluntary restraint imposed by the House upon itself in the interest of justice and fair play.

As a number of hon. members opposite have noted, there is a test outlined in the existing and indeed in the amended Standing Order 23(g), which talks about the "probability of prejudice to any party" being the essential element that is important in determining whether

sub judice has applicability. To those who are following this, it seems to me apparent that in fact a question that is posed in this House while there is a trial on, which is prejudicial to the party to that particular case, is equally prejudicial to that party if that question is asked during the period between the sentence and the filing of the notice of appeal, just as it would be during an appeal period. So what this particular provision does is cover off the relatively short period of time when a party to a case could be at prejudice, and therefore it seems to me it's very much in accord with the concept of justice and fair play being at the heart of the sub judice rule.

I think it is important for people who are following this matter to understand that there is no defined period of a trial; that is, when it begins and when it ends. And there is no defined period for an appeal; that is, when it begins and when it ends. But the issue of a notice of appeal is very much a defined term which is capable of understanding by those who work in the area of criminal cases. It is a very small time period compared to the time of trial and the time of appeal.

So I cannot support the amendment being put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and would encourage the members to vote against it.

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on the main motion.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Government Motion 21, the main motion. Looking both at the proposed motion with all the amendments proposed in it and also the introductory remarks made by the hon. House leader when he was introducing the motion, one general thrust of his argument as I listened to him was that the changes proposed in Motion 21 are intended to make our work in the House more effective and make the Standing Orders more effective: it'll save us time, it'll provide more opportunities for private members to speak to the private members' bills, and it will rationalize the proceedings of the House if we change the order of business of the House. Those sorts of comments have been made.

He also of course made an interesting comment about why we need to perhaps cut back the time that we have available to speak from 20 minutes to 15 by using the analogy of the high school debate. That I found quite intriguing actually, comparing the business of the Assembly, which is about running a government, about governance and holding governments accountable and passing legislation, as somewhat analogous to a high school debate. He said he was impressed by the rules by which high school debates are conducted, allowing five minutes of questions for all parties taking part in the debate. He wouldn't want to of course bring in that model here to help us sort out our activities in the interest of improving our overall functions in the House. I'll come to that, but I just want to draw attention to the context first, Mr. Speaker, in which this motion is being brought forward and debated.

We have a changed House. We have on the opposition side nine members, and the amount of time that nine members can take to debate any bill, any motion is necessarily much more limited than was the case in the last Assembly, when there were 17 members on the opposite side to speak. So the issue of somehow saving time is one that doesn't make sense to me. That isn't in my view a problem that needs to be addressed by making changes to the our Standing Orders.

4:20

I also want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that I tried to look up the number of days that we sit. That is one of the arguments made, by the way, in Motion 21, that we need to reduce the time that members have to speak on private members' bills from 20 minutes to 10 minutes. That will allow more members to speak on bills, and I certainly see the logic of why we should provide opportunity to as many members as elect to speak on private members' bills. I think that's a good idea. But why do we not ask the question of whether or not to allow them to have time to speak on it can be fixed in more than one way. One way, of course, would be to reduce the length of time for which we speak. The other one would be to increase the number of days that we sit in the Legislature. That will certainly allow us more time, give private members more time and all members more time to speak on issues that they feel strongly about.

To compare the number of days that we sit in the House for the year 2001 – and this information has been taken from on-line research on Assembly web sites. This year, for example, the year 2001, the Saskatchewan Assembly sat for 71 days, Nova Scotia for 60 days – and they're back in the fall session now – Ontario, 55 days – and they returned to the Assembly for the fall sitting on September 24. Quebec sat for 49 days, and again resumed the sitting on October 16; Manitoba, 49 days; and New Brunswick, 41 days. We, compared to them, of course, had sat only 26 days this year until we resumed the sitting a couple of weeks ago. Today is our eighth day in session, and 26 plus eight makes 34. How many more days we will go I don't know, but I think we will probably not be able to say that we have sat at least as many days as New Brunswick, which sits for the lowest number of days of the provinces that I mentioned.

So the way to fix the problem is certainly more than one, and I would have liked to see the matter addressed perhaps in presenting the rationale for Motion 21 and the amendments that it proposes to the Standing Orders of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard some other interesting arguments, as I said, with respect to private members' bills. I think we should seriously consider extending the sitting days for the Assembly to fix the problem of members not having enough time to speak on private members' bills. On government bills the argument is that the only people who need to speak, that do normally speak are members of the two opposition parties, and therefore it's only appropriate that we provide an opportunity for government members to ask the opposition members some questions when they are speaking on government bills. Well, the government members, I am told, the private members from the government side, don't speak on government bills because they've already had the extended opportunity via standing committees, public hearings, caucus discussions to have spoken on the government bill. So the only time they need to speak is in the form of asking questions of us.

That has two interesting aspects to it. First, in a parliamentary system I guess there's nothing wrong with seeking information on the argument that's made. I think I'd be very happy to answer questions of fact, questions of information at the end of 20 minutes. So we could extend to 25 minutes that time available for any one member, and we can afford to do that if we are willing to sit for a few more days rather than going in the opposite direction of cutting the time back to 15 minutes and then saying: now you'll be interrogated from the government side.

The other side to this argument is to sort of turn the parliamentary procedure upside down, that somehow we should have what would become a sort of question period from the government to the opposition side. I find it intriguing that this should be suggested as a way of improving the business of the House. As I said, I don't

mind getting into some sort of exchange of information provided that we allow for more time to do this. Otherwise it makes no sense, Mr. Speaker.

The intent of changing the order of business – the argument is made that we want to make predictable the time of the question period so that Albertans know exactly when it's going to start. Well, that's certainly one reason why we could do this. There are other Assemblies in this country, Mr. Speaker, who televise all the proceedings of the House, many other Legislatures, from Newfoundland to Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and B.C. All of these Houses or Assemblies have learned and televise all of their proceedings. So rather than just trying to play around with the one and a half hours of televised time in the Assembly so that we can make a particular part of this proceeding more predictable or fixed in terms of time, I think what we need to do is increase access to the debate in the House to Albertans. In a province as large as ours someone sitting in Pincher Creek should be able to just click on the TV and watch the debate at any time, including question period.

So I don't think the argument given to change the order of business to accommodate interests Albertans have just in the fixed hour for question period makes much sense. We need to go in the opposite direction and increase access, increase visibility to Albertans so they have a sense of participation or at least the ability to watch anytime they want to see what we do here in the House. It certainly would be good for our own discipline, I think, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few other comments here. I think the point has been made – I'll reiterate it at the risk of repeating what has been said, I guess, more than once already. That's the manner in which this change in the Standing Orders is being sought. I think it's inappropriate for the government caucus to proceed unilaterally to bring in these amendments, some of which are quite far reaching, which will impact the ability of this House and particularly the ability of the opposition parties. For a very small caucus like mine, the New Democrat caucus, it would certainly further restrict our ability to contribute to the debate if we were to accept many of the changes that are being made here.

The unilateral way in which the whole process has been undertaken is something that I find unacceptable. I have worked as House leader with other House leaders during my time in this Assembly. I worked with you, Mr. Speaker, and we were able to work out through negotiation, agreements the needed changes in the existing Standing Orders without too much difficulty. I think that's the process that needed to be used. The fact that that route was not even tried suggests that the intention is to steamroll some of these changes regardless. That's unacceptable and should be unacceptable in the Assembly, because these Standing Orders affect all of us. They belong to the Assembly and to all of us, not to one party or one caucus. So the method used to make the changes is not quite the one that should have been adopted in the first place.

I should qualify my remarks by saying that we were consulted once the decision was made and the agenda changes were determined, but those consultations haven't gone very far in terms of allowing us much of an influence in affecting the items of the agenda that we have before us.

I want to turn now to one particular part of the proposed amendments. That is that I want to propose an amendment to Motion 21, proposing by way of this amendment that Motion 21 be amended in section 18 in the proposed Standing Order 49(1). I just want to draw the attention of the House to this. I have the amendment here. Mr. Speaker, do you want me to read the amendment or to circulate it?

4:30

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, why don't you just give it to the page for circulation and read your amendment at the same time.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The amendment, as I said, is to the proposed Standing Order 49(1), by adding the following after clause (e). The additions are:

- (f) Justice and Government Services, consisting of 11 members,
- (g) Learning and Employment, consisting of 11 members,
- (h) Energy and Sustainable Development, consisting of 11 members,
- (i) Agriculture and Municipal Affairs, consisting of 11 members,
- (j) Health and Community Living, consisting of 11 members, and
- (k) Economic Development and Finance, consisting of 11 members.

These are the standing committees, and I'm proposing by way of this amendment that the proportionality principle be applied in the composition of these committees as an addition to the amendment of Motion 21 in the section that I just referred to.

If we go this route rather than striking out some committees, Mr. Speaker, it seems to be better to make the standing committees, the policy committees, all-party committees so that they reflect the true composition of the House. Thereby those committees would become more effective, more representative, and be able to reflect more successfully what Albertans want. Such committees would certainly become forums where Albertans can come and speak to their concerns and the issues that they want the government and the Legislature to consider. If this were to be done, I think the work of the Assembly – the job of policy-making, the legislation and statutes that this Assembly proposes, debates, and passes – would reflect comprehensively and truly a broad cross section of the concerns of all the voters of this province, all the citizens of this province.

In addition, of course, they will provide an important role to all three caucuses – my caucus, the New Democrat caucus; the Official Opposition, the Liberal caucus; as well as the government caucus – and will be able to raise issues and concerns and examine and scrutinize proposals that come before those committees either from the government or from interested groups and organizations in the province or from individuals who may have concerns with respect to government policies and issues. In doing that, I think we'll make the functions of these committees much more democratic, much more open, much more representative.

So this amendment that we're proposing, if passed by this House, will be of great consequence. It will mean a great improvement in the way the government does its business, the way the House does its business, the way we all have a say in the substance of the business as well as the manner in which business gets conducted in this House. I would ask all members to give serious consideration to this amendment that I'm proposing and ask them to support this amendment.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I conclude, and we'll have other speakers.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would welcome an opportunity to enter the debate on this amendment. I listened very carefully to the hon. member's comments when he proposed that rather than removing some committees that today probably do not fulfill a function that contributes to the process we enter into here, we add a number of committees. The hon. member spoke of the people's ability to provide input to the process, to participate, I think to paraphrase, in debate in the House. You know, I believe that Albertans reflected what they wanted on March 12. I believe Albertans understand that they live in what we call a parliamentary democracy, and I believe Albertans understand that under our Premier's leadership we have a process of standing policy committees that cover all of these. Those committees meet on a regular basis. They are policy-making bodies, and I believe that the people elected these members on the government side to develop policy.

The opportunity to debate that policy is in this Legislature, and I believe that's what parliamentary democracy is all about.

The opportunity for debate, Mr. Speaker, does occur in this Legislature. It occurs in the period of time when we debate the Speech from the Throne that Her Honour delivers in this House, which outlines the government's plan. It occurs when we debate in this House for a set number of days the budget of the government, which affects every department in the government, all of which are here. At the same time, the government presents its business plan for not only each department but for the government as a whole, and the opportunity to have that debate is here in this Legislature. So I have not in my experience, some 14 years last Friday, had a lot of calls from constituents from one of the very large constituencies, in geography at least, and had them say: we don't have an opportunity to participate. They believe they've elected a member, they believe they have an opportunity through that member, and they believe that every four years they elect a governing body who, until the next election period, will develop the policy and enter into debate with other parties in the Legislature on that policy and pass it. I think that's how the people's voice is heard in the parliamentary democracy which we enjoy and should cherish in this country.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I believe so very, very firmly in the parliamentary process and parliamentary democracy that I don't want to support amendments to the Standing Orders, that govern the rules of this House, which I feel would not contribute to the continuance of that tradition and that form of government that has stood this country and this province in good stead for many, many years. I think that sometimes we complain a bit about our system, but when we look afield, we come back and say: you know, this works pretty well.

So I cannot support what I think would be a repetition of a process that we already have in place. I believe in having the standing policy committees and the many opportunities for other people from the public and/or opposition parties to participate in open meetings of those standing policy committees; in the opportunity for every member to be in this House right now at this moment to debate the Standing Orders, as we're doing; but, most importantly, in the time that we set aside where we debate the government's plan, the policies that we set for how we're going to expend the dollars that the people of this province entrust us with, and I think we have a very good system.

The other thing that I just wanted to make a brief comment on, Mr. Speaker, was when we get into comparisons with other Legislatures. I think we want to be very careful when we do that, and I think when we talk about this Legislature, let's talk about the hours that we put in rather than using the term "days." Some Legislatures do not sit in the evening. They sit at a different time of the day. They may start in the morning, pause at noon, sit for a while in the afternoon, and they call that a day. We start at 1:30 in the afternoon, recess or stop for supper hour, sit sometimes till midnight, and we call that a day.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sometimes longer.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Yes, this Legislature has been known on occasion to call a day 36 hours or some such figure.

So I think when you start comparing the number of days you sit, whether it be in Prince Edward Island or Quebec or the state of Montana, you should look at the hours you spend in the Legislature. Maybe what we should all consider more than anything is the quality of the time and how we spend our time here.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those brief comments I do not feel that I can support the amendment and would recommend to our members in this Legislature that they do not support this amendment.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I've been drawn into this debate, and occasionally we actually do have a debate in this Assembly which I find really exciting, where we have people putting forward their heartfelt belief in what is right. I believe that the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development genuinely, absolutely believes what she's saying, but what I find interesting is that the defence she is making, that the Progressive Conservative caucus committees replace the committees of the Assembly, is not acceptable to me.

Those caucus committees are caucus committees, and the government is perfectly entitled to have its caucus develop policy for government, perfectly entitled to do that, absolutely entitled to do that. However, let's be clear: that is the Progressive Conservative caucus developing policy for itself; that is not legislative committees. It is not, and we have always objected on this side to taxpayers' funds being used to pay for essentially a caucus committee that is developing policy.

Now, the minister says: oh, these standing policy committees are open and people can come and there can be debate. No, they're not open. Most of those meetings we don't even know have taken place. They're closed meetings. They are closed. Occasionally they are opened up for members of the public or the media to sit in. The media and the public cannot ask questions, and other members of this Assembly are treated as though they are members of the public. They do not have the same rights as those that are sitting around the table, and right there is the defining factor.

Again, I repeat: the government is perfectly entitled to give itself advice from its own party policy. Absolutely. But it does not replace the committees from this Legislative Assembly, and I say that it should not be paid out of taxpayer dollars for those committees. Those committees and any additional sums they're going to pay for their committee chairperson should come from PC Party moneys.

Now, the member also talks about the public having decided on March 12 the way it's going to be. Yes, they did, but we have to remember that in this province 30 percent of those who were eligible to vote put this government in power: 30 percent, not 60 percent, not 100 percent. Thirty percent of the voting public. That is not a slam dunk by any means, ladies and gentlemen. There are 70 percent of Albertans . . . [interjections] Oh, this always gets people upset, gets them engaged, Mr. Speaker. I find that very exciting, and I hope they're all going to get up and debate on it rather than just heckling me.

So what we've got is that 70 percent of the people that were eligible to vote did not vote for this party that formed government, did not vote for them. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please. The chair has recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think we have to be very clear. This government, in having such a large majority for such a long period of time, has come to believe that it replaces parliamentary procedure. It doesn't replace parliamentary procedure. This political party's approach to government does not make democracy. It does not make this Assembly, nor does it replace it in any way, shape, or form. So it is perfectly legitimate to say that if the Progressive Conservative Party caucus is going to have policy committees to advise itself, we can have those committees for the Legislative Assembly, and it is not even a duplication.

One is giving policy of a political nature. The other is an all-party committee to work out how we're going to approach things in the Legislative Assembly. That would be true democracy. That is the problem with having a party in power for so long.

It's been interesting for me when I've been able to travel out of the province and speak with people in other provinces, and the minister cautioned against comparisons. You know, with these rules that are being put in place tonight, members of the government opposite would be horrified to have to work as opposition members under the restrictions that are being contemplated under these Standing Orders today, horrified at how limited their ability to perform as representatives of the people would be. But then the members that are on the government side here assume that they are never, ever going to be in opposition. Who knows? We will see in the future. But you have to consider, as you put these rules in place, that you will have to operate under them as well. Do you really want to be operating under these Standing Orders that are being put in place?

4:50

Now, just imagine, as horrific as I know this will be to all of you, that the Liberals are in power and the Liberals have their personal party policy committees. The rest of the members of the Assembly are not able to participate in that, and they bring forward an amendment that suggests that they want to have these committees in the Assembly and want to discuss that business in the Assembly. Of course, it's not possible because the Liberals, who've now been in power from 2004 to 2075, won't allow that. What's left for the other members of the Assembly is very restricted in what they're able to participate in, what they're able to bring forward, how long they're able to speak, what committees they can influence policy on, et cetera.

So while I appreciate that the minister believes very strongly that the Progressive Conservatives will form government in perpetuity, I do not think that that is the case. They were not elected by 100 percent. This is still supposed to be an Assembly that reflects a Commonwealth parliamentary tradition, and therefore it's perfectly appropriate that we do have all-party committees that reflect this Assembly. The payment for those – it's appropriate – would come out of taxpayer dollars.

The last thing is the public's ability to access and influence these committees. What the government has is not accessible by members of the public, but the Assembly is. They can come, they can watch, they can read it in *Hansard*, and they can listen to the live audio online. They are able to watch what's happening, and they're able to influence what's happening through their representatives. That is not the case through the PC caucus committees, not the case at all. There is no access there. There are no minutes kept. There's no *Hansard* kept. When the committee meetings are closed, nobody knows what's going on. So the public does not have access to that system even through their elected representatives. They have no way of holding their member accountable, because they can't tell whether their member spoke in those committee meetings or not. They have no way of tracking. Now, their member can come back and say: yes, indeed, I raised your point in the committee meeting. We have no way of knowing. We have to take the member's word, and of course we're all honourable members in this House. We would all want to accept any hon. member's word on this.

I don't want to take up any more time on this. I appreciate the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona bringing it up. I appreciate very much the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development speaking so passionately to it, but I disagree absolutely with her interpretation of it, and I disagree absolutely that internal party politics replaces the business of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did want to add a few comments to this debate because of the members presently sitting in the House, there aren't very many who have been in Legislatures that have both kinds of committees. I do have some sympathy for the intent behind this motion. Whether it's workable or not is a whole other question. I did want to put on record, though, the fact that the standing policy committees of the government are an exceptionally good way to provide for backbench members to have input into developing policy, and that's what is lost in this debate or lost in the greater debate in the public on just what these committees can and cannot do. The standing policy committees of the government, as represented through the caucus committees, have incredible oversight and incredible power as compared with my prior experience.

The prior experience that I have with committees is also such that because they're controlled by the government completely – not a little bit but absolutely completely – and the committees are creatures of their own and not governed directly by the Legislature, they are an exceptionally handy place for controversial items to go and suffer a quiet death. They're referred to committee, never to be seen or heard from again. Committees can also do some pretty good work in listening and becoming a listening post for all of the Legislature. So there are pros and there are cons, but I think that for the moment, in my experience, the capacity of the standing committees of the caucus to have meaningful input into legislation is quite remarkable. I did want to put that on the record.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford on the main motion.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very, very brief. I did want to also in debate – I've heard members speak to the question of questions and comments and whether or not that takes capacity or time from the opposition to make their point. The reality is that if the opposition chooses to, the opposition can actually get more time, because each time a government member speaks, the opposition is able to use five minutes, in fact, to question the government member speaking. The chair occupant normally will go to the opposite side of the aisle to select people for questions and comments. So while it will put considerably more responsibility and pressure on the chair occupant to control the debate, it will have the effect of actually generating debate in the House.

AN HON. MEMBER: Government members don't speak.

MR. McCLELLAND: The member says that government members don't speak. Well, if the opportunity presents itself, we will.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on the main motion.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have an opportunity to make some comments about the motion before us with respect to Standing Orders. As I go through the changes that will occur, I guess the one I'd like to spend a little time on is the change that would be made to Standing Orders with respect to the Law and Regulations Committee. The proposal, of course, is that

that committee be eliminated. I think that's an unfortunate proposal. From the time I've been in the Legislature, the opposition has made reference and attempted on numerous occasions to refer legislation to the Law and Regulations Committee. That committee operates in many Legislative Assemblies and parliaments. Australia and a number of the states have such a committee, and I think they have that committee with good reason. The purpose of such a committee, of course, is to scrutinize bills and regulations, bills that are passed and then regulations that are formulated to support or to carry out the legislation. They look at the bills with the intent, I think, of making sure that it's very clear, that any unclear references are cleaned up.

I think that it could be particularly useful in our Legislature as we look at the language that is used in legislation. I've taken the opportunity on a number of occasions to point out the promise that was made by the government in 1993 to bring forward plain-language legislation. I remember the discussion at the time. There was a commitment to make sure that the legislation that was introduced would be plain-language legislation. There was good reason for them to make that commitment at the time, Mr. Speaker. I think a number of bills demand plain language.

5:00

As I've mentioned before, the School Act is a bill that I think has to be open to all. The School Act, for instance, would have been a bill that would have benefited from an examination by the Law and Regulations Committee. It's become very convoluted over the last number of years. If you look at the Bill 16 debate that we just concluded last week and passed, for ordinary citizens to take that piece of legislation and actually trace back through the bill and through the amendments and then to the School Act itself, it takes a fair amount of perseverance and, I think, makes a demand that's really unnecessary on citizens who would like to understand laws that pertain to them and to their children and to the operation of their schools. So I think that it's a bill that would have benefited immensely in terms of suggestions for clarity should it have been referred to the Committee on Law and Regulations.

Such a committee scrutinizes bills for clarity. They make sure that those bills are not redundant, that they don't put in place laws that are already on the books. They have a bookkeeping function in terms of looking at past legislation, looking at other acts and how a particular bill might impact other legislation that's on the books in the province.

A third function of that committee is to make sure that laws are not ambiguous, that the references made in legislation are clear and easily understood. So those are generally three of the scrutinizing functions that the Law and Regulations Committee undertakes. I think that in looking at clarity and redundancy and ambiguity, someone has to make sure that legislation doesn't trespass on the freedoms or the rights of others. That's been a major function of law and regulations committees as they operate elsewhere. I remember reading some information about Australia where that is a major concern.

There's been legislation here. I can recall, since I've been in the House, that Bill 26, the bill that would have limited the rights of sterilization victims, when it came forward, was one such bill where scrutiny by a body such as the Law and Regulations Committee would have been very beneficial. That's the most glaring example, but I think that there were other pieces of legislation where we've raised issues about the rights of particular groups and how they're being affected by the legislation.

Another function is that it can make sure that the freedoms and the rights or the obligations that are embedded in legislation are reviewable, that they aren't shuffled off to administrators, never to

see the light of day again. Such a committee has a role in making sure that there's sunset legislation, that there is some mechanism in place to make sure that legislation is going to be reviewed. In particular, there was an opportunity missed here that we didn't have an active Law and Regulations Committee working when we were looking at changes to the health act and practices that might have an adverse effect on the privacy of health information. That's been a topic for a number of law and regulations committees as the whole issue of changes to health legislation have occurred in a fairly large number of jurisdictions lately.

I think that a last commitment of the committee is to make sure that legislative power is not inappropriately delegated. Again, I think it was with Bill 57; we had just such a discussion in this Legislature in terms of the delegation of authority to other bodies and the appropriateness of that delegation.

I can see why the government would want this committee to no longer function. It can't be easy if you're a government member or you're a minister and you've worked on a particular piece of legislation and you've gone through the consultations and you've tried to as best you can meet the criticisms and the legislation comes forward and you find yourself then having to see the piece of legislation move to another body that can make changes to it. I can understand from the government's side where that might make them uncomfortable. I think that a Law and Regulations Committee would be even more uncomfortable for those members, who would be faced with either just rubber-stamping government legislation as it came along or trying to provide some constructive criticism of bills. I do understand why it's difficult for the government, but even though it is difficult, I think that it's important.

I don't have any experience with the committee here, although I once sat on it, was named to it, but if you look at how it operates elsewhere, bills are usually referred to the Law and Regulations Committee after second reading. That can take from overnight to five months, up to two months in other jurisdictions. The outcome is usually the tabling of a report to the Legislature that either makes changes to the bill – in fact, some jurisdictions allow the legislation to be disallowed, but I don't think that that's common practice.

So I have a great deal of concern with that particular part of the motion that would change our Standing Orders, and with that I would like to propose an amendment. The amendment is that Government Motion 21 be amended in section 18 by adding the following after the proposed order 49(1)(e): “(f) Law and Regulations, consisting of 21 members.” So it would put that committee in place.

I have copies of the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the pages will circulate this amendment, even though I'm standing here.

The hon. member basically indicated in his amendment that there be one clause added: “(f) Law and Regulations, consisting of 21 members.”

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on the main motion.

5:10

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I'm glad that I can speak on the main motion, although I express some regret that the previous amendment did not in fact pass, but I'll come back to the discussion about the Law and Regulations Committee.

There are some interesting changes and proposals that are being

made with Motion 21, the amendments to the Standing Orders. As I was outlining when I spoke in support of the motion put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I think my reading of the history of this Assembly has been that because we've had the same party in power for a long period of time with large majorities – and I know that members find that very exciting – it has shaped and changed this Assembly. I think that what we get as a result is more than an expectation. There is an all-pervading belief by members of the government that they will in fact form government forever and that their way of doing business is the only way of doing business. It's not.

The comments that came out in the press release are disingenuous in many ways, and I'm wondering, actually, if there is a real understanding by the members opposite of the difference between government and this Assembly. It strikes me that in many ways they don't seem to understand the difference because so much of what happens in the Alberta Assembly has for so long been the absolute domain of a particular political party. As decisions are made to do more and more inside of that political caucus, then those members would likely see less and less reason to repeat the process in the Legislative Assembly. Thus we get things like custom-tailored, custom-designed committees, that the PC caucus wishes to say is government policy development. Fine. I disagree with that, but okay, let's leave that there. But then you can understand why the members don't want to come into the Assembly and have the discussion over again. They believe that they've already had it, so they don't want to have the discussion over again in the Assembly. They see it as a waste of time. Certainly that's been expressed repeatedly in the House.

In fact this is the place where the decisions are ultimately supposed to be made. We've had a subversion or a perversion, where that decision-making body has been shifted inside of a particular party caucus, and that shows all the way through the changes that are being suggested in Motion 21, all of the changes that are being anticipated here to the Standing Orders, things like question period. Well, they want question period moved up in the order of business. Why would that be?

Well, you know, when I look at what's happened in the five years that I've been in this House, I can see that the members of the government caucus get very annoyed when there are a lot of tablings. Tablings are one way that the people of Alberta can speak through their elected representatives and have their issues brought to the House. It's time consuming, say the government members; we don't like it, and we don't want it to be there. So they change the Standing Orders so that in fact the tablings go after question period. Well, we all know that the television cameras will be off by then. Nobody is going to see or hear. Oh, yes, I can hear the people in the government caucus; they think it's funny that in fact they've now manoeuvred it so what the public is able to see of the proceedings of the Assembly in this Chamber is very limited.

The press release also talked about how we have such a long question period. Well, that may be true. We might have 50 minutes here and it's 40 minutes somewhere else and 30 minutes somewhere else. But let's be really clear, people. Everywhere else question period is 100 percent questions from the opposition. It's very unusual to have government members included in question period. Very unusual.

How did we come to that in this House? Well, at one point we came to it because there were only four members in the opposition. At that time, the leader of the party in power said: it's important that we have an opposition; it's important that there are questions to the government; therefore, we will have government members act as opposition to fill out the ranks of opposition, if you will. I don't

think it was the intention of that particular leader of the party and of the government at the time to in fact turn it into a platform for government press releases, which is what we've come to now.

As the Speaker often points out, we get through somewhere between 11 and 13 questions in a 50-minute question period, and out of that we have possibly six or seven that are questions from the opposition. So almost half our questions are in fact questions designed specifically for government to get up and talk about its platform in whatever way it wants to, because they're clearly questions that are designed to be complimentary and not to hold the government accountable in any way.

So we now have a question period that is not about holding the government to account. It's not about scrutinizing the government. It's now a 50-minute question period of which at least half is designed to give the government a platform. This is the kind of change that slowly shifts when you have a party in power for a very long period of time with very large majorities.

Let's look at a couple of the other things that are being suggested here. To cut speaking time. Again, it's perfectly understandable why members of the government believe that speaking time in this Chamber is boring and a waste of time. They believe they have already discussed all of this. This is in their little partisan caucus discussions in their little committees. My point – and I made it before – is that it is not the same as the representation of those people that elected us to be here. Those committees are not open to the public. They are not Hansarded or minuted, and if they are, the minutes are not made available to others. So it is decision-making that takes place in private, behind closed doors. It is not available for your own members to be able to scrutinize whether you represented them appropriately. It's not.

DR. TAYLOR: Albertans like the way we make decisions. They put 74 of us here.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, once again I'm being reminded about the 74 seats that have been put in, and once again I will remind the Minister of Environment that they were put in with only 30 percent of the vote. Seventy percent of the voting public did not vote for the members opposite.

One of the other issues I'd like to address is getting rid of some of the legislative, all-party committees that are never called. Now, again this is a little disingenuous. The setup is that you don't call a committee for 20 years, and then you stand up and go: oh, this is not a useful committee; let's get rid of it. Well, we don't know whether it's a useful committee or not. It hasn't been called. It hasn't been allowed to perform the legislative function that it's there for. You go: "Well, is that true everywhere else? If we look elsewhere, is it a useless committee that's never called?" No, it isn't. It's used lots of places, and to very good effect and for the bringing together of many different people's approach and good brainpower that's able to be pulled together on all of it.

The perfect example of that right now is that the Standing Orders are proposing to eliminate the Law and Regulations Committee. I had spoken earlier about how each thing that's being proposed to be eliminated or changed in these Standing Orders can be attributed to a particular action or individual that has annoyed the government in the past, and I think this one, the elimination of the Law and Regulations Committee, must indeed be acknowledged as the Gary Dickson memorial Standing Order.

5:20

Certainly the former Member for Calgary-Buffalo spoke often and

passionately about the usefulness of this committee and often brought forward a motion to have the regulations of a particular bill that was being debated referred to the Law and Regulations Committee. Frankly, I backed him on that. I think it was a good idea. I've spoken many times about our having our bills and statutes available on-line; we do not have the regulations on-line. It's important that it is brought out into the open, that the decision-making process and the specifics of what the regulations are are out in the open. It's a shame that we're looking to lose it. I do have to point out that it's not that these committees are not useful, but to cripple the committee or not use it and then say that it's no good is not an accurate reflection of what's going on here.

Frankly, I'm sitting on another legislative committee right now, and I'm watching the government do exactly the same thing to it. So I'll put it on the record now. I don't think the Public Accounts is a useless committee. Ten years from now there will likely be a Standing Order back here saying: oh, well, it hasn't met, and it never gets through all the ministries anyway, so we're going to get rid of it. That's exactly what's happening right now. We are no longer in session long enough for this committee to scrutinize every government department. So every attempt by this member to try and ensure that the committee meets often enough to in fact scrutinize every department of the government has been turned down by the overwhelming majority of government members on the committee. But that's not to say that the work of the Public Accounts Committee isn't useful and shouldn't in fact be there. But I will bet you dollars to doughnuts that 10 years from now I can cast my eye forward and there will be a desired change in the Standing Orders to get rid of Public Accounts for exactly that reason: oh, well, it doesn't scrutinize all the ministries anyway, so what's the good of it?

So the government sets out to cripple a committee and then turns around and says: well, it's no good, so let's get rid of it. So there's a very current example of how it's done, and I want to make sure that people understand that.

This government has been quite progressive in e-government, and I think that's a good thing in many ways. We can't assume that unless the government is willing to pay for a computer for every household, which I don't think they're willing to do, nor would I suggest it – it must be remembered that people cannot necessarily keep up with the government. If everything is going to be put on-line and all press releases are going to come out that way, documents now – I was involved in one of summits that happened recently, and the whole report came out on-line. It was never published in paper form. That makes it very difficult for still a significant portion of the community to get access to it. I think we have to be careful about that. Again, this is around the Law and Regulations Committee. We don't get the regulations on-line. We just get the bills and statutes. So it's still important to get those. [interjection]

That's an excellent suggestion actually. I've just heard one of the members suggest that only the opposition would sit on Public Accounts. I'd be perfectly willing to have that happen, because at that point we could actually have the committee scrutinize every department. We could have the committee operate under the guidelines of the Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees. We could have the committee meet outside of the sitting days in order to be able to scrutinize everything. All of these things have been defeated by the government members that are on the committee. So I wouldn't mind having opposition members only on that one at all, although I admit that it would defeat the purpose of the legislative committee. So I'm willing to have other people on the committee, unlike my colleagues on the other side.

AN HON. MEMBER: Question.

MS BLAKEMAN: No. I'm sorry; you don't get the question yet.

I've talked about question period. I've talked about shortening speaking time. I've talked about the House committees and the partisan committees. You know, there's some discussion that these Standing Orders would open up more time for private members' business, more time for private members' bills. Well, that's a really interesting possibility, because we've only managed to get through 12 private members' bills in this statutory year. Twelve. We're not even on Bill 212 yet. I think it's been introduced, but we certainly haven't debated it. So again that's something to think of.

What I'd like to do at this point is move a motion of referral. For the convenience of the House I have actually made copies of it although it's not required for a referral motion. Nonetheless, I thought that for the convenience of the members they might like to have a copy of it. I'll read the motion into the record: that

Government Motion 21 be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for discussion and that the committee be instructed to report to the Assembly no later than 15 sitting days into the spring session in 2002.

I've often seen members of the government side hoist their private members' bills. It's a favourite so that they're not actually seen voting down their own private members' bills. The temptation to hoist this is very high, but I chose not to do that. What I decided to do was incorporate what's available to us in the Legislative Assembly and use a referral motion, that this all be examined and sent to an all-party committee to carefully consider, with all members and all parties represented, what's being proposed here and whether, in fact, it is the best thing for the longevity of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, not the best thing for the Conservative Party or the Liberal Party or the ND Party. What is the best thing for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta? I don't think that is what is being proposed under Motion 21. I think it's partisan, and I think it is not healthy for this Legislative Assembly, and I think ultimately it's not healthy for Alberta.

So members have had an opportunity to examine the referral motion that I've put forward, and I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the *Hansard* for March 17, 1982, page 181, where a former member of this Assembly moved the same type of motion. It was dealing then with significant changes to the Standing Orders, and in fact the referral motion was passed by the Assembly. Support for such an action was even congratulated by the Speaker at the time.

I encourage all members of the Assembly with the best interests of our Legislature at heart to support this referral so that we can have

a constructive and all-party discussion of these changes before we pass them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:29 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is before the Assembly a division, and what is occurring here this evening, just from a procedural point of view, is that we are beyond the hour that is normal. There is a provision, though, in *Erskine May* and the traditions of parliamentary government that if in essence a vote is called and the time to leave has come, that matter of business must be concluded. That's the only reason we're into this scenario right now.

For the motion:

Blakeman
MacDonald

Massey
Nicol

Pannu
Taft

5:40

Against the motion:

Abbott
Ady
Cenaiko
Coutts
Danyluk
DeLong
Ducharme
Evans
Forsyth
Haley
Hancock
Hlady
Horner

Hutton
Jablonski
Johnson
Jonson
Klapstein
Kryczka
Lord
Lougheed
Lukaszuk
Lund
Maskell
Masyk
McClelland

McFarland
O'Neill
Ouellette
Rathgeber
Renner
Snelgrove
Stelmach
Stevens
Tarchuk
Taylor
VanderBurg
Vandermeer
Zwozdesky

Totals:

For - 6

Against - 39

[Motion on amendment lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:42 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 26, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/11/26

[The Speaker in the chair]

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

21. Mr. Stevens moved:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be amended as follows:

1. Standing Order 4 is struck out and the following is substituted:

4(1) If at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m.

(2) If at 5:15 p.m. on Monday, the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, the committee shall rise and report immediately.

(3) If at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the business of the Assembly is not concluded, the Speaker leaves the Chair until 8 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned until the next sitting day.

(4) If at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday or Wednesday, the Assembly is in Committee of the Whole and the business of the committee is not concluded, the Chairman leaves the Chair until 8:00 p.m. unless, on a motion of the Government House Leader made before 5:30 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the next sitting day.

(5) At 5:30 p.m. on Thursday the Speaker adjourns the Assembly, without question put, until Monday.

2. Standing Order 5 is amended by adding the following after suborder (1):

(1.1) If, during a sitting of the Assembly, a question of quorum arises, the division bells shall be sounded for one minute and if a quorum is then not present, the Speaker may declare a recess or adjourn the Assembly until the next sitting day.

3. Standing Order 7 is amended by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

7(1) The ordinary daily routine business in the Assembly shall be as follows:

O Canada (First sitting day of each week)

Introduction of Visitors

Introduction of Guests

Ministerial Statements

Oral Question Period, not exceeding 50 minutes

Recognitions (Monday and Wednesday)

Members' Statements (Tuesday and Thursday)

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Presenting Petitions

Notices of Motions

Introduction of Bills

Tabling Returns and Reports

Projected Government Business (Thursday)

4. Standing Order 8 is amended

(a) by striking out suborders (1) to (3) and substituting the following:

8(1) On Monday afternoon, after the daily routine, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Written Questions

Motions for Returns

Public Bills and Orders other than Government

Bills and Orders

(2) On Monday evening, from 8 p.m. until 9 p.m., the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Motions other than Government Motions

(3) On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons, on Monday evening commencing at 9 p.m. and on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, the order of business for consideration of the Assembly shall be as follows:

Government Motions

Government Bills and Orders

Private Bills

(b) in suborder (4) by striking out "55 minutes of debate" and substituting "60 minutes of debate and 5 minutes for the mover of the motion to close debate".

(c) by adding the following after suborder (4):

(4.1) Before the mover closes debate on a motion under suborder (4), a member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that provides for the motion under consideration to be moved to the bottom of that item of business on the Order Paper.

(d) by striking out suborder (6) and substituting the following:

(6) Before the mover of a motion for second or third reading of a Public Bill other than a Government Bill closes debate, or the time limit is reached for consideration at Committee of the Whole under suborder (5)(a)(ii), a member may move a motion, not subject to debate or amendment, that the votes necessary to conclude consideration at that stage be postponed for 10 sitting days or the first opportunity after that for the consideration of the Bill, unless there are other Bills awaiting consideration at that stage in which case the Bill will be called after the Bills at that stage have been considered.

5. Standing Order 18 is amended

(a) in suborder 1(h) by adding "except as provided under Standing Order 49" after "committee";

(b) by adding the following after suborder (2):

(3) In this Standing Order, "adjournment motion" includes daily adjournment motions and any motion to adjourn the proceedings of the Assembly for a specified or unspecified period.

6. Standing Order 20 is amended by striking out suborder (1) and substituting the following:

20(1) In a debate on a motion, if a member moves an amendment, that member may only speak to the amendment and the main question in one speech.

7. Standing Order 21 is struck out and the following is substituted:

21(1) A member of the Executive Council may, on at least one day's notice, propose a motion for the purpose of allotting a specified number of hours for consideration and disposal of proceedings on a Government motion or a

Government Bill and the motion shall not be subject to debate or amendment except as provided in suborder (3).

(2) A motion under suborder (1)

(a) that applies to a Government Bill shall only refer to one stage of consideration for the Bill;

(b) shall only apply when the Bill or motion that is the subject of the time allocation motion has already been debated in the Assembly or been considered in Committee of the Whole.

(3) A member of the Executive Council may outline the reasons for the motion under suborder (1) and a member of the Official Opposition may respond but neither speech may exceed 5 minutes.

8. Standing Order 23 is amended by striking out clause (g) and substituting the following:

(g) refers to any matter pending in a court or before a judge for judicial determination

(i) of a criminal nature from the time charges have been laid until passing of sentence, including any appeals and the expiry of appeal periods from the time of judgment, or

(ii) of a civil nature that has been set down for a trial or notice of motion filed, as in an injunction proceeding, until judgment or from the date of filing a notice of appeal until judgment by an appellate court,

where there is probability of prejudice to any party but where there is any doubt as to prejudice, the rule should be in favour of the debate;

9. Standing Order 29 is struck out and the following is substituted:

29(1) Time limits on speaking in debate in the Assembly on Government motions, Government Bills and orders and private Bills shall be as follows:

(a)(i) the Premier,

(ii) the Leader of the Official Opposition, and

(iii) the mover on the occasion of the Budget Address

shall be limited to 90 minutes' speaking time;

(b) the mover in debate on a resolution or on a Bill shall be limited to 20 minutes' speaking time in opening debate and 15 minutes in closing debate;

(c) the member who speaks immediately following the mover in debate on a resolution or on a Bill shall be limited to 20 minutes;

(d) except as provided in clauses (a) to (c), no member shall speak for longer than 15 minutes in debate.

(2) (a) Subject to clause (b), following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each member's questions and comments;

(b) the 5 minute question and comment period referred to in clause (a) is not available following the speech from

(i) the mover of the resolution or the Bill in opening or closing debate, and

(ii) the member who speaks immediately after the mover.

(3) Time limits on speaking in debate on motions other than Government motions, public Bills and orders other

than Government Bills and orders, written questions and motions for returns shall be as follows:

(a) the Premier and the Leader of the Official Opposition shall be limited to 20 minutes' speaking time;

(b) the mover in debate of a resolution or a Bill shall be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time and 5 minutes to close debate;

(c) all other members shall be limited to 10 minutes' speaking time in debate.

10. Standing Order 30(4) is amended in clause (a) by adding "the debate proceeds and" before "the Speaker".

11. Standing Order 32 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):

(2.1) When a division is called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, a member may request unanimous consent to waive suborder (2) to shorten the 10 minute interval between division bells.

12. Standing Order 34 is amended by adding the following after suborder (2):

(2.1) Amendments to written questions and motions for returns must

(a) be approved by Parliamentary Counsel on the sitting day preceding the day the amendment is moved, and

(b) be provided to the mover of the written question or motion for a return no later than 11 a.m. on the day the amendment is to be moved.

13. Standing Order 37 is amended by adding the following after suborder (3):

(4) For the purposes of this Standing Order and Standing Order 37.1, a tabling must be in paper form.

14. The following is added after Standing Order 37:

37.1(1) Documents may be tabled by providing the required number of copies to the Clerk before 11 a.m. any day the Assembly sits.

(2) When the Clerk receives a tabling under suborder (1) that is in order, the Clerk shall read the title of the tabling when Tabling Returns and Reports is called in the daily routine.

15. Standing Order 39.1 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 39.2 and adding the following before Standing Order 39.2:

39.1(1) The sequence of motions other than Government motions shall be determined by a random draw of names of members who have submitted written notice to the Clerk no later than 3 days prior to the date of the draw.

(2) The draw referred to in suborder (1) shall be held on a date set by the Speaker in the July preceding the session that the motions are expected to be moved.

(3) Prior to a motion other than a Government motion being moved, members may switch the positions in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Speaker.

(4) A member who has a motion other than a Government motion on the Order Paper may, upon providing 4 sitting days' notice, withdraw the motion before it is to be moved in the Assembly.

(5) When a motion is withdrawn under suborder (4), the Order Paper shall indicate "withdrawn" next to the motion number.

16. Standing Order 48 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 48(1) and by adding the following after suborder (1):

(2) Dissolution has the effect of nullifying an order or

- address of the Assembly for returns or papers.
17. The following is added after Standing Order 48:
 - 48.1 A member of the Executive Council may, on one day's notice, move a motion to reinstate a Government Bill from a previous session of the current Legislature to the same stage that the Bill stood at the time of prorogation and the motion shall not be subject to debate or amendment.
 18. Standing Order 49 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 49(1) At the commencement of each session, standing committees of the Assembly must be established for the following purposes:
 - (a) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing, consisting of 21 members,
 - (b) Public Accounts, consisting of 17 members,
 - (c) Private Bills, consisting of 21 members,
 - (d) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, consisting of 9 members,
 - (e) Legislative Offices, consisting of 11 members.
 - (2) At the commencement of the first session of each Legislature, the Assembly must establish the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services consisting of 11 members.
 - (3) The Assembly must determine the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order by resolution which shall not be subject to debate or amendment.
 - (4) The composition of the membership of the committees established under this Standing Order must be proportionate to the number of seats held by each party in the Assembly.
 - (5) The proportionate membership of committees as prescribed under suborder (4) may be varied by an agreement among all House Leaders.
 - (6) The Clerk of the Assembly shall post in the Legislature Building lists of members of the several standing and special committees appointed during each session.
 19. Standing Order 52 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 52 The Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund shall report to the Assembly on the Fund as prescribed in the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.
 20. Standing Order 56 is amended by striking out suborders (2) to (8).
 21. Standing Order 57 is amended by striking out suborders (1) to (6).
 22. Standing Order 58 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 58(1) In this Standing Order, "sitting day" means any afternoon or evening that the Committee of Supply considers estimates for not less than 2 hours unless there are no members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 2 hours.
 - (2) The number of sitting days that the Committee of Supply is called to consider the main estimates shall equal the number of members of the Executive Council with portfolio.
 - (3) The Committee of Supply shall consider estimates in the following manner:
 - (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, and members of the opposition may speak during the first hour, and
 - (b) any member may speak thereafter.
 - (4) Subject to suborder (5), the vote on an estimate before the Committee of Supply shall be called after it has received not less than 2 hours of consideration unless there are no members who wish to speak prior to the conclusion of the 2 hours.
 - (5) On Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon, during the consideration of the main estimates, the Committee of Supply shall be called immediately after Orders of the Day are called and shall rise and report no later than 5:15 p.m.
 - (6) The Leader of the Official Opposition may, by giving written notice to the Clerk and the Government House Leader prior to noon on the day following the Budget Address, designate which department's estimates are to be considered by the Committee of Supply on any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon during the period in which the main estimates are to be considered by Committee of Supply.
 - (7) When the Leader of the Official Opposition fails to provide notice in accordance with suborder (5), the Government House Leader shall designate the department for consideration by Committee of Supply for that afternoon.
 - (8) The estimates of the Legislative Assembly, as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and the estimates of the Officers of the Legislature shall be the first item called in the Committee of Supply's consideration of the main estimates and the Chairman shall put the question to approve the estimates forthwith which shall be decided without debate or amendment.
 - (9) In respect of the supplementary estimates and interim supply estimates, a member of the Executive Council may, with at least one day's notice, make a motion to determine the number of days that the Committee of Supply may be called, and the question shall be decided without debate or amendment.
 23. Standing Order 59 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (1)
 - (i) by striking out "Monday," and
 - (ii) by striking out "midnight" and substituting "11 p.m.";
 - (b) by striking out suborder (2).
 24. Standing Order 60 is struck out and the following is substituted:
 - 60 Committees of the whole Assembly shall rise and report prior to the time of adjournment.
 25. The following is added after Standing Order 68:
 - 68.1(1) The sequence of Public Bills and Orders other than Government Bills and Orders shall be determined by a random draw of the names of members who have submitted written notice to Parliamentary Counsel no later than 3 days prior to the date of the draw.
 - (2) The draw referred to in suborder (1) shall be held on a date set by the Speaker in the July preceding the session that the Bills are expected to be introduced.
 - (3) Members may switch their positions in accordance with guidelines prescribed by the Speaker.
 26. Standing Order 83 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (2) by striking out "received, shall be read by the Clerk if the member so requests" and substituting "presented during the daily routine";
 - (b) by adding the following after suborder (2):
 - (3) Petitions must be submitted for approval by Parliamentary Counsel at least one sitting day prior to the petition being presented in the Assembly.

27. Standing Order 83.1 is amended
 - (a) in suborders (1) and (2) by striking out "read and received" and substituting "presented";
 - (b) by striking out suborder (3).
28. Standing Order 102 is amended by renumbering it as Standing Order 102(1) and adding the following after suborder (1):
 - (2) The Clerk shall be responsible for the printing of the Votes and Proceedings and the Journals of the Assembly.
29. Standing Order 109 is struck out and the following is substituted:

109 The Speaker shall, after the end of the fiscal year, prepare an annual report on the Legislative Assembly Office and lay the report before the Assembly if it is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.
30. Standing Order 114 is amended by striking out suborder (2).
31. This motion supersedes the House Leader agreement for the 25th Legislature dated April 10, 2001.
32. This motion comes into force on the first day of the Second Session of the 25th Legislature.

[Debate adjourned November 26]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to put a couple more comments on the record about the proposed changes in the Standing Orders. This has a lot of implications for basically the way that information can be presented in terms of the material that is brought forward from people in the communities. It also deals with some of the issues that reflect on not only the flexibility of how we deal with things in this House, but we also have to look at it in the context of how we deal with the equity in terms of representation that occurs between individual MLAs that are elected from different parties, within the framework of that choice by the constituents. If we look at the process that's brought forward here in the motion and if we look at it in terms of how it works out in dealing with some of those issues, we end up with a lot of changes that are essentially making it more likely that members who do not have an active role in the government, whether it be in cabinet or a lead role in some of the standing policy committee positions, will have in some ways less opportunity to get input from their communities.

I know a number of the other speakers have addressed the issues of timing and how changes in process will affect the daily Routine, but if we look at it from the perspective of what we should be trying to do in terms of democracy, it's especially incumbent upon us to make sure that our constituents have opportunities to present their ideas to the Legislature. One of the things that has come up and that has to be dealt with in the context of how these changes will further limit what constituents can do is the changes in the process for petitions. There was quite a bit of concern, Mr. Speaker, expressed in my constituency when we made the original changes that required particular types of wording to petitions, because they felt that they wanted to be able to address a concern that they saw with the government in a language and in a format and in a way that reflected and allowed them to express what they were really trying to say and what they were really trying to mean.

What we basically did in a previous amendment to the Standing Orders was that we had a particular type of wording that had to be put in the context of the pledge or the prayer at the top, and then a lot of petitions were effectively not read in because of that. What we're doing now is basically telling those same constituents that

there will be little if any public notification of their concern if they don't exactly meet that format. Under the previous structure an MLA had the chance to at least address the issue as they presented the petition to the House, and if it was appropriately in order, it would then be read back in and filed as a permanent part of the documentation of this Legislature. Yet this seems to be a process that we're moving farther and farther away from as we move to implement changes here in petitioning.

You know, I guess this is a kind of a question about what we mean in terms of constituent responsibility and constituent input. I know there is a private member's bill coming up that deals with citizen referendum. This is the kind of thing where if we really believe that our constituents should have an opportunity to have input and be able to come to this Legislature and say, "This is a concern; this is an action we want the Legislature to take," we shouldn't be limiting how they go about doing that. We should be encouraging and in fact making it easier for them to deal with this kind of input into the legislative process or a reaction to a government action or, you know, any kind of other means they want to express in the context of how they see fit to put their words into this Legislature.

The continual change in terms of how these things happen I think will essentially discourage in many ways how a petition can be presented, Mr. Speaker. I think there is a good chance that if we really wanted to make the process a little more orderly, what we might suggest doing, instead of limiting access, is to put a more orderly process in place for actually making the presentations, in the sense that if a group of people is trying to put together a petition that is going to be presented by a number of MLAs, we could centralize the actual presentation so that you don't end up with a whole series of different presentations or limit them to a number of subject days. Say an education one would be done on this particular day, and then you only get a chance to submit your petitions on those days. This would create order, and that is basically the rationale behind what I've heard the Government House Leader say when he's talked about why they want to have this. They don't want to have a whole series of small petitions that say the same thing presented on the same day.

Well, there are ways that we can make that orderly rather than limit the ability of citizens to express themselves in terms of their concerns and their wishes in terms of government, in terms of reaction to policy. I guess I would hope that this kind of process might be looked at more so than just saying, you know: if it isn't written exactly the way I want, exactly in the order that I want, and with exactly the right commas and questions and all this . . . That really infringes on a citizen's ability. So I guess the main concern there, Mr. Speaker, is in terms of how we deal with that kind of process.

The other basic concern that I have and that I've heard from a couple of individuals who are kind of the parliamentary experts or the people who always come to me about process – I guess that's a better way to put it than to call them necessarily experts. They were very concerned about the elimination of the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations because they felt that we should in a sense be holding hearings or bringing out into the public in a much broader way how regulations are put in place by the government, how they are changed by the government, that a process that's more open on regulatory change should be initiated. A number of them compare it to their experiences as they followed through legislative change from the approach to the government to standing policy committee to executive committee to the Legislature: you know, that kind of a process.

They felt that that kind of openness, that kind of ability to first of all see what the regulations are and get a chance to read them in the context of the law they relate to, react to them, and have feedback

into the government would be much better than trying to kind of react after and then have the government go back and change them. Even though that committee hasn't been used, I guess what they were saying was that we would have better relationships with our community and better government in the end if we actually used that committee and allowed it to operate in an open way so that Albertans would have a sense of what to expect and how to react to and how to incorporate the ideas of regulatory change just the way they see an openness in legislative change.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, I think over time that is going to become more and more critical because what you're seeing is that more and more of our actual legislation, the bills that we pass in this House is enabling legislation rather than actually functional legislation. The actual operational aspects of each of these pieces of legislation then show up in the regulations that are assigned or that are attached to the piece of enabling legislation. They wanted to see that kind of debate being put in place so that they could have an input to both the legislation and the regulations that operationalize them.

Mr. Speaker, I think the process that the minister of agriculture and the Member for Leduc have gone through on this intensive livestock bill, where the regulations, although not in final form but in a draft form, were made available to a number of the participants, shows how that committee could function. It could work if that committee were operating in conjunction with the policy committees and the legislative committees. You know, that kind of openness and that kind of good legislation and operational regulations could be developed.

By having that together, we wouldn't have this kind of piecemeal process, even though it was a very open process, that went on with the intensive livestock bill. You had to try and relate first to the draft legislation, and then as we started to debate that draft legislation, the regulations became available, and then it became too restricted in terms of the time frame for a lot of the citizens of the province to really get in a reaction to that. By having this regulations committee in place where it was really functional, it would in effect make sure that the citizens who were either going to have to operate within or were in support of the proposed legislation felt much more comfortable about the relationship between the legislative process and the regulatory process.

I guess the other couple of things that I was just concerned about were, you know, the idea of the changes in how we deal with debate. Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm going to sound a little bit out of key with a lot of people in the sense that we're going to have options for Q and A for a speaker in the Legislature, and that doesn't offend me at all. Anybody that stands in this House should be willing to stand and be held accountable for the things they say here. But the idea that it takes away from the ability to develop an issue is critical in the sense that there are a lot of times when we're dealing with extremely large pieces of legislation and we have to talk to the principles of them, we have to talk to how they are going to be operationalized because in some cases we don't even have the appropriate regulatory framework available at the time.

To say that we have to be able to stand up and deal with the principles that are associated with it in a matter of 15 minutes – I would suggest that if we had to deal with some type of policy or procedural change with respect to speaking times, what we should have done was left the 20 minutes for second reading, added on the five minutes, and then when we went into committee or third reading, we could have subsequently shortened those so that the total time on the bill was the same. But we'd have a lot more up front when we could raise the issues, start the debate, introduce the

concerns, and develop the framework of how that piece of legislation was going to work. I think that would have been much better in terms of trying to deal with facilitating the appropriate development of good legislation, because it's through that kind of debate that we're allowed to start concerns.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I think the more we debate the legislation, the more we see the intricacies of the ways that it could be interpreted or applied when it actually becomes operational, so that gives us a better chance, then, to make sure that the legislation we're dealing with at the time gets to be the right legislation and good legislation. You know, I think what we need to do is look at that possibility of sustaining that 20 minutes in the second reading, add on the five minutes of Q and A, and then make adjustments at other stages if it's really felt that we have to have some kind of a limit on the debate that goes on in this House.

I think the other critical issue that comes up, Mr. Speaker, is the idea of the application of the sub judice ruling or the sub judice limit on debate. Here, you know, there have been a lot of different interpretations of what the change in the Standing Order is going to mean in terms of the ability to address issues that are an integral part of public policy. If that sub judice restriction is interpreted and applied to the extent that the wording in the proposed Standing Orders suggests it might be, there are a lot of issues that in effect could be removed from debate in this House just by the simple introduction of some kind of a challenge through civil court. I don't think any of us want to see that type of trade-off or that type of action potentially being facilitated by the kind of changes we make in legislation.

You know, I think it's imperative that as we go through and look at the changes we make in how we operate within this House, one of the fundamental responsibilities each and every one of us has is to make sure that as we make changes, we don't in any way limit what the public's perception of a true democratic and legislative process should be. The idea that we're going through here and in some ways trying to control debate, control the ability of an opposition or a citizen to hold a member of the government accountable in a sense reduces the ability that we have to make sure that democracy functions in an open and acceptable way for the citizens of our community.

It's like every legislative change. What we have to do is see how these things actually become operational when we actually start to deal with them, how they're interpreted and how they're going to be applied. Mr. Speaker, I think that what we have to start looking at here is that some of these have the potential to greatly reduce the ability to have constructive debate in this Legislature. The main thing that we have to look at as representatives of our community is that when these things actually become the new Standing Orders, we don't let them in any way inhibit our ability to have open and productive debate within this Legislature.

8:20

Mr. Speaker, I kind of talk about these things in terms of suggestions and input. I think when we deal with Standing Orders and the process, it would almost in many ways be unfortunate if we actually did what one of these Standing Orders is suggesting and did away with the committee that was supposed to look at Standing Orders and make sure that they were operational, because that's where we could have had a lot of the debate, a lot of the questions that we're raising in connection with these changes. That's where this debate could have gone on. We could have had an exchange of ideas, an exchange of alternatives. We could have had some negotiation, some give-and-take. I'm quite sure that in effect the final changes that we would be debating tonight would have been a lot better if we

could have had that kind of open give-and-take in the process, recognizing – and I think everyone in this House recognizes it – that we have to facilitate proper discussion, that we have to make sure that there is a degree of order to the way we operate. But it's kind of unfortunate that when it comes to this particular case of really looking at how we're going to change the Standing Orders, that openness and that participatory discussion and what the changes were and how they should be implemented didn't occur as readily as it possibly might have.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that as we look at these when we start the spring session, we interpret them with as much latitude and with as much ability to carry on good debate as we can get so that everybody feels that they've truly been able to represent their constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader to close the debate.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Motion 21 represents a comprehensive review of the Standing Orders, and once agreed to, these changes as they apply to the next spring sitting will improve the business of this Assembly. What I would like to do is highlight some of the improvements as a result of this initiative.

More private members will now be able to speak to private members' bills and motions. For example, under current rules if every member spoke the maximum at second reading, only six members could participate. Under the proposed rules twice that many, 12, can participate if speaking for the maximum time. The time on private members' motions will increase from 55 to 60 minutes. Oral Question Period will arrive at a much more predictable time each day, likely around 1:45 p.m. most days, instead of currently, where it varies from 1:50 to 2:15 p.m. each day.

Tablings may be done through the Clerk's office prior to the House sitting each day. This simple administrative change allows the Routine to progress more quickly.

Committee of Supply will be streamlined and evolve along lines previously developed in all-party House leader agreements. After several years of opposition complaints about the A, B, C, D subcommittees, these committees will be eliminated. After several years of opposition complaints about all estimates needing to be before the whole Assembly, now every single estimate from each ministry will have its own separate sitting day before the whole Assembly. Opposition designation of departments will increase substantially from eight in the spring of 2001 to 12 under the proposed rules for 2002, meaning that half of all the 24 ministries will be designated.

Closure will be eliminated and replaced with time allocation.

Sub judice will be made more comprehensive.

Speaking times will be reapportioned on government business before the whole Assembly – that is, second and third readings and government motions but not Committee of Supply and Committee of the Whole – so that generally a member may speak for a maximum of 15 minutes followed by a five-minute question and comment period in which other members can hold to account the member who has just spoken.

Redundancy of Reading and Receiving Petitions and Presenting Petitions will be eliminated with the striking of Reading and Receiving Petitions.

What I would also like to touch upon, Mr. Speaker, are those things that have not changed. Oral Question Period remains 50 minutes, one of the longest in Canada, the longest in western Canada by far, and certainly much longer than the 15-minute Oral Question

Period in British Columbia. Oral Question Period rotation has not changed. Television coverage of Oral Question Period and tablings and all other items of the Routine has not changed. All will continue to be covered from the time prayers are observed until Orders of the Day are called.

Speaking times in committees of the whole Assembly, Supply and the Whole, have not changed; 20 minutes still applies. The Assembly will sit the afternoons of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and the evenings of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday beginning at 1:30 p.m., adjourning at 5:30 p.m., and reconvening at 8 p.m. There will still be a throne speech, a budget, and a list of government legislation. The right of the government to govern and legislate remains balanced against the uncompromised opposition right to hold the government accountable.

I'd also like to spend a moment addressing some of the opposition criticisms. One general opposition complaint deals with process. Over the years several attempts to review Standing Orders in a comprehensive way have ended without result or with only minor changes receiving unanimous, all-party consent to proceed. In fact, on one occasion six months' worth of work in all-party meetings was lost when the opposition parties could not agree on the issue of one extra member's statement. Thus, honest attempts have been made to achieve change through the usual all-party consent channel, and that process has been unsuccessful.

Another general opposition complaint has been that we will be taking off and not sitting on Monday evenings, which would be perhaps murdering the truth or, at the very least, wounding the truth. The fact is that when the Assembly meets on Monday afternoons, it is obliged by the proposed rules to sit Monday night, so the Assembly will continue to sit, and there will be government business dealt with on Monday nights.

One of the hon. members opposite – I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Riverview – complained that the opposition will now be questioned by the government. I notice that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition does not have a problem on this account, and I appreciate that. The proposed rules allow for any member who speaks to government business in Assembly to have their speech followed by a five-minute question and comment period whereby any member may pose a question and make a comment regarding the speech. This is not Oral Question Period in reverse, with the government drilling the opposition, as the hon. member has suggested. The proposal is simply an improvement in the evolution of debate back and forth.

In summation, these proposed rules are good changes, and I urge all members to support the passage of Government Motion 21. But before concluding my comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all MLAs who provided suggestions for change. I would like to particularly thank David Gillies, who is the executive assistant to the Government House Leader, whose knowledge of the rules, the procedure of this Assembly, and the practice of this Assembly was of inestimable value in putting forward these comprehensive changes under Government Motion 21.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, further to the ruling made on November 21, we will now proceed with three separate votes on the motion.

On the motion as proposed by the hon. Government House Leader, all those in favour of part 1, which comprises sections 1, 3, 4, 26, and 27 of Government Motion 21, please say aye.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Jablonski	Ouellette
Ady	Jonson	Rathgeber
Cardinal	Klapstein	Renner
Cenaiko	Lord	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Lougheed	Stelmach
DeLong	Lukaszuk	Stevens
Ducharme	Lund	Strang
Evans	Masyk	Tannas
Forsyth	McClellan	Tarchuk
Fritz	McClelland	Taylor
Hlady	McFarland	Vandermeer
Horner	O'Neill	Zwozdesky
Hutton		

Against the motion:

Blakeman	Mason	Nicol
Bonner	Massey	

Totals:	For – 37	Against – 5
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[Motion carried]

8:40

THE SPEAKER: The second vote, then, is on the motion as proposed by the hon. Government House Leader which comprises sections 20, 21, 22, and 23 of Government Motion 21.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The third vote is on the motion as proposed by the hon. Government House Leader which comprises sections 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32 of Government Motion 21.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, congratulations on the progress that you've made. This is akin, I guess, to building a constitution, and you did it in only several days' debate, which is rather interesting. Sometime in the next month or so this Assembly will rise, and when hon. members return in the spring, there will be new Standing Orders. For those of you who believe in collecting memorabilia, these Standing Orders which were printed April 23, 2001, will now be completely revised and will become part of the history of the province of Alberta. Please feel free to take these home with you and study them over the winter, and keep them in a safe place.

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Bill 28
Agricultural Operation Practices
Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc will offer some

comments, after which we'll have comments, questions, or amendments.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What I wish to do is to move an amendment to the proposed Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001. I believe there are copies there for distribution.

The amendment is that the bill be amended as follows. In part A section 5 is amended in the proposed section 27 by (a) adding the following after subsection (1), "(1.1) An application for leave to appeal pursuant to subsection (1) must be filed and served within 30 days after the decision of the Board is made," and (b) in subsection (2)(i) by striking out "on application made" and in (2)(ii) by striking out "making of the decision sought to be appealed from, or within a further time that the judge allows under special circumstances" and substituting "application for leave being filed and served under subsection (1.1)."

The purpose of the amendment is to make it clear what is the requirement of the appellant and what is being requested of the court.

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. leader, just to clarify, we don't seem to have some paper in front of us, and I don't think any of the members have, but as I understand, all members of the opposition have seen the proposed amendments. Is that so?

DR. NICOL: Mr. Chairman, I was shown the amendment this afternoon.

THE CHAIRMAN: You may proceed if you wish to, hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, or we can wait a moment till the paper comes.

DR. NICOL: In my conversation with the minister this afternoon I see no problems with it. It's a good amendment. It will improve the bill. So as far as I'm concerned, it's quite acceptable to proceed, but if we're going to wait for it . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: That wasn't a command. That was just a question to the committee.

Please pass them out then. You might begin with those that are actually sitting here. Thank you.

I believe we're ready to proceed now. This amendment will be called amendment A2, and we'll ask the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition to start off.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Chairman, as I said, I saw this this afternoon. It makes it much more clear in terms of the relationship between the appellant and what is expected and how they'll relate to the court. It doesn't provide undue direction to the court. It provides the court with the freedom that should be provided to the court, and I think because of that very last statement, that it doesn't interfere with the court process, we should all support it.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions and comments? The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had submitted amendments during committee on the previous day of debate. I assume they're still at the table; are they?

8:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. leader, you're saying that there are some amendments here?

DR. NICOL: I submitted a pile of amendments to this bill in our previous debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: When we last debated this; right?

DR. NICOL: They were left at the table, so I'm assuming they're still available for distribution.

THE CHAIRMAN: Either that or they're recycled. We'll just check.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Chairman, I'll describe the amendments while they're being located. They have been found.

Essentially, the first one and the second one that I had proposed deal with the same issue. We had labeled them A2 and A3 before. They'll now be A3 and A4. Because they do the same thing in two different sections of the act, I would suggest that we take them together. What they're basically doing is dealing with section 13(1) and section 14(1). Basically, what this does is it essentially further limits the ability of a person to construct either an intensive livestock operation or a manure handling facility and changes the wording in both section 13(1) and section 14(1) from a situation where "no person shall construct or expand" to "no person shall commence construction or expansion of."

The idea here is that there have been a number of instances in Alberta in an historic context where individuals have gone through and basically when they submit their application, they begin construction, and the construction is well under way by the time approval is obtained. By making this explicit, that they shall not commence construction of either the facility or the manure handling, basically we are making sure that they understand the repercussions if they go ahead and begin construction as opposed to completing construction. So I guess what it does is clarify them. Given that they are both the same in section 13 and section 14, we can handle them as one vote or we can handle them as separate votes if the chair would prefer.

THE CHAIRMAN: It's not a matter of what the chair would prefer, but as long as you have that it is a motion and yourself to move that Bill 28 be amended, then that has to have a separate vote.

DR. NICOL: Well, then, let's deal with the one that we numbered A2 the other day, which is the one that's on section 13(1). It'll now be A3: Dr. Nicol to move that Bill 28 be amended in section 5 in the proposed section 13(1).

THE CHAIRMAN: That is A3. Do we have that? It's a very brief one. It should have been the first one in the package that you received: section 13(1) of section 5. Okay. Do you wish to move that now?

DR. NICOL: Yes, I would move that amendment. I've already gone through the rationale for why I think it's a good amendment, so we'll allow the member opposite to react.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Chairman, we accept the amendment, and I'll ask members to vote in favour.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. Are you ready for the vote? [interjections]

Hon. minister, you're only allowed to speak or make noises when you're at your place and not when you're moving around.

The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has moved amendment A3 to Bill 28. This is the one with respect to section 5 in section 13(1).

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would now like to move what is amendment A4. We had labeled it A3 the other day, but now it will be A4. This is that Bill 28 be amended in section 5 in the proposed section 14 by striking out subsection (1) and substituting the following:

14(1) No person shall commence construction, expansion or modification of a manure storage facility for which an authorization is required pursuant to the regulations or commence construction, expansion or modification of a manure storage facility for manure that is in a predominantly liquid state or manure to which water has been added unless

- (a) the person holds an authorization that authorizes the construction, expansion or modification, or
- (b) the person holds an approval or registration that authorizes the construction, expansion or modification.

Mr. Chairman, again, the rationale is the same as it was when I asked for the modification to section 13(1). There have been cases where individuals have gone ahead and assumed that they can begin construction when their application is submitted, and they're well into the construction process by the time the approval comes. This way, by having it specifically stated that they are not to do that – there are provisions in the process for exceptions – this basically makes it clear to them that they cannot start without approval. I think that's important because it creates a lot of community friction if people are asked to reverse something that somebody has already started to build on. This makes it plain to them that if they do commence construction, they're doing so at their own risk.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc on amendment A4.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Mr. Chairman, we accept the amendment and ask members to vote in favour.

THE CHAIRMAN: Because there's a little bit of a question on this particular one, just to reassure us, hon. leader, A4 is the one that amends section 5 in section 14(1).

DR. NICOL: In subsection (1). That's correct.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is amendment A4. Okay.

[Motion on amendment A4 carried]

DR. NICOL: Mr. Chairman, I had submitted an amendment that we had called A4 previously. This is the one that amends section 2(a) by striking out proposed section 1(a)(i). I would like to withdraw that. I will not be proposing that amendment. That's in the package that was distributed, so I just want everybody to be aware of the fact that it will not be dealt with.

I would like to move to the one that we had labeled A5, which will now be A5 because A4 has disappeared. I move that Bill 28 be amended in section 5 in the proposed section 19(1) by striking out

“the approval officer may notify” wherever it occurs and substituting “the approval officer must notify.”

Mr. Chairman, in the act, in section 19, we’re looking here at basically conditions under which the approval officer must notify individuals who have been designated as affected persons, and those affected persons are defined by the regulations. Section 19(1) basically classifies two groups that may be notified, first of all the people who have been defined as affected persons. There’s a process in the regulations both to determine who is an affected person and, secondly, how that notification can be carried out or should be carried out. What I would suggest is that if we have from a public perspective, first of all, set in place a process to define who is an affected person and, secondly, set in place a process to go about notifying those people or those individuals or those municipalities or those bodies of concern that they are designated as an affected person under this act, then I feel strongly that we should make sure that the board does go through the process of notifying.

9:00

The process in itself can be set up under the regulations to provide, you know, flexibility so that if I’m halfway around the world somewhere and nobody knows where I’m at, then due diligence in notifying me is appropriate. So from that perspective I think it’s really important, especially in that first part, that we notify them. What this will do is greatly reduce the potential for individuals to come back, subsequent to a ruling by the board, saying: “Well, you know, you’ve identified me as an affected person, but I never knew anything about it. I was never notified. I didn’t have any idea that it was going on.” If we have it in there so that at least they must follow the process, then what we’ll have is a situation where in a sense the person has lost that ability to say: “Well, why didn’t you notify me? You’ve already defined me as an affected person.”

The second part of that clause is a secondary notification of individuals who, under either the Environmental Protection Enhancement Act or the Water Act, are defined as affected persons subject to this application. Similarly, even though those persons are designated as being affected under a different piece of legislation, the process of notification is there as well, and just to reduce significantly the possibility of any after-ruling repercussions, I think it’s important that we make sure that these people be adequately notified.

So, Mr. Chairman, those are the reasons that I think in both cases here we should in a sense change that “may” to “must” just so that we go through the process and make a statement strongly to the board that within the constraints of the process that we define by regulation, they follow through on it. I don’t think the board should have the freedom not to notify somebody if they’ve already identified them as being an affected person subject to the regulations of this act. I think that in the end we’ll have a much more peaceful resolution as people either accept or do not accept the fact that they are being notified.

So for those reasons, Mr. Chairman, I hope everyone will accept this amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just make a few comments on the amendment. The whole area of notification is rather a complex one in this bill – and I admit that – and it is for a good reason. Some of the reasons the hon. member opposite has outlined. We have a section that deals with the notification occurring to municipalities that are directly affected or

may be affected. We talk about the necessity of notifying those who are directly affected. I think that is important, that that is a must in this case.

When we talk about this section, Mr. Chairman, we’re talking about the approval officer that may notify or require the applicant to notify, and I believe that begs the question of whose responsibility ultimately it is to defend the project. For that reason, this bill has been written in the way that once an application is received, the approval officer either may notify or require the applicant to notify the affected persons, who, as I indicated, are a different group than the directly affected, who must be notified.

Because of the importance of this section and because the hon. member had the courtesy to speak to me and through me to the mover of the bill, I would ask that we adjourn debate on this amendment for this time so that we can have a little more time for consideration and consider it tomorrow, when there is an opportunity to speak to it again. Is that a proper recommendation, that we adjourn debate at this time? [interjection] Well, I have no problem as long as I can speak again, and I guess I can in committee. I’ll withdraw the last part of my sentence for now.

The hon. member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, would like to ask a question, and I don’t have any problem with that.

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. leader, would the committee give consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It has been brought to my attention, and it gives me great pleasure when I see a class coming into this Assembly to learn about our procedures. I don’t know anyone’s name, but all I want to say is that this is a class from NAIT that has come to observe our procedures. I’d ask for everyone to give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly, please.

THE CHAIRMAN: The chair would observe for the benefit of those that are here visiting tonight that at this time we’re in committee. Committee is the informal part of the Assembly, and members are allowed to move around. We stick to the rule that only one member stands and talks at a time, from his or her place. We are allowed to remove jackets and to even have coffee and juice in here as opposed to just water. The debate also can go back and forth, and people can speak more than once on the same issue, as the case may be, in committee.

Without further ado, the hon. Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition on amendment A5.

Bill 28
Agricultural Operation Practices
Amendment Act, 2001
(continued)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In my discussions the other day with staff from Alberta Agriculture we talked about this section, and they were kind of agreeing with my interpretation of it, but as I listened to the minister speak just now, there may be a different interpretation to this section, and then the section is written correctly as is. What we have is that the approval officer basically has two choices. Either the approval officer will notify the affected individu-

als or the approval officer will ask the applicant to notify the affected parties. Is that the interpretation? May I ask her to nod her head, Mr. Chairman? If that's the interpretation, then I would suggest it is worded correctly as opposed to the process of providing the approval officer with the choice of whether or not notification will occur. So it's a "may" in the context of which process as opposed to whether or not actual notification. If that can be clarified, maybe I will withdraw my amendment.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, thank you for your indulgence. As I did indicate, this is a complex part of the bill, and it's an important part of the bill. We should make sure that we are comfortable with our understanding of it. The affected persons can be identified also through regulation as to how this section works, but certainly my interpretation is that the approval officer may notify affected persons or he may require the applicant to do it in that particular section.

I didn't go on to the next area, which is asked to be amended as well, which goes on to say:

And the approval officer may . . .

And this is the "may" in question here.

. . . notify or require the applicant to notify persons and organizations who are to be notified under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act and the Water Act with respect to the subject-matter of the application under this section and any other persons or organizations the approval officer considers appropriate.

It may be, in our understanding of this, that it is the approval officer that does that, but it may also be somebody from the departments, in fact, which operate these two acts that would make that requirement in this section. So hence it's written "may" there, because it may be the approval officer or it may be somebody from those departments.

9:10

If you go on to the next section in the bill, it states very clearly that "a notification under subsection (1) must be carried out in accordance with the regulations within the time period required by the regulations." Mr. Chairman, that was one of the reasons that we were particularly diligent in ensuring that we had the draft regulations – and they are a work in progress, but they are in draft form – to ensure that members could see the regulations as anticipated, because they are really the mechanism for carrying out much of the operation of this act.

I am giving my interpretation. I still would have no problem if members want to take a little bit more time to review this section, but that would be my point now. I am not comfortable in accepting the amendment because I have a different interpretation of how this section works. Because of the importance of this bill, the importance to the agricultural industry and to the citizens of this province that this bill is in a form that can implement the activity that it's designed to do, it would be my opinion that it would not be out of the way to come back and deal with this amendment when this business is called again by the House leaders.

So I would say, Mr. Chairman, that it's entirely up to the House, but my recommendation is that if the hon. members, in particular the Leader of the Opposition, who has spoken to this amendment, still feel they would like to carry the amendment forward, I would adjourn the debate on it until we can have more consideration.

THE CHAIRMAN: No. I think we want to get this one straightened out.

We have the offer to perhaps withdraw it if certain conditions are met. We now have the minister suggesting that we adjourn debate and rise and report progress at some later time. When we come to discuss it again, whether it's later this evening or tomorrow or whenever, then you can either withdraw it or allow your amendment

to stand and take the chance on the vote. Is that where we're at, hon. members?

DR. NICOL: Mr. Chairman, given the interpretation that the minister just gave to that section, where the "may" is not related to the notification but to the actions of the approval officer, then my amendment, in effect, is not necessary. The bill as it is written carries out proper notification. They will be notified. It's just a matter of who will make that notification, who will carry out that notification. So with that interpretation, I will withdraw the amendment.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition has requested that amendment A5 be withdrawn. May we have unanimous consent for this motion?

[Unanimous consent denied]

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, certainly the mover of this bill and this government have I think throughout the process of this bill stated very clearly that we want this legislation to be effective, to carry out a very important role in this province. This has been a culmination of three years of work and interaction with the public, including the people who have concerns environmentally, people in the industry. I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition would say that we've had a fair amount of debate and discussion on this.

I made the comment earlier that rather than have the section voted on tonight, if there is a concern over the interpretation of it, I would adjourn the debate. However, I believe that there is an hon. member who wants to debate the amendment. Mr. Chairman, having heard that there was no problem with carrying on the debate tomorrow from the person who objected to the unanimous consent, I move that we adjourn debate on the amendment A5 on Bill 28. Let's quit wasting time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee rise and report progress on Bill 28 as amended, I believe.

[Motion carried]

9:20

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 28. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 30
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2001 (No. 2)

[Adjourned debate November 26: Mrs. Nelson]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2). We're looking here at basically going through a process of kind of changing the budget in response to changing conditions across the province, which required moving dollars within the general revenue fund from one department to another. We have a number of cases where we've also, as permitted under the Financial Administration Act, been able to move dollars within departments to facilitate different needs. But what we're seeing here is basically some new dollars being allocated to departments where unexpected activities have arisen since the time we did the budget. As we went through the individual departmental debates last Thursday afternoon, I think it was, we ended up talking about some of the particular aspects of how these kinds of changes were justified or needed, and they were basically a reflection of kind of unplanned or unpredicted activities.

I guess the question that comes up is in the context of: how do we deal with making sure that the dollars are there to support some of the activities we undertake? One of the repercussions of these kinds of changes, when we have to either provide new dollars or move dollars in from one department to another, is that what we're going to end up with is a lot of uncertainty in the planning process, and we have to look at the techniques or the practices that we have to sustain that kind of constant budget. The government started off this year with a contingency fund that would have allowed for these kinds of things to be dealt with without the kind of adjustment that had to occur within all of the departments, as we were faced with an erosion both of that contingency fund and any possibility of surplus revenues. So the idea that we're looking at and actually allocating additional dollars to these departments means that other departments either had to sacrifice greater amounts within their framework or we had to deal with the issue of how we provide for some kind of stability in those contingency funds.

Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions when we've been talking about the public's reaction to the adjustments that are being made within the departments, what we're seeing is that ministers are standing up and saying, "Well, yes, we're making cuts," but they're making cuts in increases. The big one there is Health and Wellness, where we're hearing the minister constantly saying: well, you know, we're not actually cutting the budget; we're actually increasing it by \$118 million. But what it amounts to is that as per the plan, the ongoing plan, the evolving plan, at one point in time the allocation to Health and Wellness was 1 percent larger than what it is here, because that is the amount that was actually taken out subject to the adjustments that were made in November.

We have to make sure, as we look at this kind of strategy, that we don't complicate how we present these budgets to the people of Alberta. We can't keep changing the base that we're using to make our comparisons. I think it's totally inappropriate for the minister to start talking about the fact that they didn't make cuts to Health and Wellness, yet what we're seeing is that had the reduction in revenues not precipitated the adjustments made in September and October, then we would have actually been allocating more dollars in this appropriation to health care, because in the interim announcement since the last budget there were more dollars promised to the health care system. It's a matter of: how do we deal with these kinds of adjustments to budgets, and what base do we use when we make comparisons of those budgets?

If we're truly going to deal with quarterly updates, with the issue of appropriate responses to crises by ministers, then what we've got

to do is make sure that we deal with the discussion in an up-front way with Albertans so they know that an announcement is an add-on to the budget or is a subtraction away from the budget. We keep a running total, and then we deal with the debate that occurs from the point we're at in that running total, not going back to the budget or not going back to a different base.

We have to make sure that individuals understand our process so they know that as we go through the year, we can't always predict – and I don't think any of them expect us to predict with absolute accuracy – the kinds of expenditures that we're going to need within each of the departments every year, year in and year out. I notice that this year we're dealing with supplementary supply for five different departments, but it's not the same five departments. Some of them are the same, but they're not the same five departments as we dealt with last year. It's also not the same five departments that we dealt with in the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001, because these are allocations in our budgeting process that are contingent upon a change from where we're at at the point of time of the adjustment.

If we're going to deal with these kinds of measures only counting as a base when we actually pass a supplementary supply act or we pass the original budget, then what we should be doing is not adding to the confusion of the public by talking about stepwise additions to the budget when we haven't already put them in here. But if we're going to make announcements where we're going to say that we will be allocating new dollars to a program or that there's been a cost overrun from a natural disaster or for some kind of a contingency, then we should be starting from that number and going ahead whether it means adding more to it again or subtracting from it as we make subsequent adjustments. This allows for a clear understanding by Albertans that our process of budgeting necessitates a dynamic approach to it.

We can't just start off at the beginning of the year and say that this is going to be our budget for the year and hold to it, because contingencies come up, unexpected events come up, new opportunities come up. No individual, no business, no government should constrain itself and not be able to take advantage of those opportunities or not be able to deal with the crises or the disasters that arise, and we have to have the option to make adjustments in our budget. If we look at what has happened here, as I said, the public has been brought into the debate on Health and Wellness more than it has in any of the other departments. We look at it from the perspective of each of them. I know that the Agriculture, Food and Rural Development budget is now being increased by \$129,519,000, and what we're ending up with is already adjusted for changes that have been made because of the September, October cuts. It is important that we make sure people understand that that dynamic process is there. So it's basically in agriculture; it's in health as well. We have to watch that those kinds of processes are appropriately applied.

9:30

You know, Mr. Speaker, if it were just a matter of using up the department's discretionary dollar or the contingency fund, that could just lapse to the end of the year and it would roll over into general revenue. We wouldn't have to have a supplementary fund, because any surplus in a department automatically goes back to general revenue. So we wouldn't have to have a supplementary supply to put those dollars back into general revenue. When we deal with these, we have to recognize that their net adjustments at this point in time reflect possible additions to a program within a department and subtractions out of a different program in a department or subtractions from or additions to the overall budget of a department. They

need to be reflected in transition as opposed to a point in time. Otherwise, the way we do our budgeting is confusing in the eyes of Albertans.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that we look at making sure that maybe in future times, as an addendum to a bill like this when we put in the schedule, we should go through all the public announcements and end up with, you know, a bottom-line, net adjustment here so that Albertans truly do understand the fact that there have been announcements made by the government suggesting or indicating a change in a budget or in an allocation to a department. When we actually come to the vote, it either is there or it isn't, depending upon subsequent actions after that announcement. It would be very useful, I think, from the perspective of Albertans to be able to track through the cumulative actions and the consequential actions of a government as it adjusts and responds to the needs of Albertans in terms of providing them with the services they've asked their peers, through their government, to provide for them. That's kind of the approach that I think would be important for us to look at, because just a simple number doesn't reflect fully all the dynamics we've gone through with the ups and downs of the budgeting process.

That's especially critical in a year like this. We started the year with expectations of possibly a very robust economy, a very robust natural resource revenue option, and then we got into the June, July period and started to see our natural resources prices weaken and drop. We ended up beginning to talk about adjustments, but in the meantime we had already made promises and commitments to spend more dollars in some of these programs. Subsequent to the first-quarter update and the actions that precipitated into the fall, we've had to make significant adjustments again, which basically used up all of the contingency fund in the budget and required an additional reduction of expenditures. That in a sense has been reflected in the fact that we're now at a point where we end up having to make sure that, you know, the people of Alberta contract that, because this supplementary supply act doesn't reflect all that activity that went on both in terms of additions to and subtractions from departmental budgets. So I think that would be a kind of suggestion that would improve the process, making sure that Albertans understand how we go through dealing with budgets.

The other issue that's been raised a number of times by some of my constituents is the final item in Bill 30, which is the Legislative Assembly adjustment. I guess people couldn't understand why, when we go through the process of approving a budget, we have an allocation for an election in the Chief Electoral Officer's budget when we had just come out of an election. They're kind of wondering what we were expecting to do, what we were anticipating in the sense of actually putting that in the budget in the first place. Nobody truly expected that we would be in a position to have an election this quickly in the budgeting process. That's the kind of issue that has been raised in connection with that, and I think we have to be a little bit more descriptive when we talk about why those dollars were put out, why they were allocated, and how they can be transferred back into the Legislative Assembly fund.

This is a necessary part of appropriate financial management. It's kind of hard to tell what the actual numbers are in the sense of dealing with the material that's behind them. We dealt with the specifics of the additional allocations when we did Committee of Supply last week, so we don't want to get into those anymore. The overall process I've made a few comments on, and I think in the future we may want to look at that so that it helps Albertans understand the dynamics of the actual budgeting process and the decision-making process of government as it responds to the issues of Alberta.

With those comments I think I'll take my seat. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak to the 2001-2002 supplementary estimates. It's always a question as to whether or not the government acted appropriately in bringing forward supplementary funding through special warrants and so on as opposed to budgeting appropriately at the time. Now, I want to indicate, before there are too many groans over there, that I think that in fact most of these expenditures seem to be justified. Certainly drought relief for Alberta's farmers is a legitimate expenditure. I think the taking over of the financing of student loans is a justifiable expense. Forest fire fighting certainly could not be foreseen. The immunization for meningitis I think is a reasonable expenditure that could not have been reasonably foreseen in the budget. So, Mr. Speaker, I just have three questions that I would like to put with respect to these estimates. I don't know if answers can be provided tonight, but they could be provided in writing at a later time.

I would appreciate detailed breakdowns for a couple of items. The first one has to do with the \$2,797,000 of additional funding for support for the Legislative Assembly. I would like that number broken down so that we can see very clearly what that expenditure is for.

The other one that strikes me as very high is nearly \$100 million of expenditure for forest fire fighting. Now, that is an incredible level of funding. Obviously there was a serious problem with forest fires of great magnitude, but I would like to have the minister, please, provide a breakdown of that.

9:40

The one expenditure that I was looking for and didn't find here, Mr. Speaker, was additional expenditures to fund Children's Services. I find it interesting that where you have a very significant increase in the caseload, this is not seen as something that would be funded by a supplementary requisition but instead has to come from existing preventative programs. This is a different approach in this department than I see in other departments where you have unforeseen expenditures. Whether it be drought or forest fires or student loans or increases for justices of the peace, any number of legitimate expenses that were unforeseen, those are provided for by supplementary estimates. But in the case of increases in caseloads for children, it must come out of the department and it must come out of the preventative program. So it will have a feedback effect, then, because by canceling and cutting back dramatically on the preventative programs, your caseloads will increase in the future, and you'll enter an upward spiral that you may not get out of, at least not very easily. So that's a question I would put to the Minister of Children's Services as well as to the Provincial Treasurer. Why the difference in how we treat departments, and why are children treated in one way and forest fires and farmers treated in another?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I at this time would like to get some remarks regarding Bill 11 on the record – or Bill 30. Pardon me. Why am I stuck on Bill 11?

MR. MASON: Old habits die hard.

MR. MacDONALD: Old habits die hard. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands is absolutely right. Yes.

On Bill 30 there are some things that certainly any government cannot foresee, and there have to be additional sums. I noted with interest the 9 million plus dollars that has been appropriated by the Ministry of Justice for increased justices of the peace compensation, to provide the costs of the new professional lounge for provincial judges, and for hiring additional Crown prosecutors, not only Crown prosecutors but support staff. This issue was brought to the attention of our constituency office in the summer. I don't know what else to say other than it took the current government time, but eventually they certainly did the right thing and hired additional Crown prosecutors and support staff and increased the compensation levels for those that were there. This was not only an issue of hiring; it was an issue of retaining staff. I'm pleased to see in here that this issue was dealt with, not in a timely fashion by this government but at least it was dealt with.

There are other nonbudgetary items in here, certainly from Agriculture, Food and Rural Development; from income assistance programs, specifically for the province's livestock and honey producers in response to drought conditions, some of the worst drought conditions that have occurred in the last half century; and \$118 million has been appropriated by the Minister of Health and Wellness, as was mentioned earlier.

When we look at all this spending, you have to look at the plans. I would have to say that prudent management is not the name of a town in Saskatchewan. It should be the motto of this government, but unfortunately it's not. Alberta is blessed with abundant resources, and there can be a lot of mistakes made, and of course they can be covered up. Excuse me, not covered up. I will withdraw that description "covered up." A better word would be "bought." You know, buy their way out of trouble with millions of dollars of—well, they're referred to as subsidies by the hon. Minister of Energy in the *Calgary Herald*. Whenever you lurch from one spending spree to another spending spree, the public get concerned, particularly whenever there is talk of cutbacks, Mr. Speaker, and I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly that this year's projected revenue is the second largest in the history of the province.

Now we're having cutbacks. We're having this, and we're having that. I can't imagine what future supply estimates will be, but we need to recognize, you know, that there is money and that the money has to be made available to respond to urgent issues like the forest fires, like the drought. There's no denying that. However, one has to have serious concerns about the lack of planning within the entire government's budgeting process, and again prudent management is not a town in Saskatchewan.

We on this side of the House have always had concerns about the budgeting process here. I can't for the life of me understand why this government is operating on a three-month plan when the Government Accountability Act talks about a three-year plan. One of the main problems with this government has again been the improper management of the budget. They didn't manage the cuts properly in health care and education. They were reckless, and we're still paying for it. They didn't effectively manage reinvestment, and this government refuses to even consider better management practices in light of volatile crude oil prices and natural gas prices and the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East's solution of the stability fund. The hon. Minister of Community Development is fully aware of, you know, the prudence of having the stability fund and just exactly what it would do for this province and for the Minister of Finance as the price of oil goes up and goes down. The stability fund as proposed by the Member for Lethbridge-East is a sound idea, and we could avoid so much of this if the government

would just do the right thing and say yes to the Alberta Liberal stabilization fund plan.

Now, if you're not sticking to your budget, Mr. Speaker, there is no ability for the departments to plan and to get full value for Albertans' money. Everyone is fond of saying that there is only one taxpayer, but the taxpayer with this government is, I guess, the Rodney Dangerfield of taxpayers because they're not getting any respect.

Even the Auditor General has said:

While subsequent additional funding may provide relief from immediate budget pressures, it is not conducive to good management since [repetition may] create the expectation of continuing amounts in addition to planned [annual budget increases].

Now, surely if the hon. members across the way are not going to listen to the Official Opposition, they could heed the advice of the Auditor General. They could listen to the Auditor General, but it seems there's always this issue of poor management, poor management covered up by robust natural resource prices. It's quite easy, as we saw last year before the election, whenever 'egonomics' is being practised: throw money at every problem. Every problem. Now that the election is over, oh goodness, we're going to have to start taking money out of the taxpayers' pockets or their purses. [interjection] It is true. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs is anxious to participate in the debate, but I don't know what's going to happen whenever constituents start phoning and asking about the deferral account and how we're going to pay this now that the election is over. Is this going to be in supplementary—no, in the budget.

9:50

Now, budgeting by this government is clearly resource based. It's not in any way, shape, or form service based, but it's resource based. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, if there is not sound management by adopting a thing such as the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East's policy, the stabilization fund, it's going to come back to hurt not only the hon. members of this Assembly but every Albertan. We cannot be at the whim of extremely volatile resource revenues. We are at their mercy because there's not sound management of international petroleum prices and in the natural gas market to the North American price. The real benefit here is that we have the benefit of a low Canadian dollar, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Benefit?

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, a benefit, hon. member.

Now, I have a few questions before I cede the floor. What criteria is the government using to determine whether extra or unbudgeted spending is necessary? I would like to know this on behalf of the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Now, many of the government's goals and performance measures are too vague and are arbitrary. They fail to give a real picture of the government's performance. If there's a snapshot there and it's not approved, the performance measure, as the Member for Edmonton-Centre frequently tells the House, it is removed. Many of the government's goals and performance measures don't even relate to the government's actual performance, Mr. Speaker.

Now, in closing I would like to say that this isn't three-year budgeting; it's three-month budgeting. The government is simply engaged in reactionary budgeting or, as the people at the Capilano Mall call it, 'egonomics,' because it's simply a way of buying favours with the electorate. Then after the election is over, 'egonomics' is over and we're back to their reckless cuts to health care and to education and to children's services. That's what we have.

We've gone from 'economics' back to the old ways, without a plan.

Now, with those remarks, at this time I would take my seat, Mr. Speaker, and cede the floor to another hon. colleague. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a second time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been another excellent evening of tremendously exciting debate with very good progress having been made. At this hour of the evening I would move that the Assembly do stand adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, November 27, at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 9:55 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 27, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/27

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table two petitions from my constituency of Edmonton-Riverview addressed to the Premier regarding the War Amps key tag identification program. The program has been denied access to motor vehicle operators lists in Alberta through AMV because of FOIP rules. This access has been provided since 1947, and the petition urges that such access continue to be granted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table petitions from constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry addressed to the Premier regarding the War Amps key tag program. The program has been denied access to motor vehicle operators lists in Alberta through AMV because of FOIP rules. This access has been provided since 1947, and the petition urges that such access continue to be granted.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table three petitions from my constituency of Lethbridge-East addressed to the Premier regarding the War Amps key tag identification program. They would like to have this program reinstated so that they can continue to do the good work that they've been doing through the War Amps program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to table a petition from the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods addressed to the Premier with respect to the War Amps key tag identification program asking for access to the names that they have been denied under the FOIP rules.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday on Chinchaga now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative

Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to support the establishment of the Chinchaga Wilderness as a legislated protected area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition that I tabled yesterday in the House on Chinchaga be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to support the establishment of the Chinchaga Wilderness as a legislated protected area.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on that day's Order Paper also do stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Bill 31

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice to request leave to introduce Bill 31, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2).

This bill makes minor changes to nine pieces of legislation provincially, including the Health Disciplines Act, the Crown Contract Dispute Resolution Act, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and the Maintenance Enforcement Act.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour of tabling five copies of the 2000-2001 annual report of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This is the sixth report since the act was proclaimed in 1995, and it highlights a number of significant accomplishments from the past year, including the development and delivery of an on-line course on information access and privacy protection, the first of its kind in Canada.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of the

authorized accredited agency annual report summary statistics for April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I would take this opportunity to table a copy of the 2002 Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research calendar, which outlines some of the outstanding work this organization does on behalf of Albertans and, in fact, of all Canadians. Along with the calendar are the 2001 financial highlights and the consolidated financial statements for the 2000-2001 year.

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I have essentially three tablings today. The first tabling is the Child Welfare Act Review Discussion Guide. My hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo is distributing and discussing the act review.

The second tabling is the Children's Advocate report of 2000-2001 and the response Children's Services provides for the substantiated investigated summaries. Mr. Speaker, we are providing a comment on every single investigation without identifying the child and family service authority, without identifying the child, but it should anecdotally provide some assurance about the level of investigation into the cases that have been cited by the Children's Advocate in this report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings, with your permission, this afternoon. My first is five copies of a letter to the federal secretary of state responsible for women's issues regarding the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women on December 6, 2001. As you are also aware, I have provided a white ribbon, such as the one I'm wearing, to each of our colleagues in the Legislature today to mark this important event along with a memo requesting all of us to support actions and activities that help prevent violence against women. I know that our colleague from St. Albert will comment further on this later this afternoon. I also want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for her leadership role in getting these activities started in our areas.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is in fact a letter from me to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre in supplement to my response to a question she raised in this House a few days ago regarding APLEN, the Alberta public library electronic network.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. First I'm pleased to file five copies of responses to questions raised May 14, 2001, in the Committee of Supply's review of Alberta Finance's 2001-2002 budget estimates.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 10 of the Government Accountability Act I'm tabling five copies of the annual report of the government of Alberta, that highlights the successful implementation of the single-rate tax system. This report is for fiscal year 2000-2001 and includes consolidated financial statements that show a record payment on the province's accumulated debt.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table annual reports on behalf of the following ministries and government agencies as required in section 14 of the Government Accountability Act: Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, Children's Services, child and family services authorities' financial statements, Community Development, Economic Development,

Resource Development, Environment, Treasury, Gaming, Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, Government Services, Health and Wellness, health authority financial statements, Human Resources and Employment, Infrastructure, Innovation and Science, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Justice, Learning, Executive Council, and Municipal Affairs. These reports have been delivered to the Clerk's office as they are too numerous to bring into the Assembly.

Thank you.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of petitions from individuals in southern Alberta to get education on track, asking the Legislative Assembly to support Bill 218, which will provide adequate funding for a properly functioning education system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings. The first is from Rod Olstad of Edmonton, who is concerned that there is not enough protection in the Alberta foothills ecosystem, and he is "disappointed that oil and gas leases have been recently allowed in 'protected' areas in Alberta."

My second tabling is from David Montgomery. He is very concerned about recycling practices in this province.

My third tabling is from Jim and Pat Dittrich, who are "very concerned about the proposed shutting down of trails in the Canmore area."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table the required number of copies of 101 requests from Albertans who urge the government to vote for Bill 218, the class size targets bill, to "end the need for parents to fundraise for . . . basics" and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the required number of copies of 19 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size target bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings from constituents today. The first is a letter from Elizabeth Esaiw, who is very concerned about diabetic management in Alberta. She's

paying an average of \$100 per month for her diabetic supplies, and she's hoping that the government is going to show some positive change.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is from June Mowers. She is very concerned about user fees for health care and considers that a scare tactic. She would rather see a sales tax than user fees.

The third tabling is from John Shepherd, who was involved with the Mennonite Centre Welcome Home Community. He's very concerned and asks the government "to uphold its commitments and reconsider funding for the Welcome Home Community."

The final tabling is the appropriate number of copies of a petition from the War Amps, who are asking that the motor vehicle list, which they have been denied access to, be made accessible to them again.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the required number of copies of 20 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size target bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to ensure that Alberta can afford to keep teachers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter from Theresa Driediger, a chartered psychologist and marriage and family therapist who has worked closely with the Welcome Home Community and calls it a wonderfully effective model. She is expressing dismay at the decision of the Ma'Möwe Capital region child and family services authority for cutting its funding effective February 15, 2002.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling five copies of an open letter from Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus asking the federal and provincial governments to address "the current crisis in affordable housing."

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, it is my pleasure today to table the appropriate copies of the first School at the Legislature report card 2000-2001. This is the Legislative Assembly educational program for grade 6 students co-sponsored by three community partners: Shaw Communications, Capital City Savings, and The Quality Group.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you. I am honoured today to introduce to you and through you an individual who has given long and loyal service to this Assembly. Mike Chwok served with the Legislative Assembly security staff from March 8, 1984, until the 15th of June 2001. At his retirement he was the longest serving security staff member. Prior to his service here he was for 29 years a member of the Edmonton Police Service. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chwok is in your gallery. He is accompanied by his wife, Evelyn, and I'd ask Mr. and Mrs. Chwok to rise and receive the grateful thanks of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two outstanding grade 6 classes from Lago Lindo school. They are accompanied today by Principal John Eshenko, teachers Marilyn Gehring and Kevin Peters, and parent Mary Anne Luellman. They are seated in the members' gallery, and with your permission I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege and honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a great group of intelligent and energetic young people from J.J. Nearing school in St. Albert. They have 80 visitors in both galleries. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Reid, Mr. Raypold, and Mrs. Sowinsky and parent helpers Mrs. Brenneis, Mr. Manastirski, Mrs. Fontaine, Mrs. LeBlanc, Mr. Bell, and Mrs. Vanderwalle. They are, as I said, in both galleries, and I would ask that they all rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have 17 guests from Kneehill home educators visiting the Legislature today. Unfortunately, they won't be in the Assembly till 2 o'clock, but I would like to acknowledge their visit with the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 25 very bright and enthusiastic students from a school appropriately named Brightview elementary school. Accompanying the class are teachers Graeme Walker and Heather Parkinson and parent helpers Ms Kathy Dupuis and Mr. Searle. Unfortunately, they're not in the Assembly right now, as the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has half of his constituency in the galleries. They will be arriving a little later on, and I would ask that we show them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members today a group of students from Tulliby Lake in Vermilion. They are accompanied by Miss Sandra Lawson and Mr. Allan Belsheim. I just want to dispel the myth of class size; all three of them are here today. I'd like them to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

head: Oral Question Period

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

Natural Gas Royalties

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few years the

government has been moving natural gas royalties paid in the first quarter of the current year backwards to the previous year and adding it to the surplus. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Can you explain why you've taken over \$2.8 billion paid this year in royalties and moved it back and added it to last year's surplus?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the \$2.8 billion that the hon. member is referring to was accrued into last year because it's the production from last year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Finance: are you not trying to protect revenues for debt payment and not for education, children's services, or health, where they're needed?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, oil and gas revenues usually come 60 to 90 days after the month in which they are produced, and it's normal accounting to accrue back into the actual year. This is the standard accounting principle that we have followed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. But they don't do it with all the other revenues that they get as well that come late.

Given that the minister is willing to move these royalties back when last year's revenues are positive, what happens if the royalties are below the projection? Will you move a deficit back to last year as well?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a silly question, but let's be very clear. Under standard accounting principles you usually report the actual year as close as possible, and you use a method called accruals to do that, to reflect what the actual picture for the year looks like. We did not deviate from that one bit. The second part of the question is just silliness.

THE SPEAKER: Second main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you. Everything else is done on a cash basis.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, children in Alberta are going without essential services, parents are being forced to fund-raise for their children's education, and RHAs are cutting their budgets while running deficits. All this is happening while the government sits with over \$2 billion in the bank. My first question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Why has your department cut 21 programs for children in the MáMōwe region when the government has over \$2 billion in the bank?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think that to a recent question I responded that 93 agencies are currently on contract to provide services within the MáMōwe Capital region. It's very clear to me that when you have that many agencies, there are naturally opportunities to find cost efficiencies. Many of the reductions and in fact many of the cuts have been done to become more efficient in our delivery of services, not to in fact squeeze children out of services but to become more efficient and cost-effective.

Mr. Speaker, after the first-quarter result we saw that Children's Services, if we had continued caseload growth, could well have a deficit. Much of the cost-containment strategy has been done in fact to make sure that we don't have a deficit, that we do refine our service delivery system, and that we do look after children in a very cost-conscious way but in an even better fashion.

There's something else that I want to reinforce for this House. We have an Alberta response model that is currently being taught to social workers, that is being transferred to the CEOs and co-chairs, which will mean that low-risk children will be taken care of at the community level, where they're most in need of services that support the family, not engage the child in Children's Services, through the full spectrum, Mr. Speaker, to still having high intake services for children most at risk.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why did your department announce more money for RHAs earlier in the year and then cut almost half that money when the government still has over \$2 billion in the bank?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can say with some amount of confidence that we've been working with the regional health authorities in dealing with this. We make decisions, and unlike the Leader of the Opposition we do not have the benefit of his 20/20 hindsight, but we do make the best decisions that we can with the information that we have. In working with regional health authorities, both the Minister of Finance and I have satisfied ourselves that they will deal with the lesser amount of money that is made available to them because we have a lesser revenue available to us as a government. We have worked with them in order to reduce the amount of impact on frontline services.

Earlier this week the Premier himself tabled a press release from the Calgary health region indicating that they were able to take \$30 million off their expenditures without any change in their frontline services. One of the areas that we've reduced in our transfers to regional health authorities was for energy rebates – and we know, of course, what happened to the price of energy: it's gone down – and that did not affect frontline services either, Mr. Speaker. So we have worked mightily with the regional health authorities to reduce our costs of delivery of frontline services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Less revenue and they moved \$2.8 billion back to last year and still have \$2 billion in the bank.

My third question is to the Minister of Learning. Why do parents have to subsidize the education system when the government has \$2 billion in the bank?

DR. OBERG: They don't, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

School Fund-raising

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to an Alberta Learning Best Practices study, computer costs for one area high school are \$340 per student per year. Studies of other schools show costs ranging from \$176 to \$678 per student per year for computers.

My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Does the minister consider parents who are fund-raising for computers to be fund-raising for a basic school item?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, included in much of the curriculum is a need for computers. There is no doubt about that. There's a minimum number of computers needed for certain of our curriculum, and those are provided by the school board. If the parents want to go out and fund-raise for more computers, if they want to increase the number of computers to, for example, one to one in their schools, anything like that, they are very capable of doing that, and they can quite easily make that decision on their own. I do consider that a certain number of computers is essential for schools in this day and age. I believe it is an essential component. The question comes down to the number of computers in schools.

DR. MASSEY: Based on that study, how does the minister then propose to stop the hundreds of parent groups across the province who are fund-raising for computers for that basic program?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I'll basically say the same answer as I did before. There is a minimum number of computers that school boards put in their classrooms. Many school boards have elected to put in many, many more computers than what is necessary. I think that's a good decision. I think that's a decision that the school boards have to make. If the parents want to fund-raise for more computers, again I say that they have that ability to do it, and I think it's good for their students.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member?

The hon. leader of the third party.

Children's Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a Minister of Children's Services who is quite frankly failing in her duty to protect vulnerable children in this province. If the minister can't find children who will be hurt by brutal cuts to frontline services, it is simply because she is choosing not to look. There are many such real-life examples, including a six-year-old autistic child I'll call Jeffrey. Jeffrey has severe emotional and behavioural disorders and requires intensive intervention and treatment. My question to the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister please explain how removing Jeffrey from the Salvation Army Children's Village in Calgary with its round-the-clock care and professional staff and moving him into an already overburdened foster care system can be accomplished without hurting Jeffrey?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am loath to comment on individual cases in this House because of the confidential nature and the manner in which we deal with children. I have accepted every single member's challenge to follow up on the hot spots of the individual children. From the Leader of the Opposition to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, people in this House have been bringing me questions individually. It is my responsibility individually. But to cite the name of a child and a location in this House is totally inappropriate.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, let me assure the House that the name I used is not the real name.

Let me ask the minister a second question. How can the minister keep defending the absurd proposition that she will take care of individual children when she knows well that a one-kid-at-a-time

approach is simply not practical in the face of the thousands of children who are being pawned?

2:00

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, let's be perfectly clear. We had \$647 million when we started this year, and we have barely half a million dollars at this particular point in time. For every individual case that is brought, I think it is our responsibility to deal with them, as Mother Teresa said, one at a time, and we are looking into these one at a time.

In terms of those overall agency reductions or eliminations, Mr. Speaker, I am very confident that the local authorities are examining these with their CEO. They're looking at what cases are possibly affected furthest from the child. On individual cases that relate to handicapped children's services, services for special needs, I think it is my responsibility as Minister of Children's Services to follow up on every single case, and I'll be pleased to follow up on the hon. member's case. It will be investigated and explored.

Mr. Speaker, we have not made the reductions that are being cited by the other side of the floor. We have reduced information technology, made administrative efficiencies, worked on our contract agency supports, and done numerous things. These individual horror stories that are coming forward could most productively be dealt with if they were passed directly to me so that as quickly as possible we could look after those through our department.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the minister: given that the cuts we already know about don't come anywhere close to making up the ministry's \$40 million-plus budget shortfall, will the minister confirm that even more cuts are coming, and will she announce them to this House before the end of the fall session?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am doing my level best day by day to do the very best thing with the resources we have available for children, and across Canada there is no place where the resources are so prolific for children. I could respond on behalf of myself and our government. The Minister of Learning, the Minister of Justice, the Solicitor General, the Minister of Health and Wellness: every single minister across this table has funds that are available for children and families in need, and we are providing those. At such time as our Premier and our ministers of Finance and Revenue deliver another budget, then I will be pleased to provide my comments, my projections, my expenditures and revenues, as this Legislature requires.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Internet Sales Regulations

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we could deal with reality for a minute, please. In light of the recent bankruptcy of Canada 3000, the Minister of Government Services has explained that there are a number of protections in place for consumers, one of which is the Internet sales regulation. Can the minister explain the significance of this regulation and why it was necessary?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta happens to be one of Canada's most connected provinces, and the number of Albertans that make access to the Internet will probably

continue to rise as our economy continues to strengthen, so it makes sense that this government would put in place and take a lead in protection for consumers who want to shop on-line. The Internet sales regulation was thus put in place on October 15 of this year so that shopping on the Internet would become the same as shopping, say, at your local store or mall. On-line shopping of course comes with its challenges, and those same challenges don't exist in the traditional marketplace. As an example, you can check prices, you can compare products, and you can deal with your merchant right up front. So it was important that Internet sales regulations be put in place to protect shoppers, to assist on-line shoppers by providing standards that will help reduce customer complaints and misunderstandings.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplement to the same minister: does that not mean that now it's safer to shop on-line than in stores?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question, and I want to make it clear to the hon. member and to all consumers that Alberta consumer protection legislation, which is the Fair Trading Act, applies to all purchases whether they're purchased in a store or whether they're purchased on-line. There's no arguing that shopping locally does have its advantages and shopping on-line has its disadvantages. That's why we put the provisions in place, and both instances are covered by the Fair Trading Act. The goal of the Internet sales regulation is to level the playing field between on-line and retail shopping for both sellers and buyers. One of the specifics about on-line shopping is that the regulations that were put in place are to give customers the opportunity to have a cancellation provision, and by using a credit card, that cancellation provision comes into place.

MR. SNELGROVE: My second supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can the minister explain what tools the government has to enforce the Fair Trading Act or the Internet sales regulation?

MR. COUTTS: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, the Fair Trading Act is Alberta's consumer protection legislation. It defines unfair practices and provides remedies if the act has been breached. For example, a breach of the Fair Trading Act might be in describing a used item and selling it as a new item. Penalties for that type of breach of the act include a \$100,000 fine or up to two years in jail, as well as that a business can also be ordered to pay restitution. It should be added that all sellers, both traditional and on-line, have the right to establish a whole range of policies. So you'll see different policies for different on-line purchases, but for that reason I would advise customers to ask the proper questions when buying either on-line or in stores. We have a tip line that's available to help consumers through Government Services' toll-free number.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Provincial Fiscal Policies (continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development said that the government is developing a policy for what it calls rationalizing the commercial fishing industry. In this rationalization the government is consider-

ing buyouts for people voluntarily leaving the industry. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. Why is this government considering underwriting business losses while cutting essential children's programs?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not. We put forward a fiscal plan that has a balance that meets the demands and needs and priorities of Albertans. The hon. member is trying to play a little game here. Policy decisions are made through our caucus, through the standing policy committee, and recommendations are brought forward. They all must fit within the overall fiscal plan of the government. They're debated in this House in the Committee of Supply during the estimates of each department. In fact, we're in the process right now of debating supplementary estimates. So all of the moves financially and fiscally that the government decides on are in fact debated right here in this very Legislature, and I would encourage the hon. member opposite to engage in that debate. If she has questions of a particular ministry, she should raise them at that time.

MR. CARDINAL: Just for clarification, Mr. Speaker, the plan was put out as a five-year plan which will rationalize the commercial and sports fishing industry, because it is a very, very important subject to all Albertans. It's not approved yet, but once approved, the plan is designed where dollars can kick in at any time in the five years in order to proceed with the program. So when the budget is not there, like this year, we will not expect to implement that program this year, but I just want to approve the process.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that I am hearing the same thing, I'll repeat the question to the Minister of Finance. Why is the government making the choice to put industry before children?

MRS. NELSON: I think the Minister of Children's Services has in detail talked about how children are being protected in this province, far more so than any other jurisdiction in this country. She also challenged the opposition to notify her directly if they found that there was a child that hadn't been dealt with properly. She identified in her fiscal plan that she had made the corrections, the corrective action of October 18, by streamlining her administration. Not one frontline delivery program had been adversely affected by the 1 percent that her department contributed to the fiscal plan of this province. They in fact had accomplished their mission through administrative things like IT changes, et cetera.

Now, the member opposite can't understand that, so, Mr. Speaker, I would ask, with your indulgence, that the Minister of Children's Services and the minister for aboriginal affairs supplement this answer so it's crystal clear to Albertans how children in this province are being protected.

2:10

THE SPEAKER: Well, sorry, hon. members. We're moving on. I've got a whole list of members.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, my next question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Given what has just been laid out by the Minister of Finance, am I to take it, then, that there have been no cuts to frontline services? Well, does that mean that your department has been funding programs that were not essential programs for children, necessary for the protection of children in Alberta?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, presently we're in what I would call a transition zone, where we've had early intervention funding that has been provided by the province, about \$30 million, and we are awaiting still more of the early intervention funds coming under the early childhood development funding of the federal government. Some of those funds that support aboriginal children in need are still not in receipt of any of the provincial authorities. So during this period of time we have been trying to be creative in our responses to early childhood delivery programs, starting first with the home visitation, in co-operation with the Minister of Health and Wellness, and working our way through these programs. Where those cuts have been furthest from the child in need of protection, we have had a belt tightening, to be sure, and we have had reductions in those services. But make no mistake; we have not at any time taken funds away from direct-line services to children who are in need, who are either handicapped or who are being served in a foster or a group home. I've reiterated that a number of ways, and I'll be pleased to go into more detail and bring that to this Legislative Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

TCE Contamination

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just recently in the media in Calgary there was a potentially dangerous leak of a chemical called TCE, namely trichloroethylene, a known cancer agent. It was detected in some of the homes near the Canadian Pacific railway workshop in my constituency. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. Can the minister explain the cause of this pollution and how it happened?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The CPR rail yards at Ogden were established in 1913, and as that happened, you then have commercial, industrial, and some residences that have grown up around this area. From about the '50s to the '80s TCE was used as a degreasing agent, and nobody was aware, quite frankly, of the chemical toxicity around that chemical during this period. It was used all over North America. You know, it wasn't just used in Calgary; it was used in all of North America as a degreasing agent. Over time the caretaking in handling it wasn't there, so obviously some was spilt on the ground. Then over the long period of time, with the concentrations of this spill, some of it has got into the groundwater, and that groundwater has carried the contamination off the CPR Ogden site.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My supplemental question is to the same minister. What measures are being taken to ensure the safety of my constituents?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, the contamination was first discovered in 1999, late 1999, and the CPR immediately informed Alberta Environment, as they must. They also immediately informed the residents in early 2000 that there was this contamination, and Alberta Environment is overseeing a cleanup process. We're working with the Calgary regional health authority in this cleanup process, and we will continue to work with them. It's my understanding that the CPR has been very proactive in this process and is at present installing ventilation devices in the homes where this was detected to take this out of the homes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My last supplementary is also to the same minister. Who is liable for this pollution and the damages and cleanup?

DR. TAYLOR: The CPR has assumed all legal and financial liability for this cleanup, and they are proceeding with it at their cost.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment this afternoon. Does the government endorse \$650 a month as enough for an Albertan to live on?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, one of the measurements in terms of this government that appears in the Measuring Up document is that this government will provide assistance to Albertans who truly need our assistance. One of the principles that this government works on is the fact that it is, first of all, better to be working than to be on assistance, but we do recognize that there are people within our communities that will be unable to enter the workforce. So it is then incumbent on this government and upon the taxpayers of this province to provide for basic needs, and that is always going to be perhaps a contentious issue in terms of how much assistance a government does provide. In our case, within this province the assistance will be temporary in nature and will be basic in its components.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Again to the same minister: will the government announce its new, two-tier AISH system with its two sets of rules and its two sets of rates? When will this announcement be made?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: I'm not familiar with what the member is talking about. It seems to me that it is an attempt somehow to perhaps incite a certain group that we have within our community.

If I might talk about our AISH program, it's recognized as one of the better programs across the country. It's received national attention. It provides income for people that are severely handicapped. I think that amongst the population generally it's seen as an excellent program, and we want to make sure that everyone is aware of how good we think it is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can the minister assure us that he will oppose an AISH system with two rates and rules for recipients, one set for new applicants and another for existing recipients who would be grandfathered under the old system?

Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Quit giving him your questions.

MR. DUNFORD: Did I write your question for you? I don't think so.

The assumption is being made, I think, in anticipation perhaps of the low-income review that has been placed on my desk. I've indicated here that we've received the report, and again thank you to the committee for a very thorough and comprehensive report.

As we speak, department officials are taking a look at the information that's been provided. Of course, we'll be making that public at some sector, Mr. Speaker, and then we'll be reviewing how we provide assistance to low-income Albertans, and that will be well publicized. It would have to come to this House for any particular changes, because most of the programs that we provide are covered by the Social Development Act, and of course that's an act of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

School Fund-raising

(continued)

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday and today in this House opposition members have raised concerns about fund-raising in Alberta schools. The Minister of Learning has been quite clear that fund-raising for basic educational requirements is not permitted under the guidelines drawn up by the Alberta School Boards Association. However, today I am hearing reports that parents at Bisset elementary school here in Edmonton have raised more than \$60,000 for their school. I also understand that the principal at Bisset school has indicated that the money is required for basic educational needs. Could the Minister of Learning tell this House whether or not this is the case?

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I gave the House the undertaking that if anything was brought to my attention about fund-raising for basic educational needs, I would take a look into it. In keeping with what was said yesterday, I made a phone call to the superintendent of Edmonton public. The superintendent of Edmonton public gave me some very interesting information. I will read it to you, if I may. This is the surplus or deficit for the past three years for Bisset school, which is the school the hon. member has just asked me about. In 1998-1999 they had a surplus of \$96,788. In 1999-2000 they had a surplus of \$129,737. In the year 2000-2001 they had a surplus of \$70,556.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I do have some serious concerns when there are people making these allegations in public. I also understand that the principal of the school has stated that he needs it in case there are some major structural damages to his school. I think that's potentially true. I will say, though, that his school is 11 years old. I will also say that through my department there is roughly \$310 million for operation and maintenance. Through the Department of Infrastructure there's another \$50 million for building quality restoration projects.

Mr. Speaker, I think that these numbers raise some significant questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. Could the minister advise this Assembly what measures are in place to ensure accountability for school budgeting?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, basically what is in place is that every school, every school board has to include the funds raised by their schools in their statements. As a matter of fact, I just tabled the statements of all the school jurisdictions in Alberta last week. So they do have to account for those statements.

Mr. Speaker, the Edmonton public school system has an excellent system of allowing the principals a great deal of leeway in how they spend the money. They are, however, accountable, and they do report what those dollars are and how they've been spent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is for the same minister, the Minister of Learning. Perhaps the minister could offer some advice to parents who want to engage in fund-raising. If parents are raising funds for school-related activities, how can those parents find out how those funds will be used?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent question, and I do hear an awful lot about it. As a matter of fact, today we had lots of phone calls in the office saying that they were raising it for field trips or they were raising it for this or raising it for that. I think the very simple answer to this question to all parents out there who are fund-raising: make sure you know what you're raising the money for. The principal has an obligation to tell you what that money will be used for. I would really encourage it.

I would also add to what I said yesterday that the policy statement from the ASBA, the Alberta School Boards Association, the policy direction from me is that parents should not be fund-raising for the core activities of school. That's what parents need to remember. Go out and ask the teachers what the fund-raising is for.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Commercial Fisheries

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister explain to Albertans how government policy and lack of leadership have contributed to the fishing industry being destroyed in this province?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe we have. We always have a balance between industrial development and environmental management, and that will continue.

Mr. Speaker, the oil and gas industry, agriculture, forestry, and tourism are the leaders as far as job creation and revenue generation in Alberta, and we will always have to keep that balance. That industry has to be strong while we keep good environmental management of our resources.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, given that the government has been trying to fix the fishing problems for over a decade, when can Albertans expect to see a revitalized fishing industry in this province?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, very soon, and it will not take any dollars from Children's Services.

MS CARLSON: Finally some good news, Mr. Speaker.

What studies or reports does the department have indicating how many people are affected by the request for financial compensation for commercial fishing that this government is going to supply?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the process of rationalization of the sports and commercial fishing industry is very critical in Alberta, because what we have out there – and it is important for Albertans to understand. We have over 800 commercial fishermen. There is not room for 800 in Alberta. The plan that was developed was done jointly by the Alberta Fish and Game Association and the commercial fishermen of Alberta to try and determine how we may rationalize their industry so it continues to be economically viable and manageable at the same time.

All we are planning here is a program over five years that will cost a certain amount of dollars and can be implemented any time from here to the five- or 10-year term. The compensation package is very limited. Once succeeded, the compensation package will see a reduction of the commercial fisheries down to about 200 licences, which is going to be manageable.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Aboriginal Children's Services

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night the House approved \$355 million in supplementary estimates for drought relief for farmers, fighting forest fires, loans for students, and wage increases for MLAs. [some applause] Well, you might clap. What wasn't there was any money to take care of the increase in child welfare caseloads. Instead, money has been taken out of existing preventative programs for poor and at-risk children and in particular for aboriginal children. To the Finance minister: why did other departments receive approval for additional funds for unexpected costs and the Children's Services department was told to find their required funds at the expense of desperately needed children's programs?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, in filing these supplementary estimates in the House, it was an opportunity for all hon. members to go through the requests that had been made by ministries, to debate them, and to put them forward. Now, let's look at these as they came forward. There can be no secret in this province surely, even with the members of the third party, that Alberta has experienced the worst drought conditions in its history this last year. So to deal with the pressure points and the emergencies that occurred, this government felt it was absolutely appropriate to go and take the fiscal room that we had in the \$819 million cushion and allocate it to emergency situations. The same applied as our forests were burning at a record rate this year. The options were to go into our cushion and deal with them.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please specifically get to a question because this is anticipation. On the schedule for today is actually Committee of the Whole on Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2). The hon. member will have ample opportunity. A specific, focused question. We're not going to debate the estimates here in question period.

MRS. NELSON: So I won't go through them, Mr. Speaker, because that would be anticipation.

THE SPEAKER: Please don't.

Aboriginal Children's Services (continued)

MRS. NELSON: But in response to his first question, our government dealt with the pressure points and emergencies that were there before us. Insofar as the other departments of this government, we have a fiscal framework that we filed in this House the end of April and debated through Committee of Supply and dealt with the fiscal framework for the rest of year.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. member. Specifically.

MR. MASON: Given that the government clearly places a lower priority on aboriginal children than on other programs, what is the Finance minister prepared to do to reverse this discrimination?

2:30

MRS. NELSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker – and I know I'm not allowed to say this – that's a lie. You can't say that about this government.

MR. MASON: Point of order.

MRS. NELSON: Our priorities are clearly the priorities of Albertans. You just have to look around this House. We have 74 members and Albertans believe in us, and you have two. So I believe that Albertans have confidence in this government to set the priorities and do what's right to deal with the issues that face Albertans, and I object to somebody making a comment like that: that we don't have the interest of children at heart. Let's be quite frank. We have all children's best interests at heart because we deal with it every day not only as legislators but as parents.

Now, the framework has been put in place that deals with the priorities that we believe the people of Alberta want us to deal with. They were set, we laid them out clearly, and we're following through on them. Where there have been pressure points, we have been able to deal with those all the way through these first six months of operation. What was filed in this House was a recognition of some of those large pressure points, which we were able to deal with with the financial cushion we had.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you rose on a point of order?

MR. MASON: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: We'll deal with it at the conclusion of the question period. Obviously, it was in reference to the hon. Minister of Finance's statement, "That's a lie." We will deal with this at the conclusion. The hon. Minister of Finance will define her arguments as well.

Last question, and I repeat again what I said. The purpose of the question period is not to review the estimates. We were here last Thursday afternoon for nearly three hours on these estimates. It's coming up again tonight. So focus on your question, please.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try.

To the Minister of Finance: why does this government consider things like drought relief, forest fires, all very important things, and the many other important things that she's touched on to be an emergency and not aboriginal children in need to be . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. member. I've given notice that this is in committee later today. We can deal with it then.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Wood Preservatives

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are concerns being expressed about the use of wood preservatives, chemicals, specifically pentachlorophenol and chromated copper arsenate, in our community, especially in playgrounds. It appears that the level of soil or other contact leaching may be higher than previously thought, and therefore the level of toxicity and carcinogenicity may also be higher than previously thought. This represents a health concern, a concern to our overall environment, and a concern to our lumber industry. My first question is to the Minister of Environment. Could the minister indicate whether or not his department is investigating this concern?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Any lumber that is treated with any preservative falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government, and it's my understanding that right now the federal Department of Health is doing a review of treated lumber. Alberta Environment is in discussions with the federal government on this aspect of treated lumber. What we're encouraging the federal government to do is, one, properly test any product they put on the market before it goes to the marketplace, not just a general test but tests for specific purposes. So if that lumber is going to be used for playground purposes, then the tests should be around playgrounds. If it's going to be used for pilings in a dock, then that test should be around water and the transfer between the lumber and the water.

Secondly, we're encouraging the federal government to inform consumers about what is in the lumber, what is in the treatment process, and asking the federal government to provide precautions to consumers on how they handle that lumber: is there a statement of warning with that?

Finally, we're asking the federal government to very clearly delineate how that treated lumber should be disposed of, because that is a real concern to us here in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Could the minister inform us as to whether or not his department is aware of these potential health concerns surrounding the use of wood preservatives?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can advise that the answer is in the affirmative. We have been working with the lead department in this particular matter, which is the Ministry of Environment, and I can confirm, as stated by the Minister of Environment, that Health Canada has taken responsibility for determining which types of wood preservatives are safe for use in Canada, and that includes chromated copper arsenate. I have been advised through the lead department that Health Canada is currently evaluating CCA and its potential for harmful health effects. I am further advised by the lead department that the federal government's re-evaluation remains under way and that the results of this re-evaluation of CCA will help us determine whether there is a need to take further action on this issue to ensure that the health of Albertans is protected.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Could the minister explain if there's anything being done to find alternative ways of preserving wood so that we can reduce this potential threat to the Alberta lumber industry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Very briefly, my department of course does not regulate the products used by the industry. The federal government has the responsibility and has been working with the industry to introduce consumer labeling on treated wood products. In addition to that, our forest industry in Alberta generally is very well advanced as far as the discharge of toxins; for example, when pulp is produced. We are known to be leaders in this industry across North America. I think we are in good hands, and I know that the forest industry itself will continue moving forward to ensure that our environment is protected as part of their development plans. Part of the forest care program of course deals with these particular issues. I believe that our department is doing well in this area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Building Code

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The safety and security of our homes and workplaces is something that we're all concerned about. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when will the minister publish the results of the public consultation on objective-based building codes?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member raises a good point. Certainly that is in progress, and I can assure the hon. member and all Albertans that we are committed to the safety and security of all Albertans relative to safety codes and certainly will update this House as it becomes available.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the difference between the objective-based building code and the system currently used?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member, I want to assure this House first and foremost that as we look at the priorities relative to the safety and security of all homes, we're going to be looking at it. I recently spoke with the chair of the safety boards commission; I have frequent meetings with those people. I'm going to continue to do so and, as I committed earlier, will report back to this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in light of the workplace accidents and fatalities that we have had in this province, does the minister agree with the proposal that the

Alberta building code should no longer include part 8, safety measures at construction and demolition sites?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member raises an important point, but let me assure this House once again that no matter what the issue is, we want to protect all Albertans. We're reviewing it, and I'm going to report back to this House. It's incumbent upon not only this ministry but this government to do exactly that, and I'm committed to doing that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Dogrib Creek Forest Fire

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to dry conditions and lack of rainfall this past season we've had an extremely busy forest fire season, a season that has seen over 160,000 hectares of forested land in Alberta burned by wildfire. There have been many contradictory reports in the community regarding the fire west of Sundre known as Dogrib Creek. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Has the investigation into the Dogrib Creek fire in October been completed?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, of course it's been a busy year because of the dry season, like the hon. member mentioned. It is a standard procedure for our department to investigate any human-caused fires. In this particular case we believe that there was not only one human-caused fire but possibly a second one. We will be, of course, in the process of finalizing those investigations and will make them public.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the same minister tell me what the response time was from the date the fire was first reported?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the fire was reported on September 29 at about 10 p.m., and we had our resources in place early the next morning. At the peak of fire activity, in fact, we had 19 fire-fighting crews in there and three helicopters battling the blaze. The blaze was initially brought under control by October 4, but again the winds picked up, and 12 days later we had more crews in there. Finally the fire was under control.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is again to the same minister. Were the response time and the equipment allocated adequate to respond to this fire?

MR. CARDINAL: I believe they were, Mr. Speaker, but we do continue to review our fire-fighting policies. Right now, in fact, I'm working very closely with the 16 or 18 municipalities adjacent to the protected area to ensure that we respond as quickly as possible to any fire that starts. One of the policy changes I've made recently is to have the water bombers at the fire site at daybreak instead of waiting until 10 o'clock. It's one new process that we've put in place.

THE SPEAKER: Before we go to the next item on the Routine, I'm going to call on the hon. Minister of Finance.

Point of Order Member's Apology

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, in answering a question from the Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I indicated that I was going to say something I knew I shouldn't say, and I did say, "That's a lie." I know that's not allowed in this Assembly, so I do apologize to the hon. member. I was, unfortunately, not able to come up with a different phraseology that would be acceptable. So I would like to withdraw the phrase and apologize to the House for using unparliamentary language in this House.

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, I was going to recognize you later on the point of order. Will you accept that apology?

MR. MASON: No longer necessary, Mr. Speaker. I accept the apology with thanks.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Violence against Women

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would note for all members of this Assembly that on December 6 Canadians will mark the 10th National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. December 6 is the sorrowful anniversary of the Montreal massacre, in which 14 young women were murdered at Montreal's l'ecole Polytechnique in 1989. In addition to remembering these innocent women, December 6 is also a day to reflect on violence against all women. It is a time to think about women of every age who live each day under the threat of violence or those who have died as a result of it. It is a time to reflect on the tangible actions each one of us can take to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

Ten years ago a group of men formed an organization called Men Working to End Men's Violence against Women to build awareness among men about the persistent problem of violence against women in our communities. It encourages men to speak out against violence and to work in partnership with women to prevent it. As a result, for the past 10 years Canada has recognized the week of November 25 through December 6 as white ribbon days. Sunday, November 25, marked International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Wearing a white ribbon symbolizes our opposition to violence against women.

Thank you.

Mrs. Urvashi Sabharwal

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, over the past few weeks I've attended several events celebrating Diwali, the festival of lights and the beginning of the Hindu new year. As I reflect upon years of attending such events, I have been moved by one individual who has touched the lives of thousands of children in Alberta. Since immigrating to Canada in 1970, Mrs. Urvashi Sabharwal has trained over 2,000 children in the art of kathak, a unique form of Indian dancing using storytelling techniques.

Mrs. Sabharwal initially settled in Edmonton and ran her classes at lunch hour at the University of Alberta. Her students in the '70s performed under the banner Hoppy Happy Tipy Tappy Dancers. She now resides in Calgary and runs a school under the name

Urvashi Kala Kendra, meaning Urvashi School of Fine Arts.

Mrs. Sabharwal is a postgraduate in genetic science. However, her love for dancing led her to perfect her dancing skills in India, and she devotes her career to that field. Mrs. Sabharwal has performed on several renowned stages in India and Canada. In Alberta her school has performed at various events, including Heritage Days, the Commonwealth Games, United Nation days, Diwali festivals, to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, both of my daughters have been fortunate to have the privilege of learning kathak dancing from Mrs. Sabharwal. One of her students once told me that the lessons learned from Mrs. Sabharwal have helped her develop self-esteem, discipline, and greater understanding of diversity in culture.

On behalf of those children whose lives have been enriched and on behalf of their families I extend sincere appreciation and gratitude to Mrs. Urvashi Sabharwal. I also wish her and Albertans of Indian origin happy Diwali.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Children's Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are currently debating a supplementary supply bill that adds \$443 million to government spending for this year. This extra spending includes more help for farmers to help them deal with the drought, more money for fighting forest fires, more money to hire more Crown prosecutors, and more money for health care and education. It also includes more money to pay for the enriched transition allowance for MLAs that was voted in by the government and the Liberal opposition last August. Yet when it comes to finding extra money to pay for frontline services that will benefit Alberta's most vulnerable children, all of a sudden the well is dry.

There was an unbudgeted increase of 9 percent in the child welfare caseload in the past year. Instead of having this Assembly provide funds to make up the \$40 million shortfall that this unanticipated increase in child welfare caseloads created, the government chose instead to rob Peter to pay Paul. The government chose to rob the preventive early intervention programs to make up for the shortfall in child welfare budgets.

The sheer shortsightedness of the government's approach is incredible. The Conservative government seems blissfully unaware that these very preventive programs are a key to keeping children out of government care down the road. The lesson of an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure is lost on this government, Mr. Speaker.

The government's fiscal priorities are totally wrong. Last week the Premier indicated that going ahead with the planned \$275 million in corporate tax cuts was a higher priority for this government than making sure their frontline children's services are adequately funded. I'm deeply disappointed in the Premier's stance. I think that respected Alberta businesspeople like Robert Stollery would also likely disagree with the government's priorities.

In conclusion, I once again urge this government to get its priorities straight. Don't proceed with the reckless and irresponsible cuts to frontline services for vulnerable children and families. Don't rob Peter to pay Paul. Find the money so that Alberta's children are not harmed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Calgary Public Library

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak about the

outstanding achievements of the Calgary public library. The library started out with a donation from Andrew Carnegie, an American industrialist, in 1908. It grew with the city, and by 1963 it had 100,000 books at the main branch near Calgary's city hall today.

Starting in the 1990s under the direction of director Gerry Meek, the Calgary public library has become a network of libraries across the city. Like other Albertans Calgarians exhibit a great thirst for information and knowledge. The Calgary public library is the busiest library in Canada, circulating over 10 million items. The rate at which Calgarians ask the library for information is the second highest in the country, 3.71 per capita. In the year 2000 B & M Gates Foundation provided 69 public access workstations, and close to a thousand volunteers donate their time to the library services.

The Calgary library has received many awards; for example, awards from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, the best practice award from Industry Canada, and the Stan Health achievement literacy award from the Canadian Library Association. Mr. Speaker, recently myself and the hon. members from Calgary-Buffalo and Calgary-Currie attended the celebration of another achievement, the multilanguage initiative approved by the Calgary library board and headed by Annemarie Mayer with the participation and work of many library staff and volunteers.

2:50

Calgary is fast becoming a cosmopolitan centre, drawing residents from all over the world. Several thousand new Canadians from all walks of life come to Calgary every year. Multilanguage and ESL resources are needed. Now available are books, magazines, and newspapers from all over the world in 30 languages, information on Canadian citizenship, and many other interesting aspects.

I would like to ask the House to join me in acknowledging and congratulating the Calgary public library for a job well done.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. My guests have departed.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Private Members' Public Bills

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we get to Orders of the Day, the chair would like to make a statement with respect to the order of private members' public bills, and particularly I would like to clarify what the order of business will be for considering private members' public bills this afternoon.

As members might recall, last Thursday, November 22, 2001, the chair tabled letters from the sponsors of bills 207, 208, and 209, all asking for early consideration of their respective bills. To be clear, Bill 207 has been reported out of Committee of the Whole and must come up for third reading consideration by tomorrow, Bill 208 is still being considered by Committee of the Whole, and Bill 209 is awaiting consideration by Committee of the Whole.

Although not part of the Standing Orders, Speaker Schumacher ruled on the process for members to have their private members' public bills considered earlier than the deadlines imposed under Standing Order 8(5). This process was laid out in the February 11, 1997, ruling by Speaker Schumacher and has been followed by this Speaker. Essentially, members who want their bills to be considered

early must write the Speaker to that effect no later than the day before they want the bill to be considered. The practice followed is that the bill which is the subject of the request will be considered after debate is concluded on the bill then before the Assembly or the committee assuming that no other bills have reached their due dates under Standing Order 8(5).

Given that Bill 208 is currently before the committee and that Bill 209 is past its due date for consideration by the committee and that Bill 207 must be considered at third reading tomorrow under Standing Order 8(5)(d), the order of business today will be consideration of Bill 208 in committee, then Bill 209 in committee, and, if the Assembly gets through that, Bill 207 at third reading.

The chair also notes that the request for early consideration of bills 208 and 209 at third reading came before these bills actually reached that stage. Taken to the extreme, this practice could jeopardize the legitimacy of the draw by considering one member's bill early by virtue of one request, thereby prejudicing other members. Interestingly enough, the only other time the chair recalls a request for early consideration for a bill not at that stage was by the Member for Calgary-Cross by a letter tabled in the House on April 28, 1998, for her Bill 212.

The order of business tomorrow on these bills will depend on the progress today, but the chair will endeavour to give effect to the request of members for early consideration of their bills while preserving the integrity of the system.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 208 Alberta Official Song Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to indicate some support for this important bill and to congratulate the Member for Calgary-Fort for doing his due diligence in bringing it forward. In doing so, I have to pledge my personal bias when it comes to music and anything related to it. Since I've been involved in this music industry all my life, I find it very easy to support a bill that encourages the creation of more music in our province.

I also recognize that this is an important initiative with respect to our provincial centennial that will culminate in 2005, and all of the activities that are leading up to it indicate that it will be an incredible celebration indeed. I do believe that Albertans will appreciate having something to sing about.

In saying that, I also want to comment briefly on the impact that this bill will have and is already having in our communities. Mr. Chairman, it's a known fact that when we introduce an opportunity such as this for Albertans to become creative and talk about their favourite province, that generates a lot of activity throughout the entire industry. We get poets going. We get lyricists going. We get the musicians going, our recording studios and the recording companies. All of these entities begin to take a very active interest, and that's indicative of the tremendous driving force of creativity we

have in this province, particularly so in the music industry.

Mr. Chairman, during five years in the late '80s and '90s I also had the privilege of chairing the Alberta Recording Industries Association, or ARIA as it's called, and I can tell you from my personal familiarity with several song contests in this province that we have an enormous amount of talent out there just anxiously waiting to take part in something official such as this bill, when it gets through, I hope will lead to. We are grateful to the contribution made by our creative community in this province, specifically the music writers and the lyricists and so on, and I say that having just recently experienced again the Prairie Music Alliance convention workshop weekend at the end of September, when we had literally hundreds of individuals come from all three provinces to our capital city of Edmonton and talk about the very important aspects of music, singing, and recording. That is what this bill is all about.

I would say that I do have a few concerns with respect to some of the time lines that are indicated in the bill, but I think they will be workable; at least I hope they will be.

So with that report of support from me personally and from me as the minister to whom this area will come, I will take my seat and say thank you once again and look for support from all members and from all Albertans interested in helping to promote our province through the medium of song. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. It has been an interesting process watching this. I think it's most notable because of the number of private members who have participated in the debate. I think that next to the debate about the dress tartan this is – perhaps the number of people that debated on this in fact surpassed that. I'm glad that it was such a good opportunity to give members of the side opposite a chance to get up and speak on the record. It's good practice for them, and I hope they will take that practice and now use it on some of the other bills that are available to be debated in the House.

3:00

A couple of questions that I had put to the sponsor of the bill that I've not yet heard an answer to. I'm still looking for those answers. In section 4, where the membership of the committee is being set out, the member has been very careful to give backup plans. It's very clear in here that if there are no members of the opposition who wish to participate on this committee or who are able to participate, then their places would be filled by government members. My question is: what if the reverse? The reverse has not been dealt with in here. So there's a bias in your assumptions that the opposition would not be willing to participate and therefore the plan is already in place that government would take that place, but not the reverse, that if government members are unable to participate, the mechanism is in there that opposition would take their place. It's a small thing, but it is one that I'm looking for an answer for.

My second issue that I raised in second reading of this bill was around participation of artists in this process. The point that I was making in second reading was that as much as we all love music, seemingly – everybody in here seems to love music – we are not all experts in it. My concern was that if we are going to put money into this project or put a lot of time and effort into it, we'd be looking for the best possible song. So I'm wondering why it is not specified in the bill that several of the other people that are going to be on the committee should be artists with an expertise in music, just to make sure that we don't end up choosing a song that is unsingable or lyrics

that don't really go with a composed piece of music or whatever. There are a number of things that can go wrong for us here, and I wonder why we don't have the specific mention of artists in the membership of the committee.

The other question that I had put forward was the recognition that royalties would have to be paid. There needs to be some sort of payment to the artist or artists who come up with the song, whether that's a lyricist and a composer or one person doing both. There needs to be payment in recognition of that, certainly if they are professionals and they do this as their living. But I think that if we're going to recognize that, then it should also be offered to an amateur if they are the writer of the successful song. I don't know if the member has researched the intellectual property laws that exist in Canada, but if we are going to take someone's creative work and use it for our purposes, there has to be a payment made. There is no discussion of where that would be coming from, who would be responsible for it, or in fact that the member recognizes that that needs to happen and needs to be incorporated there.

Something that the minister had raised – and I thank him for that – was in referring to this being a legacy project. I'm aware that the funding around legacy projects has been altered in that some of the funding has already gone out and cannot be clawed back. Recent announcements in the 2001-2002 budget were announced for legacy projects, and it has now been announced that they were clawed back or that they're not proceeding or the money would not be given out. So where is the stability in the funding for this project? Is it inside next year's budget? Can we get confirmation that it's there, or does the completion of this project also rest on the given price of a barrel of oil or something or another of gas? I don't know how you measure gas.

I think that's important, because if this is as important as the government members would lead me to believe, then we need to make sure that it's doable. The doability has to do with whether the funding is in fact in place there. If this is going to be called a legacy project, is the funding there? Is it predictable? Is it long-term? Is it enough to get the project done, in other words? We've been mute on that. I haven't heard anybody get up and recognize that and put it on the record. So I'd like to hear that question answered.

So those were the questions I'd raised the first time. I've listened, and I haven't had them answered, so I raise them again. I'm happy to offer my services as the opposition member on the committee, but I'm sure that there are others that will vie for that position. I think it's important that the committee be chosen not only for – how do I put this? – the show of who's on the committee but also for the ability of the people that are on the committee. You've got a minister in front of you there who's already spoken on the bill and professes to have a great deal of experience. Perhaps he's a good choice as one of your government members. But certainly if we're going to do this, can we please do it right? Can we please have the experts on the committee that are going to advise and give us the good choices?

When I spoke in second reading, I pointed out the number of skilled and talented people that we have in Alberta who have an amazing talent for being able to choose music that people will enjoy, people like Holger Petersen from Stony Plain records, Maureen Chambers from South Country Fair, and Terry Wickham from the Edmonton and the Calgary folk festivals. There are three names of people who have a great deal of experience in this field, who know how to look at a song and listen to it and go: yeah, that's singable; yes, it's playable by high school bands. There's a lot to be considered here. You can choose a beautiful sounding tune that a high school band can't play. If we really want this to be a song that is shared by all Albertans, it should be able to be played on a tin

whistle and right up to the Calgary Philharmonic and be enjoyable all the way through.

So those are the questions. I'm urging that if this idea is as important as it seems to be to the government, please do it right. Please show me that you have the funding there for it to be sustainable and that it won't be withdrawn halfway through. Please reassure me that there is an understanding that there is an obligation to pay the musicians that do this work. Maybe I should go off and do an amendment and bring it back so that section 4 clearly states that membership on the committee will include artists. Maybe it's enough if we have the member speaking to it on the record in the House, and we can combine that with what we see in the legislation, but I think it's important that it is clearly there if we're going to make it work. Otherwise, we can just have some pretty faces on the committee and we don't get anything from it, as nice as pretty faces are. I think if the member really wants to do it right, then do it right and get that expertise in there.

One last thing. Given that we are increasingly a group in Alberta who reflect a diversity of backgrounds, a diversity of ethnicity, a diversity of home countries that people came from either in this generation or past generations, I think it would be very interesting if we had music that incorporated and reflected that. Having said that, don't take my words on it. That could be very odd. That's why you need the artists on the committee.

So I'm glad that the members have had such a good time with this bill and have found it so entertaining and were able to get up and practise their speeches on it. That's delightful. I look forward to this bill passing with all of the meat and potatoes in it. [interjection] Well, it's a free vote, my friend. We're Liberals. So I am supporting this idea.

Thank you very much.

[The clauses of Bill 208 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

3:10

Bill 209 Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise today and present Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001, to the committee. As my colleagues in the Assembly know, Committee of the Whole is an important third step in a long process of passing legislation into law.

First reading of Bill 209 took place on May 9, just six months ago, Mr. Chairman. During the early stages of drafting this bill, I carefully considered whether bicycle helmet legislation should be for all age groups. Initially I consulted with many of my colleagues, whose sound advice I value. I received an extraordinary response from them. Many indicated that for a variety of reasons they would support bicycle helmet legislation if it covered children and youth

under the age of 18, and I believe that, that they would support it if it covered children and youth under the age of 18. They believed it was this age group that had the highest recreational use of bicycles, took far more risks when riding a bike, and had more potential years of life lost from a head injury than adults. From the input of my colleagues I determined that Bill 209 would be structured in the best interest of those under the age of 18.

With this in mind, Mr. Chairman, I then met with a legal representative from Parliamentary Counsel, Ms Shannon Dean, whose hand is at the heart of the creation of this bill. It was her patience and her ability to draft changes to the bill through several revisions that resulted in what I believe is a sound piece of legislation.

In essence, this bill offers protection from bicycle-related head injury to our young people through the use of a helmet. It is based on good, solid, up-to-date information, that was presented to the Legislature during second reading. During the summer I had the opportunity to discuss the proposed legislation on many occasions with countless people. They were medical professionals, educators, staff at Co-op, young people at the Boys and Girls Club. So many people took time to tell me that they support this bill as it is written, and rarely did anyone oppose it.

There are several sections within Bill 209 which I would like to bring to the attention of the committee and explain the reasons for their specific intent. Section 2 of this act will make it mandatory for all children and youth under the age of 18 to wear their helmet while riding a bike. I've chosen to encompass young people who are 17 and younger for a few key reasons. First, they are our future, and even brain injuries of the smallest proportions can have a lifetime effect on the child, which may have been prevented if he or she was properly wearing a helmet. The second reason I've chosen to make it for children and youth is because being a parent, I know how difficult it can be to have them follow rules. The protection of our children and youth is intrinsic to the belief that government will act to protect children who are unable to protect themselves. My third reason is to raise awareness about how serious brain injuries really are.

Mr. Chairman, it is my belief that those who do not support this bill do not realize how staggering the statistics are and their devastating effects. Whether they be physical, emotional, or economic, the effects are truly devastating.

Mr. Chairman, I've researched this issue extensively. A number of important groups have gathered in support of the creation of this sort of legislation. KIDSAFE Connection at the Stollery children's hospital, the brain injury association of Alberta, the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research, all of the health authorities in Alberta, the RCMP, St. John Ambulance, and the Edmonton and Calgary police services have all vocalized their strong support for mandatory bicycle helmets. I happen to trust their judgment because they work in the field.

The treatment of injuries is an immense cost to our health system and to society. With health costs escalating at an unprecedented rate, it makes good sense to support cost-effective strategies. Bike helmet legislation, coupled with community-based education, has clearly been shown to be one of the most effective means to reduce head and facial injuries.

Section (5) of the proposed act, which ensures that bike helmets conform to regulations, is written in that way because we know that in a one-year period in Alberta 6,430 emergency room visits were attributed to bicycle-related injuries. According to the available diagnostic groupings 373 resulted in intracranial injury, 18 resulted in skull fractures, and 51 in facial fractures. A further 3,415 resulted in open wounds, contusions, and superficial injuries, many of which involved the head and/or face, and sadly, Mr. Chairman, five

resulted in death. That's in a one-year period. You can see the importance of having a helmet which fits securely and meets certain specifications, which, as section (5) in the bill indicates, will be outlined in the regulations.

A number of scientific studies have shown that the use of approved bike helmets reduces brain injury by 85 percent and mid/upper facial smashes by 65 percent. In applying these results to Alberta figures, we could therefore project the prevention of 332 head injuries and 33 mid/upper facial smashes with the use of approved – and I stress the word “approved” – bicycle helmets in a one-year period. The efficacy of bike helmets is known to be high, and aside from the enormous costs related to treating head injury, prevention makes rational sense since it saves the cost of suffering.

Section 2 of this act is based on injury trends, best practice evidence and scientific support, consultation with injury prevention and trauma specialists, and public support as was indicated by our government's own discussion papers and a public provincial survey completed by KIDSAFE Connection.

Bicycle helmet legislation is an essential and positive role that we can take to reduce the significant public health problem of injury. Mr. Chairman, I happen to believe that all sections of Bill 209 are required despite advances in neurosurgical intervention, technology, intensive care treatment, and transportation of the injured. The reality is that improvements in the outcome of severe brain injuries have not advanced significantly over the past decade. The most promising to reduce the consequences of head injury is through primary prevention, which is preventing the injury in the first place. All sections of Bill 209 address secondary prevention, which is mitigating the results of the injury through bike helmets.

In Alberta our children and teens have the poorest bike helmet wearing rates when compared to other age groups, while recording a high number of bike-related injuries. They often cite peer non-use, non-use because nobody else wears them, as a rationale. Legislation supporting teens to wear helmets helps build social norms of use over time. A good example of this is the increased awareness of the perils of drinking and driving. More teens are choosing the designated driver option, and it has required the support of legislation, education, and public awareness over time to advance this social norm.

3:20

Mr. Chairman, section 149.1(1) through to subsection (5) recognizes that the rate of injuries for bicycles versus other recreational activities is higher for youth by 28 percent compared to adults at 18 percent. This is most likely due to the increased frequency of bike use by youth as compared to adults. Eighty-two percent of young people, compared to 75 percent of adults, admitted to a trauma centre for bike-related injury were reported not to have been wearing a helmet at the time of their injury.

Children and youth should be protected, as they have the most to lose in terms of potential years of life lost as a result of injuries, and caring for youth with debilitating injuries involves more direct and indirect costs over time than for adults.

Injuries to structures of the brain cannot be corrected through present medical technology, and the consequences are often disastrous. Study after study has shown that helmets of any type which meet CSA international standards, which is outlined in the bill, can prevent head injury from falls and crashes when worn properly.

I firmly believe that this bill will protect the lives of our children and youth from bicycle-related head and brain injury. I would ask that other members of the Legislature speak to Bill 209 in committee, and hopefully I can answer any questions that there are.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to speak on Bill 209, Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001. This bill raises a few concerns for me, Mr. Chairman. As I drive around my constituency, in particular in the city, I note a lot of habits of bicycle riders. It seems that they with immunity ride from the sidewalk to the street, whichever light is convenient, and even if the lights aren't convenient, many cyclers travel right through. They will follow you on the right-hand side of your car in the blind spot, where they can't see your signal light, and turn in.

The point I'm trying to make, Mr. Chairman, is that there seems to be a lack of enforcement on how cyclists operate right now, and I don't see anything in this bill that is going to create more enforcement. Indeed, it would make another rule for cyclers that would probably be hard to enforce if not impossible. Another thing: I don't see anything regarding penalties in here for noncompliance with this bill.

I'm concerned that this bill could even cause a false sense of security amongst riders.

Many of the proponents of this type of legislation cite the Australian study that was done some years ago. They state that there was a 51 percent reduction in the number of accidents the year following the institution of this legislation, but opponents of this type of legislation also cite the same study and claim that the ridership went down the same percentage. So if that's true, Mr. Chairman, then did the bill actually accomplish what it set out to do? If it reduced the number of riders, naturally the percentage of accidents would automatically be reduced as well. Perhaps we're not looking at this from all of the angles.

Another thing that concerns me is: where does the government stop taking personal responsibility away from individuals and start encouraging individuals to take responsibility for themselves and their own families? There's currently nothing that states that parents cannot go out and purchase a helmet and require their children to wear it. Surely the government does not have to tell parents how to raise their children. Perhaps we are dealing with the effects of a situation instead of the cause. Perhaps we should be getting back to the cause of things; that is, taking some personal responsibility for our actions.

I know the cost to the health care system can be increased through accidents. But in talking to some doctors in the past few years that have attended standing policy committee meetings – and I know we've had some on both sides of the question – and getting back to the false sense of security, I've had some doctors tell me that that indeed could happen, that children under 18 could think they're invincible just because they have a helmet on. I've been told by those same doctors that brain injuries are caused by the sudden impact of the brain hitting the inside of the skull, which could still happen even though you have a helmet on. So you may even take more risks with the helmet, which could cause greater cost to the health care system.

I just have those few comments and concerns I'd like to make about this, Mr. Chairman. I know the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross has done much more research than I on it, but these concerns that I've raised have not been addressed in the bill. I just don't think this is a bill that can properly be enforced or can cause any real changes to take place, and indeed it could even cause more problems.

With that, I'll take my seat and hope that other members would rise and also share some of their views on this particular piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say a few words in support of this bill. I think that protecting children is one of our most important principles in Alberta. Many parents are responsible and caring and will encourage their children to wear helmets. Some will have to force their children to wear helmets, and some will be very pleased to say: because it's the law. Some parents may not even realize how important helmets are, so I think it's important for us to reinforce the safety issue that goes along with wearing helmets.

I would like to quote from a letter that was written to the editor of the *Smoky Lake Signal*. It was written by Denise Matjushyk, who is the Lakeland injury control project team co-ordinator, and she sums up everything that I believe about this bill.

Dear readers,

The opportunity is here! Bill 209, a Bicycle Helmet Bill, passed second reading this spring and is now before the fall sitting of the Legislature . . . If passed, this bill makes helmets mandatory for cyclists under 18 years. Several more steps, including a third reading and a vote of support by MLAs, are required . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the committee has to rise and report before 3:30, so the chair will recognize the hon. Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Chairman, I would in fact move that we now rise and report progress on the two bills before us.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 208. The committee reports progress on Bill 209.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

THE CLERK ASSISTANT: Motions Other than Government Motions. Motion 509.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before I recognize any speakers, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two gentlemen visiting us today from northeastern Alberta, Mr. Darwin Ullery and Mr. Dennis Bergheim. Darwin Ullery is an agricultural fieldman in the county of Minburn, which is within the constituency of Vegreville-Viking, and is well known for being a cowboy extraordinaire. His skills in team roping won him over a dozen championships in the saddles at the amateur level in association finals, and since turning pro last year, he is currently ranked 13th in the Canadian rodeo association. Dennis Bergheim is the St.

Paul agricultural fieldman. He's also the past president of the Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen and serves on the provincial committee for Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture. Darwin Ullery and Dennis Bergheim are seated in the members' gallery today, and I would ask them if they would now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. Gentlemen.

3:30

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Private Health Care Contracts

509. Dr. Taft moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require regional health authorities to collect and publicly release information on private health care providers whom they contract with, including details regarding services provided, public funding received, and charges to individuals.

[Debate adjourned November 20: Dr. Taft speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Are there any speakers on the motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to support my colleague on Motion 509, the public release of information on private health care providers contracting with RHAs. I'm hoping that we're going to see members from the front bench of the government or private government members speak on this issue, because it should be one that they are at least somewhat interested in, and whether they support it or they don't support it, it would be good for them to put their comments on the record. In fact, what this motion does is encourage greater transparency by making public more information on private health care providers, which was one of our big concerns with the former Bill 11, and government members had a few things to say about that. We would like to hear what they have to say about this specific concern, because definitely part of the real issue with the private providers is transparency.

We have seen some of the regulations come forward on the former Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, that do make accommodation for the release of some information, Mr. Speaker, but it isn't going to be comprehensive enough, we don't think, to meet the kinds of needs that we're looking for.

The text of the motion itself reads:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to require regional health authorities to collect and publicly release information on private health care providers whom they contract with, including details regarding services provided, public funding received, and charges to individuals.

The public has a right to have this information, Mr. Speaker, on a service that is supposed to be universally accessible to people in this country. We believe that those regulations should have been included more extensively in Bill 11, and since they aren't, we're bringing forward this motion urging the government to do so. Particularly we'll be interested to see what the minister of health has to say. Certainly there's been some support in stakeholder groups for this kind of recommendation, and in fact there has been some support from the Auditor General of Alberta with regard to some of the comments he made around the control in keeping with new requirements for surgical service contracting.

We are particularly interested in the one he made where he talks about the performance standards and assessment criteria that should be very explicit, Mr. Speaker. Why does he say that? Because in his opinion it hasn't been the case, or he is concerned that it may not be the case. So what he recommended the government do, which I

hope they will be undertaking, is that they need "to establish the extent of required outcome expectations and performance measures for services in both private and public facilities." We've heard the government say often that private facilities come under different kinds of rules than public ones do, and it's a problem when they're providing health care. Even the Auditor General recommends that.

He talks about provincial performance standards not being "defined for inclusion in surgical facility contracts." Of course, the question to be asked, then, is: why weren't they? What has the government got to hide in this regard? Why is it that they're not forthcoming? How many other kinds of deficits in this regard are we going to be looking at in the future? So that is a problem.

He talks about the "absence of standards (e.g. for mortality rates, surgery complication rates, wait times, volume of service)" making "it difficult for the Minister to evaluate performance of insured services on a consistent and comparable basis." Not just the minister; what about Albertans? You'll want to know if a private service has difficulties in any of these areas or is underperforming in terms of what other services they're providing or when you compare them to public services. So it's a real problem.

I want to know if a private provider has a high mortality rate compared to other private providers or compared to the public service or compared to other facilities in Canada. That's a very big deal to me and to my family, and I'm sure it is to everyone in this province. So it's a minimum kind of a requirement that's being asked for, and this motion certainly starts to identify that.

The Auditor General goes on.

Ambiguity could be reduced by improving contract assessment criteria with the use of quantitative and quality requirements relating to such matters as performance expectations, standards of care, conflict of interest, best practise and support for expected public benefits including access and quality of care provided.

A simple statement, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly an area where we want less ambiguity rather than more ambiguity. It's certainly not the case in this particular area and something that needs to be talked about.

Why aren't there quantitative and quality requirements related to any of those expectations? This is an ongoing criticism that the Auditor General has with the way the government performs and particularly how it addresses benchmarking and performance indicators. Of course, they're carrying this style of delivery into this new bill, which addresses the private health care providers. Very serious stuff, very important to be addressed, and isn't being as far as we can see. Hence, the reason for the motion to be brought forward.

The Auditor General has quite a bit to say about the proposed changes, Mr. Speaker. All of them have at least some minimum kinds of implications for private health care suppliers and more than enough concerns for us to be worried about the way these services will be delivered in the future. We haven't heard the minister of health or the Premier or, in fact, anyone else talk about this. When we send services to the private sector, we have to remember that in a universally provided system the first and foremost responsibility of the government is to ensure that the public benefits from a universality perspective, from the perspective of being able to have minimum standards met, from the perspective of having the maximum standards met. This is what we should be able to expect from our health care system, and we're not seeing that being met even in terms of the very least of the concerns here, which is the private health care providers and the details regarding the services provided. So that's why it's very important for us to see that these changes be met.

I know that the health care minister will say that there are lots of regulations in this new bill, but there aren't a lot. There are a few.

They do require that private health care providers must provide information on ownership of the surgical facility to the minister, and the minister is then required by regulation to publish the information. However, how it is published and where it is published is up to the minister. So that's an issue. Plus the minister is allowed to omit certain details if releasing the information could be considered a threat to the safety of a person, so you have to define "threat to the safety of a person" there. I think the filters we would use to make those determining criteria are quite different than what we have seen this government use in the past. So that's certainly an issue for us.

3:40

Under this act the R.A. is required to

- (a) make the agreement available to the public for inspection . . . and
- (b) publish the following information . . .
 - (i) the name and address of the owner and operator of the . . . facility;
 - (ii) the insured surgical services to be provided under the agreement;
 - (iii) the term of the agreement;
 - (iv) the amount or the estimated amount to be paid by the [R.A. for] facility services
 - (v) a description of the performance expectations and . . . performance measures . . . under the agreement.

Not bad in as far as it goes, but it certainly doesn't go far enough.

For one thing, the form and manner of the information to be provided is up to the minister. We see examples all the time of this government providing one-line information. Whether it's requesting billions of dollars in supplementary estimates or it's information in situations like this, the very, very minimum kind of level of requirement is met and not anything close to average or to industry standards or to what we think would be reasonable in this kind of a circumstance. Not at all what we think is adequate information in this case given the kinds of precedents that this government operates on, not the least of which is the most recent request for supplementary supply estimates.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we saw the announcing of the approval of the contracts under the Health Care Protection Act. Back in September of 2000 the minister released a list of reasons for approving contracts and the associated costs and what kinds of services we were going to see provided by that. The minister stated, and I quote: Albertans will now know what agreements have been made, how much they cost, and what is being provided. That part is good, but the problem is that's all the information they're going to get, certainly not enough information to make informed choices on and certainly not enough to make healthy choices on, we would argue. So our position would look for more information, more detail.

We agree with the health minister when he said that Albertans are interested in public contracts with private facilities, but the provisions under the Health Care Protection Act and its regulations do not go far enough in providing Albertans with information on these contracts. We've seen those issues arise many times in this Legislature in question period and throughout a series of debates and quite extensively raised in the media, in editorial reports, and through media contact with people in the community who have concerns in this area, and definitely not enough information is being reported. We think that greater transparency in reporting will contribute to an open and transparent government, something that we've been asking for a long time, something which this government says it provides but which isn't really true.

If you look at the process the government goes through, they have a real problem with understanding what the role of the government is and what the role of the Legislature is, and there's a big differ-

ence. It's not open and transparent when information is supplied to government members who take it to caucus, who take it to standing policy committees that are not all-party committees, who take it to their executive committees for decisions to be made, and then roll back through the departments, and the decisions are made without any input from any of the opposition. They have a responsibility to share that information with the general public. That is why other jurisdictions have things like all-party committees, so that the Legislature can support and integrate into the process of decision-making.

It's not fun for the government often when the opposition gets involved in decision-making, because it takes a lot longer. No two ways about that. It's a little messier. Ministers and the Premier are challenged on issues. New ideas are brought forward. Amendments are brought forward. They can be hotly debated. Information can be requested to go out to stakeholder groups and then brought in, but that is democracy, Mr. Speaker, and that is the process which all of us here in this room signed on for when we decided to run. That this government runs differently from that is in part a reflection of how long they've been in power and the size of their majority, but it isn't in fact a part of the process of the Westminster parliamentary system, which is the system that our system is based on. That system has a lot more input and does contribute to way more openness and transparency, something that we don't see in this government.

If you're not going to have the openness and the transparency at the beginning of the process, Mr. Speaker, then you must put it in somewhere along the process. The most natural place for it to be inserted would be on the regulations side, and that's why we ask for more detail in that regard. That is not usually forthcoming from this government, probably defeated in this particular motion, but important to request, important to speak on behalf of, and important to demand from a democratic perspective. So that's why we're here and supporting this particular message. The public has a right to have more knowledge, in fact a complete body of knowledge on this particular issue – on many others but in particular on this issue – and they need that information to assess the government's involvement with private health care providers. It's a very important point to bring forward, that we need that information. It's not good enough for the government to say: "Don't worry. It's going to be fine. We'll take care of it all." We've seen them say that often. We've seen them say that to their own backbenchers, and there have been some issues on it.

With that, I think I've got colleagues who want to respond to this, so I'll leave my comments at that. I wish there was more time available for motions, Mr. Speaker, but there isn't, so I'll take my seat at this time.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join in the debate today and bring some common sense to the discussion surrounding Motion 509. This is the motion that would urge the government to require regional health authorities to collect and publicly publish data regarding contracts with health service providers.

Now, I must say that although I am sure the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is very well intentioned in putting forward this motion, the facts are that the motion he is putting forward is actually unnecessary, it is moot, and it's because all that he is asking for that could or should prudently be done in this regard is already being done. All health contracts with providers are already being published and provide specifically detailed additional information on individual treatments being received. Opening up this level of detail

to the general public of what treatment individuals received is not only unnecessary, but indeed it could compromise the very privacy of Albertans who are seeking medical treatment.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important to scrutinize the contracts signed by RHAS in a public forum. No one here would dispute that. We are, after all, dealing with very important taxpayer dollars here. It must be ensured that these contracts are fulfilling an expressed need of the public and that the delivery of services is at least as cost-effective as would be provided by a hospital.

Now, I am sure that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, as a high-profile critic on health care in this province, must already be aware that this is one of the requirements under the Health Care Protection Act, which continues to provide excellent guidance for the regional health authorities throughout the province. Any and all contracts signed by the regional health authorities are already being provided in full and are accessible during business hours at all R.A. offices. Not only is this the law, but I am pleased to report that the RHAS are absolutely following both the letter and the spirit of the law in a manner that makes sure they do not violate the privacy of individual Albertans.

Now, it's unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that the motion did not stop just with the publication of contracts. Instead, the motion requests details, details that I worry could not be released without violating the privacy of Albertans and which would also possibly, if not probably, infringe upon the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, another law which this government is also very concerned with and diligently aspires to meet and exceed all expectations on as well. I am concerned that this motion, if carried through by this government, would make available for any dubious purpose the records of any private clinical procedure performed on any individual Albertans. Some of these clinical procedures are of a highly personal nature, as one might expect, and surely the motion cannot actually be endorsing that these records be made public. But right there in plain English – in plain English – it states, "Including details regarding services provided, public funding received, and charges to individuals."

3:50

Private facilities constitute only a very small fraction of the health care system in Alberta, but they certainly have been targeted for an inordinate, disproportionate, indeed overzealous amount of controversy. So it is necessary and, indeed, incumbent upon us to ensure that they not only meet but vastly exceed the amount of scrutiny required of others such that the province is absolutely assured of quality and effective service, particularly when these clinics are hired to perform publicly insured services. Not only must the contract be efficient and cost-effective, but the Health Care Protection Act also requires that there be no negative impacts to the publicly administered system as a result of contracts proposed by the R.A. If any contracts determined to have the potential to negatively affect publicly administered hospitals are identified and if there is not a net benefit to the regional health authority, then the health authority is obligated by the act to terminate that contract.

The quality assurances that must be provided by contracted facilities are comprehensive and strict. The facility must meet a very high standard of quality care at least as well as a public facility and still demonstrate significant cost-effectiveness on top of that. All of these contracts are scrutinized heavily by the Department of Health and Wellness, which is one of many checks for effectiveness and accountability. The other checks are made by way of the R.A. board members themselves, comprised of responsible community leaders that commit their time to guide the formation of health policy of the region. Of course, many in the public are also watching very closely.

Through a variety of accountability mechanisms, contracts for the RHAS are fairly awarded based upon the very best possible outcome for the overall health of citizens in that region. If a contract in an R.A. is not adding to the benefit of a region or there are better alternatives through the public system or another private health care provider, the contract will be terminated for the better option.

[The Speaker in the chair]

These provisions are part of the regulations of the Health Care Protection Act, and they're monitored directly by the minister, whose job it is to ensure the efficient provision of health services throughout the province. This is done by requiring frequent updates to the health proposals and business plans of all 17 RHAS in the province. Ongoing performance measures for every contract are monitored, and if a contract is failing to live up to the required standard, by law it must be terminated. Additionally, there must be a reason why the private sector is more able to provide effective service. This statement is made by the minister and is available to the public from the R.A. office that co-ordinates the contract. Additionally, every last detail of the contract is made available under section 19 of the Health Care Protection Act. A comprehensive list of all contracts must be made available to the public during regular business hours at each and every R.A. office pursuant to the act.

This is a very perplexing circumstance I find myself in, Mr. Speaker, because although I support the intent of any motion intended to ensure accountability, this motion I think is quite adequately already being done. While I agree that releasing details of health service provision to the public is of vital importance, this provision is already thoroughly provided for by legislation, namely the Health Care Protection Act. In fact, the Health Care Protection Act goes much further than the extent of Motion 509 in the accountability of regional health authorities to the public.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's concerns and the goal that would be accomplished by Motion 509. The motion would urge the government to require RHAS to be open and accountable in their provision of health services. Well, there is already a great deal of openness and accountability that encompasses the member's motion. Not only do the contractual arrangements between RHAS and private health care providers have to be published, but the very reason for the contractual arrangement must also be made public. In addition to this, performance measurements and the expectations of the health authority relative to the contract are also made public. All of these records are obtainable at any Alberta regional health authority office in the province, all in accordance with the Health Care Protection Act regulations.

Perhaps it is the motion's intent that these records are published through an alternate mechanism other than the current posting at every R.A. office. Maybe that's what was intended. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital health authority are already publishing all of their private contracts on the Internet as well as making them available in the office. These contracts constitute the vast majority of all private contracts throughout the province, so they're a step ahead of the requirements already. I believe that this should more than satisfy the intent of Motion 509 as well.

Just so the members of the Assembly are able to verify for themselves what I have said, they can visit the Calgary regional health authority on the worldwide web and perform a search for contract. Every contract is there, supplied in full. Finding contracts on the Capital health authority web site is slightly more complicated. You have to look under reports and publications, under the topics area, but it is also there nonetheless, although it is not required by

law to be published on the Internet either. Although publishing contracts on the worldwide web is not obligatory under the Health Care Protection Act, these documents are intended for public release. They have been released, and the RHAS apparently felt they may as well go even one step further and also post it on the Internet. I could not agree more. These resources are valuable both for the purpose of accountability and to let the public know about the services their health region has to offer. The larger health authorities are able to do this because of their size. Some smaller health authorities post a listing of all private contracts at their main offices because they have to budget their communications a little more conservatively, or perhaps they see no need because their region is less connected to the Internet. In any event, these records are available by several methods.

So while I support the intention of Motion 509, I really must say that it's only highlighting the good work this government has already done. Each contract is available in full from all the regional health authorities, detailing the charges for contracted service and the number of procedures performed under contract on an annual basis. The contracts detail how records are to be used and maintained and to what degree these records can and cannot be used for financial reporting and accountability purposes. All reporting must comply with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which is extremely strict in the protection of patient information.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview brought up this important issue. I'm a strong believer in accountability in the delivery of services to Albertans, and this debate allows me to discuss our safeguards and stringent requirements for financial and quality assurance from regional health authorities and the contracted facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the Health Care Protection Act expressly prohibits a regional health authority from engaging in contract for services that are better provided by the publicly administered health care system. Also, the contract must be made public, must be demonstrated as cost-effective, and even go further to demonstrate that there will be no harm to the publicly administered services in the contracting region or in any other region. These regulations are a clear demonstration that Alberta takes very seriously the efficient, reasoned, and highest possible quality provision of health services. I fully support this quality assurance because properly administered health care will eventually prolong the length and quality of life for all Albertans. The Health Care Protection Act has ensured that private health care will not interfere with the provision of public services and that there are sufficient safeguards for individuals seeking either elective or necessary procedures from private clinics.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would simply like to say that there is enough regulation upon RHAS and private contractors to sufficiently safeguard the public interest. To intrude into the sphere of private health care provision in this way would provide inefficiencies, annoyances, redundancy, and possible violation of personal and professional privacy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was listening with great interest to the remarks from the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. However, all said, one has to recognize that the Health Care Protection Act, Bill 11, allows for increased contracting out by regional health authorities to the private health care providers. There's no doubt about this. While the act and regulations may make some accommodation for information on the operations of the private provider to be made public, it does not go far enough.

4:00

Now, with the motion that's presented by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, it was mentioned certainly that charges to individuals be released but not necessarily the names of those individuals, the patients involved. I'm going to get into why that is so important further in my remarks.

The health care protection regulations do specify that the private health care operator provide a report to the regional health authority, that there's a monthly report regarding inpatient and outpatient information. The regulations also require that the private health care provider must provide information on ownership of that surgical facility to the minister. The minister is also required by regulation to publish this information. However – this is important, and I would remind all hon. members – how it is published and where is entirely up to the discretion of the minister. That's at the discretion of the minister. Plus, the minister is also allowed, some would advocate, some people who were on the steps of the Legislative Assembly during the Bill 11 debate . . . [interjections] Yes, hon. members can remember them.

The minister is allowed to omit certain details if releasing the information could be considered a threat to the safety of the person. Well, fair enough. Now, that's in the regulations, but under the act the regional health authorities are required to make the agreement available to the public for inspection and publish only the following information: name and address of the owner and operator of the facility, the insured surgical service or services to be provided under that agreement, the term of the agreement, the established amount to be paid by the health authority for facility services, and the description of the performance measures and expectations for the agreement.

Now, we were talking about performance measures earlier with the last hon. member. However, when we look at the Auditor General's report, with all due respect to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie and her remarks, I believe it wasn't perfectly clear, obviously, to hon. members of this Assembly just what the Auditor General had to say. I'm going to quote. In this case, this is the Department of Health and Wellness, and this is in regards to performance standards and assessment criteria.

The Department needed to establish the extent of required outcome expectations and performance measures for services in both private and public facilities. Provincial performance standards were not defined for inclusion in surgical facilities contracts. Absence of standards (e.g. for mortality rates, surgery complication rates, wait times, volume of service) makes it difficult for the Minister to evaluate performance of insured services on a consistent and comparable basis.

It goes on to talk about – the quote is too long here, Mr. Speaker, but the Auditor General is perfectly clear.

In light of the remarks from the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, we all should support this motion because it is going to improve a system that is in need of improvement. On the accountability and transparency of our health system in this province, whenever citizens have concerns, they are justified. There are examples here of health authorities going through half the fiscal year before there's a set budget, yet an improvement such as Motion 509, an improvement in how health care providers are going to have their contracts with the regional health authorities, is dismissed. With section 16 of the FOIP Act I would have to question the hon. member as to how this could not work to protect the privacy of individuals that were looking at receiving treatment in a private facility. Now, we only have to look at our past here to see just why greater transparency in reporting will contribute to open and transparent government, since it will provide the public with a more complete body of knowledge

to assess the government's involvement with private health care providers.

Now, I would refer to a letter. This is in the past, granted, but these are some of the problems that have been dealt with. This is a letter dated the 23rd of November two years ago from the regional clinical department head to the president and CEO of the Calgary regional health authority at the time, Mr. Jack Davis. There are a lot of expressions of concern here, but one thing that is stated in this letter is that "private facilities are accountable mostly to the Alberta College for certification." Now, this is two years ago, granted, but it's also noted here that "patients are unfairly taken advantage of through enhanced service charges." It's also noted in here that "if you contract out, you must either send cases out and do more inpatient procedures to alleviate the wait list of other services or contract out and close inpatient facilities." Should this not in itself be a red flag and say to all hon. members of this Assembly that Motion 509 is another check to balance the system?

It goes on to say here in this correspondence: "Will we see patients charged for an enhanced hip prosthesis without scientific data to back it up because of entrepreneurial marketing skills?" Is this sort of salesmanship going to be listed in the criteria that are given in a summary of approved contracts? Now, we're going to look at ophthalmology here. This is the rationale of the minister's approval of contracts under the Health Care Protection Act, and you can list them off here. I believe the words that were used to describe this motion were "unnecessary" and "moot." Mr. Speaker, here you have in excess of \$5 million in contracts from the Calgary regional health authority. Some of these contracts: the Gimbel Eye Centre, Holy Cross Surgical Services, the Mitchell Eye Centre, the Rocky Mountain Surgery Centre, and Surgical Centres Inc. These contracts, as I understand it, have been renewed.

Now we come to the Capital health authority. We've got to realize that the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital health authority are about the same size with the same size budgets, and the population is relatively the same. Here there was roughly a little better than \$1 million, Mr. Speaker, given out in approved contracts, so that's about 20 percent of what is done in the Calgary regional health authority. When you look at some of the concerns that are expressed, how are these concerns expressed? Well, they are expressed quite well, in my view, in correspondence dated October 1, 2000, and this again is to the hon. minister of health. It goes on here. This is quite a long piece of correspondence. Again, concerns expressed here are that

the Private Contract scheme is now forcing us to consider our entrepreneurial abilities in setting up a private facility and negotiating a contract for surgery. These are skills which are not imparted to us in Residency training or the Hippocratic Oath. I encourage you to consider carefully all implications of the Private Surgery Scenario.

Now, that is only one concern.

4:10

Another concern expressed is that

the current cost allotment of \$515 per cataract to private facilities allows significant profit taking by parties with vested private interest. Through the Regional Eye Care Center the average running cost per case is approximately \$150 per case for instrumentation and equipment plus \$200 per case for an Intraocular Lens Implant.

Now, I'm curious. Are these costs that we have the same in Calgary as they are in Edmonton?

MS BLAKEMAN: We don't know. We don't have the details.

MR. MacDONALD: We don't have the details, so how are we to know unless we pass Motion 509 as articulated by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview?

Also in this correspondence is this concern, and it is stated in this way, Mr. Speaker.

It is both unfortunate and telling that the renewal of private contracts for cataract surgery in Capital Health Region 10 is announced only 1 day after Bill 11 is legislated . . . This ministry's mandate to legitimize for-profit private enterprise in the field of Ophthalmic Surgery is an insult to the Royal Alexandra Regional Eye Care Center which has only in recent years been developed as a Premiere Program to the tune of 3.1 million dollars of public funding.

Now, in light of that concern in the correspondence dated October 1, 2000, I don't know how this Assembly could not support this motion. We will have, I believe, a sounder health care system. There will be more accountability.

There are additional recommendations in the Auditor General's annual report that I think have to come to the attention and hopefully the interest of all members of this Assembly. Recommendation 18, contracting for services, states quite simply: "We recommend the Department of Health and Wellness assess reliance on contracted services and improve the control over contracting activity." This is exactly what the Member for Edmonton-Riverview wants to do through Motion 509.

This is another recommendation, unnumbered. I guess there were so many recommendations for the Ministry of Health and Wellness. I'm going to refer to this one as A, approving surgical service contracts. The Auditor General suggests or recommends that "the Department of Health and Wellness improve the process for approving surgical service contracts issued by health authorities." Health authorities would include, I'm sure, the Calgary regional health authority, which would encompass the entire constituency of Calgary-Currie.

Now, another unnumbered recommendation from the Auditor General, recommendation B.

We recommend the Department of Health and Wellness, in collaboration with health authorities, assess the benefits and risks of the approach to information systems management in the health system and clarify the accountability [the A word] of the chief information officer for health.

Now, there are more recommendations here: recommendation 19, reporting financial results. Financial results would be taxpayers' money; that's the source of the finances here.

We again recommend the Department of Health and Wellness improve the reporting of financial results in the Ministry and Department financial statements.

Recommendation 20, surgical service contracting – conflict of interest:

We recommend the Calgary Health Region and the Capital Health Authority enhance their conflict-of-interest processes:

- by extending private interest disclosure requirements to senior management who are in a position to influence contract decisions, and
- by using an independent third-party review, as part of a formalized appeal mechanism, when employees operate private practices or clinics that contract with their employers.

It goes on to say that "this recommendation should apply" not only to the Calgary and Capital health authorities but "to all regional health authorities."

Now, in light of that alone, that recommendation 20 from the Auditor General is proof enough that each and every member of this Assembly should support the motion by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. We can have a better province.

MR. MASON: I'm sure they will.

MR. MacDONALD: The Member for Edmonton-Highlands is confident that this motion will pass the Assembly.

However, Mr. Speaker, an unnumbered recommendation again: Surgical service contracting – performance measures.

MS BLAKEMAN: That would be details.

MR. MacDONALD: That would be details.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put the question with respect to the motion under consideration.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:17 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Pannu
Carlson	Mason	

Against the motion:

Abbott	Haley	McClellan
Ady	Horner	McClelland
Boutilier	Jablonski	Nelson
Broda	Johnson	O'Neill
Calahasen	Klapstein	Shariff
Cenaiko	Knight	Snelgrove
Danyluk	Lord	Stelmach
DeLong	Lougheed	Strang
Doerksen	Lukaszuk	Tannas
Dunford	Lund	VanderBurg
Friedel	Mar	Vandermeer
Goudreau	Marz	Yankowsky
Graham	Maskell	Zwozdesky
Graydon		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 40
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 509 lost]

4:30

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

Bill 28
Agricultural Operation Practices
Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are considering amendment A5.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition's amendment, as I recall.

AN HON. MEMBER: Which he tried to withdraw.

MR. MASON: Yes, and I wanted to just raise the issue because my interpretation was quite a bit different than that given by the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. It was clear to me that the approval officer in this case need not necessarily provide notification to interested parties, and I can't see how an interpretation could be made that it's one or the other. Even with the hon. Official Opposition leader's amendment, it is not a question of either they must do it one way or require the applicant to do it. That is why I didn't want to have the motion withdrawn, because I felt that the Leader of the Official Opposition was missing a point there and I wanted to bring it to his attention. So I don't know if anyone from the Official Opposition wants to address this question further.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Seeing nobody wanting to speak, the question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Minister of Finance for some reason thinks that I don't want to talk about this bill, but there's still lots to be said about this. I'm very happy to speak to the bill, and I would encourage the Minister of Finance, who's a little chippy this afternoon, to get involved in the debate as well.

Mr. Chairman, this is one of those bills that we have some concerns about. In principle I like this bill a lot because it moves us forward on some of the issues that really needed to be addressed, particularly on environmental concerns. But when we look at the specific detail of the bill, we see that there are many, many concerns out there in the community with this kind of a bill, not the least of which is whether or not we should be setting up a program or an agenda in this province that will encourage continued or increased use of intensive livestock operations.

Recently I had a chat with some people who work on the municipal side of issues, and they were very concerned about this bill, Mr. Chairman. What they said was that their first issue with the bill was with the splitting of responsibility for who's going to be making the decisions here. They felt that the hybrid that we were looking at, in terms of municipalities having some form of input and control over what was happening and then the NRCB actually administering the registration and authorization and approval processes, wouldn't work. They felt that either the municipalities had to have the control and decision-making powers or the NRCB had to have the control and decision-making powers. They felt that what would happen – which is actually what the minister told us would not happen, so this is interesting to talk about – is that with the way the regulations would be interpreted, municipalities would have next to no control and the NRCB would have very far-reaching responsibilities.

If that's the case, if that's how this bill is going to be interpreted, then I do have some serious concerns, because as I read it, the NRCB only has the ability to make decisions based on environmental criteria. Based on that, there will be few spots in this province where you can't put an intensive livestock operation in, and with the NRCB not having any criteria or capacity to make decisions by incorporating a cumulative impact assessment on the areas in terms of a provincewide assessment, then we're setting ourselves up for some huge potential problems. Not the least of those are things like groundwater contamination, as we saw the world-renowned David Schindler respond to on or around November 20. So those are some serious concerns for me.

We still have increasing concern about the kinds of changes that municipalities can make to land zoning use in terms of being able to zone out these kinds of applications if they want to. The people I talked to, who have worked in the municipal area for a long time and have been closely studying this bill, had some very grave concerns about that. They said that they did not believe that kind of thing would ever be allowed to happen, that people wouldn't be able to zone out these kinds of operations if they wanted to.

I still haven't heard any comments or concerns about how the government is going to address any of the heavy metal issues. Even if we could take care of the air and the water issues, we can't get rid of the heavy metals. There's no place to put them, Mr. Chairman, so that's an issue that still needs to be addressed.

I did receive e-mails from Barry and Lana Love, one from each of them, on this issue, and I'm sure that the minister of agriculture has also received them. They have some concerns that I haven't heard specifically brought up, so I'll take a moment to just paraphrase what they talked about. They're grain farmers, and they own about 1,200 acres of land. They're very concerned about the ILOs potentially moving next door to them. They reference other provinces and other states where there has been intensive livestock production brought into the regions and that there are a number of dangers, not the least of which are lower property values because resale is tougher to do if you're a neighbour to an intensive livestock operator. I think that has been proven to be true in some cases.

They live in the Flagstaff county area, and they've seen all kinds of issues about sitings within the municipalities. Given that, they still feel that ILO sitings should remain in the hands of the county or the municipality involved. They think that even though communities are often torn apart, it is more important for those closest to the decision-making process to be the ones who have the freedom to speak out and the freedom to decide who their neighbours are going to be. So that's part of his comments here.

They think that the province should be able to "come up with definite scientifically calculated regulations to help Counties make unbiased decisions." This is in fact what we had asked for, provincewide regulations, when we first started talking about this issue. They feel that MLAs, that all of us here in this Legislature should investigate the damage and controversy caused by the possibility of ILOs in our own constituency.

4:40

They say that they've paid a high price for being so outspoken, that there have been a lot of things happen to them and their family, but they felt that it was worth while to continue to pursue these issues. Their point of view – this is Barry Love from Hardisty that I am specifically referencing – is that they should say no to the proposal to remove the local people from any decision-making regarding the siting of ILOs.

Now, Lana Love talks about the process itself. She says that people need to reconsider what she calls a "catastrophic decision," that they've been present at and sat through a couple of the committee meetings that went provincewide, read the reports resulting from the meetings, and were concerned about where the decisions came from. She states that "when 72 of the oral presenters wanted the land use issue left in the hands of the Municipalities and only 4 thought the Provincial Government should take it over," she was very concerned about the outcome. She feels that taxpayers' money and time was wasted because the decision had already been made. She goes on to say that the province should not be taking over all the responsibilities, and she feels that the minister of agriculture should have checked with other agriculture ministers for their opinions. That would have pointed out that there were problems caused by ILOs in all provinces.

There are concerns about the Natural Resources Conservation

Board, that they will be able to actually ease the fears about the safety of the environment. She feels that the government "is outwardly promoting ILOs in Alberta [and] cannot possibly pass on any unbiased information." So I think that's an interesting point.

Water quality is an issue for her. Water quantity is also an issue, this having been a dry year. We've had a few dry years. Water supplies are drying up. They reference Bellshill Lake, Mr. Chairman, which is a lake we have talked about in this Legislature, as being the perfect example of how this government has failed the people of this province. There is a fecal coliform count in the lake of 48, which is unbelievably high. In fact, the lake looks more like chocolate pudding than it does lake water. They're concerned that . . . [interjections] Well, it's quite disgusting. You have no idea. Even the ducks and geese don't go there. Nothing lives there. [interjection] Well, it's I think a reasonable comparison.

So the concerns about that lake have been there for a long time. It's called a lake, but really it's like a slough. The concern about that is that the contaminants of course are leeching into the ground-water and getting into the lake, so that's a real problem. We've been repeatedly told that this is a slough, not a lake, and that it should be okay, but I think that that is not a reasonable answer. We may come back to that issue again at another time.

She goes on to voice more concerns about this. This is a pretty good cross-reference, examples of the kinds of concerns that we've heard out there. You know, it's a tough bill for me because environmentally this bill will encompass – I agree with the minister when she says the best standards in Canada on the environmental side from a site-by-site location basis, but it doesn't address the overall problems, the cumulative impact. There's a lot of unease in the community about the lack of input and decision-making the municipalities will in reality have when this bill goes through in terms of siting issues.

I know that my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview is very much looking forward to having his turn to speak on this bill, because he's spent some serious time talking to farmers throughout the province in the last week or so on these issues. [interjection] That's right; he did. A lot of these farmers in the past have been government supporters, yet they don't really trust this piece of legislation to do exactly what the government says it's going to do.

So this is one that at the end of the day I'll have to support on some level, but, you know, it's really a hold your nose kind of bill, Mr. Chairman, literally a hold your nose kind of bill because of the little bit of good and a lot of concerns about the rest of it.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're fast-tracking it through.

MS CARLSON: They're fast-tracking it; that's true.

Part of the problem is that we've been talking about this issue for at least 10 years. I've personally been talking about it for five years for sure. I know that my colleagues in this Legislature have been talking about it for longer than that. Did we need something? Yes. Is this the full answer? This government never gets it right the first time around, Mr. Chairman. I'm sure we're going to be back here with amendments and changes and adjustments. I hope that those amendments, changes, and adjustments will improve the legislation down the road. Sometimes it works for this government, and sometimes it doesn't.

So I think with that I will conclude my remarks at the committee stage. [interjections] Of course, if you liked it so much, perhaps I have a few more things I could say and take up my full 20 minutes, because there are a lot of outstanding issues. The more I talk about it, the more concerned I get about this particular piece of legislation, Mr. Chairman. I haven't had my questions satisfactorily answered

on the impact on the soil of the existing ILOs, never mind any new ones. We've got lots of nitrogen losses that need to be taken care of. Contaminated groundwater is potentially an issue. Surface water, when we talk about some of these sloughs in the area, we know is a problem. In areas where you get flooding conditions, the runoff can be huge, human health, the parasites that can result from that. Interestingly enough, there seem to be increasing concerns about those kinds of infections particularly in southeast Alberta, which has, as we know, the highest concentration of intensive livestock operators now.

I think that in general when you take a look at this from a global perspective, with proper manure management and storage threats to land, water, and human health can be eliminated. That includes deep injection of manure to prevent runoff. We've seen that this doesn't eliminate the heavy metal issues, it doesn't eliminate the human error issues, and it doesn't eliminate the poor management practices of some operators.

Now, I know that the minister had talked about this bill giving them greater ability to address issues with operators who pursue poor management practices. We certainly look forward to seeing tougher enforcement and penalties and perhaps the closing down of those kinds of operators and are happy to hear that the minister is quite interested in pursuing that. That's all good news. So if this bill will help in that regard, that's another piece that would be good about this bill.

We've seen quite a few issues. When there are this many concerns in a bill, Mr. Chairman, it's tough to support it. There's no doubt that it's tough to support. So I guess we'll hear what the rest of the people have to say at committee and at third reading and see what kind of support this bill has in the Legislature.

Thank you.

4:50

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to offer a couple of comments to the hon. member, who has expressed some interest and some support, albeit conditional, in some areas for parts of this bill. I think the recognition on all sides of the House is that this is a matter that we do have to deal with, that the concerns that could be here today or in the future of the effects on our soil, air, and water quality must be addressed and monitored. Certainly I have had the opportunity to pass on to the members the very much a work-in-progress draft regulations, which to a large extent deal with the issue around manure management, where a lot of those concerns are.

Certainly to this point we have concentrated more on nitrogen and its effect within the soil, but we are doing some work in the area of phosphorus. As I've indicated, we have 23 sites that we monitor constantly for water quality, but it is important that we continue to work in these areas and use the best science we have for manure management.

There's some excellent work happening at the University of Alberta in composting, in phosphorus. Certainly the agricultural industry itself has been very aggressive in finding new technologies and new ways to manage this, projects that use microbes to change the makeup of the effluent so that it can be all used by plants rather than some of it leeching into the soil. Many of those things are there today.

It's interesting that while it would almost seem onerous on the agricultural industry when you look at the extent and the, I think, very tough regulations that are around manure management, whether it's on minimum distance spacing, whether it's on level of effluent spread, many of those areas, we still have the total support of the feeder association, of the Alberta Cattle Commission, of the feather industry, of the dairy industry, and of the hog and pork industry in

this province. I think that speaks to the industry's commitment to continue to develop in a very responsible way.

As I've indicated in the House many times, it is in their best interests to protect the quality of their soil and water. They drink the water. They use and depend on the soil for their livelihood, and of course they are the ones who are in the air 100 percent of the time, not just driving by. So they want to ensure that this industry grows and develops in an environmentally responsible way. I think that this bill will lay out clear rules that all can understand, and when they make their investments, they will understand the rules that they must play under.

So with those few comments I will commit to the hon. member, as I have always, that if there are questions that are detailed that we can't maybe take the time for in the House, she will receive a written response.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move an amendment, and I will provide that for you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, can you just wait for a second for us to receive the amendment, please?

The amendment that's being proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands we shall refer to as amendment A6. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, you may proceed.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Would you like me to read out the amendment?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please.

MR. MASON: All right. I move that Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be amended as follows. Section 5 is amended in the proposed section 5(1) by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following.

(b) appoint 3 persons as an agricultural practice review committee in the following manner:

- (i) at least one appointee must have experience in the type of farming operation to which the application or referral relates, and
- (ii) at least one other appointee must be recommended by the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

Mr. Chairman, I'd just like to speak to this. I think it's fine that a body that is responsible for the resolution of disputes ought to include people who are experienced in the form of farming that is under consideration, but I also believe that it's important that we not restrict or limit the membership on these committees to those that are strictly involved in the industry. I believe that to do so may well create a certain type of bias. It won't be a bias in terms of the acceptable practices in the industry, but it will be a bias in favour of that particular type of industry as opposed to other considerations which it might be asked to consider. I believe that it is appropriate that people who have some other experience – that is to say, some experience in representing people in the rural community – or who have a strong community background in the particular municipal district or county ought to be included. So I think it is important that we amend this.

If you look at the sections of the act:

- 8(1) A practice review committee, when acting as a mediator, may assist the parties in reaching their own mutually acceptable settle-

ment by structuring negotiations, facilitating communication and identifying the issues and interests of the parties.

(2) . . . may inquire into and assist the parties in resolving the dispute and, if the matter is not resolved, may recommend to the Minister what should constitute a generally accepted agricultural practice in respect of that agricultural operation.

So it's clear, Mr. Chairman, that these practice review committees are not just strictly dealing with the best possible agricultural practice but are in fact dealing with the impact that practice or that operation has on surrounding communities.

It seems very apparent to me that there's a lack of balance on the committee as the legislation is currently proposed, and we believe that the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties is well suited to be able to advise the minister as to who may be acceptable from that point of view. I think it would be a very, very appropriate organization to assist the minister in selecting a well-rounded committee and one which could assist the committee in reaching a decision which is fair to all affected parties. I just want to indicate that I do believe it's very important to have someone who has some expertise with the particular agricultural practices in the industry that are used by that particular operation. I don't think that it's wrong at all in the act to present that as an alternative, but it is not sufficient.

I believe that the AAMD and C is seriously concerned about this issue, Mr. Chairman. In our conversations with the AAMD and C our impression is that they're in agreement with many aspects of this bill. They obviously want provincewide standards. They want to have some uniformity in the province around confined feeding operations or industrial livestock operations. I think they're quite supportive of that, and I think that they're hearing, as are members in this House, from their own constituents that something needs to be done. I think that that's a very, very real concern of anyone serving in any order of government whose constituency may be affected by these types of operations.

5:00

I do believe, as well, from our conversations that they have a concern with respect to the taking away of municipal authority under this act and rightly so, in our view, Mr. Chairman. We think that this is a very unfortunate step which is mixed in with a bill that otherwise has considerable merit. It is one of the reasons why we believe that the organization could very well be asked to participate in these decisions on an ongoing basis, and the practice committees are a perfect place for them to participate.

So, Mr. Chairman, just to conclude. We're not opposed. [interjection] I'm sure that the hon. member over there will get up on his feet and contribute to the discussion, because I know he's got a lot to say, even if he only communicates it this way. I do believe that the agricultural practice review committees are probably a good thing. It's a very good thing that people who have some expertise in the particular area are on them, but what is deficient is that there's no person there to bring a community point of view to the review committee. So if it is dominated or set up in a one-sided way, you may find that people who are very, very biased towards their particular branch of agriculture could end up on the committees and that there's not a balance there. I think that neighbours will not be getting a fair shake from these committees unless this amendment is approved, so I'd urge support by all members.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to call to members' attention that the Agricultural Operation Practices Act is

Alberta's right-to-farm legislation. The essence of that act is that if a farmer is farming in an acceptable farming practices manner, he has the right to do that.

The section that the member is seeking to amend is the nuisance section of this bill and is really separate and apart from the NRCB operations. Essentially it says that when there is a nuisance complaint, it will go to the minister, likely, according to the proposed regulations, in the person of the Farmers' Advocate, who will try and deal with it. If he cannot resolve it, he has the authority to strike a three-member committee, two of which are intended to be people that have familiarity with that particular agricultural operation, to help pass judgment on whether or not it's being done in an acceptable manner. So in that light I'm speaking against the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to just make a few comments on this bill. First of all, I want to say how pleased I am that we are bringing this bill forward. It's something that is really necessary as we build confidence in the public that confined livestock operations and livestock operations in general are quite safe and in fact are not harming the environment and therefore are not something that we need to be greatly concerned about.

I want to just touch on a couple of things, one of them being the whole issue about the fact that the government is taking over the process and that municipalities will have a major role but not the final say. Now, leading into this, I want to point out the fine work that the last committee that worked on this did. They were dealing primarily with the issue of approval and then, of course, the ongoing administration that's required afterwards. The committee did great work, but I think it's important at this point because of some of the criticism that I heard this afternoon about the whole role of the municipality – the committee, when you look at it, was chaired by the hon. Member for Leduc and made up as well by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, and then the former president of the AAMDC. So now you have three people on this committee that had long municipal experience, people who came from the municipality. Then, of course, to round out the committee there was a person who does operate a confined feeding operation, but this individual does a lot of research work, is a very, very entrepreneurial-type person and a person that is most interested in protecting the environment.

So the committee was well rounded out. It had the expertise from municipalities, knew the role of the municipality and how best we could satisfy the municipalities. They came back with this report, and in fact that's what you find in the act, a system where the municipalities will have input. They still have land use planning that they will be engaged in, and then the application can flow through that whole process.

Another issue that I constantly hear the opposition raising is the whole issue about the contamination of water. Yes, it's true that there is a lot of risk particularly for surface water, but there's not a lot of risk for groundwater. If anyone doubts that, I would like them to show me a lagoon that is in fact leaking and contaminating groundwater.

When I was Minister of Environment, this came up. When I was the minister of agriculture, it came up. Every time I asked my staff to show me where this contamination was. Right around my own farm we have about four or five confined operations with lagoons that have been there, some of them, in excess of 35 years. Now, nobody has shown me one yet where there's contamination. Just

think about it. With most of these operations the family that's operating the operation lives at the same location.

MR. MacDONALD: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on a point of order.

MR. MacDONALD: Yes.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Citation, please.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. *Beauchesne* 482. Would the hon. minister entertain a question regarding his remarks?

MR. LUND: Of course, Mr. Chairman.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Earlier in the hon. minister's remarks there was reference made to the committee. Could you please explain if that committee traveled to southern Manitoba to examine the issue of extensive hog operations there, particularly around the municipality of Brandon, and if so, what were their findings?

Thank you.

5:10

MR. LUND: Mr. Chairman, I did not control where the committee went. I don't know if they went to Brandon. That question would be much better put to the individuals who were on the committee. If they did, they certainly did not report anything negative to me. They didn't report about any contamination. If the hon. member knows of any in Alberta, please let us know, and be sure that they're not just anecdotal. There are a number of people that like to spread that gossip, and it's just that. It's gossip.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think it's really important that these sitings and the whole operation be based on science, not emotion. Every time these members get up, they talk about all of these things that are very, very emotional. Yes, I will be the first to admit that there is a problem with offensive odour. I know that. We live close to one. I know that it's not pleasant at times, but the fact is that the groundwater is not being contaminated. When you see these families that have lived beside them for years using the water that's at that location, I can assure you that they are not drinking contaminated water.

I remember listening to particularly the third party talking about the regulations, that we need a lot of regulations. Now, I know they love regulations. They like big government. They like lots of spending, but they're very, very short on common sense. I'm concerned that if in fact we go way down the way with these regulations, the very thing that they claim they want, which is the family farm to operate – if you put in too many regulations, I can assure you that you will have no family farms getting into confined operations. It'll all be large corporations. Why? Because the costs of getting in, the capital cost, will far exceed what anybody can handle unless you're a very large operation. So that is a big concern that I have. I think we have to be very careful as we write the regulations that in fact we don't put ourselves in a position where it is just large operations.

Now, I'm sure that there are a few warts in the bill. One of them that I'm worried about is in section 16, where we talk about, "The owner or operator of a seasonal feeding and bedding site must

construct, maintain, operate, reclaim and abandon it in accordance with the regulations." Here's one site that I'm talking about, where if the regulations are not very carefully drafted, you will put many, many of our family farms out of existence because they cannot afford to go way overboard on these bedding sites and all of the things that go with them. Now, it is extremely important that the environment be protected, that the groundwater be protected, so I'll be the first one to be watching that, but I've also got to put on record that we must be careful about it.

Now, the member who had the amendment and the third party whip this afternoon was concerned about . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Does he whip?

MR. LUND: Oh, yeah, they have a whip. If you notice, it's important that they have a whip so that they can make sure one of them is keeping them on their toes.

This afternoon on that amendment: please, hon. member, read section 19(2). In case you haven't, I'll just tell you what it says: "A notification under subsection (1) must be carried out in accordance with the regulations." So it's extremely important that people be notified. They have to be notified. Certainly section 19(2) covers that. So I think that one has to be dealt with.

Mr. Chairman, I could go on with some of the other sections in the bill, but once again I've got to repeat that I think it's critical that the regulations make sure that there is protection of the environment, but we've got to also be very careful that we do not put the ma-and-pa operations out of business, because that's what we could do by drawing these regulations to the point where they cannot afford to operate.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move an amendment, and I will distribute it now.

AN HON. MEMBER: Another one?

MR. MASON: One of several.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee has before it an amendment moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. We shall refer to this as amendment A7.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will move that Bill 28, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be amended as follows. Section 5 is amended in the proposed section 20(1) by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following:

- (a) the requirements are not met or the site is not zoned as a permitted or discretionary use pursuant to the land use by-law of the municipality affected, the approval officer must deny the application, or

Now, just to help people find that, it's on page 11 of the bill. It's an amendment, of course, to 20(1)(a). It has the effect, Mr. Chairman, of restoring the authority of the municipality to zone for these types of operations. In other words, if there is not zoning in place for an operation of this type, then the approval officer must deny the application. That could be a permitted use, or it could be a discretionary use, but if neither of those two uses exist, then it would be denied by the approval officer until the proper zoning was in place.

This is how it's done for every type of land use virtually in this

province. There are only a very few types of land uses that are excluded from this authority of the municipality. In the first place, roads and pipelines are the main ones that are currently exempt from the authority of the municipality. What the bill would do unless this amendment is passed is take away that authority from the municipality to zone in a positive way for these types of uses.

We've said already in the Assembly that the biggest problem as far as we're concerned is that the ability of the municipalities to zone in a normal way for these types of organizations is taken away by this bill. We believe that it is expressly so that local municipal governments cannot stop these kinds of operations and that it forms a key part of the government strategy of extending this extremely unpopular use by very large-scale operations into rural areas against the wishes of the residents that live there. This amendment will protect those people. It will protect rural Albertans against having large-scale and potentially polluting but certainly smelly operations imposed upon them. It will give the local jurisdiction the capacity to deal with this as they deal with any other potentially incompatible land use.

Mr. Chairman, that's the essence of what local jurisdictions do when they do zoning. They try to do some planning so that incompatible land uses are not placed adjacent to one another. For example, you don't want to have a busy truck yard or a busy industrial use right next to an elementary school, so you provide for some separation and you make sure that different land uses are adjacent to one another and that they're compatible with one another and that there are transitions that occur in order to protect it. If you're going to tell me that we're going to have a massive operation like the one from the Taiwan Sugar Corporation that was so controversial placed next to a residential use, then I think you have a problem with it.

5:20

Now, they may argue on the other side – and I'm sure they will – that this bill gives the municipality the ability to negatively zone. That is to say that they will identify in advance places where these kinds of operations may not go, but that's a departure from the normal practice, which is that the municipality designates where they may go. Why is that? That particular approach has not been explained satisfactorily at least from our point of view. In our view, it is a way of restricting the ability of a rural municipality to prevent large-scale hog operations in particular from being placed in their county in places that may have an impact on the surrounding neighbours.

We believe that municipal government in this province is fully competent to make these decisions, that it is better made by those people who have to live next to the operation than by a board or a bureaucrat in Edmonton, and that we should respect municipal autonomy. That's something that we in this party firmly believe in, Mr. Chairman, and we think that the government ought to believe in it too.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Chairman, I will speak very briefly to this impassioned speech on municipal autonomy. I would ask all members to read the actual section. Just to make sure that it's in the record, I will read 20(1), which then you get to section (a).

In considering an application for an approval or an amendment of an approval, an approval officer must consider whether the applicant meets the requirements of this Part and the regulations and whether the application is consistent with the municipal development plan.

Yes, that is talking about zoning. You can use any excuse to alter a bill, but I understand what a municipal development plan is. It goes on to say, "And if, in the opinion of the approval officer . . ." part

(a), which this member would like struck, says, ". . . the requirements are not met or there is an inconsistency with the municipal development plan, the approval officer must deny the application or . . ." It goes on into a number of other sections which really safeguard this bill.

One of the things that is assumed by the hon. member's speech is that things are perfect today. I'm having trouble with this, because I hear from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands about smelly large operations being sited by the municipalities, who have the authority for siting today. If this world were perfect in this area, we would not be dealing with this issue today. But we do understand, one, the importance of the protection of the air, soil, and water in this province for all citizens wherever they live and, two, the importance of the livestock industry to this province, which contributes over 4 and one-half billion dollars a year to the economy of this province, the importance of the investment that the people who go into these developments, who put hundreds of thousands, in fact over millions of dollars into it, that there are clear rules, consistent rules so that they and their partners or lenders can ensure that the rules are well understood.

Mr. Chairman, I have heard from many – and I believe the Minister of Infrastructure spoke to this just a moment ago – a concern that some of the regulations may be too strict. Today, if we go back to what we had, we do have an opportunity for some problems. That's why this bill is in the House. Today the decisions on siting a confined feeding operation will be made under clear rules by what is, I consider, a neutral board – it is not the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, nor is it in Environment; it is Sustainable Resource Development, which I believe makes all kinds of sense – by people who have the scientific knowledge and expertise to make decisions, not based on hysteria or emotion or hearsay or "I drove by an operation and it didn't smell very good." They will make those decisions based on sound science. The municipalities will have given, I would hope, their land zoning plans to the NRCB with restrictions on where confined feeding operations should not be built and the reasons for that, and the NRCB will consider that.

Mr. Chairman, I see no benefit or advantage or anything in this amendment that makes this bill better than it is today. In fact, I think it weakens the bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd just like to close on this. I do not believe that everything is perfect with the present system and have not made that claim in any of my interventions in the debate. The question is: what is the most appropriate system? No system will be perfect. That's clear. What we have now is at least that the people who have to live with the decision can make the decision. They may not make it right every time, but they're the ones that we should be vesting this authority in and not, as this act would have it, with a board that can go back to their homes in the city in most cases and not have to live with the consequences of their decision. That's the key thing.

Now, the minister earlier indicated that the development plan was the same thing as zoning, but if you read through the bill, you'll find that the municipal district or county needs to make a plan which has to have specific areas where these operations are excluded and that they can't obviously do a very large-scale plan that eliminates them altogether, because the government can then come back on them. So it's not the same as zoning for something. There's a limited capacity

to actually have local control over these kinds of operations.

Mr. Chairman, at this point I would take your guidance. It's almost 5:30. I can conclude my remarks and adjourn the debate, or we can go to the next amendment, as you wish.

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: As per Standing Order 4(3) the committee is now recessed until 8 p.m., at which time we will convene in committee.

[The committee adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 27, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: 01/11/27

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'll call the committee to order. Would the committee agree to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure this evening to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House a great group of kids that are with us tonight from St. Albert. They are with the 2nd St. Albert Cub group. They are seated in the members' gallery. With them this evening we have group leaders Mr. Larry Wright, Mr. Jim Green, Ms Wendy Radcliff, and Mr. Grant Chaney as well as parent helpers Mr. Bill Crockett, Mr. Leo Vilks, Mr. Ron Nadolski, and Mr. Neil Gamble. I would ask that they all rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE CHAIRMAN: For the benefit of those that are in the gallery, this is the informal part of the Legislature; thus members can quietly move about. Indeed, if you're following your map of where the members are, you'll soon find that someone with a beard in fact turns out to be a lady and that they're not in their right place, so please be aware of that. We're allowed to take off our jackets and to have coffee or juice in the Chamber. So it is relaxed, and we don't have a limit to the number of times that members can get up and speak on a topic.

Bill 28 Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: We've already dealt with seven amendments. Are there any comments, questions, or additional amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have an additional amendment, and I'll just ask that it be distributed now.

THE CHAIRMAN: To the pages, I would just remind you, please, when you're doing the handouts, hand them out first to the people who are actually sitting here, and then you can go and drop them off at the desks that aren't currently occupied.

Hon. member, I think you may commence your deliberations on amendment A8, if you'd move it and explain it.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will move that Bill 28, Agricultural Operations Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be amended as follows: section 5 is amended (a) in the proposed section 34 by striking out "\$10,000" and substituting "\$20,000"; (b) in the proposed section 35, (i) in subsection (1) by striking out "\$5,000" and substituting "\$10,000", and (ii) in

subsection (2) by striking out "\$10,000" and substituting "\$20,000"; (c) in the proposed section 36, (i) in subsection (1) by striking out "\$5,000" and substituting "\$10,000", and (ii) in subsection (2) by striking out "\$10,000" and substituting "\$20,000." Mr. Chairman, these amendments would simply double the fines in all respects. There are some very serious matters here that these fines apply to: the obstruction or delay of an inspector, producing false records, expanding an operation without approval, and misapplication of manure.

Mr. Chairman, it's well known that only politicians are allowed to misapply manure, and anyone else should be fined heavily. So with that, I'll take my place.

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: I have one additional amendment, which I'll distribute now. I tried to renumber it as section 6, but they wouldn't let me.

THE CHAIRMAN: This amendment will be known as amendment A9. We'd invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands to move this.

MR. MASON: I move that Bill 28, Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, be amended as follows: section 5 is amended in the proposed section 20(1)(b)(iii) by striking out "a reasonable opportunity" and substituting "at least 20 working days." Mr. Chairman, this is just to provide greater certainty for people who may be affected by this operation, whether the people are proponents or people who may be affected by such an application. So it makes a great deal of sense, from our point of view, to substitute a clear number of days instead of "a reasonable opportunity," which is subject to such wide interpretation as to produce potentially unsatisfactory results.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Yes. Thank you. On the bill?

THE CHAIRMAN: We're on the bill, yes.

DR. TAFT: Okay. Thank you very much. I have not spoken to the bill yet, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate the opportunity. I've put some effort into researching this bill. I've spoken to a number of people around the province, I've spoken to people within my constituency, and I've consulted with people in our caucus including in particular the leader, whose opinion I take very seriously on this, and I've done a fair bit of reading, not as much as I would like to. I have tried to make as informed an opinion as I can. Among the people around the province whom I've spoken to are included a number of farmers, one of whom is currently a county councillor and another who was a former county councillor, people who have been very involved in agriculture their entire lives and have been very successful at it, people who I would say are probably from the heartland of the Tory party.

MR. MacDONALD: No.

8:10

DR. TAFT: I talk to everybody.

I thought I would organize my comments into the pros and the cons as I see them with this piece of legislation, and there are a number of both. Clearly, one of the benefits of the legislation is that it will bring a standard process to an industry that has suffered from helter-skelter regulation and a lack of consistency. There's no question that a provincewide process laid out involving the NRCB and so on will make the rules clear for everybody, and I think there's a lot to be said for that. It also brings with it standards and regulations that I'm told are in many ways very strong standards. They're clear. They definitely improve the current situation in terms of environmental protection. Issues around water contamination, soil contamination, smells, and so on are covered under these regulations, and I'm told that they are regulations that are commendable, that they are quite strong and quite clear.

I'm also conscious that this is a piece of legislation that will facilitate the development of an industry in this province, and of course there are pros and cons to that. Among the benefits to it, I think, is providing a solid market for Alberta grain growers. Barley growers, growers of feed grains throughout the province will have a steady market and in many cases a very well-paying market. My information is that Lethbridge and the Lethbridge area consistently deliver the highest prices in North America for barley growers, and that's a real benefit for local farmers. If they want to be selling their grain at a premium price, this piece of legislation creates an industry that will give them an opportunity to do so, so there is some benefit to grain growers on that basis.

There is also the possibility, if there are plants developed under this legislation, of job creation in rural areas of the province. A significant intensive pork operation might employ, you know, a few dozen people, perhaps. These would be often in areas where a dozen or two or three jobs are hard to come by. So to the extent that they provide a labour market for people in some of the more remote rural areas of Alberta, I think that's commendable as well.

So those are the pros that I see, the benefits that I see with this piece of legislation.

The list of negatives that has been raised with me is also substantial. It's certainly substantial enough to make this a genuine dilemma in terms of voting. Obviously there are concerns about the environment. If we proceed with the development of, for example, a hog industry in this province on the scale that has been discussed, where we may be looking at 10 million or 12 million or 13 million hogs produced annually in Alberta, that is an enormous change to Alberta and to the environment of Alberta. I'm told that one hog produces waste equivalent to perhaps seven human beings, so if we're looking at 10 million hogs or 13 million hogs, we are looking at the equivalent impact, in terms of human waste, of several Los Angeleses or several Chicagos. I'm not convinced for a moment that most people in Alberta appreciate that this industry is developing to this scale or will soon be developing to this scale.

If that amount of waste were to be developed through human habitation in an urban development, there would be major waste treatment plants developed like the kind that we already see in Edmonton and Calgary. In the case of intensive livestock operations, or confined feeding operations, we will see a much lower level of waste handling. It's certainly by agricultural standards a good level, but given the intensity of the development, they are standards that are not up to what we would expect if these were urban developments.

When we think about the impact of, say, the equivalent to a human population in Alberta of 50 million or 60 million or 70

million people and we add on top of that the potential development of coal-fired power plants for export of electricity to the United States and we add to that the enormous environmental impact of the oil sands developments in northeastern Alberta, I am concerned that we risk turning Alberta into, in some sense, a sewer for North America. That's how some people have put it to me. In fact, last night I was talking to a constituent about this very issue, and he said: my gosh, I just spent the last two months driving around this beautiful province of ours, going all around and admiring it, and as I went around, I became more and more concerned that we were going to be losing this province, that we were going to be losing it to massive industrial developments and massive agricultural developments. So I'm not convinced at all that most Albertans realize the impact that this legislation could have on the natural environment of Alberta.

The issues environmentally cover the groundwater, and there is immediate concern of surface water contamination. Even in cases in Alberta now there have been real expressions of worry from local residents around these intensive operations that surface water may be contaminated. There are longer term issues around groundwater, although I also understand that so far in the whole development of the Feedlot Alley in the Lethbridge area there has been no evidence, I'm told, of groundwater contamination. So that probably can be managed.

I did, however, speak this morning to a county councillor whose county sits on a major, major aquifer that's about 55 feet below the surface, and he's very concerned that if drilling occurs and manure is pumped underground at the 30-foot level, it could seep into the aquifer and contaminate a massive area of Alberta. So there are both groundwater and surface water concerns.

There are soil concerns. As this manure is spread in intensive concentrations, it brings nitrogen levels up in the soil.

That can be accommodated through crop rotations, but it also leaves elements that will remain in the soil, elements like copper and selenium, which will gradually accumulate in the soil and reduce the productivity of the soil. We do risk having these operations going for 10 or 12 or 15 years, at which point the surrounding farmlands will begin to see their productivity seriously depleted because of the continual application of heavy manure. So those are some of the concerns.

Of course everybody's familiar with the air contamination from these facilities, the odours that arise. They're often well managed; nonetheless, they do become problems. Again, people including farmers that I've been speaking to in the last few days have spoken about how from time to time it can be genuinely unpleasant to be within even several miles of these facilities, depending on humidity and temperature and wind conditions. So there is a host of environmental concerns.

Related to those are health concerns. There are questions about health effects of living within close proximity to these facilities, whether there are respiratory effects from the fumes and the odours. There are also concerns about consuming the meat that is raised in these operations, meat that comes from animals that are often fed significant amounts of antibiotics. There are, as we probably all know, risks of antibiotics getting passed through to human beings. There are also risks of antibiotic-resistant diseases developing. I am told that the majority of antibiotics in North America are actually consumed not by human beings but by animals.

Of course, the use of antibiotics is a direct correlation to the operation of these kinds of facilities. That also links to the question of the treatment of the animals themselves. Those people who are sensitive or concerned about the humane treatment of animals really often are raising serious, serious questions about the confinement of the animals, the poultry and the pork especially, in these particular operations.

8:20

Then there's the whole question of economic issues. As I mentioned earlier, there are benefits from job creation. There are benefits from strong prices paid to farmers for their feed grain, but other people have been quick to point out to me the economic drawbacks of these facilities. Because they're agricultural facilities, although they may be multimillion dollar operations with what looks to all of us like factories, they are in fact not considered industrial for tax purposes or other purposes. They're considered agricultural. As a result, they pay virtually no taxes. So we could have a major offshore company investing million of dollars in a plant buying up a quarter section of land and paying perhaps a grand total of a few hundred dollars in taxes to the local municipality. Clearly, this could lead to a net loss to the municipality as the wear and tear on the roads occurs, the wear and tear on the local infrastructure, quite possibly a decrease in property values, and as a result, a diminishing of the local tax base. So the economic impact of these facilities on a local economy is mixed at best, and that's exactly the feedback I've got from everybody I've spoken to, including people with a lot of experience on this. If these operations were considered as industrial operations, which I believe they should be, then it would be a completely different approach. Frankly, when we're talking about 10,000 or 20,000 or 50,000 hogs, for example, in one operation, this is an industrial operation. This is not a family farm operation.

There's also the question of labour laws and labour force. Although these are in effect factories, the workers, as I understand it, will not be treated as industrial workers. They will be treated as if they were no different than farm family people working on a farm. To the best of my knowledge, that's what the labour situation will be. I have heard even from people who, I would say, are decidedly not sympathetic to industrial labour organizations that this is a real concern for them. There are safety issues, there are fairness issues, and labour forces should be treated as industrial labour forces, not as agricultural workers.

Beyond that set of concerns, there is the philosophical question here that needs to be put to all of us about local control and our ability as individuals and as communities to shape the area in which we live and to choose how we want to live and what will occur around us to the maximum extent possible. I think that philosophically most Albertans would agree with that. So when I see a piece of legislation that turns over the decision-making on this kind of an issue to the NRCB, for which there are no appeals to decisions, I really worry about local input.

Earlier in the day or yesterday the minister of education had a nice phrase. He talked about the need for local people to have local solutions to local issues. I would really like to see that approach taken here. We need ultimately to give people the right to determine their local community and the local environment in which they live. This piece of legislation will allow them input, but we all know that input can be marginal, can be superficial, can be manipulated. So input on its own is not enough. I think the local communities need ultimately to have an appeal and a veto on these kinds of developments.

There's one other concern that's come to my attention, again raised by people who undoubtedly have historically supported this government, and that's the issue of setbacks. The point was made to me earlier today that a farmer on a quarter section or a section of land, whose house is on one side of that property, could be half a mile from the other side of his property, but the setback for one of these intensive operations going in nearby, next door, is not measured from the farmer's property line; it's measured from the farmer's buildings. So you could have a confined feeding operation

of tens of thousands of hogs built right on the property line of a farmer who has no desire whatsoever for that development to be there yet has no real authority to deny it. In the longer term what happens then is that the value of that farmer's land is depleted. His ability to use it in ways in which he or she would freely like to use it is constrained because he then needs to respect the laws that define the space around this intensive operation. So there are very, very serious questions about the setback regulations here.

So as I wade through this issue and listen to the advice on both sides, I've tried to pay attention to the issue of providing a strong market for the grain growers in Alberta, yet I've listened to these very same farmers tell me: you know, at some point I can't sell my barley anymore to these operations because 100,000 tons of corn a month are being trucked into Alberta from the U.S., so it's not a really great benefit to me.

As I listen to these farmers and city dwellers talk about their concerns with the environment, with the long-term future of Alberta and the risk that Alberta could become a kind of wasteland for North America, and as I consider the issues of the economic depletion, I realize that this kind of development could lead towards bankruptcy, not prosperity. So in the end I have concluded that as much as the standards of this legislation are an improvement over what we have today, it's not enough. As a result, I will be opposing this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to make some observations on Bill 28 in this debate during the committee stage. It's a very important piece of legislation. It's the result of work done by our colleague the MLA from Leduc. I appreciate the work he has done along with other members of his committee, so what I say by no means reflects on the personal commitment and the effort that the hon. Member for Leduc has put into the public hearings and the consultations that he has undertaken, from which, ostensibly, this bill has resulted.

There are concerns about this bill that the New Democrat opposition has tried to clearly put before this House, and it has sought amendments to the bill to make it more palatable, more acceptable. All of those amendments made to this point in time have been voted down. I'm not surprised about it given the overwhelming majority that the government caucus enjoys here. Nevertheless, I think the points made need to be reiterated and expanded upon, the points which led us in the first place to propose changes in the act by way of amendments which we were convinced would help improve this piece of legislation, which, as I said during its second reading, has some positive side to it.

8:30

Albertans living in the rural areas, farming communities do need some positive actions and policies that will strengthen their agricultural economy, their rural communities, so in principle we should do everything we can to make sure that Alberta's farmers, particularly Alberta's family farmers and family farms, have an opportunity not only to remain viable but to grow. Lots of Albertans take great pride in family farming. It's a part of our history. It's a part of our history that we take a great deal of pride in. There's nothing in my concerns that leads to questioning the very principles and the fundamental commitments that we have to making sure we strengthen our rural communities and strengthen the likelihood of family farms sustaining themselves and going into the future.

But there are serious concerns. I mentioned earlier in my remarks

during second reading of the bill that the bill is absolutely silent about whether or not these ILOs or CFOs are industrial operations, first and foremost large industrial business operations, or if they are agricultural operations. In fact, it underlines, it reiterates the commitment of the government to the fact that these operations will be treated as agricultural operations, therefore they will not be subject to Alberta's labour standards code or, a point that I was unable to make last time around, to the provisions of WCB coverage for people who work in these ILOs. When I look at the report and recommendations of the Sustainable Management of the Livestock Industry in Alberta committee, the Klapstein report, it refers to this as industry.

If in fact the livestock sector is a cornerstone of Alberta's agricultural industry and not of agricultural activities as farming activity, then why is it that there's no attention paid to whether or not these operations that will be covered by this act, particularly large ones, not family operations but large ones, will indeed be reclassified as industrial operations and as such will be subject to the same requirements with respect to the observance of labour laws and labour standards and WCB coverage that our other industrial operations in this province are subject to? The reports about accidents of when people get killed in these operations is well known, yet there's a very serious omission in this bill with respect to addressing those very concerns.

We hear a great deal of talk about leveling the playing field. Well, here we are not doing that. We are bypassing the very question. Why is it that we should subject some of the industries in this province to the labour laws and standards of this province, diluted as they are, and to WCB coverage requirements and on the other hand, at the same time, what we consider a growing industry in this province, these intensive livestock operations, industrial livestock operations we want to exempt from the same requirements, thereby creating uneven conditions for investors, entrepreneurs, and capital as such? That makes no sense to me. That's unreasonable. It should be unacceptable, particularly when it's coming from a government which committed to creating what they call level playing fields. Well, this particular legislation seems to create a clearly unlevel . . .

DR. TAFT: Their level playing field is covered in manure.

DR. PANNU: A level playing field covered in manure. Well said.

We thought up till this point that, by and large, it was just my hon. colleague from Edmonton-Highlands and I who were so strongly concerned about some of the flaws of this act. I'm very pleased to hear the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview eloquently presenting several arguments which show why this bill is not ready to be proceeded with to the next stage at this time. It needs to be mended, it needs to be fixed, it needs to be changed, and I hope we will take our time and do that rather than having to deal with the aftermath of all kinds of problems: environmental problems, potential health problems, the economic issues, the labour-related issues, the taxation issues, and the WCB coverage of Albertans.

Essentially, farm boys from rural areas will be working in these ILOs, and why is it that our rural counterparts, these young boys and perhaps girls, who will work in these ILOs should be denied the coverage and the protection and the security and safety that we associate with industrial workplaces in this province? There are laws in this province which address the issues of health and safety at the workplace, but there's nothing here to suggest, to promise that this workplace, the ILOs and the CFOs, will also be covered under the health and safety laws of this province. I think that's regrettable,

deeply regrettable. We are in fact discriminating against our rural workers who will become workers in the ILOs by denying them coverage which we think is a normal expectation in a civilized society for workers to have; that is, to be covered under health and safety regulations.

The counties and municipal district councils have expressed concern on another account which is economic in a sense. They say they are subjected now to centralized decision-making, that this bill takes away from these councils and these local governments the right to zone, the right to permit, the right to site, the right to make decisions about siting, about permitting, and about zoning the areas and lands under their jurisdiction. That's been taken away from them and centralized in Edmonton, yet this bill if passed will oblige the same local governments to pay part of the cost that will be involved in the approval process, in the permitting process that they will have no control over. So they are saying: why is it that we should be burdened with the additional costs of implementing this bill if it becomes law, yet we also have to lose the power, the authority, the democratic control for whether or not we want these farm operations, these big industrial livestock operations to be sited and permitted in our localities?

8:40

Another point, Mr. Chairman, that has to be made again and again until someone is listening and does listen is the issue of the potential environmental risks involved with this. One of the foremost authorities on water pollution, on environmental pollution works right here in this city in one of the best universities in the country, one of the best scientists in the world, Professor David Schindler. He went public just a few days ago expressing his grave concern about what this act might unleash and lead to if we don't address the threat that it poses to the environment, particularly the quality of water, the contamination of soil. He does warn us, so we won't be able to say that no one told us this. He said: look, you are creating serious potential hazards insofar as the health of Albertans who'll be living around the areas where ILOs will be established. He talks about Walkerton in Ontario. The Ontario government was just as smug and as insensitive to the potential dangers that the operations in other environmental-related activities posed to the health of Ontario citizens.

So why is it that we are not even willing to learn and simply give the arguments which have nothing to do with really sustaining the family farm or sustaining the economic well-being of our rural areas but primarily seem to be designed to promote large-scale, industrial-sized livestock operations in the province? Thus everything else has to be sacrificed on the altar of enabling, permitting, and encouraging large-scale investment regardless of where it comes from, regardless of how long it stays here and whether or not it creates permanent jobs, permanent economic growth that benefits all residents of rural areas.

It's a one-sided piece of legislation which seems to be designed to encourage, I guess, capital, not necessarily from within Alberta or from within Canada, wherever it comes from, to come here and feel welcome and in so doing risk the health, the working environment, and loss of taxes, all of these things together. If we put all of these things together, the potential costs of allowing this bill to go through and the benefits that may accrue from it to some rural Albertans, I wonder if the balance really would suggest that we need to proceed with it.

A couple of other points, Mr. Chairman. Organic farming in this province is growing as an agricultural activity. Organic farming is growing, and lots of Albertans are concerned about the health

consequences of the kind of meat we produce through these industrial operations. I think my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview drew attention to the concern about the excessive use of antibiotics. Lots of Albertans who are in growing numbers switching to consuming organically produced vegetables, meats, and dairy products are asking those questions. What chances do they have to take to consume these products? They're concerned about it. They think that the industrially produced agricultural products, particularly meats from these confined feeding operations with thousands and thousands of animals stacked together one over the other and fed antibiotics to keep them healthy and hungry at the same time, hormones and what have you – this kind of production is not good for our own health. We are concerned. The minister of health would concur with me that we shouldn't be producing those kinds of foods and encouraging other Albertans, Canadians, and others to be consuming foods which might potentially produce certain health crises, certain health problems because the health care system is expensive. Why do we want to create more health problems? Why do we take the risk of creating more health problems through the production of these agricultural products and then complain that we can't economically afford the health system we have?

These things seem to work at cross-purposes. The health minister doesn't want to speak on what the minister of agriculture might be promoting, and the minister of agriculture doesn't want to pay much attention to what are the causes of growing health problems and therefore health costs. So I suggest that the Assembly seriously address these concerns before it proceeds further with this bill.

With these comments, Mr. Chairman, I will close and let my colleague take the floor.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have listened with interest to the last couple of speakers, to their remarks regarding Bill 28. I, too, have some concerns about this bill that I certainly would like to get on the record this evening at this stage. I certainly can understand why it is necessary to regulate such operations or such practices. Certainly there's not one member of this Assembly that wants to turn our entire agricultural economic sector into 21st century sharecropping, but I would caution all hon. members about going ahead with this bill.

Earlier this afternoon I asked an hon. member from across the way about the consultation process that had been initiated by the hon. Member for Leduc and two other colleagues of this Assembly, specifically if they had traveled or studied the hog industry in and around Brandon, Manitoba. There has been a lot of development there certainly since 1998. In 1997 we closed a major hog slaughtering facility in this city, and the enterprise, I believe McCain Foods or an associate corporation, got well over 10 percent of the money to develop their plant in Brandon from various levels of government. Certainly that, as far as I know, is not the practice that is going to occur in this province. I didn't think that was fair, but certainly there are other reasons than government money that attracted this facility to southern Manitoba. Of course, one of those is feed grains. Not only are feed grains accessible, but the price is right, as it was explained to me. And labour is available. There is a willing pool of labour to work in the slaughtering facility and on the farms surrounding it that are going to produce all the hogs.

8:50

Now earlier, in 1996, there was a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm about the future of the industry in this province, Mr.

Chairman. Surrounding the city, if you were to go to Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, there is certainly the capability for feed grain there. You go to the district of Redwater. There were plans for quite a large, extensive hog operation in an arc starting in the northwest and going around to the northeast of this city. That did not come to pass, but perhaps it will with this bill. I don't know if it is in the long-term interests of the province to have these huge factory farms.

This gets back to my question about what sort of analysis was done, because Manitoba is essentially five years ahead of us. What sort of analysis has been done on the Manitoba operations by this committee? I can recognize the fact that this is an issue. Many people are frustrated. If the consultation process didn't get to Manitoba, did the committee at least look at the Virginias? There are also ILOs there, and in North and South Carolina there are huge operations. If the committee had a good, careful look at exactly what has occurred there – also, I can't help but think about Taiwan. It used to be the island of Formosa, Mr. Chairman. You know, the Taiwan Sugar Corporation has expressed an interest in establishing a foothold in Alberta. I'm interested to know from any of the hon. members: what sort of practices are allowed in Taiwan? Are they strict? What sort of limitations are put on extensive livestock operations in Taiwan? We can go through this issue, and of course we think of Holland. We think of some of the European countries and the regulations they have. In fact, a lot of farmers want to leave the Low Countries, as they're affectionately described, and come to Canada particularly to farm in Ontario, western Canada, Prince Edward Island because we don't have the same regulations.

Now, when we recognize that this legislation is attempting to meet a need, that's fine. Mr. Chairman, I was driving out towards Alliance. Alliance – and many people may not know this – is a town and it's a fine town. The people were looking into the future whenever they planted all the beautiful trees in Alliance. I was out there recently and pulled into the cafe, and this very issue came up. I sat quietly and listened to the discussion. The discussion centred around the fact that the people in the cafe – and I had not heard this before – had felt let down by their government. I asked why. They felt that the provincial government had a highway 2 mentality. I asked again: what is a highway 2 mentality? They said: well, the government is concerned about development in a 50-kilometre zone east of highway 2 and a 50-kilometre zone west of highway 2 between Edmonton and Calgary, and they're forgetting about the rest of us.

Now, this may be a recognition of that oversight, and this may be the need that's trying to be met: to develop other parts of the province and other industries in other parts of the province. Now, Mr. Chairman, we can certainly see, for instance, that towards Alliance and out that way, as the oil and the gas reservoirs are depleted, for an industry to move and locate there is a sound policy, but I don't know if an ILO is that sound a policy. I'm just not convinced. Do the risks outweigh the benefits?

We can only think of the town of Brooks. Of course, there's a large meat packing industry, American owned, in that town, and there have been some consequences from this industry. There are problems recruiting and retaining staff. There are issues around housing. There are issues around schools. Many people, as I understand it, commute from Calgary because there is a shortage of housing, and that's a long commute, a very long commute. If you go south, Mr. Chairman, to another meat packing facility about a 40-minute drive south of Calgary, you have the same problem. So when we create these massive farms, are we perhaps creating the same problems that have been experienced in Brooks and to the south of Calgary in High River? Perhaps all this has been studied

and analyzed and my concerns don't have merit, but I believe they do.

In relation to the comments that were given earlier by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, I would like at this time, Mr. Chairman, to remind all members of the Assembly that it's hardly 18 months ago when there was a tragic double fatality in an Alberta workplace that was not covered by WCB, as I understand it. The two individuals were working for a company – I believe it was called the Drain Doctor, and I may stand corrected – and they left Calgary and went out somewhere within an hour's drive of Calgary to unclog a drain on a huge farm. The breathing apparatus was not used in the job, and unfortunately these two individuals lost their lives. There was no WCB coverage, as I understand it, not because this was a company that wasn't covered, but it was their location. It was on some sort of corporate farm. It is my view that if an individual is collecting pay, whether it be in a gas plant, whether it be in a bank, whether it be in this Legislative Assembly, or whether it be on a farm, if they're collecting a cheque, they should be covered by WCB. That is not the rule in this province, and I think it's about time we deal with that issue, long before we deal with this bill.

9:00

Now, Mr. Chairman, many members talked about the accumulation of waste with these enterprises. I would like to share a couple of facts with all hon. members, and that is that the average hog produces three times as much waste as a human does in a single day and also that from birth to market a hog produces one cubic metre of waste. How is this going to be handled? I was assured that there were going to be no leaks in the holding lagoons, that this would never happen. I hope, for the sake of our environment, that it does not.

I spoke earlier about the Dutch government and the regulations in the Low Countries, and I don't think there needs to be anything further said about that.

In conclusion, I would like to ask if, in the studies and the consultation process that has occurred, there has been any consideration taken regarding property tax reductions in areas around ILOs. [interjection] Now, I hear from across the way that properties will increase in value. This would be very interesting, and of course one way of indicating this would be to check in West Virginia or perhaps check in a municipality anywhere around Brandon, Manitoba, to see how they're dealing with this, because there certainly are consequences to intensive livestock operations. Mr. Chairman, I understand there are individuals in this Assembly who have constant contact with municipal officials in Brandon, so that's going to make all our jobs that much easier. They will be that much easier. This is an important piece of legislation, and to consider that an intensive livestock operation will change the entire community if it's permitted, we can't take this legislation lightly.

Under this legislation the municipalities will still only be able to designate discretionary and accepted-use provisions for intensive livestock operations. Now, the NRCB is going to be the final authority on approval of an ILO or a factory farm. I don't know if in the spirit of this government that's precisely what they want to do. I can understand where they want to get rid of the highway 2 mentality and have economic development all over the province. I can understand that, but I can't understand where this legislation will benefit Albertans 10 and 20 years down the road. I just don't think it's the right way to go.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 28 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:05 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Dunford	Lukaszuk
Ady	Fischer	Magnus
Amery	Friedel	Marz
Boutilier	Goudreau	Maskell
Broda	Graham	McClellan
Calahasen	Graydon	McClelland
Cao	Horner	Oberg
Carlson	Hutton	Rathgeber
Cenaiko	Jablonski	Strang
Coutts	Johnson	VanderBurg
DeLong	Jonson	Vandermeer
Doerksen	Knight	Yankowsky
Ducharme	Lord	Zwozdesky

Against the motion:

MacDonald	Pannu	Taft
Mason		

Totals:	For – 39	Against – 4
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[Motion to report Bill 28 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that the committee now rise and report Bill 28.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

9:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 28 with amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 22
Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, it is both an honour and a privilege to move third reading of Bill 22, Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 22 read a third time]

Bill 23
Regulated Accounting Profession
Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Regulated Accounting Profession Act, or RAPA, brought the governing legislation for three accounting organizations under one statute and replaced the Chartered Accountants Act, the Certified Management Accountants Act, and the Certified General Accountants Act. Since RAPA was proclaimed, a few amendments were identified to fine-tune the legislation by clarifying its wording and updating its provisions and references. I wish to acknowledge the collaborative work of the accounting organizations – the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta, the society of Certified Management Accountants of Alberta, and the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta – together with Alberta Human Resources and Employment in developing these amendments.

With that said, it's a pleasure for me to move third reading of Bill 23, the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001, and I hope this Assembly will support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Bill 23, the Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, which the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie has described, is certainly a piece of legislation that the Official Opposition at this time is quite willing to support. Many organizations have expressed their support for this legislation.

I would at this time like to remind members of this Assembly that this legislation is considered by some to be just a change that is housekeeping in nature but that it is a bill that demonstrates to all members of this Assembly that perhaps we need to take a closer scrutiny of all legislation that comes before the Assembly. I refer in this case to the original Regulated Accounting Profession Act, which originally passed, but of course we're back sooner than later to make some improvements to it. Some would consider this to be little more than corrections of drafting errors, but one has to be diligent, I believe.

With those few remarks at this time, Mr. Speaker, I again would like to say that we are fully supportive of this initiative. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 23 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 30
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to respond to Bill 30 in committee tonight. We have a few comments in addition to those ones that I shared with the Assembly on Thursday past, when we had estimates before us.

We didn't get through the estimates in one afternoon, which is quite a common practice because there's so much money requested in them, Mr. Chairman. We only got through three out of a possible five departments in terms of the questions and comments that we had, because there is never enough time allocated for the money that's requested at those times. We find the same thing when we see the bill as it comes before us, Bill 30, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2). A lot of money is asked for. A lot of it is asked for because this government in most cases has an inability to plan and forecast properly. There are some exceptions to that. One of those would be the requests for fires, because that's one of the areas where you can never actually forecast what the demand is going to be. However, as we've said many other times in this Assembly, it would be quite fair and reasonable to put aside a contingency fund based on a five-year rolling average of what those kinds of costs are so that when they did come back for supplementary estimates, it would be minor in nature and not substantive, as we see.

I do find, Mr. Chairman, that when I read through the second-quarter fiscal update released on November 21, 2001, that we were given, there are a few things that actually are quite hard to swallow when we take a look at how the government is pitching this new need for money and the manner in which they account for what it is they need. For instance, on page 1, where they talk about the 2001-02 forecast, they list the highlights. Under the highlights they talk about implementing "corrective actions to maintain a balanced budget." What they don't put in here is that in terms of corrective actions, what they're actually talking about is cutting 21 direct, on-the-ground programs that enhance children's lives in this province, that enhance their lives not just in terms of providing extras or trips or new clothes or skateboards. We're talking about taking kids off the street, off drugs, out of abusive families, giving them a network of social support. Those were the kinds of programs that were cut.

We've seen the Minister of Children's Services state day after day in question period that those programs closest to the children weren't cut, Mr. Chairman, but in fact in this city we know of 21 programs that we firmly believe were programs that were closest to the children and which directly affected them and made a huge difference in the quality of their lives, in fact perhaps even in terms of their having lives and certainly in terms of giving them any kind of a hand up, that this government so commonly says that it likes to give to people. Those were not hand-up programs that they cut. Those were very necessary and integral support services. That's

what this government means when they say implementing corrective action.

9:30

They state in the next highlight that in their corrective actions were deferred infrastructure projects, many projects that have been put off for years because of the kinds of restraints, which become critical in terms of sustainability and that this government doesn't talk about. Also lapses in energy assistance programs, energy assistance programs that we wouldn't have needed in the first place if this government didn't totally foul up energy restructuring here at the beginning of the year. It looks like we're taking a look at higher prices and all kinds of ongoing problems there over this next winter. And a freeze on hiring, Mr. Chairman, with the exception of Crown prosecutors. In some of these areas of hiring, particularly social workers, there is a desperate need in this province, not just a minor need but a desperate need.

You know, the problem is that the government doesn't use judgment when they do these things. They do these across-the-board cuts, which sometimes means that programs that are very necessary are not sustainable. That brings up the key problem of how this government decides. Everything for them is dollars and cents. It's money in, money out. If you're not getting as much money in, you just arbitrarily cut, but that isn't really the role of government, Mr. Chairman. The role of government is to provide for those basic needs of the people that the people have decided the government should provide. That means not only a universal health care system in this province but some universality of education. We're starting to see a huge erosion in that regard, particularly in terms of tuition fees.

So we end up getting a two-tiered health care system. We end up getting a two-tiered education system. We see the huge increase in private schools. Many parents send their kids to private schools now because they want them to be associating only with children who have parents of like minds, those who have a high focus on academic scholarship. Well, the problem with that is that you ghettoize those left in the public system. We see that happening.

Tuition fees too. This government says that, well, you can get a student loan. It's true that you can, but first of all you need to know how to access the student loan program. You need to be earning below a specific amount of money, and many middle-income families these days just can't afford to have their children access those systems. They're making a little bit too much money, but they can't afford to send their child to university with paid tuition, so it forces the children either to not go or to leave home for some period of time and then apply for a student loan. So where is the promotion of family values in that kind of system, Mr. Chairman? I say that's a totally skewed kind of perspective for them to take.

The last part of this, the second bullet, in terms of corrective actions, is the discretionary spending. You know, discretionary spending to me means potato chips, not potatoes, Mr. Chairman. Now, we've seen a lot of potatoes go by the wayside in the last week, with potentially more on the cutting block in the near future if we see a continued decline in energy prices. The kind of destabilizing of our economy wasn't even necessary in the first place had this government ever taken our good idea of essentially bomb-proofing this government by putting in a stabilization fund, and they wouldn't be in the kind of problem they are in right now. That fund would be well funded, given the surpluses we've had in the last few years, and the government would be able to access that fund to flatten out the revenue stream and stop us from having the kinds of peaks and valleys that we've seen in prior times. This government I believe felt that the good times were going to roll forever and

didn't foresee, weren't able to forecast the kinds of falls in energy prices we've had now and therefore were very shortsighted in their planning. They still can't seem to get a handle on this, which is a real deficit from their perspective. We hope they start to listen to some of the people who are advising them in terms of finding ways to level out the revenue stream, because what they're doing is really not too bright.

Speaking of the revenue stream, I want to speak for just a moment to what they do with the surpluses they book forward to pay off the debt in the future. I'm seeing if I can find this. Oh, here we go: accumulated debt, including cash set aside for future debt repayment, is forecasted to decline. Well, tell me, Mr. Chairman, what is the justification for setting cash aside for future debt repayment rather than an ongoing set-aside of the existing revenue stream when we're in these kinds of cost reductions? It's a real problem. This is, I think, only because the Premier wants to see the debt paid off by the 2005 anniversary, and that's his ticket out of this particular job. That's the big thing he wants to have done before he retires, the debt paid off, but at what cost?

There's a huge cost of him doing that when we don't have these huge surpluses we've seen in the last little while, so he needs to show some leadership in this area in terms of putting people first in this province rather than putting his own agenda first. If oil prices skyrocket back up to where they have been before, if gas prices increase to where they have been before, then fine; let him go ahead with his accelerated debt repayment plan and nobody is the worse for that having happened. But in this kind of situation that we find ourselves in right now, people do get hurt by what he's doing. He needs to really show some leadership and statesmanlike behaviour in terms of saying: "You know what? The debt can wait." We need to feed families, we need to provide support for families, and we need to ensure that our children are educated adequately to a level so that they can compete in the global marketplace. We need to ensure that those kinds of pillars of our society are put in place, are well funded, and are maintained before he takes a look at the other options.

So what he's doing now I believe is very shortsighted and is definitely a problem from the perspective of funding core programs and thinking about what the core service of government really is, which is not to balance the budget. It is to properly provide for people in the province within the dollars they have available to them. That ends up in a balanced budget, Mr. Chairman, but the filter that you use to make the decisions on where the money goes, how it's spent, and how it's accounted for is quite different.

Speaking of how the money is accounted for brings to mind the question the Finance minister responded to today. She needs to get a little bit of an update from her technical people on the accounting side, because she either didn't understand the question or she was particularly leading the people of the province down a path that is absolutely incorrect in terms of talking about how revenues are booked and used to pay forward and pay back debts. It has been the policy of this government to accrue revenues, to account for revenues on an accrual basis, which means that anything meant to be earned in this fiscal year-end is counted in this year regardless of when it's received. That's fine. Those are generally accepted accounting practices, and that's a good way to operate. But for the rest of the cash flow in the province they operate on a cash basis regardless of whether it's actually received within the 12 months that it was booked in or not, and that is wrong, Mr. Chairman. If it's an accrual basis for one system, it's an accrual basis for every system. There are a couple of accountants in here who know that to be true, and we would certainly appreciate it if they could stand up and speak to that issue or at least privately take the Minister of Finance aside

and ensure that she understands that if they're going to play fast and loose with the books of this province, then at least she doesn't state otherwise on the record in question period.

9:40

So, Mr. Chairman, many concerns. I am completely in disagreement with the way they allocate their economic cushions and in most cases with how they take their corrective actions. I'm completely in disagreement with what they term to be highlights of this particular budget, which I think are anything but highlights. They show very poorly on this government and they show very poorly in terms of how the government reports. Not just the Official Opposition think this. We have seen many, many reports over the years from the Auditor General on this, not the least of which was the 2000-2001 report, where we see the Auditor General taking no less than five pages for serious concerns about the manner in which this government talks about accounting issues and inadequate progress on how the money is spent. Those include Health and Wellness, where they talk about risks, that costs escalate but results don't improve. So what that means is poor management, plain and simple. There is no excuse for it. You should get at least the same benefit out of the dollars you're spending, at least that if not better.

In these days of continuous improvement as a base level for industry to perform, costs escalating when results don't improve is simply not acceptable. It isn't acceptable in industry. It isn't acceptable in government. He states where the Department of Health and Wellness "continually spends more money on our health system without knowing the value of that extra spending." How can that be? They are clearly not doing their job. He goes on to talk about that in some detail, not the least of which, Mr. Chairman, is talking about findings and recommendations from three years ago that still apply today.

This is a government that tries to tell the people of this province that they know what they are doing, but the Auditor General still states for Health and Wellness, which is the biggest dollar fund in this province, that they can't figure out what they are doing still, after three years. After three years of having assistance from the Auditor General, it is a real shame. So that's a problem.

He states that "progress is unsatisfactory," and that his office "will continue to recommend ways to improve the management of health resources since that is our job." He'll "continue to report on our performance in terms of whether our recommendations are implemented," which haven't been so far, Mr. Chairman. He also says that "the challenge is to get senior people to invest time, effort, and personal commitment in resolving the issues outstanding since restructuring of the health system began."

Now, you know that leadership starts at the top, Mr. Chairman. The Auditor General is stating here that the problems come with senior people, and I agree with him. That's where the problems come. That's where they need to start addressing them, and they're just not doing it. [interjection] Well, that's right. My colleague from Edmonton-Riverview makes a very good point.

The Auditor General goes on to talk about the ministry business plans. Serious problems with those since the beginning of time, when they first implemented them, which I think, Mr. Chairman, was when I was first elected, in 1993.

It's one thing for them to name these things and to say that they're going to do them. It's quite another thing for them to actually do them, and they haven't. The Auditor General previously recommended that the costs of core businesses be reported. It's hard to believe that they talk about costing for businesses and they have business plans, but they don't actually do it. So that's a problem.

He states that "approximately one third of ministries did not adequately link costs to . . . core businesses." Well, what are they reporting them for? They're wasting everybody's time, Mr. Chairman, not the least of which is the time of all those civil servants who are churning out these documents and churning out these numbers without ever linking the cost to the core businesses. So that's a problem that needs to be addressed.

Performance measures and targets. Again, we've been talking about this since '93. The Auditor General "previously recommended the performance measures and targets in business plans be improved." They state that the quality of measures has improved, but few ministries disclosed the external factors that affect performance. You know, that's directly linked to the motion we brought in this afternoon in the Chamber, Mr. Chairman, that this government voted down because they do not want to be accountable. So that's a problem.

The Auditor General talks about recommending that "best practices in business planning be stated," once again a very common practice in industry, the very industry that this government prides itself on following and recommending, but not a practice that this government wants to implement.

So all in all, Mr. Chairman, a very shoddy performance by the government at this stage. It's very disappointing, no surprise to me, but very disappointing. We hope they can do better when they bring in what will likely be another fiscal update before the end of this year comes, and more supplementary estimates. Not likely that they'll be able to get it right yet, but let's hope they don't do it on the backs of children.

[The clauses of Bill 30 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 30.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 30. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 28
Agricultural Operation Practices
Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on behalf of the hon. Member for Leduc.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would move third reading of Bill 28, the Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001, on behalf of the Member for Leduc.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak briefly about this bill. Much has been made about difficulties in siting industrial livestock operations in different parts of the province. Much has been made about the conflicts which can exist. Much has been made by the government about the need for it to step in and ensure that things are done more rationally where local jurisdictions have failed in the task. Much has been made by a number of people about the advantages of having parts in this bill that deal with consistent regulations and so on for environment and for siting. Those are some of the parts of the bill that people have supported, but I don't think these things really capture the underlying motivation for the bill or the essence of the bill.

9:50

What we have here is a tool which the government plans to use in order to facilitate larger scale, including some potentially very large-scale, operations which may in fact have a significant amount of foreign ownership. As the Premier said – and I attended his news conference in which he talked about increasing the number of hogs in Alberta from around 2 million to around 12 million, a 10 million increase. So what I see and what we see in the third party here, in the New Democrat opposition, is that this bill is a tool to override local opposition, to regulate it, to be sure, but primarily to ensure that large-scale operations, including those on the scale of the proposed Taiwan Sugar plant, can be sited in this province whether or not the people of this province agree. They can increase the pig population to the point where it is four times the population of the province, and you don't have to go farther than southern Manitoba, but you can go into the Carolinas in the United States and you can see all kinds of situations in which this particular policy has been followed. It doesn't matter which party it is, Mr. Speaker, it's not a good policy. Certainly there are very, very serious problems as a result.

So the province's vision in agriculture is one which will squeeze out the small producer and the family farm, and we heard some comments earlier from the Minister of Infrastructure expressing that concern. We're going to industrialize agriculture, and we're going to intensify agriculture. There will be great consequences not just for the environment of this province, Mr. Speaker, but there will be great social implications as well, because the small producer who owns his or her own land will be driven out of business and will become an employee working for a wage for some big foreign company. That is the future that this government has in mind for many Albertans with this bill.

I want to just come back, Mr. Speaker, to the question of what consequences might exist for the environment of this province as a result of this. Don't forget that this comes on top of the same policy that's gone on for many, many years in this province with respect to the oil and gas industry, where its rights have been put ahead of the

rights of the ordinary citizens of this province, and then the forestry industry, and now they're going to do the same thing. Foreign-controlled, industrial-level, intensive agriculture is the vision that this province has for its people.

We're going to have a very serious problem with pig manure. I know we'll hear some tittering from the backbenchers over there, but we did some calculations, and I referred to them in an earlier comment. If there are 12 million hogs in this province, we break it down that about 1 million of them would be dry sows. They will produce between 11.3 and 15.9 litres of manure per pig per day times 365 days times 1 million dry sows: 5 billion litres of pig manure. We're assuming that there would be 2 million nursing sows which would produce 7.3 billion litres of pig manure, that there would be 3 million starter pigs for 2.2 billion litres of pig manure, that there would be 3 million grower pigs for 5.8 billion litres of pig manure, and that there would be 3 million finisher pigs for 12 billion litres. A grand total, Mr. Speaker, every year in this province, if this government has its way, of 32.3 billion litres of pig manure, and if it was spread evenly over the province, our calculations are that we would all be ankle deep in the stuff. Now, it may be somewhat higher in rural areas, and we're hoping it will be somewhat less in urban areas, but clearly that exceeds any practical measure of containment and treatment and disposal. We think this is a very, very serious problem.

Now the Minister of Infrastructure, when he spoke today, talked a little bit about his ideas. Certainly he argued very strongly that there's a very small chance of contamination of groundwater by this process. You know, he was the minister of agriculture and he may know better than I about that, but there are certainly cases of contamination of groundwater which we have looked at in other jurisdictions, so it is not impossible. On the other hand, there are plenty of examples of contamination of surface water by these huge containment ponds. There aren't adequate regulations around those containment ponds. They kill fish, they contaminate with bacteria, and they contaminate with chemicals. They are a real threat to the environment of this province.

Now, I want to come . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: What do you think of pig shit?

MR. MASON: Well, I don't know if that would be a parliamentary term or not. I was tempted to make use of it, but I prefer thinking of these lagoons maybe in terms of having not a song for the province but a provincial ballet, and we might call it Swine Lake, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps one of the members opposite can propose a private member's bill to establish a provincial ballet.

Mr. Speaker, the Tory vision for agriculture in this province is one that will contaminate the environment, drive small producers out of business, and create an odour that will waft from one end of the province to the other. I urge hon. members to vote against this bill. Hold your noses now or hold your noses for evermore.

[Motion carried; Bill 28 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's been a very interesting day, ranging from an official song to an official ballet, potentially. Who knows?

That having been said, I would move that the Assembly stand adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

[Motion carried; at 9:58 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 28, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/28

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O God, grant that we the members of our province's Legislature may fulfill our office with honesty and integrity. May our first concern be for the good of all our people. Guide our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Chornovil, Member of Parliament of Ukraine and member of the Committee for the State and the Development of Local and Provincial Government. I would like to welcome Mr. Chornovil and his colleagues: Ms Kravets, head specialist, Ministry of Economics; Mr. Kononenko, deputy head of Sviatoshyn regional government administration; and Mr. Voronin, head of the Secretariat Committee for Government Building, Municipal Self-Government, and Council Activity.

Our friends from Ukraine are visiting Alberta on their official visit under phase 2 of the CIDA-funded Canada/Ukraine legislative and intergovernmental project. This project advances legislative development in Ukraine, which is striving to become more market orientated and grow its economy. Our guests today have come to Alberta to examine Canadian federal/provincial relations, fiscal federalism, and municipal government. At this time I'd like to ask our honoured guests to now please rise in the Speaker's gallery and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a petition signed by 447 Albertans urging "the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children . . . financial assistance to their parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in traveling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres." A total of 1,447 Albertans have so far signed this petition.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the provincial judges and masters in chambers pension plan annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2000. This is pursuant to section 5 of the provincial judges and masters in chambers pension plan regulation Alberta No. 265/88. Members who would like a copy of this annual report can obtain a copy from my office.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the annual report for 2001 of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. As all members know, this is a very active council that works very hard to present issues related to our disability community, and I want to thank our chairperson of that particular council, the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, for his stellar stewardship as well as our own Premier for his good guidance in this regard.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Premier asked Government Services to study the issue of lobbyist registration, and today I'm pleased to table five copies of that research report. As we committed, the report identifies what's being done in other provinces and federally on lobbyist registration, the cost of the bureaucracy needed to run such a registry, and on the basis of those factors whether or not a lobbyist registry should be established in Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. Pursuant to Standing Order 37(1) it's my pleasure to table the requisite number of copies of the Safety Codes Council 2000 annual report. The council, of course, is a valued partner of this government and of Municipal Affairs. It works to ensure the safety of all Albertans.

My second tabling today is pursuant to Standing Order 37(3). I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter I sent to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry in response to his good questions of November 27 on public consultation relative to objective-based building codes and the good work we're doing in partnership with the National Research Council.

MR. DUCHARME: M. le Président, il me fait grand plaisir de déposer cinq copies de la Charte du Jeune Citoyen Francophone du 21^e Siècle, créée par 85 étudiants provenant d'une quarantaine d'états et de gouvernements de la Francophonie réunis à l'Assemblée nationale du Québec pour le premier Parlement Francophone des Jeunes en juillet dernier. Cette charte s'articule autour de cinq grands thèmes: l'éducation, la santé, et les questions sociales; la culture, la communication, et la nouvelle technologie; les libertés fondamentales et la démocratie; la prévention des conflits; et l'environnement.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table five copies of the Charter of the Young Francophone Citizen of the 21st Century, created by 85 students from 40 Francophone states and governments meeting at the Quebec National Assembly last July for the first Francophone Youth Parliament. This charter centres around five main themes: education, health, and social questions; culture, communication, and new technologies; fundamental liberties and democracy; prevention of conflicts; and the environment.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a letter sent to the Minister of Transportation and copied to the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert and to me, authored by the mayor and council of the city of St. Albert, endorsing the St. Albert RCMP Community Advisory Committee's

resolution that asks the government to put in place regulations under the Traffic Safety Act making the wearing of approved bicycle helmets mandatory for bicyclists of all ages.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table five copies of an information sheet prepared by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters that informs us that over 9,000 abused women did not receive shelter services last year.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a brochure from the Mill Woods Welcome Centre for Immigrants. They had an open house celebrating their new location and paying tribute to their volunteers on Friday, November 23, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the fall newsletter from the Terra Association, which is a very good, hardworking association in my riding for young mothers and teen mothers. It's outlining their new family literacy program and their services for young fathers.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have three tablings today. The first is an open letter representing 48 principals in Beaumont, Calmar, Devon, Leduc, New Sarepta, Thorsby, and Warburg in part indicating that parents are often required to fund-raise to maintain libraries, purchase new equipment, and provide important learning opportunities for students.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is the licensing information put out by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission.

My final tabling is 41 requests from Albertans who want to urge the government to vote in favour of the class size targets bill, to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the required number of copies of 40 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

1:40

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter, an e-mail, from Natasha Wiebe of the department of pediatrics at the University of Alberta suggesting that the Ministry of Children's Services' cuts are breaking faith with the families it serves.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a news release from the

Edmonton Aboriginal Coalition for Children and Families. This coalition is organizing a community public meeting on November 29 at 9:30 in the morning at the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, which is located at 11205-101st Street.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter addressed to all MLAs from Penny Davis, RN and bachelor of science in nursing, where she urges all members to support Bill 209, and she goes on to say that this is extremely important, that the safety of our children is worth it.

The second tabling is from a teacher that wrote to me, and he goes on to say that he is very concerned over

the Conservative Government's apathy with regard to teacher's concerns over education funding. I know I speak for a great many of my colleagues when I say that I'm feeling extremely undervalued, underpaid and ignored. I am very concerned that the Government is underestimating the level of commitment that teachers are feeling as we enter into a potentially volatile contract year.

Thank you very much.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc. Happy birthday.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Legislature three visitors from the constituency of Leduc who have come to see their Legislature in operation. They are Paul Cissell, Leroy Paulson, and Andre Sirois, and I'd ask the House to extend to them the traditional warm greeting.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to introduce 43 special guests from Whitecourt-St. Anne, 35 students from the Grasmere school accompanied by three teachers: Mrs. Hansen, Mrs. Brayford, and Mrs. VandenBiggelaar. There are five helpers: Mrs. Renz, Mrs. Ehrenholz, Mrs. Tiedeman, Mrs. Schroeder, and Mrs. Jacques. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 96 constituents who are visiting us from St. Albert's Muriel Martin school. Three teachers, 14 parent helpers, and 79 students are a great example of why Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert is one of the best constituencies in the province. These bright, energetic students participated in your Christmas decorating program this morning and are accompanied by three teachers, Mrs. Kane, Mrs. Boyd, and Miss Griffiths, and fourteen parent helpers: Cathy McLelland, Marion Jasinski, Chris Patterson, Cynthia Olson, Pamela Radford, Mark Brown, Sandy Graveline, Jason Wood, Mrs. Olson, Mrs. Chies, Mr. Born, Mrs. Hart, Mrs. Schimpf, and Mrs. Joshi. They are seated in both galleries, and I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. DUCHARME: M. le President, j'ai le plaisir de vous presenter

ainsi qu' à l'Assemblée Legislative M. Marc-Andre Vincent, étudiant à l'école Maurice-Lavallee d'Edmonton. Marc-Andre fut choisi pour représenter l'Alberta à la première rencontre du Parlement Francophone des Jeunes, qui a eu lieu en juillet dernier au Québec. Marc-Andre faisait partie de l'équipe responsable pour la rédaction de la Charte que j'ai déposée à la table il y a quelques minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Marc-Andre Vincent, student at Maurice-Lavallee school in Edmonton. Marc-Andre was selected to represent Alberta at the first meeting of the Francophone Youth Parliament, which took place this past summer. Marc-Andre was part of the team responsible for drafting the charter which I tabled earlier today. Marc-Andre is seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that he please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce two very special friends who are in your gallery this afternoon, and in doing so, I want to thank the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for allowing me this privilege to introduce two long-standing friends who are accompanying our special delegation from Ukraine. They are, first of all, Mr. Jim Jacuta, who does a yeoman's job working at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at our university, and the second is Yuri Loutsenko, who is providing interpretive services. [remarks in Ukrainian]

I welcome you both along with all the special guests who are with you from Ukraine. I greet you warmly. [as submitted]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Jacob Ross, who I believe is seated in the visitors' gallery. Dr. Ross is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Perinatal Research Centre at the University of Alberta. He comes to the University of Alberta from Adelaide, Australia. He is one of the many distinguished scholars attracted to the University of Alberta, many of whom I have the distinct honour of representing in this Assembly. I would ask Dr. Ross to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Mrs. Patricia Gordon. Mrs. Gordon is here to observe the working of the Assembly and the contributions her granddaughter is making to its operation. Mrs. Gordon is the grandmother of Maya Gordon, a page of the Assembly. Mrs. Gordon is seated in the members' gallery. I would now ask Mrs. Gordon to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two excellent volunteers in the community of St. Albert. They are Heather and Gareth Jones. Gareth is also a member of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Gaming Revenue for Children's Services

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government relies on gaming revenue to fund essential services. Given that this is the case, we would expect that all essential programs are given their fair share of gaming revenue, but according to this year's budget figures some programs are more essential than others. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Why did the racing industry renewal program receive 18 times more funding than the fetal alcohol initiative?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to say that in Alberta we have a unique model where all gaming revenue goes into the Alberta lottery fund, and that Alberta lottery fund is used for the benefit of our communities through charities, not-for-profit organizations, and also for public initiatives. Each spring we vote on the lottery estimate, and it is through that vote that it is determined whether the money will go to charitable foundations or whether it will go to public initiatives.

MS CARLSON: To the Minister of Gaming: why did the Calgary Stampede receive seven times more revenue than the entire Children's Services department?

MR. STEVENS: The Alberta lottery fund as it relates to public initiatives is not to be used for operational matters but, rather, to be used for capital. So if you take an analysis of each of the ministries which receive funding, you will find that there are specific projects under each ministry which are to have the money spent on them and those projects only. The one exception that I can think of is relative to the Ministry of Health and Wellness, where through the Alberta lottery fund we fund AADAC's budget in its entirety, which includes operational funding.

1:50

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I feel compelled to supplement the answer. In the hon. member's question she left the impression that Children's Services had not received its fair share of budget dollars in this fiscal plan. Quite clearly, Children's Services in the overall budget received \$648 million in funding. The Calgary Stampede through lottery allocations received I believe it was \$7.1 million. So, please, let's not play that game; that's not fair.

MS CARLSON: We're talking about lottery funding to Children's Services, and that minister heard the question.

Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Children's Services then: how does this minister defend a policy that chooses to fund horses over children in need?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, programs like fetal alcohol syndrome do not use capital dollars. Some of the prerequisites for funding are quite different. If in fact the hon. member is concerned that we should be exploring dollars from gaming revenues or liquor revenues to fund programs, we're currently reviewing a program in Manitoba, where they are looking at the dollar revenue possibilities from the sale of liquor. I believe they've already enacted a program. We're going to look at the results of that program. We've had a lot of willingness from partners that are

distributing alcohol throughout Alberta, through the bottling agencies and so on, to get involved in the program.

There has been no request specifically for lottery funding for Children's Services because we've been receiving funds from general revenue and have not made it a target for revenues for any particular area.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, once again I have to get up. The hon. member across has made an innuendo that is an unwarranted assertion as to the government's priorities, and I would ask her to withdraw that, because she knows perfectly well that we have put a main focus on Children's Services by being one of the few governments that I'm aware of that has a full department that is focused on children's services in addition to our support for families in addition to our support for aboriginal children. To indicate through innuendo that there's any priority that is different is unwarranted, and I would ask her to withdraw that and do the right thing.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

School Fund-raising

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parents are working casinos to raise funds for schools. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission rules state that casino proceeds may be used for "providing equipment, supplies or programs to educate students. Not included are social or recreational activities." My first question is to the Minister of Gaming. Will the minister confirm that schools buying textbooks, mathematics equipment, and library books have done so under this provision?

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think it's important to understand that we have a unique model in the province of Alberta. It's called a charitable model. The casinos and bingos are operated by charities through licences granted by the AGLC, and each year, as a result of the charitable model, some \$171 million is provided to charity for good works in our communities throughout the province. Some of those groups are without a doubt school advisory groups. They make application and are granted licences.

I would refer the matter to the hon. Minister of Learning, who has on a regular basis commented on the appropriateness of using funds for textbooks.

DR. OBERG: Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to delay the Assembly here. That question has been answered numerous times. They are not allowed to use the money for textbooks. The Alberta School Boards Association has said no. When it comes to the Edmonton public school board, they've said no. I've said no, and the school boards have said no.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Then my question is to the Minister of Learning, Mr. Speaker. Given that school-run casinos can only fund education programs, why does the minister stand by his claim that parents are only fund-raising for extras?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, if these regulations do say that, then obviously the regulations need to be taken a look at. That's what this government is there for, to take a look at regulations such as this.

The bottom line is that they are to be used for extras. Casino-

derived revenues can be used for things such as school uniforms, trips to Europe, band trips, all these other types of things. They're not to be used for the core supplies of schools. Unfortunately, that's the way it is.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. My final question is to the Minister of Learning, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister's promised review of school financing result in a formula that ensures that parents need only fund-raise for what he calls the extras?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, that is what is occurring now, or that is what is supposed to occur right now. Certainly anything that we do with regards to funding on the funding formula will be consistent with that, so I have no problems at all with agreeing to that.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Implementation of Auditor General's Recommendations

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In his latest report the Auditor General said that "the Department of Health and Wellness has not made adequate progress in implementing past recommendations." The Auditor General points out that he doesn't believe management is ignoring his recommendations; however, he calls their progress "unsatisfactory." My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Is the minister aware of any impediments in his department that prevent it from implementing the Auditor General's recommendations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, let me say at the outset that we have a great deal of time and respect for the Auditor General of the province of Alberta, who has made a number of constructive comments not only on the operations of the Department of Health and Wellness but other departments as well. We are endeavouring to move forward on some of his recommendations. Some of them are not as easy to implement as others. So our progress on some has been immediate. Indeed, of the recommendations made by the AG a number have already been implemented, but there are others.

One that comes to mind immediately is determining the value of the services that we pay for with physicians, as an example. This is a very complicated matter that will require not just a change in government policy but perhaps a change to the contract that is negotiated with physicians in the province of Alberta. That clearly is not something that is entirely within the ability of the government to change on its own. It will require the co-operation of stakeholders. There are, I should say, other recommendations that fall into that type of category.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General has said that "the challenge is to get senior people to invest time, effort, and personal commitment," can the minister tell the House why this is a challenge for his senior people?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I don't see any reason why we should be standing on the floor of this Legislature besmirching the reputation of our senior staff in the Department of Health and Wellness. They are extremely dedicated, hardworking, committed individuals, and I see no reason why we should make a disparaging remark.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's simply in the Auditor General's report.

Is the minister prepared to implement all of the Auditor General's recommendations before implementing recommendations from the Premier's advisory council?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated our willingness to move forward on many of the recommendations made by the Auditor General. I'm advised by the provincial Minister of Finance that we will be soon tabling our overall government response to the recommendations made by the AG. Again, good recommendations that are constructive, and we will move forward on them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Children's Services Funding

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The cuts to children's services that we know about so far may only be the tip of the iceberg. Provincewide the cuts that we do know about total only a few million dollars while the projected deficit for children's services across the province is at least \$40 million. It's clear that many more cuts to children's services will be necessary to make up this shortfall. To the Minister of Children's Services: can the minister confirm that in fact more cuts to programs for children's services will be necessary in order to make up the full approximately \$40 million that has to be cut?

2:00

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge all authorities were to provide their cost-containment strategies to the deputy minister by November 23. We have received in some considerable detail all of those estimates from the authorities, and I don't anticipate any further reductions. I'd just qualify my answer this way. There may be some people in programs further away from the child that do not know or have not yet had the communication about some particular dollar figure.

If I could just make one observation, all of the authorities were alerted as early as August that we were going to be in a cost-containment mode because of some anticipated deficit dollars, so we had been working with them. In some cases, such as in MâMôwe, there was a letter sent out to each one of the agencies, 140 some odd contract agencies in all, 93 of which were involved in early intervention projects. Mr. Speaker, to the best of my knowledge all agencies, all individuals, all programs should now know what their dollar figure targets are.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, can the minister indicate to the Assembly the total dollar value of the cuts made to programs in her department so far?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to table a document that illustrates that, perhaps even before the end of this question period today. I have a breakout of that on the basis of each individual authority. The Department of Children's Services has made a reduction of some \$7 million, so we will be able to provide that and would be pleased to give the hon. member some details.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, will the minister assure the Assembly that there will be no further cuts to children's programs in her department in this budget year?

MS EVANS: You know, Mr. Speaker, I think there's a lot of temerity, and that's natural. When we're making changes, people are concerned, and indeed so am I. But I'd like to reference something from *Hearthstone* that has come to me from one of our hon. members, which example has been put in the newspaper. It quotes the CEO Jon Reeves as stating that there were \$68,000 worth of reductions within their region, that they will be able to meet their targets fairly, and that there have been no allusions to more cuts.

Mr. Speaker, unless the sky falls in Alberta and there's immediate change that all of us will be fully aware of and acknowledging, I don't anticipate more change, but I do not have a crystal ball that tells me exactly what our revenue picture will look like next week or next month or early next year. I am doing my best with what we've got, and so are all of the authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Children's Advocate

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children who are at risk or in need of protection are of special concern to all Albertans. Although there will never be a government program or service that can replace the loving care of parents, there are many caring people in the Children's Services system that do their very best to care for these children in need. My question is for the Minister of Children's Services. Can the minister tell the House what she is doing to address concerns raised in the recent Children's Advocate report?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the advocate's report for the year 2000-2001 raised some very serious issues because of anecdotal references made in consultations and meetings held in five centres on five different dates in communities in Alberta. Specifically those cases, over 186 in all, were individual children who had either been referenced or reference made to. We have investigated every single one of those circumstances and have released a nonidentifiable report; in other words, not showing each child by identity but showing what the investigation entailed. That investigation and the follow-up has been taken very seriously not only by the authorities themselves but by other authorities such as the police, in some situations, and the advocate as well. We are satisfied that we have followed up on that report.

The second part of my answer would be that during this Child Welfare Act review with the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, we will be looking at recommendations from the Chan Durrant report about what type of advocacy model should be in place and listening to Albertans through their responses on the discussion guide and through other submissions that will be made to the hon. member in the review of the Child Welfare Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister of Children's Services: are you taking any action as to the role of the Children's Advocate at this time?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, beyond what I have currently suggested, there's nothing in place at this time that has changed at all. We have had an Acting Children's Advocate in place, especially while we go through this consultation, making sure that we get all of the thoughts and views of Albertans. We're looking at some other changes that are systemwide in concert with that. At the time the advocate's role was put in place and at the time of the Chan Durrant review, many

people were suggesting other roles for other people in the system as advocates. One example is that we used to centralize the child welfare director. Now there are child welfare directors in each of the individual authorities.

One anomaly that I have discovered in the review of the Children's Advocate report is that frequently not all parties who should be advocating on behalf of the child were on the same wavelength at the same time. We need to ensure that the child welfare director is directly accountable for the work done on behalf of that child and that any advocacy about any anomaly that'll occur to the child in the system or anywhere else, as a matter of fact, would be reported to that director at that time. So there are a number of things we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. The minister has stated that her department is reviewing specific cases that were cited in the Children's Advocate report. Has that internal review been completed?

MS EVANS: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Day Care Workers

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children's Services has forgotten about the children and those that care for them. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Children's Services. Seven months ago the minister said that the Cleland report on day care workers' salaries was not yet ready to be tabled. Is it ready today?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the first phase of that report that examined the day care workers and day cares themselves has been done. This report has not been completed, however, because we are now looking at the emerging issue that arose with family day homes. This was another part that we discovered when we went out talking to the day care workers and to the people throughout the communities of Alberta. They pointed out and cited quite properly that over 6,000 children in Alberta were looked after in family day homes and wondered, if we were going to make changes to any part of the system, if we would look at yet another part of the system.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: with the mandatory 1 percent cutback this year and who knows what next year, will the minister have any money to be able to act upon the recommendations of the Cleland report and provide a salary increase to the day care workers in this province?

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of planning for our business plan presentation at our standing policy committee. At such time as I can divulge that to this House, I will so do. Let me be very clear though. On the matter of early intervention and early childhood development we have taken on the task of planning for several programs which we believe will certainly and clearly benefit the children whether they are low-risk or high-risk children, whether they are in day cares or universally throughout any community of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: how can we have among the lowest salaries for day care workers in Canada when the 2000-2001 Children's Services annual report shows that \$2.4 million dedicated for supporting day cares went unspent? Why couldn't you have put that into the pool of money for the child care workers, the day care workers? Why not?

2:10

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, oversimplification would be an answer to that question. There are many components to the situation of day care supports through supports to families. I think quite clearly that the targets we have had are the programs for those children that are most in need. When we did do some of the data collection, in reference to the Cleland report, we found out that throughout Alberta some of the profit-making day cares had dissolved and that nonprofit groups had come together and done exemplary jobs of providing day care and day care supports for their children.

One additional thing in the context of the low-income review. We have been talking to the people that have been working on that report, with the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment, and some of these things will tie in very nicely together when we bring out our report in due course.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Lobbyist Registry

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the hon. Minister of Government Services. Now that the report on a lobbyist registry has been tabled, can the hon. minister tell the House if this government plans to proceed with a registry?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is correct. After studying the lobbyist registries in other jurisdictions, it's clear that such a registry is not needed in Alberta today. So the answer simply is no. This government will not be proceeding with a lobbyist registry.

Presently, Mr. Speaker, there are two lobbyist registries operating in Canada, one in the province of Ontario and one federally. British Columbia and Nova Scotia have just come on with new legislation to establish lobbyist registries. However, in all four of those cases our research has shown that those registries are being set up in climates where an existing government is trying to provide stability and public trust that has been eroded by the previous governments. Those levels of concern simply do not exist here in Alberta today, so it's strictly a public relations move on behalf of those governments.

When you take a look at the \$300,000 or \$400,000 that's required to set one up and set up a bureaucracy to operate the registry, to run it for one year, we don't think that that cost is warranted at this time. That cost does not even come close to making sure that compliance and enforcement are looked after, so the costs could be much greater in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. To the same minister, Mr. Speaker: can the hon. minister better explain why a lobbyist registry would not be effective?

MR. COUTTS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we seriously considered, for

example, the concerns that were raised in this House last spring around a particular incident that happened last year, and we determined that a lobbyist registry would not have uncovered that particular situation. Even though a registry requires lobbyists to register and provide general information on their activities, it would not catch illegal acts between lobbyists and public officeholders. As well, under the definition currently being used in existing registries, only individuals or organizations that spent a significant proportion of their time and work on lobbyist activities would be required to register, so registries do not cover onetime lobbyist incidents. The operating records of existing lobbyist registries show quite simply that they are not capable of deferring illegal activity or enforcing registry requirements that are already in place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question to the same minister: can the minister explain, then, how a report from 1996 can recommend a registry, yet this report can arrive at a totally different conclusion?

THE SPEAKER: That strikes me that a lot of opinion is involved in that, Mr. Minister.

MR. COUTTS: Well, the research that was put in certainly did help form some of our opinions, but the research was based on what is actually happening in these other jurisdictions. It's interesting to point out that since 1986 there haven't been any prosecutions in the federal system, and there is evidence of widespread noncompliance in the registry system. So the fact is that we have had enough information that raised the red flags to say that although other reports have indicated that we should have lobbyist registries in the province, the evidence in our research shows that it is not needed at this time.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Driver Testing for Seniors

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently physicians may require seniors to go for special mandatory driver testing if the physician feels the senior may no longer be capable of driving safely. The physician could refer the senior to the private Drive-able program just as he would for a CAT scan, an MRI, or lab work except that the fee, over \$200 with tax, is not covered by Alberta Health, and the minister of health in correspondence with an Edmonton senior has referred the issue to the Minister of Transportation. So my question is to the Minister of Transportation. Considering that his department publicly acknowledged on August 1, 2000, that it was considering paying for these tests, why has there been no decision in the last 15 months?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member across the way is identifying an issue that's becoming more prevalent right across Canada, and that is that as our population ages, we have more and more people that are wanting to retain their driver's licence at a time when maybe family members are concerned about the safety of their parents. I would inform the House that one of the most difficult issues is to try and find some balance between the safety of the traveling public, the issues centered around the family with the senior, the registry agents, and also the police.

MS BLAKEMAN: There was no answer.

Since seniors are being forced to take this test for medical scrutiny, is it not unfair for the government to charge them for the medical component of this test over and above the actual driving component that any other driver would have to pay?

THE SPEAKER: Well, again, we're searching for opinions again, hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to inform the House that if any one of us has a class 1 driver's licence, the regulations require an annual medical checkup. The government doesn't pay for that particular medical. The person who has the privilege of that driver's licence pays for the medical. For anyone that wants to retain the privilege of owning a driver's licence, there are some obligations; there are some rules that we have to meet. But they're all centred on ensuring the safety of the traveling motoring public.

MS BLAKEMAN: Is the minister not worried about some cases where physicians may not require seniors to take the test because they know the financial strain that it could place on the seniors? How does that put us ahead?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member is asking more for an opinion as opposed to government policy.

Cloning of Human Beings

MR. LUKASZUK: Following the recent line of questioning, Mr. Speaker, my question may suggest a way to double the opposition caucus size.

Mr. Speaker, on a serious note recent news reports confirm that scientists now have the ability of cloning human beings. Many people have expressed concerns at the serious ethical dilemma this development in science imposes. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us if he will propose any legislation to deal with this serious issue?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the cloning of human beings is an issue that is recognized as a matter of major significance on a number of different levels. At present the federal government is taking the lead on this particular issue, and on the 3rd of May of this year the federal Minister of Health tabled the assisted human reproduction act. This act was tabled for consultation purposes. It is clear in this act tabled by the federal minister that there is a prohibition on human cloning. The bill also has provisions that allow for the delegating of responsibilities to a province with equivalent laws.

2:20

Mr. Speaker, I am advised that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health has been asked to provide its views on this particular bill by January 2002. The province of Alberta has been asked for its input, and we obviously have concerns with the legislation. We are working with our counterparts in other provinces and territories throughout Canada to improve the bill from a provincial perspective, but at this time my department will also closely monitor this issue to determine if, in fact, there is a need to move forward on provincial legislation, if required.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second and last supplemental to the Minister of Innovation and Science: since there

is, as the minister has indicated, no legislation in place at this time, what precautions are in place to ensure that ethical practices are followed on research that currently takes place in Alberta?

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question. Even though the legislation is not yet in place in Canada, there are other safeguards in place to ensure ethical research. In fact, all across Canada and Alberta strict ethical guidelines and review processes are part of any research involving human subjects. No research can receive public funding unless it has been shown to meet the ethical review process in the tricouncil policy statement.

The tricouncil policy statement on research involving humans was put together in 1998 by the Medical Research Council, which is now known as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. In this, it expresses the continuing commitment of the three councils on medical, social, and natural sciences to the people of Canada to promote the ethical conduct of research involving humans.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister. There is as part of the Routine something called Ministerial Statements.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Rebuilt Air Bags in Automobiles

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Transportation: does the minister support Quebec's call for a nationwide ban on rebuilt air bags in automobiles?

MR. STELMACH: Did he say airplanes or automobiles? I never heard the question.

THE SPEAKER: Well, actually, the House was rather quiet at the time. The question had to do with air bags.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I must apologize. I heard air bags. Then one person said windbags. I'm not quite sure what he was asking for.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please.

MR. BONNER: To repeat the question, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: Please proceed. We have now spent a minute.

MR. BONNER: Thank you. My question to the minister was: does the minister support Quebec's call for a nationwide ban on rebuilt air bags in automobiles?

MR. STELMACH: We are looking at the information that's coming forward from a number of organizations that are quite knowledgeable in this area and will be making a determination on the information as it comes forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is the minister planning any type of public education campaign to let Albertans know about the concerns regarding rebuilt air bags?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of organizations that partner with Alberta Transportation in terms of traffic safety and

all of the issues related to repair of equipment or automobiles following accidents and also many of the issues related to highway traffic safety. I will endeavour to just check with some of the organizations, like AMA, and see what their position is on it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister be creating regulations to protect Albertans from rebuilt air bags?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we don't build regulations in isolation from the other provinces. Any regulations that come forward in this particular area are done in partnership with the federal government and all of the provinces. It could be done through the Council of Motor Transport Administrators or all of the other individuals that are involved in doing regulations for various areas centred around not only the safety equipment on motor vehicles but also the actual construction of trucks or cars that we use on our highways.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mazankowski Report

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans were subjected to a multimillion dollar advertising blitz two years ago during the debate over Bill 11. The government used taxpayer dollars to outspend the bill's opponents at least 10 to 1. It now appears that the government is once again preparing to take its expensive PR machinery out of the hangar to sell Albertans on the dubious propositions that are no doubt contained in the Mazankowski report. All of my questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the government preparing to spend millions of dollars to convince Albertans of the merits of user-pay health care while simultaneously cutting millions from programs benefiting disadvantaged children? What kind of warped priorities are these?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that we spend a considerable amount of money on health care in the province of Alberta: \$6.4 billion. I should further note that the hon. member does not appear to be able to frame a question without besmirching the reputation of a fine person like Don Mazankowski. I should further note . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister has the floor.

MR. MAR: I should further note, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member does not appear to be able to get his own facts straight on a number of occasions. We know that between him and his colleague who sits to his left, his far left perhaps – between the two of them they are not able to do a sufficient amount of research to provide us with a question on government policy as opposed to mere insinuation. Really there is very little that can be answered in this question. The quality of the response must necessarily be governed by the quality of the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Minister of Health and Wellness needs to feel better than he is doing now.

THE SPEAKER: Let's get to the question.

DR. PANNU: Given that the Tory caucus is being given an advance briefing on the Mazankowski report tomorrow, will the minister extend the same courtesy to opposition members, and if not, why not?

MR. MAR: The purpose of question period, which has been stated by you on a number of occasions and has been understood by most members of the Assembly, is to ask questions about government policy, Mr. Speaker. It is not to answer questions about how a caucus works. We certainly do not want to know how their caucus works. The matters that go on within our caucus are not matters of government policy that are the proper subject matter of question period.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wonder if the Premier's council is a government body or not.

Why does the government believe that the recommendations in the Mazankowski report will actually save dollars in health care when it is authored by the same person who as federal Finance minister racked up the biggest budget deficit in the history of this country?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Palliative Care

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my work I hear and read about the increasing public awareness of our aging population and its impact on Alberta society. We have recently heard in this Chamber a certain amount of discussion around the issue of palliative care in Alberta. All of us have known someone who is terminally ill. My first question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us exactly what palliative care involves?

2:30

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview also asked a question about palliative care, and at that time I did outline in broad-stroke terms what palliative care is. It is a term that we use for the type of care that our health system offers for people who are terminally ill. As the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. Member for Calgary-West know, palliative care is active, it is also particularly compassionate, and it focuses on the quality of life of an individual who is dying and also the quality of life of that person's family. In the province of Alberta palliative care includes therapeutic and supportive services. These services are designed to meet not only the physical but also the spiritual, psychological, and social needs of the person and their family. It's for that reason that the provincial government considers palliative care a core health care service in our province, and we will continue to provide it on that basis.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second question is also to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us how palliative care services are delivered in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, regional health authorities in the province are responsible for delivering palliative care services in Alberta.

Each region can differ with respect to the manner in which it is delivered. It is for that reason that we ask regional health authorities to determine their own needs within their jurisdictions and gear their programs accordingly.

As an example, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary health region has devoted considerable resources to delivering more palliative care services in the homes of those suffering from terminal illness. I should say that palliative care can take place in a number of different settings. It could be in acute care facilities, long-term care facilities, at home, or in hospices. In the case of the Capital health authority, they have instead chosen to invest their dollars devoted to palliative care in subsidizing the cost of patients for some of their palliative care accommodation charges. That is the reason why there is regional difference in the cost in each different region.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my third and final question is also for the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister tell us what Alberta is doing to improve palliative care services in the province?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a matter where we can have some amount of pride in the work that we've done to improve palliative care. As an example, we've changed the home care regulation to exempt palliative care patients from the \$3,000 limit for home care services that would normally apply. In 1999 we implemented a \$3 million palliative care drug program that supports the cost of medications and allows patients to receive treatments in their homes or in a hospice or in a lodge. The department has also released a three-year action plan to implement Alberta's aging in place strategy, and part of that plan is to enhance palliative care.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall.

Child and Family Services Authorities

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Budget cuts are threatening and disrupting the work of personnel in the Children's Services department. My questions are all to the Minister of Children's Services. Have any regional Children's Services CEOs resigned for refusing to implement budget cuts?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of any resignations as the hon. member has suggested.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, have regional Children's Services CEOs had their positions threatened should they fail to implement budget cuts?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, this morning I attended Public Accounts, and there was a reference in the Auditor General's report about governance. It's very clear that the governance of the authorities is with appointed and approved boards that are managing those authorities. Those boards evaluate performance, they institute policy, and they work with the CEOs and a management team where the board sets policy and works with the CEO. I have not been given any communication heretofore that anybody has felt threatened and have not any information to support providing any further answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what are the consequences for CEOs should they not implement the budget cuts?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we've got full agreement, and if I could just say that all of the authorities have agreed with signing a plan on the support of their targets. Every authority will send in signatures of all the members on their service plan. I will similarly be forwarding to our Premier and to Finance a copy of the signatures of our department officials and myself supporting that we will achieve our targets. There has been no other policy or process in place.

Women's Shelters

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, at the request of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters I met with Ms Jan Reimer, provincial coordinator for the council. The council brochure which I tabled suggests that last year over 9,000 abused women and over 10,000 children could not be admitted to Alberta shelters. Given the upcoming holiday season, I am very concerned for the welfare of abused women and their children. My questions are to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Could you confirm if the statistics circulated by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters are accurate? If so, what is your ministry doing about it?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about the rising incidence of women and children who are seeking shelter. We have instituted a committee and liaison with the executive director of the Council of Women's Shelters to see if we can identify the best possible manner in collecting statistics. Prior to this we were not collecting them as well as we might. I think there's a real importance in understanding that many of those statistical references are not substantiated. They are different, given different authorities' management of the system. So we are taking every one that leaves as a serious issue, hoping that they are getting proper direction. Quite frankly, some of them do not want us to know where they're going, do not want us to follow up on their behalf. We're working very hard to make sure that we manage the issue in the best way possible.

MR. SHARIFF: My supplementary is also to the same minister. According to the document I tabled earlier, is it true that women's shelters have not received an increase for their operating costs since 1985? If that's true, how can the minister justify such an omission?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we have put increases in the budget in the last two years. Two years ago it was just over \$11 million; today it is approximately \$14 million. We had an increase again this year. Women's shelters across this province are one group of support agencies which I have suggested to all the CEOs and to the authorities we not ask for reductions during this period of cost containment because of my concern that many of those programs needed our support because of the accelerated exposure of women and children, predominantly, to family violence. The phenomenon of increase in the statistics on family violence is something that's happening Canada-wide. This is not simply an Alberta issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, sir.

head: Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Webber Academy

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Thursday, November 22, I was very pleased to represent the province at the official opening ceremony of the new Webber Academy campus in my constituency of Calgary-West. Webber Academy opened in 1997 with an enrollment of 85 students, and the new campus opened September 4, 2001, with an enrollment of 410 students. Webber Academy is a combination of a vision for learning by Dr. Neil Webber, four-time MLA for Calgary-Bow and former minister of social services, education, and energy. The mission of Webber Academy is to prepare students to strive in university and beyond, to be accomplished by creating an environment of high expectations of achievement, behaviour, and service. Webber Academy reflects the principles of Alberta's learning system: choice, learning opportunities for future success, and focus on lifelong learning. I heartily congratulate Webber Academy and Dr. Neil Webber in particular on this significant day in the history of the academy.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

2:40 Mill Woods Welcome Center for Immigrants

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to recognize the Mill Woods Welcome Center for Immigrants. For this organization the resources of Catholic Social Services, the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, and the Mennonite Center for Newcomers are combined into a multidisciplinary team which works through the Mill Woods Welcome Center for Immigrants. This team is dedicated to improving access and opportunities for immigrants through strategies that contribute to the building of the whole community. They are settlement assistance, employment strategies for foreign professionals, language and educational counseling, community development, homework club, and citizenship classes. They have been operating in this joint venture fashion for the past four years in Mill Woods and have been a welcome addition to our community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Lindsay Thurber Volleyball Team

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I stand before the Legislature today to congratulate the Lindsay Thurber high school senior women's volleyball team on being the very first team in Red Deer history to win a provincial 4A championship in volleyball. With determination, hard work, poise, and a lot of Red Deer fans cheering in the stands this team of young ladies played well under great pressure, especially in the final game, to defeat the defending champions from Edmonton's Harry Ainlay high school. This championship team with gold medals from the Tom Bast tournament, the Hunting Hills tournament, the Notre Dame tournament, and the southern Alberta regional championships in Medicine Hat has made Red Deer very proud.

Congratulations to the coach, Kirsten Andersen, and to each member of the team; namely, Cheryl Kranenborg, Jen Atkinson, Julie Young, Ashley Costigan, Raelene Purnell, Chelsa Kallis, Azadeh Boroumand, CaraLeigh Newfield, Ashley Fleming, Sara VanDoesburg, and Justine Barthel. As the very first team to win a provincial 4A volleyball championship for Red Deer you have earned a place in high school history.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

International Human Rights Day

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On December 10 we will celebrate International Human Rights Day, commemorating the signing and proclamation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The United Nations has designated 2001 the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations for reconciliation, peace, and respect of human rights among all people.

In keeping with this designation and in light of the events of September 11 of this year, the theme chosen for this year's event is Reach Out, Make a Difference: Respect the Rights, Freedoms, and Dignity of Others. It calls on each of us to make a commitment towards building a peaceful society by reaching out to ensure fairness and equity for all.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Center.

HIV/AIDS Living Positive

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to recognize the citizens of Alberta who are living with HIV and AIDS and the organizations that work so hard to provide support for living positive. As we observe AIDS Awareness Week and on December 1 World AIDS Day and the Day With(out) Art, we must recognize that we are all affected by this disease.

HIV does not discriminate. It knows no sexual, age, cultural, ethnic, or religious boundaries. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in Canada has changed from one that affected primarily gay men to the current epidemic that increasingly affects injection drug users and heterosexuals. Because of this shift, HIV/AIDS affects a growing number of women. In Alberta 23 percent of new cases of HIV infection reported in the first six months of 2001 were women.

HIV Edmonton, AIDS Calgary Awareness Association, and the Alberta Community Council on HIV are just three of the 21 agencies devoted to addressing the needs of the living positive community. As we go about our business this week, I would ask that you wear the red ribbon that I have distributed in recognition of the living positive community.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Character Cities Initiative Drayton Valley

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour for me to rise today to recognize a town that is taking a major step towards making Alberta a better place to live, work, and raise a family. Today the town of Drayton Valley will be the first municipality in Canada to implement an international initiative that has been proven to reduce crime, drug abuse, family breakup, as well as many other societal ills. This is called the Character Cities initiative, and it's a communitywide strategy to promote 49 different character traits amongst local governments, businesses, families, and citizens. Character qualities such as compassion, creativity, generosity, gratefulness, responsibility, and tolerance, to name only a few, will be promoted at schools, in churches, at jobsites, and in offices simultaneously each month. The Character First implementation seminar is being taught in Drayton Valley today and is being attended by community leaders and other municipalities that are thinking about joining in this great initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I must specifically recognize Mayor Moe Hamdon

and Pastor Gary Carter, who have together quarterbacked this dream for almost three years to make it a reality today.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Big Smoky Bridge Opening

MR. KNIGHT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with pride and pleasure that I rise today to give recognition to an important event in the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituency. Government staff, engineering firms, and contractors all worked through some very difficult situations, including a flood in July which took out a temporary crossing and some of the forming. Notwithstanding these setbacks, on Tuesday last the second bridge spanning the Big Smoky River on highway 43 was opened. This 303-metre – and for those of us who don't really understand that, that's 985 feet – \$7.8 million structure allowed for the opening of an additional 40 kilometres of twinning on the very important Canamex trade corridor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm going to recognize the hon. Deputy Speaker for a special recognition.

Page Recognition

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All hon. members, each day of the session we are served by the tireless efforts of our pages. On behalf of all of the members we want to give each page a small Christmas gift to say thank you and to wish each and every one a Merry Christmas. I'd ask our head page, Brett Shewchuk, to distribute these gifts for us.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to now move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 207 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, 2001

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to move third reading of Bill 207, a bill that has been debated at some length in this Legislature, the bill that would provide, if it continues to receive the support that it has thus far, that apprentices and journeymen in the 50 trades recognized in Alberta be placed on par with other taxpayers who are required to incur expenses in order to do their jobs, in order to complete whatever task is before them to build Alberta's economy.

Mr. Speaker, this bill has received support, I believe, because it simply makes sense. This morning I was at a breakfast meeting with about 300 or 400 people from the Sherwood Park area, and a contractor came up to me. I was just speaking with him briefly, and he said: how's that bill coming along that you had introduced? I was really surprised that he knew anything about this bill. It hadn't been talked about much in the media or any such place. He inquired of it, and I asked him: well, what do you think of it? He said: "Well, it just makes sense. It makes sense to enable those apprentices and journeymen who are expending considerable sums to buy those tools with which to ply their trade to be on par with other taxpayers, to be able to deduct those expenses and not have to purchase them with after-tax dollars."

I'd like to leave time for others who've indicated that they'd like to comment on this bill. I would take my seat at this time and listen to their comments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take a moment in this Assembly to acknowledge those apprentices and journeymen who have contacted me and asked for my support of this bill, indicating that it would indeed be a helpful financial opportunity for them to establish themselves in their chosen trade. I would like to go on record in this House as saying that I believe it is a very good bill. It is one that will serve Albertans and particularly the new workforce that we hope to encourage within our province. So I lend my support to it.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to rise and speak in favour of Bill 207. Bill 207 is important for Albertans because it will help address the growing gap and the need for success in our province and fill in the gaps in the shortage of trades in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, qualified tradespeople are what fuel our economy. I appreciate that we're in the midst of difficult times, but Alberta, more than any other province, is well positioned to ride out the slump in our economic cycle.

Tax relief is a goal for all Albertans that want government tax policy to be fair and not penalize them for making good choices, good choices such as going into trades, apprenticeship and journeymen. This province, Mr. Speaker, is no stranger to the benefits of tax relief.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage the members of this Assembly to support Bill 207 and provide the tradespeople in this province with the support necessary to move ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take this

opportunity to congratulate my colleague from across the way for having the initiative to bring this type of bill forward. I have had a number of phone calls in the constituency office in support of it, and I appreciate him doing this.

The apprenticeship program has been a huge part of my family for many years. My husband is a journeyman carpenter by trade and does work for the Department of Learning and is responsible for managing the Red Deer office of the apprenticeship program, so I'm told often about the skills necessary to become a journeyman and often what is required as to the time commitment when they're going to school, the need for them to sometimes move away from home and go to where they can receive their apprenticeship training for that period of time each year, and of course the cost. I think that this, as was just said a minute ago, enables many, many people to consider the apprenticeship program.

While I have the floor, I would like to congratulate the government of Alberta and the Minister of Learning as well. I think we have an excellent apprenticeship program in Alberta. Hon. minister, this certainly is not my husband telling me to say this, but I do know that we have one of the best in all of Canada, and a lot of other Canadian jurisdictions look to Alberta for assistance in qualifying many trades to be part of the apprenticeship program. The hon. member talked about 50-some trades. That's where they're at right now, but yearly there are new trades that come onstream because, of course, of all the changes within our society. So I think this particular bill, when passed and when proclaimed, will become a very useful tool once again for the other jurisdictions looking our way to see exactly what we're doing.

Right now in Alberta all the trades are very, very busy, and a lot more people, men and women, are looking to the trades for a very good way of life. There are some people that make exceptional money in many of the trades, and many of them are specialized, so I think we can encourage our students to look this way.

I'm very proud, again, of what has been accomplished today. I will be supporting it. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to be followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today in support of Bill 207. I want to be on record as being in favour of this piece of legislation. I realize that it may take some time for this to become effective, but I believe we need to rectify somewhat of an inequity between a sole-proprietor contractor and an employee who must purchase his tools to work. The constituents of Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert have advised me that we should support our tradespeople in this way, and I will be voting in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to add a few final comments on this bill before passage. I'd like to commend the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for bringing it forward. It does bring the tradespeople who are employed and who are required as a condition of employment to purchase their own tools basically on the same or a comparable playing field as those tradespeople who are self-employed, and I certainly do support this.

One of the things that I heard just last Friday night at a Future Summit town hall in my constituency was that fairness in taxation

is a high priority for people in my constituency, and I believe that this Bill 207 does set a fine example of fair taxation amongst the tradespeople. I'm sure that we're going to hear more about fairness in trade at the Future Summit next February, and this gives us an opportunity to show some leadership and get out ahead of what Albertans want by passing this bill now.

I thank you for the opportunity to add those comments.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be siding with the concerns of the Treasurer on this particular bill. I am very concerned about the cost impact of this. I have a concern that so many members are supporting it when we have no sense, that I'm aware of, of the cost impact of this piece of legislation. It does entail a tax expenditure, and a tax expenditure is the same, in effect, as a cash expenditure. My information is that there could well be a hundred thousand or more applicants for this sort of a benefit, and it could end up easily, easily costing the provincial treasury tens of millions of dollars a year, not to mention the very substantial bureaucratic development that may be required to handle that many applicants and the impact on the whole trades registration system.

I am also aware that while this is certainly intended to stimulate trades training, there is a very tight limit on funding for trades training at the technical schools. In fact, NAIT, for example, is expecting no increase whatsoever or at least very little increase, as I understand it, in their budget for trades training for years to come. So I think that may be a more direct way to address any shortages in the supply of tradespeople. I am concerned that we are proceeding with an idea here for which we have not got a clear sense of the cost. My sympathies on this one are with the Treasurer.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted just to make a few brief comments on third reading of this bill. I do appreciate the motivation behind bringing the bill forward, and I totally concur and respect what he's trying to accomplish. I do however have some concerns about it, starting off with that during the past year we've changed our income tax system in the province of Alberta. We left a graduated system that tied us to the federal government. We brought in a 10 percent flat tax to the benefit of all Albertans. The point behind it was that it was to the benefit of all Albertans.

3:00

We've brought in some tax cuts for corporations with promises of more in the future as we can afford to bring them in. The key on that is: as we can afford to bring them in. We've tried to implement through business tax reviews and corporate and personal income tax reviews over the last six or eight years a careful, methodical, studious method of where the problem taxes were and how to deal with them. The goal, of course, was to try to stay away from things called one-offs, and this is, in fact, a one-off.

I mean, I have no desire to stand in the way of anybody taking up a trade or being able to buy their tools or, in fact, being able to write them off. My concern is that it is not costed out. When you ask for information on what this will cost, no one can answer. If it costs \$100,000 for the entire province, it's not a big deal, but if it costs \$10 million in lost revenue to the province of Alberta in this particular year, it is a big deal.

We're struggling right now. We've virtually wiped out transportation and infrastructure and the construction of new schools and health care facilities because we have a revenue shortfall because of oil and gas right now. There is a recession occurring in the entire country. Whether any of the other provincial governments are admitting it or not, they're all dealing with reduced revenues. We all have increased expenditures. Health care has an inflationary spiral of 10 to 15 percent. Nobody knows where the additional dollars will come from to cover additional costs as our population ages.

We come up with ideas like this, and yes, who doesn't want to have another tax break or a tax cut for anybody? I wouldn't mind another one myself. My concern is that we don't know what this will cost, and I don't think that's a good way to pass laws in the Legislature of Alberta. I think that you have to be careful and methodical and understand all of the ramifications of what you're doing before you do it.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity to get those points on record, but I won't be supporting this bill.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I spoke earlier on this tool tax credit, and I want to make some comments regarding the speech earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview about the cost. Early costs no doubt have been calculated and are estimated to be in that 3 and a half million dollar range. But one thing that we all forget is that a tax credit that's derived from the purchase of tools – there's a profit side to the people that are selling the tools, and no one has really thought that it could just be a wash. With a wash really all we do is have an opportunity to recognize a segment of our population that's really created the Alberta advantage.

So I really want to thank the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan for introducing this, and I do support this wholeheartedly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share many of the ideas that have come forward in support of this bill. Two things I want to comment on. First, I congratulate the member as a private member for bringing forward this bill. I know it's caused lots of debate, and you can see what's happening today. You have people on both sides of the House both for and against it. I think that's what a previous Government House Leader wanted to accomplish when some of the rules of order were changed so that private members would have better access to bring some of their ideas forward. I can remember at the time that that happened in '93 or '94, I interjected, "Free at last; free at last; thank God Almighty, we're free at last," on the part of private members. So certainly I want to support all private members as best I can on the particular issues that they bring forward.

The angle that I want to bring forward in support from the Human Resources and Employment side is one that I haven't heard discussed as yet on this particular issue. Inadvertently in a government's wish to provide assistance to its citizens – and it's not just this government, but it's all jurisdictions across Canada and, I would suggest, right around the world. When you want to care for citizens, there's a fine line, of course, that any person has to cross over at some point when they go from the assistance of the state to the assistance of independence. What has happened, as a matter of fact, in our country – and I would say here in our province as well – is

that we've created a welfare wall, and part of the construction of that wall has been medical benefits that apply to people that are on assistance. It is very scary to think that they should go out and get a job, because there might not be the kind of benefit package that's available within that employment that they would have being on government assistance, and I want to say that I think the cost of tools in sort of granting a job has been one more brick in that particular welfare wall.

With the consideration of this House in terms of this private member's bill it would seem to me that we can provide some kind of encouragement now to those who are just on the cusp of moving from where we have found them. As a department we have moved them into career development and we have provided them with some skills, and they're now ready to move out into that wonderful world of work. We don't want to and we shouldn't be providing any more possible barriers than are absolutely necessary.

It would seem to me that while the purchase of a tool is a necessary expression of being able to work in a particular occupation, we as a government should be able to find the kind of flexibility so that we after all can live with our overall philosophy, and that is that Albertans will be better off working than they will on assistance. I believe that this private member's bill helps us meet that government philosophy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan to close the debate.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments today that have been put forward. It's certainly important to express some of the concerns. The Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has indicated that the rough and as best as could be brought forward estimate is around the \$3 million to \$7 million mark based on current trade enrollment, current practitioners of those trades, the apprentices that are involved. Those are the kinds of dollars that have been estimated are at stake here.

We should recognize the kinds of dollars at stake for the individual. The apprentice who is perhaps just getting started has to go out and buy those tools, and the amendment that was passed the other day would permit for that individual a tax break because of the cost of those tools of \$450. A much bigger impact certainly if the federal government would take this on and as well bring it forward and say that they would acknowledge the same kind of deduction.

You'll also notice that the bill will come into force when proclaimed. That will give the ministries time to negotiate with the federal government about how the line would be put on the Alberta tax sheet that we've got that each individual taxpayer has to fill out, and there has to be some monitoring of that. Those negotiations will take place over some period of time if the bill continues to move through those ministries with their bureaucracy working it out.

So those were some concerns that have been there for some period of time. We believe we've put into place the necessary cautions to help those things be taken care of.

So thank you for your support, fellow members of this Legislature. Shall we have the question, Mr. Speaker?

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a third time]

3:10

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than

Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 209

Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001

THE CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Doing all that we can as a government to help protect children in small and big ways will never be enough to see every child reach adulthood safely without injury. This is no reason to stop trying. I support Bill 209, the bicycle helmet bill, because every small step we take to help our parents protect our children helps all Albertans. I would encourage all MLAs to support this bill.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill in committee and again to echo not only the concerns but the support that so many members of this Legislature have had. When we consider that approximately 100 children under the age of 14 years die in Canada every year from head injuries related to bicycle injuries, then certainly we have to consider this type of a bill.

We certainly are long overdue in recommending this type of safety equipment for people that ride bikes. We have had this type of legislation by various sporting groups throughout the province, whether it be hockey, whether it be skiing, whether it be baseball or softball. So it is a bill that is long overdue. The only recommendation I would have that I don't see in here is that we certainly don't stop at age 18, that we require every adult who is riding a bike to wear a helmet.

So with those few comments, Mr. Chairman, I would urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill and to see that it does get speedy passage through here.

Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to rise today and speak to Bill 209, the traffic safety amendment act. First of all, I'd like to begin by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for caring about children and wanting to protect them. I support her in that and thank her for her intentions, but I have to say that I think those intentions that center around the safety and protection of children – and as the mother of four boys, trust me, over the years they've needed protection. But good intentions do not necessarily mandate the intervention of government into the lives of citizens, and today I'd like to speak for a few moments on why I think Bill 209 should be defeated by this Assembly.

I rise today not to question the value of wearing a helmet but the statement that is made when government imposes that decision on its citizens, as illustrated in section 2(2) of this bill. Mr. Chairman, I believe that the role of government in the lives of citizens should be limited, that inherent in our system of values is the emphasis on the ideal of individual responsibility. It's true that government does have great responsibility for the public's safety and public health, yet it's also true that responsibilities in these areas should also be the work of average citizens.

I believe in the principle that you teach correct principles and then you allow people to govern themselves. It is the role of parents –

and I'd like to repeat that: the role of parents – to decide for their children if they should be wearing bicycle helmets. It is not the role of this province. I worry about the province taking over any more of the role of parents or that law enforcement officials should be making that determination through legislation.

I would also like to point out, Mr. Chairman, that this bill deals with only one aspect of helmet safety. At what point should hon. members consider bringing in legislation to enforce a helmet law on the thousands of individuals who take to the ski slopes annually? At what point should we be protecting skateboarders from potential falls and mandate that they wear helmets too? Clearly, these individuals are taking a risk when they strap on their skis or visit a local skateboard park, just like bicyclists do when they take to the streets. Why are bicyclists any different from these individuals and the choices that they get to make? Is it government's role to protect these individuals from themselves? That is not our role, Mr. Chairman. That's why I think that Bill 209 should be defeated.

Government does have a duty and a role to educate the public on the benefits of using safety devices in their own lives. The money and the energy that Bill 209 would use to enforce sections of this bill like section 2(2) on children should instead be used to educate both parents and children alike to help them make better choices for themselves. I know that my family and I have enjoyed many hours in Fish Creek park on bikes with helmets on because it's a choice that we've made as a family. I feel that it's a correct choice, but it is one that we made.

Education makes people easy to lead, Mr. Chairman, and that is the direction this province should be headed in. If this Assembly believes that children should be wearing helmets, teach them about the benefits of helmets. Convince them. Win over their minds and those of their parents in this debate, but do not mandate that decision for them. Let's never forget that one of the things that makes this province so strong is our individual ability to make good decisions, to live good lives, and to contribute back to this province.

I encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly to vote against this bill and let the citizens of this province make their own decisions. Thank you.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the hon. Member for St. Albert, perhaps I should just remind all hon. members that even though we're in committee – and for the benefit of those in the gallery, this is an informal session, and people are actually allowed to move around and go and sit in places other than their own chair and in a very quiet voice converse with others. Whether it's in the Chamber under Assembly or in the Chamber under committee, you're not supposed to walk between whoever it is that is speaking and the chair, whether the chair is here or there. So that's to benefit all members, because there are many members who in fact transgress from time to time.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Debate Continued

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise today to speak in favour of this bill brought forth by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. The reason I want to lend my support to it is not because I feel that the bill is usurping the right of parents to guide their children. In fact, on the contrary, I think it is our civil duty as legislators to look at those means which provide for the children, indeed for the people of Alberta those opportunities that would make their lives safer and consequently their usage, if you will, of the

services that would be required to be paid for by the state less cumbersome and less obligatory to the state.

3:20

What I would like to do is read a letter that I tabled earlier today, Mr. Chairman, a letter that was sent to the Minister of Transportation and copied to me, as I indicated, and to the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. It's signed by the mayor of St. Albert, and I would like to read it since I tabled it earlier.

At its meeting on November 5, 2001 St. Albert City Council endorsed the St. Albert Royal Canadian Mounted Police Community Advisory Committee's resolution that states the following:

Whereas 71 Albertans suffered a severe head injury requiring hospitalization as a result of a bicycle-related incident in 1997;

Whereas 461 Albertans made ambulatory visits (including emergency room visits) for medical treatment as a result of bicycle-related head injuries between April 1, 1997 and March 31, 1998;

Whereas bicycle helmets are extremely effective in reducing deaths and head and brain injuries resulting from bicycling incidents;

Whereas a combination of legislation and education is the most effective way to increase helmet usage and decrease bicycling-related head injuries;

Whereas the cost of care of a brain-injured individual can reach \$300,000 in the first year, \$2.5 to \$5.5 million over a lifetime;

Whereas the human societal costs of brain injuries resulting from bicycling incidents are immeasurable;

And whereas 65.4% of Albertans and 77% of Alberta parents are in favour of mandatory bicycle helmet legislation.

And therefore be it resolved that the Alberta Government enact regulations under the Traffic Safety Act making the wearing of approved bicycle helmets mandatory for bicyclists of all ages, and carrying a penalty of a \$50.00 fine for failure to comply with the regulations.

Now, I realize that this is a resolution that originated with the St. Albert RCMP Community Advisory Committee and it is signed by the mayor of the city of St. Albert and we are dealing with a private member's bill, Mr. Chairman. I would like to say that any effort or any consideration that is brought forward here that speaks to the safety of our children and to those circumstances which would enable our children to play safe, free from, we hope, the occasion to unnecessarily injure themselves and cause concern to their families and indeed to us as legislators in this province – so I would like to speak specifically to the details and the contents of this bill.

It does ask that individuals who are under 18 wear helmets while they are cycling. It is only common sense. Whatever we can do to wave that flag of common sense and protection and care for those who play, cycle, enjoy, exercise within our communities, I think it testifies to our strength as a government and indeed our strength as a province that we want to have laws that assist individuals in looking after their own safety under these circumstances.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would again encourage everyone here in this Assembly to realize how important this is not only to the individuals who will be required to wear helmets but also to the greater community at large, the greater community who will benefit by their health, by their contribution, by their work, and by their studies within our respective communities. I would encourage everyone here to look very specifically at the strength of this bill. I commend again the Member for Calgary-Cross for bringing this forward not only as her private member's bill but bringing it forward, as well, having done all her research and the understanding from both the medical community and the resolution that was brought forward by the police council in St. Albert, a recognition of the research and the statistics that have been presented in favour of this recommendation as they look at the imposition, if you will, upon the health system and societal care within our community.

Again, I would urge everyone to support this. There is a great deal of support in my community for this proposal.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Once again I'd like to commend my colleague from Calgary-Cross for bringing forward an interesting bill idea, and once again, keeping to my true form, I'm not going to be supporting it. The reason I'm not going to be supporting it is not because it's not a good idea. Everybody should be wearing a helmet when they're riding a bike. There's just absolutely no question about that.

I think in the latest study that I saw comparing the late 1970s to today, at that point there were about 800,000 cars on the roads in Alberta, and today there are over 2.2 million vehicles on the roads in this province. The real problem is not whether or not you wear a helmet. It's: where, in fact, do you ride a bike safely in cities, in towns, on rural roads? Where is it actually safe to do so?

I was trying to do some research on this, and I hooked on my computer, Mr. Chairman, and I found an article in the *New York Times* that was talking about a bicycling mystery, and the mystery was that head injuries were piling up. The article went on to talk about that the number of head injuries had increased 10 percent since 1991. Even as bicycle helmet usage also rose very sharply during that same period of time, head injuries were in fact increasing. They were trying to figure out why, because over that same period of time that helmet usage was increasing, there was in fact a 10 percent increase in injuries and a 51 percent increase in the use of helmets. So it wasn't logical, what was happening. They were saying that helmets, of course, don't prevent accidents. They are very effective – there's no question about it – at reducing the severity of head injuries, and that's incredibly important.

There were other parts to what they were trying to determine. One of them was that some cycling advocates were contending that the rising number of aggressive drivers was at fault, and possibly that's true. I mean, we hear more about road rage all the time. One of the things that probably annoys people is having cyclists weaving in and out of traffic. When you're trying to slow down for a light, you end up passing the same bicycle rider three and four times in the space of a block. You know, there's probably a confluence of things going on. Maybe people driving vehicles aren't driving as carefully as they should, but people driving bikes aren't paying attention to the rules of the road either.

So the specialists came along, and many specialists in risk analysis argue that something else was at play. It wasn't just helmet laws. They believe that an increased use of bicycle helmets may have had an unintended consequence, making riders in fact feel an inflated sense of security and therefore taking more risks. In the last nine years in the United States 19 state Legislatures passed mandatory helmet laws, and today such statutes cover over 49 percent of American children under the age of 15. I think that's another difference with the law that's being proposed here. When you're dealing with children under the age of 14 or 15, perhaps that's one level, but dealing with people up to the age of 18, I think you've probably gone too far.

Law is not about common sense, and I disagree with my colleague who made that comment. Law is in fact law. Common sense is what we as individuals are supposed to have. As a parent I tried for years to get my sons to wear helmets even when they went skateboarding or snowboarding – and he knows who I'm talking about – but it doesn't always work. These are my sons. When it was 40 below outside, I had a hard time getting them to wear anything to cover their ears so they wouldn't freeze to death. I'm not sure that

by passing a law, you will in fact solve the problem.

One of the things they discovered in the United States is that ridership on bikes actually declined. That's counterproductive, because we're trying to encourage people to participate in sporting activities and become more healthy and look after themselves. At the same time, we're doing things which actually have the opposite impact, because during the same period that these laws were being passed in the States, bicycle ridership declined by 21 percent, and participation in other things – inline skating, skateboarding, and other sports – all increased.

So where do we go with the laws? We can pass this one today, and maybe in the spring session we could bring one in that said: if you're going to ski, snowboard, rollerblade, in-line skate, you name it, we've got it; we got a law for you. I don't think that's why I was sent here. I don't know. I could be wrong. I've never had one call in my office from my constituents. Now, I've been lobbied by other groups and I respect that, but I've never had one call in my office from my 45,000 constituents saying: oh, please, you've got to pass another law.

3:30

There's one other thing I wanted to bring up, and that was something that was interesting. One parallel risk expert in the States was talking about antilock brakes. He said that when they were introduced in the 1980s, they were supposed to reduce accidents, but government and industry studies in the mid-1990s showed that as drivers realized their brakes were more effective, they started driving faster and the accident rates rose. Insurance companies have long been familiar with a phenomenon which they call moral hazard. Once someone is covered by an insurance policy, there's a natural tendency for that person to take more risks. That, I think, is probably the phenomenon that we'll find when we pass a law and it says that everybody must wear a helmet. Perhaps people will in fact start to relax a little bit more about that and say: well, it's perfectly logical; now my son, my daughter will be safe. I don't think that's the intended consequence of the law, but it may well in fact be the consequence of that law.

I guess the last thing I want to say, Mr. Chairman, is that I believe that as Conservatives we have to be very careful about trying to live people's lives for them. I think we need to educate children, we need to educate young families particularly, and we have the ability to do that. We have the well-baby clinics, where we could be passing out information on the importance of looking after your little child whether he's riding a tricycle, moving up to a small bicycle with training wheels, or right on up to the mountain bikes and BMX racers that we have today in the province of Alberta. It is absolutely imperative that we respect adults and people in this province to make decisions in the best interests of their own family.

I don't know how you enforce a law like this when you're not going to put any more resources into policing throughout the province. It's yet one more thing for the police to do, and I believe that they're fairly overburdened now. What are you going to do if they don't pay the fine? Take the bike? Who are you punishing? I see reams of little bike bureaucrats going out there and having a real good time. "Don't just wear your helmet. Make sure it's on properly. By the way, you know, you could break your neck. Your head will be okay, your neck will be broke, but we'll worry about that next year because I'm sure we'll be able to find a collar or a brace or a bodysuit that we can wrap you up in to keep you 100 percent safe for 100 percent of your life."

It can't be done, Mr. Chairman, and we've got to stop deluding ourselves and the people of this province by passing laws that will not make that much difference at the end of the day. Educate them

instead. Make sure that parents know the importance of this. Make sure that children understand the importance of it for their own safety, their own security, and the health of their lives. I think that's what we can do, and we can do a really good job of it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and hon. members. I have to tell you that in all likelihood this isn't a really pleasurable thing to debate because there probably are no winners in a caucus when we have to debate an issue that doesn't really have, I believe, a positive yes or no. I don't believe the debate here about this law is about whether people should wear bicycle helmets or not, because I think, as the hon. member previous said, there is no question that in the right circumstances or the wrong circumstances a bicycle helmet can save serious injury and possibly a life. That goes without saying.

I've got four children, and by and large their mother tried very hard to make them wear bicycle helmets. Many, many times they were spread out down the block or back up the block, and it's pretty hard for a six year old to remember exactly where he's left his bicycle helmet. I, too, would hate to see the bicycle gestapo chase him down to tag him with a little ticket.

I don't believe that the debate should be about the statistical information on whether or not bicycle helmets increase or decrease ridership, whether they will in fact kind of hurt some of the other programs we have, because I don't believe that's the issue here either. I don't believe that the issue about saving health care is fair either. We all remember the arguments used when we passed the seat belt law here, that it was going to save us millions and hundreds of millions of dollars, and in fact our health care just went through the roof. There's no question that for individuals in some circumstances it saves their lives, and under those circumstances it may have in fact saved health care some money. But if he's not fixing Joe for a seat belt, he's fixing Fred's knees, so it isn't going to save health care money, folks. We know that going in. It's us that made the system not hold people accountable for what they do. It's not them. We've made a health care system that doesn't recognize personal responsibility. Let's not start passing laws to cover that. That doesn't make any sense.

The hon. member before me talked a little bit about enforcement. We might all have this wonderful picture of the friendly beat cop going down the street helping the kids on their bikes and patting them on down the road. That in fact isn't going to be the problem, but when we see the RCMP pull up to a group of teenagers beside the 7-Eleven or beside the convenience store and they're there without their helmets, they're going to scatter. They're going into alleys; they're going out on streets. They don't want to get a ticket. So we're not going to have a very positive relationship fostered between our young children and the police, and I think that's very counterproductive, because if you start running when you're eight, you'll be running when you're 18.

I guess you have to go back to the poor families in Alberta too. There are lots of people that aren't on any of the government programs. We've talked about them. Maybe they don't have the wherewithal to just go and buy helmets at will for four or five kids. Are we going to provide them helmets? Are we going to make them make a choice whether they have to do without food or rent to get a helmet, or are we just going to make them criminals? It's quite a bit like the gun law the federal government passed. It didn't accomplish what it set out to do, and this won't either.

We talk a little bit more about enforcement. I'm not a lawyer,

thank goodness, but I would have to wonder about enforcing a helmet law at a school when the child leaves his home with the helmet on, gets to school, and takes it off at noon hour to go for a bike ride. He probably had to go for a bike ride because his playgrounds were ripped out. He forgets to put his helmet on. The police come along and say: well, that's it. Who's responsible? We don't even hold 13- or 14- or 15-year-old kids responsible for bad things they do. How are we possibly going to hold them responsible for riding without their bike helmet? We can't go home and tell mother or father that we caught them. It is unenforceable. If we can't enforce it, don't pass it. It won't work.

We've got to go back a little bit to this false sense of security. I grew up playing hockey, and my kids are all playing hockey now. Over the years we've had a lot of people involved in that sport who probably never played it, and we've put our little kids into armour now. They're covered from head to toe. They can't be hurt, you see. You're right; we get very few stitches. We hardly lose any more teeth. We may have a great looking bunch of NHL stars, but what we're breaking are backs and necks. The kids think they're invincible. They dive into boards. They fall into nets. It has hurt seriously more than it has helped. You can't start to tell people: "Don't worry. We're looking after you. Put your helmet on. You're safe. Get out there on the street."

There are a bunch of causes we can have. I call this bill a cause. There are skateboards. There are rollerblades. There's rodeo. We all witnessed the young man hurt here in Edmonton. Are we going to outlaw rodeo? Least of all, we should have maybe seat belts on them so they wouldn't fall off. We can't eliminate people from doing things that hurt themselves.

Folks, this isn't about: is it right to wear a bicycle helmet? Of course you should. I'm not arguing that, but there is no end to good causes that we can write laws or create motions about. It is not government's responsibility to pick one or two from the tree and say: let's do this this year, and let's do that next year. We are going to have children hurt no matter what we do. That's unfortunate, but it's going to happen.

I just know from experience, or feel I know, that when government starts to get in the business of raising families and making personal choices for you, they don't do it very well. I would just ask you to think of any issue where we've taken personal responsibility from people that has helped in the long run. It doesn't.

Now, I only say this to the people here. The government taxes our money. We have to accept that, but please, please don't start to tax my responsibility as a parent, because I do resent that part of it. Other than that, I just ask you to consider where we are going when we start to bring bills like this through the Legislature.

Thank you.

3:40

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 209 as well. I've had a lot of opportunity over the last few months to talk to my constituents on this matter, and I am reminded of when I was a young lad growing up in Alberta and the big debate over seat belt regulations. The last hon. member mentioned it, and he raised probably all of the same arguments that were raised for the seat belt debate. I know that it is still a pretty serious concern for a lot of people, but I do know that now I wear my seat belt out of a sense of habit, as I'm sure all hon. members of this House do.

Mr. Chairman, as I said, I've had the opportunity to speak to my

constituents about this matter. I've talked to the parents, I've talked to the teachers, and I've talked to the kids. These are the people that we're going to affect with this legislation in this House. These are the people who put me here. When I was talking to them and visiting them in the classrooms, they told me that this is a good bill to pass. This is what they would like me to support.

I know the arguments from both sides because of the debates that we've had over these issues. I am a Conservative as well, but government does have a responsibility, and one of those responsibilities is to listen to our constituents. I take that responsibility very seriously. So the message to me was very clear. The majority of my constituents want me to support this bill, so I must, and I ask the support of this Legislature to support the bill as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to add a few more comments in committee to the ones I have made in second reading. I've listened to the debate so far with quite a bit of interest, and I appreciate both sides of the argument. I acknowledge that the number of injuries has increased even though the ridership in some of those jurisdictions has decreased, but the style of riding has also changed over the years. I watch on television some of the freestyle and high-risk ways that young people are riding in competitions, and I'm reminded of when I was a young person so very long ago, when television first came out.

AN HON. MEMBER: They had television back then?

MR. MARZ: Yes, we did have television back then. It was black and white and it was brand new, and we watched it through the store windows because we couldn't afford one of our own.

One of the shows that was prevalent, Mr. Chairman, was *Stampede Wrestling*. I'm sure all of you who are of similar vintage to me will remember watching *Stampede Wrestling* and the influence it had on our lives. We went to school and our mothers could never figure out how come we came home with our shirt in shreds and all our buttons missing, because how could this happen sitting in a classroom and just playing on the swings? Well, we were doing body slams and dropkicks just the same as we envisioned it to be on television, and we did some severe damage to our clothes and sometimes to ourselves.

Cyclists today, as you can see in the parking lots and shopping malls and on the stairs of public buildings, are riding up and down, they're skidding them across rails, they're trying to do all sorts of things, and you see them pile up. They do the same thing on skateboards and snowboards and rollerblades. Those that they're mimicking are wearing safety equipment, but where do we stop with legislating safety equipment? You can have elbow injuries, you can have knee injuries on bicycles as well, and I'm sure they're a cost to the health care system, for those that are concerned about that. I'm concerned about where this is going to end up. As the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View stated, next spring it will be dealing with skiers, snowboarders.

I see that probably the activity that has the most number of injuries is driving a motor vehicle. There are thousands and thousands of them on the highways, and there are far more accidents involving motor vehicles than there are bicycles, because there are simply more of them and there are lots of accidents. We have air bags and we have seat belts, as was stated by some of the hon. members, but race car drivers have those types of safety equipment and they also wear

helmets. Are we going to put helmets on people that are driving motor vehicles? It makes as much sense to do that as it does this if we're looking at saving costs to the health care system.

I'm concerned that taken to the limits of another couple of sessions, we won't be able to legally leave our houses unless we appear like the Michelin Man so we won't hurt ourselves. Mr. Chairman, that is a concern. I believe that government has a responsibility, but part of government's responsibility is ensuring that individuals take responsibility themselves for their actions and encourage that as much as possible.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I'll close, but I would like to close by saying that I think education, not legislation, is the key to safer riding on our roadways. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise to put a few comments on record with respect to this important private member's bill, Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001, brought forward by our colleague from Calgary-Cross. I, too, have received a few phone calls, not a large number by any stretch. Nonetheless, a few comments have come to my office from constituents who are supportive of this particular legislation. I think the recognition in their support is with respect to the issue of safety for children and for society in general.

I know that it's by and large a commonsense issue, and I can certainly tell you from my personal perspective that when my children were growing up, we did provide them with proper headgear, be it for bicycling or skateboarding or rollerblading or skiing or whatever it happened to be. We did take those precautions. We did it voluntarily. We didn't need a law to have common sense prevail.

I'm also well aware that there are impacts on injury numbers as reported through our emergency wards and through other mechanisms, so that point is not lost. In fact, the Alberta Center for Injury Control & Research – everyone knows the group I'm talking about I'm sure – does have some compelling evidence that it has advanced with respect to the need for some stronger guidelines, perhaps laws, that would support erring on the side of safety and caution.

Having said that, however, I do have some concerns about the enforcement that might become necessary here and to what extent it would be possible to police this issue. It's not quite the same, in my view, as the argument for seat belts, for example, where we have certain age restrictions apply. Quite obviously, you need to be at least 16 years of age to drive a motor vehicle in this province, and there are certain places where you can ride that particular vehicle and so on. So it's easier, if you will, to enforce the seat belt legislation than it would be to enforce the outcroppings of what this legislation may become.

3:50

The fact is that children especially are in the habit of just jumping on a bike and driving where ever at whatever time. It poses one type of a problem in the cities, but I can tell you that as a young man growing up in the rural climes of our province, in Sangudo particularly, there was a whole different perspective on bike riding. It was a main activity, because we didn't have all that much to do. But we grew up looking after ourselves in a different way, and I'm not suggesting that we don't still apply common sense today, because I know that we do. I'm simply pointing out that during my time as a bike rider, specifically a bicycle rider, we did exercise proper precautions to the best of our ability. Of course, we had the benefit of things like balloon tire bikes. I don't remember anyone in the

town owning a 10-speed or a five-speed or any of those. We had one speed. It was slow, and we were very careful about that. We also didn't have the benefit of paved roads; we still had wooden sidewalks. So I'm going back a little bit down memory lane here, and I'm sure . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: When were you born?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I was born a long time ago, hon. member.

We did take great precautions as did our parents to exercise education on a very commonsense level.

Now, with respect to the calls that I've had from some of my constituents, whom I'm bound to represent, I do understand their points, and I do understand the need for us to be vigilant, especially where children are concerned, but having said that, I do have some reservations with respect to how we might be treading on that ever so dangerous ground of trying to legislate common sense.

I want to conclude there and allow other members, should they wish to, to continue speaking on this important bill. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to make a few comments on this particular bill. I know that a lot of the issues have already been brought up on this bill, but I think that to begin with everyone in here is very supportive of wearing bicycle helmets. I think we should underscore that, because we want to see that happen. What we're talking about with this legislation is: how do we make it happen, and should government make it happen?

I just want to say that it's going to happen a bit like this. When government steps in and takes that responsibility, then parents will step out and let them do it. In many, many cases you'll have the police trying to do what the parents should be doing, and we do not have anywhere near enough police to do that. And should they? When should people take their own responsibility? And how many freedoms and so on do we want to interfere with? How much do we want government to come in and run our lives?

I happened to be around here at the time that the seat belt legislation came in and remember very well some of the arguments for and against. Whether it has proven to be a whole lot better – yes, it did at the beginning. Would we have educated ourselves enough to have done it anyway? I guess we don't know that answer, but I think maybe we should try it a different way this time so that people are educated and they want to, and then they will have their helmets on a lot more.

It interferes with your own personal life each time we run another bill through the Legislature like this, and there are many, many more. I mean, you can go all the way to smoking and drinking and whatever. There are many, many things that you can start legislating, whether it's bike helmets or, as was mentioned, rodeo helmets. It could be any kind of thing. But let them do it. I think that we should see that the opportunity is there to do it, but to get in and actually legislate it, one after another after another, slowly does take away any responsibility that you might have.

I want to just make my final point about the responsibilities and the freedoms that you're taking away, and I'll do it with this little story about the fellow that went to the doctor. "Doc," he says, "If I quit drinking and smoking and chasing women, will I live to be a hundred?" And the doctor says: "No, you won't, but it'll seem like it." I want you to think about that. I want you to think about that a little bit as we gradually take away every freedom. At some point it will start interfering with your quality of life.

With that, I don't think I can support this bill the way it is, but I do want to see us get helmets on. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 209 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE CHAIRMAN: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Goudreau	Mar
Blakeman	Graydon	Maskell
Bonner	Hlady	Massey
Boutilier	Horner	Oberg
Calahasen	Hutton	O'Neill
Cao	Jablonski	Pham
Cardinal	Kryczka	Rathgeber
Danyluk	Lord	Stelmach
Ducharme	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Fritz	Magnus	Zwozdesky
Gordon		

Against the motion:

Ady	Dunford	Marz
Coutts	Fischer	Snelgrove
DeLong	Haley	Vandermeer
Doerksen	Knight	

Totals:	For – 31	Against – 11
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[Motion carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 209.

[Motion to report Bill 209 carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills and reports Bill 209.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

4:10

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 208
Alberta Official Song Act

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort to move third reading.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move Bill 208 for third reading.

Since the introduction of the debate on Bill 208 last May, even knowing that the bill has not been passed and without my solicitation, many Albertans from across our province sent in many supporting inquiries and song submissions in the form of lyrics, music sheets, tapes, and CDs. My thanks go to each of them. I also want to acknowledge queries from some of the hon. members about the costs and copyrights of their musical works. I must say that the musical and poetic works so far are the labour of love for Albertans from the authors. No one asked for money. Everyone wants to sing about Alberta. We should not underestimate the labour of love and volunteering spirit of Albertans.

Bill 208 does not intend to address the detailed process of selection and arrangements with the authors. It is the work to be done by the official song committee, as stipulated in the bill. As to the composition of the official song committee, Bill 208 does specify the participation of all parties in the House and the Alberta public. However, the number of committee members has to be limited to be effective as a working committee, but everyone is welcome to participate.

Hon. colleagues of the House, your passing of Bill 208 and its song selection process will give Albertans a celebrating spirit for our bright future, uplifting us beyond the current cloudy and stormy weather of our world. Your passing of Bill 208 will give our 25th Legislature a landmark of an Alberta official song for our centennial celebration in 2005.

I would like to sincerely thank my MLA colleagues, media professionals, and many fellow Albertans for speaking in support and passing votes on the bill. My special thanks go to the hon. Minister of Community Development for his expression of support. Once the bill is passed, his department will help in the implementation.

To conclude, I would like to thank our colleagues in the House and all fellow Albertans with a lyric that I wrote last weekend. It's adapted from the musical score of Mr. P.H. Luu of long ago, that I am familiar with. I don't know if it's appropriate for me to sing, so I just want to read it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Sing. Sing.

MR. CAO: With the permission of the Speaker. So at the request of my colleagues, may I have your permission?

Our Alberta, the land of people free.
Together we're building our great province,
From Western Rockies to Eastland prairies,
And Northland forest to Southern rivers,
Blue sky, white snow always pure,
Green grass and wheat fields abound.
We're Albertans, so blessed and free.
We're Canadians, proud of country.
From all parts of the world we have come here
To live together in peaceful joy.
Albertans, we stand together.
Albertans, we will forever
Keep on building province we love.
Blessings from God to Albertans.

With that bellowing, I thank you for bearing with me.

Hon. colleagues of the House, Bill 208 has passed committee debate; for that I thank you very much. In the final third reading stage it is now in your good hands to pass it again.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've never seen the Assembly so attentive before. Perhaps we've discovered a new form of debate. If we can carry it out in song, I think we'd keep everybody's attention.

I spoke to this in second reading last spring, and since then a number of my constituents, not a lot of them but quite a number of them, have spoken to me about this. They expressed the view that they thought having an official song was a good idea, and certainly having a competition amongst Albertans so they all have the opportunity to participate in it was certainly another good idea. I would like to pass on my compliments to the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this forward.

I just have a few brief comments, Mr. Speaker. In the haste of speaking in the spring on this bill, there were some errors in identifying the writers of certain songs. I would acknowledge a couple of great Canadian songwriters: Mr. Gordon Lightfoot, who did write *Alberta Bound*, and Ian Tyson, who wrote and sang *Old Alberta Moon*. I just wanted to clarify that for the record.* Both songs depict the wonderful Alberta lifestyle that we have, just two fine examples of songs that have been written about our fair province already, and I'm sure that on the passage of this there'll be a lot of Albertans that will be excited about getting involved in putting forth their submissions to add to the one the Member for Calgary-Fort graced us with in the House just moments ago.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that I will be supporting this bill and urge my colleagues in the Legislature to do the same. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will present my little speech, and I emphasize "speech," because I will not be singing. But it is my pleasure to support Bill 208, the Alberta Official Song Act. I think it's a great idea, and I would like to offer my thanks to the Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing this matter to the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would give a committee the power to seek out original songs and the power to recommend one of them as an official song for Alberta. The nonpartisan nature of this committee displays this bill's goal to be representative of all Albertans with a submission process that will allow composers from all over the province to compete. This song will then be officially unveiled in 2005 to mark Alberta's hundredth anniversary as a province of Canada.

4:20

Designating a song for Alberta on our centennial anniversary will provide a lasting impression of the people and the culture that make up our fair province. We would seize this opportunity and create a legacy that future generations will recognize and be proud of. I would imagine, Mr. Speaker, that our hundredth anniversary might be just the biggest event the province has seen since the turn of the millennium. Many ideas have been brought forward and are being considered for the centennial celebrations, but a song for Alberta might just be the best yet the most economical venture we can do for the hundredth anniversary.

*See p. 748, left col., para.10, line 2

This debate has been a breath of fresh air in this Assembly. It has allowed my hon. colleagues to talk about and, as we have recently seen, to sing about this province, which might include the praises we have and the respect we have for our province. Some of my colleagues have offered that it should be a testament to the diverse culture and ethnic history of Alberta. Others have mentioned a desire to hear a song that will tell all who hear it about the beauty of our environment. These are all valid propositions, Mr. Speaker, and I think that any and all of these ideas would make an excellent song for Alberta. Maybe that is why this bill has caught the attention of so much of the public and the media. First of all, it's great, and second, it's a fun idea because the possibilities for this song are truly endless.

Mr. Speaker, I am touched and inspired by the words recently shared with me and written by one of my constituents. They reflect upon this great province, the hard work of those who built it, and the pride and appreciation of those who remain living here, raising their families on this beautiful land. There are undoubtedly so many great things to say about this province.

Another point of consideration is that our province already has a substantial range of official emblems. I am sure most Albertans know the wild rose, our official flower, and our provincial coat of arms, but we have an official animal, tree, tartan, stone, and even fish. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort made a very good point in his opening speech by remarking that all the symbols are visible, and it is time to indulge one of our other senses with the official song.

The song will always be for Albertans by Albertans, but I am sure it will be heard by many, many people. In the same way that the opportunities and advantages of coming to Alberta have drawn so many to our province over the years, the official song will call for our Alberta advantage in years to come.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a third time]

PARLIAMENTARY COUNSEL: For third reading, Bill 209, Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak today in third reading, but before I do, I wondered if I could ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly to introduce guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Mrs. Jackie Petruk, executive director, and her staff from the Stollery children's hospital who are with us today. I know that they've been in the Assembly several times to listen to this bill throughout the different readings that we have had. Could you please rise.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than

Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 209

Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, if you'd move the bill, then you can speak to it.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 209, Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is about the very special value that we as a society have for our children and youth. It is about protecting them from injury, disability, and death, and it is about saving our health care system millions of dollars through safe bike-riding practices.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank everyone who supported making bicycle helmets mandatory for our children and youth. KIDSAFE Connection at the Stollery children's hospital, the Brain Injury Association of Alberta, the Alberta Center for Injury Control & Research, all the health authorities in Alberta, the RCMP, St. John Ambulance, the Edmonton and Calgary police services have all vocalized their strong support for mandatory bicycle helmets, and I strongly thank them today for that support.

The biggest supporter of this legislation has to be the parents in this province. I know that over 77 percent of parents in a public survey that was conducted by KIDSAFE Connection supported mandatory bicycle safety helmet legislation because they have the same fears as I do. Although we cannot foresee every danger, we can prevent some accidents, and I think that we should use every tool available to us as parents to protect our children and prevent the worst from happening. Mandating children and youth 17 years of age and under to wear bicycle safety helmets at all times while riding a bicycle will give parents one more tool to help protect their children.

Mr. Speaker, along with Alberta's parents who voiced their strong support for Bill 209, there are a number of groups and organizations within the province who treat head trauma and know how serious bicycle-related head injuries are and how preventable they can be. KIDSAFE Connection, who's with us today, is sponsored by Capital health and works together with the Stollery children's hospital to promote child safety. This report that they had released in 1997 with a number of shocking statistics and truths about bicycle-related trauma suffered by our children was interesting, and I know it was filed with the Assembly earlier in other debates.

For example, the report detailed that close to 6,500 people are admitted to an emergency room in Alberta in a one-year period for a bicycle-related injury, and of these 6,500 over 4,000 were children under 20. Only 18 percent of these children who came to the emergency room had been documented as wearing a helmet at the time of their accident. The most impressive statistic is that bicycle helmets have been shown through research to reduce brain injury by 88 percent and upper and mid-facial injury by 65 percent. National statistics show that only 15 percent of children wear a bicycle helmet while riding a bike. That's national statistics: 15 percent. It's a very serious concern since in a one-year period our hospitals here in Alberta recorded over 460 emergency room visits for head injuries due to a bike-related accident. When you consider that the bike-riding season is only six months long in Alberta, that averages to 75 emergency room visits per month.

Bike riding is the most popular sport amongst our children; 90 percent of children and youth ride bikes. Because they are the most frequent users, they're the age group most hospitalized. Not only could this be attributed to proportionally greater numbers of young riders, but it also has been proven that youth in Alberta are not as cautious or as responsible as they could be. Children tend to take more unnecessary risks than adults do.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 50 children in 1997 required an inpatient hospital stay for their bike-related injury. Most of the injuries sustained happened close to home, and only one-quarter of bicycle-related injuries involved a motor vehicle. Most occurred from a fall, and statistics show that a fall from a bike traveling only 20 kilometres per hour can cause death.

Mr. Speaker and hon. colleagues, there has been some consider-

able discussion about the mandatory safety helmet infringement upon the freedoms of choice for individuals. An encroachment on personal freedoms is a difficult challenge for any government, and I respect what I heard in the Assembly here earlier today. I know that *Hansard* will be read and people will be very interested, because there really are two sides to this issue. It was very well balanced today in Committee of the Whole, and I appreciate the debate of my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak, though, a bit about the Canadian provinces, including B.C., Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, as well as other countries, Australia, New Zealand, many of the United States. They all have bicycle safety helmet legislation in place. A recent study conducted in B.C. after the 10-year anniversary of helmet legislation shows that legislation has drastically aided compliance. Mandatory helmet legislation does work, but I believe, much like my colleagues had mentioned earlier in Committee of the Whole, that it really should be working along with an education program.

4:30

More and more scientifically documented information becomes available every day. I found it very interesting over the past few months since Bill 209 was first introduced to read a great deal of new and helpful information in the area of efficacy of bicycle helmet protection. I now have three very large volumes of letters from renowned physicians and medical personnel and many others, as well as significant data and research. It ranges from the cost-effectiveness of bike helmet legislation to, as we said earlier and heard from colleagues, the need for education programs in order for our children and youth to change their bike riding habits so they'll include wearing a helmet so that they can live long, healthy lives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to quote Dr. Dan McGowan, who took the time to write and give strong support to Bill 209. He wrote:

I am a physician specialist in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. Many of the people that I look after in hospital have suffered spinal cord injury and multiple trauma. Others on the unit have had traumatic brain injuries. Many of the events that caused these injuries could have been prevented. The cost to the health care system for life long care for these people runs in the millions. The impact on families is always devastating. The drain on health resources is immense. Research shows that bicycle helmets reduce the risk of brain injury by 88 percent and 77 percent of parents support it. There are pages of information to describe the benefits of helmet use, but isn't this enough? Wearing a bike helmet is, at worst, a nuisance or a small inconvenience. This is an opportunity to demonstrate preventative cost incurring strategies for health care not to mention the opportunity to protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, for clarification, how many minutes is it in third reading that we can speak?

THE CLERK: It's 20 minutes.

MRS. FRITZ: It is 20 minutes? Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, every taxpayer pays for the cost of treating head injuries, and according to information from the center for disease control every dollar spent on a bike helmet results in a societal cost saving of \$32. It must be understood that for everyone who has a bicycle-related accident and sustains a fall, whether the cause is a collision with a motor vehicle or a fall due to gravel, a pothole, loss of balance, whatever, it's still a fall. Everyone who falls from a bicycle is at risk for a head injury due to the mechanisms involved in the event: the speed of the bicycle, the height of the body exaggerated by biking position, the velocity of the head during the fall, and the rigidity of the impact surface. At the time of impact the

brain, which is an organ of jellylike tissue, undergoes an additional internal collision within the confined space of the skull. The brain is the most important organ for all of us to protect from injury. It does not recover in the way a fracture from a fall will. In fact, people who sustain a brain injury can have effects from their injury for the rest of their life.

The efficiency of bicycle helmets is very high. An interesting summation at a recent research conference stated that far more lives can be saved through the application of known injury prevention strategies than would be saved with the next generation of vaccines currently being developed.

[Mr. Lougheed in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Kenneth Petruk, who is a proactive leader in the field of brain and spinal cord injuries, acknowledged through a written letter his strong support for Bill 209.

As Director of the Division of Neurosurgery at the University of Alberta and Regional Clinical Program Director of Neurosciences, Capital Health Authority, I strongly urge you to support this very important legislation. With the increasing cost of acute health care provision, it is now mandatory that a strong focus on preventative measures be undertaken by legislators, health care providers and leaders within the private sector. Recent scientific research has overwhelmingly demonstrated the efficacy of helmet protection against mild, moderate and severe head injuries. This reduction in brain injury incidence translates into a health care cost savings of hundreds of millions of dollars per year.

I respect what he has to say to this issue because he works in the field.

Mr. Speaker, last week, too, I had an opportunity to visit and tour the Stollery children's hospital here in Edmonton, and I understand that our Premier attended the opening ceremonies just three or four weeks ago. It's a beautiful pediatric hospital, and during the tour from the staff that are here today, I learned that children between five to 17 years of age fell into the most at-risk group for bike-related injuries. Mrs. Jackie Petruk, executive director, whom I introduced earlier, and Kathy Nykolyshyn and other staff, I thank you all for your wisdom. You're here with us today, and I thank you for showing me the data which stated that in 1999 there were 4,288 children and youth who went to the ER as a result of a bicycle injury; 162 were hospitalized. Sadly three young people died as a result of their bike accident. These are actual facts. It's raw data from the Stollery children's hospital.

In terms of a public health problem bike injuries really are the leading one for youth. I know we heard earlier about in-line skating, skateboarding, skiing, and snowboarding and whatnot, but this is really the number one problem, which is why we're beginning with this in this bill today. It's quite incredible really.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Dr. Louis Francescutti, director of the Alberta Center for Injury Control & Research, who deeply believes the positive effect that Bill 209 will have on so many lives, wrote:

Research has proven both the protective effect of helmets in reducing devastating and costly head injuries and of legislation in raising the awareness and usage of helmets by the public. Bicycle riders with helmets have an 85 percent reduction in their risk of head injury and an 88 percent reduction in their risk of brain injury. During the first year of legislation in Victoria, Australia, cyclists killed or hospitalized with head injuries decreased by 51 percent compared to the year before the legislation.

I trust and value what Dr. Francescutti has written.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

At our recent injury prevention and control conference he wrote:
Her Honour, the Honourable Lois Hole, Lieutenant Governor of

Alberta, reminded us that the ultimate violation of an individual's rights is death or a severely disabling injury. Please take this to heart. The citizens of Alberta and, in particular, our children need your support.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it's clear that we need bicycle helmet legislation in this province. As I said earlier, I respect that there are both sides of this issue. It's been well stressed and spoken to here in the Legislature, but I am hoping and I ask the Assembly that they would let this come to a vote here today at third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I first would like to begin by thanking my hon. colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for bringing this bill forward, and I would like to compliment her. I've known the member for a number of years, even before she and I graced the hallowed halls of the Legislature, and she has always been one to do a very, very thorough job, just as she finished telling us about all the facts, statistics, the names of the people she's written to and talked to and that she had the opportunity to view a hospital. I think it attests to her ability that the people are in the gallery today. I thank them for coming.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a house where it was often said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I know with many, many people in my constituency and all over Alberta, their children are wearing bicycle helmets, so the passing of this legislation would not be a hardship on them. They're already doing it, but not everyone is. This is what the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross and the others that are in favour of this are trying to achieve. We want to protect these children.

I think what we're talking about here is a very low-cost investment whose yield will be very, very high. These helmets, as the hon. member and several members have talked about, will prevent skull fractures, prevent a life from being spent in a wheelchair, prevent the loss of human life. Part of what we have been dealing with with the revamping of health care over the last number of years is talking more about wellness and prevention, and I think that here what we're trying to do is talk about prevention.

While I am standing before you, I think back – and I think it was mentioned earlier – about the wearing of seat belts while driving a car and how all that came to be. There was a lot of controversy several years ago. Would it in fact save your life? Would it be cumbersome? Would people do it? What would be the fine? Et cetera, et cetera. We now know today that seat belts do save lives, and we do know that most, in fact all, jurisdictions in Canada have mandatory seat belt laws as well as several jurisdictions outside of Canada.

4:40

I know that in my particular area of central Alberta right now the RCMP, who are to be commended for the outstanding job they do on our highways – and I'm primarily talking about the RCMP that patrol highway 2, the central Alberta corridor – are very, very concerned about the number of male drivers under the age of 25 that refuse to buckle up. They right now in central Alberta have a huge advertising campaign to really encourage these young males drivers to please use their seat belts. In fact, now when there's a fatality, an RCMP officer will literally stand there and say: this life could have been saved if the individual had been wearing a seat belt.

So we do know from that history and that period of time that we did make the right decision in making people buckle up, and I think it was said here earlier that it has now become habit that most people

just fall into and do. It isn't a hardship, and I don't think the mandatory use of helmets will be a hardship. I think that children will learn to wear them and will want to wear them. So I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that everyone in the House think back to when we made mandatory seat belts the law and where we are with seat belts and safety and the number of traffic deaths today compared to then per our population.

Again, I congratulate the member for her hard work, and I thank her.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak at third reading in support of the bill. I believe it's a good move, and I'm delighted that it's before the House. I do think, though, that it's just one piece of what is needed in terms of bicycle safety, and I looked at the national program that is carried on in the United States in terms of bicycle safety. That bicyclists wear helmets is just one part of a five-part program that their national strategy has in terms of making sure that people riding bicycles, in particular children, are kept safe, and the other four parts are important. I would hope that at some future date there might be consideration for a provincial initiative in terms of bicycle safety that would include some of the factors that are considered in the American national program.

The first goal for their program is that motorists will share the road. This is an important goal, and making motorists aware of the need to make way to accommodate bicyclists is an important goal. Any of you who have driven in this city and been near the university campus and other parts of the city where there are bicycle riders trying to share the road know that the kinds of indignities they suffer I think sometimes border on the very, very dangerous.

A second goal of the national program and, I think, a worthy one is that bicyclists will ride safely. That, I think, has been referred to by a number of members in debate, that along with the helmet program we need to make sure there's an education program in place that will make bike riders very aware of their obligations to ride safely for their own safety.

A fourth goal of the national program is that the legal system will support safe bicycling. They go on to mention the need for courts and the law system to be aware of bicycle safety statistics and to accommodate that awareness in the kinds of judgments that are being made and the work that is done that involves legal bicycle safety.

The last goal that they have is that roads and paths will safely accommodate bicyclists. I think that this is something that we have made a little progress on. There are bicycle routes set aside, lane-marked in some areas, and certainly bicycle routes within the city, but if you ride some of those routes, for instance in the southwest part of the city, they are still designed as an afterthought to the transportation in the city. Certainly even when the bike trails are marked, you have to be extremely careful. The other disconcerting thing is they can end without any notice, so you can be on a trail and find yourself stranded and having to get out on the road with the traffic.

I think the five goals of that national program are worthy of consideration here, and the passage of this bill, I think, this afternoon hopefully is just the beginning of a more comprehensive bicycle safety program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you allowing me to stand today. I'd like to thank, as many others have, the Member for Calgary-Cross for doing this. I first introduced this back in about 1994, and this House wasn't ready for this legislation back then. I'm glad it is today.

I guess many people have talked to it from many different angles. What I wanted to do is strictly go from an economic point and make that point for a moment and the cost to our society and why it's necessary. I think the reason for the legislation is because our society is not quite into the libertarian mode and to accept it at that level. We aren't accountable. Therefore, there is a need for this to help make sure that we can make it a safer society. That's why it's there. The example is that if in a libertarian society you would allow people to choose whether or not you wanted to do this or not, then you'd also be responsible for having to take care of the costs. It is a major cost, and that's been referred to many times. In talking to the neurosurgeons in the Calgary regional health authority, they know, as do other doctors across the province and across Canada, that the costs are horrendous when we have someone who hasn't had a helmet on.

Quickly, I would like to tell a short story of why I had first introduced it and why I think this is still important today. Many people here would know of Bill Almdahl. Bill Almdahl is a person that many people would have known through the oil sands. Originally from Calgary, he was working up in Fort McMurray. He had a son. His name was Mike Almdahl. Mike Almdahl was a provincial road race champion two years in a row, a national team cyclist, an excellent cyclist. His skill was unbelievable. We were on the same team. I was a triathlete; he was a road racer. In Calgary he was riding along Bowness Road by Shaganappi Trail, heading toward the intersection. A car turned in front of him, cut him off, and his head hit the frame coming up the side of the door. He was in a coma for a few days, and he ended up passing away. A very sad story. The best skilled person that you could find to be on a bike doesn't have a chance against a car.

The sad part is another one of our teammates had been out for a training ride the week before, and he had a helmet on. Almost the exact same accident in a different location. He did run his head into the side of the door when he was cut off by a car. He had a helmet on. He was in the hospital for a week.

A sad loss of life that didn't have to happen. I will be supporting this legislation, so thank you for bringing it forward.

[Mr. Rathgeber rose]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

4:50

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, I sure hope you get an opportunity. You've been very persistent.

Again, I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 209 in third reading, and I once again congratulate the Member for Calgary-Cross on bringing this bill forward.

When we look back in this province, Mr. Speaker, we see that initially when seat belts were introduced, they were not accepted. Today the majority of us don't think twice about strapping on our seat belt before we leave a location in our car. At one time we had a tremendous amount of resistance to wearing helmets when we rode motorcycles in this province. Today we don't have any problems with that. When we think of the range of people and the types of people that ride motorcycles, if they're quite prepared to wear

helmets, then why can't we have our children wear helmets?

A few years ago we had a law introduced in this province where children, young babies, had to be strapped into their car seats, and today in hospitals in this province they will not give up that baby to the parents unless there is an approved car seat in that car. So here we have it today that we are violating the rights of children to try and get a very worthwhile bill passed, but we didn't violate the rights of adults riding in cars or of people that wanted to ride motorcycles or of babies who were riding in car seats. Now, why can we not have protection for all members of this society?

When I look at those other examples that I have given, Mr. Speaker, we passed those laws here in this province, and we have moved on to the betterment of this society. So, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View said, this certainly is long overdue legislation and certainly legislation that I would again urge all members of this Assembly to pass today.

When we look at cycling in Canada, Mr. Speaker, it is the number one activity; that is, of course, when the weather co-operates. The types of risks that our cyclists are exposed to are certainly reflected by the great variety and types of bikes that they have to ride. We have to realize here as well that in Canada we have more bikes than we have cars, and whereas lately the sales of bikes have flattened out, we find that the number of miles traveled by bike in Canada has increased greatly. We use the bike more and more for transportation, but an even greater increase of use is for fitness. We also know that 2 percent of motor vehicle related deaths are bicyclists. The most serious of these injuries is to the head.

We know that bike helmets are designed for two major reasons. We look and we see that in the design of that helmet we have a hard outer cover and a very soft interior. These are built that way specifically for two reasons. One, of course, is that the hard outer shell is for instances when people are thrown off their bikes and slide along the pavement or the roadway, the gravel or whatever. The softer, thicker padding inside is put there for those occasions when the cyclist strikes some type of a fixed object, and in doing so, they have to pad the brain and prevent what could be serious injuries occurring.

MS BLAKEMAN: It collapses; doesn't it?

MR. BONNER: Yes. It does collapse.

As well, one of the recommendations that manufacturers of bike helmets have is that once you've been involved in any type of a serious blow to those helmets, we discard the helmet and get a new one.

Now, as well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross indicated that there is an 85 percent reduction in head injuries when people wear bike helmets, and there's also an 88 percent reduction in brain injuries when they are wearing helmets. It is critical that we pass this legislation. We all know that cyclists have the same rights and responsibilities that drivers have when they're on the road. We know that there are a number of organizations where bicycle helmets are mandatory if you wish to participate, and of course in any racing that is done in the United States people must wear bicycle helmets. As well, in the Olympics anybody participating must use a bike helmet. So in doing this, I don't think we are infringing upon people's rights. We are giving them an opportunity to participate in an activity where they can be very, very safe.

Now, then, as well, Mr. Speaker, we have an organization here in Edmonton called Sport Central. Sport Central provides sporting equipment to disadvantaged children free of charge. Of course, one of the pieces of equipment that they pass out – and they have just a tremendous call for these in the spring – are bicycles, but before any

child is issued a bike, the one thing they must promise is that they will wear a helmet when they ride that bike. As well, they provide that child with a helmet.

Now, are we talking about a big expense here? Absolutely not. The cost of a bike helmet today that is CSA approved is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$10 to \$15. We can certainly get Cadillac varieties that are much more expensive than this, but it is not a big expense when people are looking at riding bikes. It is amazing that when we see people skateboarding, they have all the various safety equipment on. So, as well, I think that when we are looking at this particular issue, to expect somebody to wear a bike helmet when they're riding a bike, when they are traveling at speeds in excess of 30 miles an hour, we certainly are not doing anything out of the ordinary.

The Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute has tracked what happens with the helmet use rates when legislation is passed, and it's amazing in the United States, Mr. Speaker, that in nine out of 10 jurisdictions that have passed bicycle helmet safety legislation, the increase in the use is certainly much more, and it certainly has not impacted the use of bicycles. So we are not looking at something that's going to restrict people riding bicycles here at all.

We have also had a tremendous amount of scientific research over the past few years, and this certainly indicates, Mr. Speaker, that if we wear the right types of protective equipment when we are involved in various sporting activities, whatever they may be, then certainly the incidence of injury is going to go down and the severity of that injury is going to go down.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much consumer awareness today that society has at its fingertips. So I would urge all members to look at that scientific evidence, to realize that a bicycle helmet law in this province is long overdue, and to please vote for Bill 209. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

MR. RATHGEER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to stand and finally get to speak in support of Bill 209. This bill is taking a necessary step in the protection of Alberta's youth.

Bicycling involves extraordinary risks which cannot be ignored. The speed that a bike can travel, even with a child on as a rider, can be well in excess of any speed required to sustain severe head or spinal cord injury in the event of any collision. In passing this bill, we will be acknowledging the inherent risks involved in cycling and informing children that these risks are never to be taken lightly. This bill and what it aims to achieve is extremely relevant in today's society and will only become an increasingly important consideration.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has grown over the past century and has become more and more urban. There are more hazards for cyclists today and more paved surfaces that not only facilitate a much greater speed but also are far less forgiving in the event of a crash. Bicycle technology has also changed, and today's bicycles are more efficient. They can travel across far more jagged terrain and can even sustain the impact of a crash far better than bikes built during the days of our youth. There are far more recreational options for cyclists, and many are so risky that even experienced cyclists would never consider riding without a safety helmet.

Nevertheless, children often have to learn the hard way that function, safety, and responsibility must come before fashion. Although many would much rather sail over bumps and hills with the wind flowing freely through their hair, sooner or later one of

those bumps will bump back, and the price may be much dearer than only a scraped knee. In far too many instances throughout Alberta children are severely and permanently injured in falls off bicycles. What is tragic is that most of these injuries could have been avoided through the proper use of a bicycle safety helmet. The technology for bicycle helmets has also progressed in the past decade. Lighter weight yet strong, they provide minimal burden to the rider, yet in the event of a fall they provide extraordinary protection.

Mr. Speaker, bicycles are not just a harmless diversion or a toy. They are amazing machines capable of carrying people at speeds in excess of 50 kilometres per hour. Unfortunately, their capabilities are often not respected, and when there is a loss of control, a tragedy can result. Head and spine injuries have much further reaching consequences than any other type of injury. Injury to the brain can lead to behavioural problems, memory loss, and even loss of physical control. A spinal injury can be more devastating, leaving some with permanent paralysis of the lower limbs or even the entire body. Medical science cannot treat these conditions. They are irreversible by all known methods of treatment. The old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is inapplicable to this situation because brain and spinal cord injuries have no cure. In this case an ounce of prevention has a value that cannot be measured.

Mr. Speaker, when we consider the asset that we will be protecting, there is a clear responsibility on the part of this Legislature to pass Bill 209. We may save only one life or prevent one innocent child from becoming severely disabled, but that is enough incentive for me to vote in favour of this bill. With an increasingly traffic-congested and chaotic series of roadways, we must ensure the security of young cyclists. Bill 209 affirms that Alberta's youth is valuable and worth protecting.

This has been an interesting debate, Mr. Speaker, and I've listened to both sides of it. I agree with the members who are not in favour of this bill that this ought to be a parental responsibility, but the reality is that if all parents lived up to this responsibility, we would not need this bill. The fact that we see so many cases of children being taken to emergency clinics with preventable bike-related injuries means that unfortunately some parents do not measure up to that responsibility, and it's for the children involved in those situations that we need this legislation. Children might not always appreciate what we do for them in protecting their safety, but we nevertheless recognize the necessity of setting reasonable limits upon them. I feel that this bill will help Alberta parents protect their children, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this bill.

I thank the Member for Calgary-Cross for her hard work and efforts in sponsoring this bill, and I hope that all members will help her make this bill become law in the province of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak in support of Bill 209, Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001. We have all fallen off our bicycles at one time or another. We have seen and heard of others doing the same. Learning to ride a bike is a rite of passage for Alberta's youngsters, an early taste of independence from their parents. It's a part of growing up. So, too, are the cuts and scratches that come with occasionally falling off. Unfortunately, not all tumbles from bicycles are minor or harmless. In 1999 children and teens under the age of 17 made over 450 trips to Alberta emergency rooms for bicycle-related head injuries. People say that you never forget how to ride a bicycle. I hope they always

remember to wear an approved safety helmet. With roughly nine out of 10 Canadian children aged 10 to 14 riding bikes, this is something that must be taught and enforced from a very early age.

Bill 209 requires that nobody under the age of 18 shall operate or ride on a bicycle unless they are wearing a regulated bicycle safety helmet and that it is the parent's or guardian's responsibility to ensure this to the best of their abilities. In addition, this legislation would require that only safety helmets that meet the regulated specifications of the Canadian Standards Association could be bought or sold in Alberta for use by operators or passengers on bicycles.

Mr. Speaker, the wording and intent of this legislation are very clear about putting children's safety first. Bill 209 has been backed up by mountains of evidence over the years that bicycle helmets save lives and prevent injuries. In fact, helmets have been shown to reduce the likelihood of head injury by 85 percent and brain injury by 88 percent. In spite of years of educational programming promoting bicycle helmets, too many young Albertans are still not wearing helmets when bicycling. This is why the Alberta government needs to introduce and enforce mandatory bike helmet legislation.

Bill 209 is no more an impingement on the freedom of choice of youngsters or their parents or guardians than laws concerning underage drinking and seat belts. It's a matter of health and safety. Many of us know someone who has been spared death or serious head injury thanks to their bicycle helmet. I think the member for Calgary-Mountain View made that point very clearly. Believe me; these people are not worried about the cost of a good helmet or how wearing one might make them look. Surviving and realizing one's full potential in life are worth far more and look much more cool than the alternative.

One of the potential benefits of Bill 209 is that a mandatory bicycle helmet law for minors could encourage more adults to wear helmets when cycling. This is particularly true of parents or guardians who wish to lead by example while requiring their children to observe the helmet law. With such a law in effect I would not be surprised to see a drop in the number of visits to Alberta's emergency rooms by adults in addition to minors with bicycle-related head injuries.

Mr. Speaker, there are already bicycle helmet laws in Ontario and British Columbia. The laws have served these provinces well, with solid increases in the use of helmets and a decrease in bicycle-related head injuries. With Bill 209 we will be taking yet another step to ensure that our youngsters have every opportunity to grow up and become Alberta's future leaders. We owe this to them and to ourselves.

For young people cycling is a sport, a hobby, or even a job. The same is true for football and ice hockey, in which safety helmets are the norm. Granted, cycling is not a contact sport or activity. However, cyclists compete on their asphalt and concrete playing fields not only with other cyclists but with cars and trucks, that outweigh and outpace them by many times. Young cyclists must also contend with their own developing reflexes and equilibrium in addition to obstacles such as pedestrians and uneven sidewalks and roads. Collisions and falls cannot always be prevented. However, we must do everything possible to minimize the risk of serious injuries when bicycle crashes do occur. Bill 209 would be an important step in accomplishing this.

I would encourage everyone to support this bill. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

5:10

MR. MAGNUS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 209 this afternoon. You know, in listening to this debate – and I've listened fairly carefully – there have been a lot of statistics thrown about and talked about, all the good reasons for bringing this bill into place. But I think what this bill is about, plainly put, is common sense. Some people have it and some don't. I remember my mother's favourite expression was always: if you expect common sense from someone else, you haven't got any yourself. However, I would like to state that we as adults . . . [interjection] Did you guys just get that? I'm glad to see I'm waking them up now.

I'd like to state that we as adults and as lawmakers rightly or wrongly make the assumption that most children do not have the same level of common sense as adults. We see countless laws that prevent children from doing some things that adults are free to do. Laws related to the consumption of alcohol or cigarettes come to mind right off the bat. We make these laws because we don't feel that children have the requisite life experience to make fully informed decisions about the consumption of these products. We also have a little law in place that says that you can't quit school until you're 16. I have to tell you as the father of three teenagers that none of them prior to 16 wanted to go to school. They'd all quit if we didn't have that law in place. It's just another example.

Also, we look at the criminal justice system. We see that we give children lighter sentences, second chances, and the benefit of the doubt when they break the law. We do this not because their acts are objectively less harmful but because we make the assumption that most minors do not have the life experience necessary to fully understand the scope of their actions.

Part of our job as parents and as role models in society is to help educate our children about the right way to do things and the consequences of those things that they do. Mr. Speaker, what I'm trying to get at here is this. When we make this assumption, we do it in the name of protecting the safety of our children so that they can become responsible adults capable of leading their children into the future. This is really at the heart of the bill proposed by the Member for Calgary-Cross, and I would like to join the legion of fans for this member bringing this bill forward. It isn't a punishment of children; it is the introduction of a responsible measure.

I believe I have a few minutes left; don't I, Mr. Speaker?

It is, admittedly, government telling children that we know what is best for them, but if anyone here could name me a government that doesn't do this with children, I'd be very, very surprised. Our own government, which takes great pains to get out of the personal lives of citizens, often tells children what to do. We do it in the name of common sense – there's that word again: common sense – and public and personal safety. In this regard Bill 209 is a prudent step.

On the other hand, I've heard it argued that this bill tells parents how to raise their children, Mr. Speaker. Some have even gone so far as to call this bill an imposition into the personal lives of individuals, parents, and families. In response I'd like to again revert to the common sense argument. In most cases we do not have laws to tell people with common sense what to do. For the most part we have laws to protect decent people with common sense from those who do not act with that same common sense. As an 18-year-old motorcycle driver – and I won't tell you how many years ago that was – I can recall very clearly that I was not happy when the Alberta government brought in motorcycle helmet laws. On the other hand, I've had a number of experiences in my life and through people and acquaintances that I've known that have had accidents on motorcycles. Today were I to get on a motorcycle – I'd love to ride a Harley,

I have to tell you – I frankly would not get on one without that helmet. Now, that's changed over 30 years. Again, common sense.

Mr. Speaker, this may be a bold assertion, but I'll make it anyway: anyone who lets their child get on a bike without a helmet is obviously lacking in common sense. While they may have unlimited faith in their five year olds to safely navigate our streets, do they really have that much faith in everyone else to be safe around their children? In both the child and the others on the road – other bikers, other motorists, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera – there is a huge margin for error. As adults we may decide to take that risk, but we should not let our children do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues here today to exercise some of their own common sense and pass Bill 209. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to speak this afternoon on Bill 209, the Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001. What I'd like to do is address three questions surrounding this bill: are bicycle helmets necessary, will all Albertans be able to afford helmets for their children, and, finally, will children actually wear helmets even if the legislation exists for them to do so?

I believe that the comments my colleagues have made on this bill in the past few months and today especially as this bill has gone through the readings and through Committee of the Whole have made it clear that bicycle helmets certainly do make an enormous contribution to reducing deaths and injuries to children. It is foolish for all people and especially children not to be wearing a bicycle helmet when riding.

Just a few statistics from the United States that confirm this point one more time. Medical research shows that 85 percent of cyclists' head injuries can be prevented by using a bicycle helmet. More than 800 bicycle riders are killed each year in the United States alone, almost all in collisions with cars. Seventy-five percent of these deaths are the result of head injuries. Many other thousands of cyclists suffer less severe but still debilitating brain injuries which are far worse than the physical pain of scraped skin or even broken bones. Children can suffer permanent personality changes and learning disabilities from a brain injury. Other common long-term effects include concentration difficulties, aggressiveness, headaches, and balance problems. Imagine the anguish any parent would feel if this happened to their child. I would have to say on a personal note that I have listened to parents who have been in my constituency office who have told me stories that are reflective of exactly what I've just said.

The need for children to wear helmets is clear, but what of the concern that mandating bicycle helmets for children will cost Alberta parents money they don't have? A concern has been expressed for low-income Albertans in that the cost of a bicycle helmet can be a

significant financial challenge. In fact, Mr. Speaker, quality bicycle helmets can be purchased for as low as \$30, sometimes even less when sales are on. Some parents might object saying that \$30 is misleading because children will need many helmets as they grow up. In fact, a child needs surprisingly few helmets throughout their growth cycle. Heads do not grow nearly as much or as fast as arms or legs, and many helmets come with two or even three sets of foam fitting pads. When I say that helmet costs are only \$30, this is not to say that \$30 is not a substantial burden for some Albertans, but when this price is compared against the potential injury to a child, is there a parent who can afford not to buy a helmet for their child?

A final concern I wish to address, Mr. Speaker, is whether the bill will have an actual impact on the Alberta community resulting in more children wearing helmets. Well, similar laws passed in other jurisdictions have made a mark on helmet usage and have significantly reduced the incidence of head injury. New Jersey, for instance, passed a law calling for mandatory use of bike helmets for people under the age of 16, and after five years of enforcement New Jersey reported a 60 percent reduction in fatalities for the age group covered by the law. Many states and dozens of counties and cities have passed similar legislation in hopes of attaining these results. Of course, it's ultimately up to the child, though, to decide whether they wish to wear a helmet or not.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-West, but Standing Order 8(5)(a)(iii) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill to close debate. Therefore, I invite the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to close debate on Bill 209.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to close debate on Bill 209. In doing so, I sincerely want to thank all members of the Assembly who have encouraged me and guided me with their wisdom from both sides of the debate. It's been a well-balanced debate which is essential for the public to hear. I'd also like to thank, as I mentioned earlier, the staff that are here from the Stollery children's hospital and especially to thank the hon. Minister of Transportation and his staff as well for their guidance.

So I appreciate that, and with that I'm calling for the vote.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a third time]

5:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a very good afternoon of excellent progress once again, and I would move that we now call it 5:30 and reconvene this evening at 8.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 28, 2001**

8:00 p.m.

Date: **01/11/28**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Please be seated. Before I recognize the hon. minister, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly present the 153rd Ardrossan Scouts, who are accompanied by their leaders Garth Petryk, Harold Petryk, Andrew Otway, and Steve Otway as well as Ken Ferguson. The 153rd are mostly residents of the Ardrossan area. We also have some tie this evening. The son of our Sergeant-at-Arms was a member of the 153rd at one time. Would you please rise and receive the welcome of the Assembly?

Thank you.

head: Government Motions

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee

22. Mr. Coutts moved:

Be it resolved that

- (1) A Select Special Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta be appointed to review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act as provided in section 91 of that act, consisting of the following members, namely Mr. Rathgeber, chairman; Mrs. Jablonski, deputy chairman; Ms. Carlson; Ms. DeLong; Mr. Jacobs; Mr. Lukaszuk; Mr. MacDonald; Mr. Mason; and Mr. Masyk.
- (2) The chair and members of the committee shall be paid in accordance with the schedule of category A committees provided in the most recent Members' Services Committee allowances order.
- (3) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid subject to the approval of the chair.
- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may undertake limited travel within Alberta to consult with interested Albertans.
- (5) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may with the concurrence of the head of the department utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Assembly or the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.
- (6) The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned.
- (7) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the act, within one year after commencing its review.
- (8) When its work has been completed, the committee must

report to the Assembly if it is then sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Seeing nobody else wishing to speak, the hon. Minister of Government Services to close debate.

MR. COUTTS: I close debate, Mr. Speaker.

[Government Motion 22 carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two wonderful constituents sitting in the public gallery this evening, and I'm not the only one in the room that thinks they're wonderful. Parliamentary Counsel's wife and son are here this evening. They are residents of Glenora, and I would ask them to please stand and be recognized by the Assembly. They're Ritu Khullar and Rob's son, Samir Reynolds. I'd like you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move third reading of Bill 24, the Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001.

The new Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act will replace the Forestry Profession Act and consolidate the regulations of Alberta's two professional forestry associations under one statute. The new act was developed to improve the quality of forest service throughout the province by enhancing the professional requirements of foresters and forest technologists. By continuing to ensure high-quality standards within the forestry profession, the act serves to protect both the public interest and Alberta's sustainable forest resource.

I wish to acknowledge the efforts of both forestry associations, the Alberta Registered Professional Foresters Association and the Alberta Forest Technologists Association, together with Human Resources and Employment and the Alberta sustainable resource department in developing these amendments. Mr. Speaker, I think this is a great example of two organizations getting together and looking at the public good and working to make sure our forests are there for our grandchildren as well as our great-grandchildren.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We support this bill in third reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead to close debate.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd like to certainly thank all members in the House for this aspect of going over this Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act. I think our forests will be well protected by this.

Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a third time]

Bill 25

Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 25, which is the Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to spend some time putting on the record some concerns that I have about the bill. I did express some of those concerns when I spoke earlier on the bill. I continue to harbour those concerns and also have had, of course, the advantage of having had some time to reflect further on those concerns, so I would like to spend some time sharing those concerns with the House and putting them on record.

It's a very important bill. It's a bill that will certainly do two things: assure victims of crime that they are compensated for the loss, personal or financial, that they may have incurred as a result of the crime committed against them, and this bill also will ensure that the proceeds of crime are not left with the people who are guilty of committing those crimes and are taken away from them and used, in fact, to compensate the victims of those very crimes. So I am fully supportive and the New Democrat caucus is fully supportive of those principles and intentions behind the bill. But because this bill deals with the powers of police, powers of the state, and powers of the courts when dealing with the matters that are covered under this act, I want to make some observations on the nature of the concerns that I think the House should take note of. At this late stage in the debate on this bill the only thing I can hope for is that in developing the regulations for this bill, some of these concerns, if not all of these concerns, will be addressed by the minister and the department.

8:10

Mr. Speaker, I'll make my observations relative to two or three different parts of the bill. First of all, dealing with part 1 of the bill, part 1 of this legislation is extremely broad and in my view invades the federal law powers related to criminal law. It's a matter that I raised before in my earlier observations, and I want to reiterate this. The province obviously cannot assume such authority, particularly

when it is so directly related to "illegal acts," which includes a contravention of the Criminal Code and other federal legislation. It was a point I made on that day; I'm making it more explicit now.

My further study of this act leads me to also observe that this part of the act may be unconstitutional as it does invade federal criminal law jurisdiction and in any event is overly broad in its scope. I had the benefit of consulting with some defence lawyers, and one of them observed – and I want to share that observation with the House – that it was reminiscent of Cicero's days, when a successful prosecutor was able to take an individual's property as part of his or her award. Several individuals might want to allege illegal acts simply to obtain another person's property, and that remains a concern of mine here. There's nowhere a clear definition or process described or defined in this act which would help the courts determine who the real victim is. Who is the victim? I think that still remains a question.

This part also makes the unfortunate assumption that individuals are victims – and this is a point that I just made – without a court having found that to be the case. That's what I mean when I say that there's an absence in this act of any procedure that would allow the courts to determine who the victim in fact is. We are well aware of the numerous cases where people claim to be victims and after trial were found in fact to be perpetrators and not victims.

Section 4(2) permits an ex parte application, which in my view is again rather dangerous and out of step with present criminal and civil practices in providing notice to other parties. There is no reason why, if such application is to be brought, the possessor of the property does not receive notice. These portions of the act may be struck down as being in violation of the natural rules of justice.

Section 5, again in my view sets too low a standard, permitting the court to be satisfied only on "reasonable grounds," which in the judgment of people that I have consulted is lower than even the civil standard of balance of probabilities. It appears to me, therefore, that if property is going to be seized as a result of illegal acts, the test ought to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

Section 5(3) also raises some difficult questions; for example, where there is no necessity to charge or convict anyone of an illegal act. This leaves open the possibility that where it appears to be an illegal act, property can be seized. Imagine the bank manager who fears that a loan is in jeopardy, who perceives the act of his customer to be illegal. Pursuant to this legislation, with the help of the state the individual's bank account could be seized without notice in order to secure the outstanding indebtedness. I suspect that writing a cheque when there are not sufficient funds to cover the cheque but when the customer believes there are sufficient funds might be considered an illegal act, and reasonable grounds could be made. This is the kind of potential mischief that the legislation can create.

I think that I'm concerned about the provisions of section 6, which would allow a police officer, for example, in essence to provide a restraint order based upon reasonable grounds only. This means that the police officer could seize the item or restrain it in some fashion without the concordance of a judge. It appears to me that section 6 is in direct violation of section 8 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects all of us from unreasonable search and seizure. The Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *Hunter versus Southam* held that any search and seizure without judicial authorization is presumed to be unreasonable and unlawful. This legislation is totally inconsistent with that cornerstone decision. At a minimum the police officer should have to obtain a warrant from a judicial officer, which in these days can be obtained by a tally warrant system. That at least would protect the individual from an unlawful seizure. Section 6 in my view in that sense is seriously flawed and may in fact be unconstitutional.

Section 6 is not saved by subsection (3) or any of the judicial

reviews that occur later, as provided for in this piece of legislation. What has been found in the past is that the police drag their feet on these sorts of things, and the courts subsequently condone that practice by issuing retroactive orders, therefore protecting the police and its actions.

It's of interest that section 6(6) provides for a penalty for anyone who fails to comply with the direction but does not provide for a penalty against the seizing individual where the seizure may subsequently be proven to have been unlawful, unreasonable, or unconstitutional. I did make that point when I spoke a few days ago on this bill. This matter has not really been addressed at all in the bill at this stage in third reading.

So in relation to my observations relating to part 1, one must bear in mind that the Criminal Code now has a specific section that deals with restitution and the use of Criminal Code judgments, which can be enforced without the necessity of a trial. One wonders in light of that why the government feels that this particular provision of the legislation is necessary.

In addition, this type of legislation waylays the longstanding tradition of civil disputes being settled between the parties involved. This now allows a plaintiff to pursue another person's property using the state and the state's resources. One can see quickly how this legislation can be abused and undoubtedly will be if this flaw is not removed and this bill becomes law.

Now to part 2 of the bill, Mr. Speaker. I'm concerned that once the minister is to be a party against the respondent – that is, the accused person – this means that the state will carry the expense of the restitution application and the respondent will have to bear that cost himself or herself. This is an attempt by the state to avoid a plaintiff bringing a civil action and in my view ought not to be permitted.

Section 25(1) is extremely problematic, Mr. Speaker, in that it requires the offender to provide documentary evidence as to his or her assets. As you can appreciate, in a civil case this might not be mandatory, but in this instance the individual would be subject to contempt of court or further punishment by the court for failing to provide this kind of information.

Section 25(2) does not appear to contemplate the alleged victim testifying; rather, the restitution assistance hearing will proceed based upon representations only. Despite the fact that the Criminal Code does not provide the power to have someone denied their liberty in this instance, the courts are permitted to bind the offender over to appear for the hearing where one has failed to attend. This suggests that somehow the province has the right to deny the individual bail. In my view, this is likely to be unconstitutional again, Mr. Speaker.

8:20

So these are some of the concerns that I have. They're based on sound advice from lawyers who have long experience in defence. I hope that in the drawing of the regulations some of these matters will be addressed or at least will be considered and that before this piece of legislation is proclaimed, those concerns will be explicitly addressed. I think it's in the interest of all of us and in the interest of justice and in the interest of maintaining the integrity of the justice system that we address those issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I did listen very

intently to the hon. member opposite, and I assure him that his comments will be brought to the attention of the mover of the bill, the hon. Minister of Justice. With that, I would close off debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

Bill 26 Trustee Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise again on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice to move at third reading Bill 26, the Trustee Amendment Act, 2001.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've had some concerns about this bill but in general support it, so we'll support it at third reading.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Justice I want to thank all members of the House, including those opposite, for their support. With that, I will close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a third time]

Bill 27 Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice I'm pleased to move at third reading Bill 27, that being the Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that we have been pleased to support at all readings, and we will continue to do so.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice, thank you to all members in the House for their support. With that, we'll close debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a third time]

Bill 29 Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance on behalf of the Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-North Hill I move third reading of the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, once again this is a bill that we have been happy to support at all readings, and we will do so again.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance on behalf of the Member for Calgary-North Hill to close debate.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased with the support from the House on this bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 29 read a third time]

Bill 30
Appropriation (Supplementary Supply)
Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to move third reading of Bill 30, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2).

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that we have a lot of problems with in terms of the process by which the government decides what it will and will not fund, but I think that we have had adequate debate about that at other levels in this Legislature, so we will call for the question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance to close debate.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the debate that has occurred through the process of this bill and have noted the comments from the opposition and thank them for their support in third reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 30 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 31
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Justice minister it's my pleasure to move for second reading consideration Bill 31, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2).

Miscellaneous Statutes typically is not a debated bill in the Assembly because it comes to the House under an all-party agreement, as everyone knows. However, another informal all-party agreement has been reached whereby the Electoral Boundaries Commission change outlined in Bill 31 will be discussed this evening and tomorrow afternoon under the following understanding: first, this evening in Committee of the Whole the Opposition House

Leader and the leader of the third party New Democrats will speak; secondly, tomorrow afternoon interested members will have an opportunity to speak at third reading, the only proviso being that all do understand that Bill 31 will pass third reading prior to 5:15 p.m., when Her Honour is expected to attend upon the Assembly to grant royal assent to bills awaiting royal assent, including Miscellaneous Statutes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

8:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General to close debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With those comments I would ask for debate to be closed.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a second time]

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

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall call the committee to order.

Bill 31
Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do have one amendment that we'd like to place on the floor at this time. I believe there are copies available for distribution. As it's going around, I think I should just point out that the nature of this amendment is simply to correct a small typographical error which unfortunately occurred. So this particular amendment to Bill 31, which of course is the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2), deals with that typographical error.

Specifically, while it's being circulated, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would just read what that amendment is all about in order that we might proceed more expeditiously in dealing with it. The suggestion is to amend the bill as follows. In part A section 7(8) is amended by striking out "(4)" and substituting "(6)." That is the entire amendment. As I indicated, it is purely a clerical error, and we would certainly ask for the support of everyone and their understanding to see this amendment dealt with in order that we can get on with the rest of the debate during the committee stage.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall refer to this amendment as amendment A1.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Chairman, we support the request for this particular amendment and call for the question on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Happy to take this opportunity to start the debate on the Electoral Boundaries Commis-

sion Act, part of the miscellaneous statutes amendments as we see them before us. We are happy to support this particular amendment, which requests that a commission be appointed on or before June 30, 2002, which actually states a specific date, which is only laid out in terms of years in the original commission act. We say that this couldn't happen too soon. Because of the nature of the agreement for our debate tomorrow afternoon, I will take some time this evening to go over the history of what's happened with the boundaries distribution in this province for the past couple of decades to indicate why it is that this is required and that it's very important for us to have an opportunity to debate boundaries and the way boundaries are drawn in this province given the kind of past history we've seen in this province.

Mr. Chairman, as every citizen of Alberta knows or should know, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives Canadians the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons and here in the Legislative Assembly. This right to vote is guaranteed, but it doesn't mean that every Albertan actually gets a vote of equal value. In this province traditionally since 1951 we've seen that rural ballots have a great deal more weight than those in the city. This is an unpopular statement to make in this province, because everybody always wants to capture the rural population in an election. Traditionally, for the last 30 years or so, that capture of votes has gone to the Conservatives, and nobody really wants to rock the boat on this issue, but it is really important to stand up and be counted on this particular issue in terms of what's right and what's wrong. If the Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives Canadians a vote, it is not a bonus. It is a right that we are given under our Charter. That vote is guaranteed and, we believe, should be of equal value.

Now, what does equal value mean in terms of the kind of legislation we see before us? It may not be a one-for-one vote, Mr. Chairman – I'm not saying that – but at least it has to be reasonable. As people who work in this building have said to me, their vote here in Edmonton or in Calgary or any other urban center should be equal to every other riding in this province. So that is what comes up for debate when we take a look at the amendment that's being brought in to establish electoral boundaries.

There's been a significant imbalance in urban versus rural representation in Alberta since certainly the late '60s. Back in the early '50s Alberta rural residents outnumbered urban dwellers, Mr. Chairman, but by 1957, which is the year I was born, the balance had shifted with more people living in cities than in the country. At that time 150,000 to 200,000 more lived in the cities than in the country. According to the Canada West Foundation, in 1996 the provincial census put the ratio at 4 to 1, or almost 80 percent urban population and 20 percent rural.

We know that as time continues, the rural and farm populations are dropping in absolute terms and as a population percentage. Urbanization has affected almost every jurisdiction in this province and certainly throughout Canada. Since representation by population is a fundamental democratic principle, electoral boundaries have to be revised from time to time to reflect where people actually live, and increasingly in Alberta that means Edmonton and Calgary. Particularly it's an issue in Calgary at this time with their rapidly increasing population.

Of course, there's the argument we hear from rural Alberta that there's little reason to alter the status quo from their perspective. We hear the arguments that the constituencies are very large – they are very large – that it's harder for the MLAs to get around in them, and that therefore their constituents should have a greater weighted vote than ours do, but in fact those are relatively solvable problems, Mr. Chairman. If the Legislature were to compensate those MLAs who have wide-ranging boundaries with access to travel and access

to placing constituency offices with support services in strategically placed locations, it would counterbalance some of those issues in terms of access to their MLA and the length of time it takes an MLA to cross.

It is a privilege for those people to be overrepresented in terms of population. It is a privilege denied to those people in the larger centres. Not a popular concept in this province but in fact a reality. It's a lifestyle choice for people to live where they are, and they should not be hampered by that choice in terms of their ability to weight their vote in elections.

8:40

Alberta for a long time had 83 constituencies, and we find that the overrepresentation and underrepresentation are quite extensive. If we take a look at 1991, Athabasca-Wabasca had a population of 16,621 at that time, or 46 percent fewer people than the average constituency, while Calgary-Fish Creek had a population of 35,666, or almost 16 per cent more than the average. This means that the people who live in Athabasca have more than twice the representation and voting power that people in Calgary-Fish Creek have, and it takes so few of them to elect an MLA. So these are the kinds of inconsistencies that boundary redistribution is supposed to correct. Not actually the case, Mr. Chairman, as we will find out as I proceed through this debate.

There was a pivotal case laid out in 1989, *Dixon versus British Columbia*, where B.C. Supreme Court Judge Beverley McLachlin interpreted the right to vote in section 3 of the Charter as requiring relative equality of voting power. By this she meant that electoral divisions must be relatively equal in population. The importance of this ruling for Alberta cannot be overstated, because it opens the door for a possible Charter challenge. The grounds for this kind of action would be that the right of a citizen to representation shouldn't be unduly compromised by the voter's place of residence. Judgments of the Supreme Court of Canada have suggested maximum permissible deviations from the provincial average of plus or minus 25 percent. In Alberta this would mean a constituency could have a population as small as 23,085 or as large as 38,475, based on those 1991 numbers.

I would strongly suggest, Mr. Chairman, that when the committee is struck to take a look at electoral boundaries, they are strongly held by this decision in 1989 and the criteria laid out. Those have not been the exact parameters that have been used in the past. It's resulted in a great many problems in this province. We would not like to see that happen again, because we are bound by this decision by the Electoral Boundaries Commission, as it states in the act, for at least eight years, not longer than 10 but at least eight years. So the decisions they make after this commission is appointed on or before June 30 of 2002 are binding for a very long time and binding at a time when we see seriously increased representation in the cities.

At the time of the *Dixon* case half the constituencies in Alberta deviated from the provincial average by more than plus or minus 25 percent, Mr. Chairman, so that was significant. In August of '89 the Alberta Legislature formed an all-party Select Special Committee on Electoral Boundaries to analyze the Charter's implications for electoral boundaries and the distribution of constituencies. Then in November of 1990 the provincial government passed a revised Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, which included some provisions to Charter-proof electoral boundaries. Then in January of 1991 the government appointed an Electoral Boundaries Commission based on the new act. However, by May '92 the commission found itself deadlocked over the issue of the creation of hybrid or what we call 'urban' constituencies, which helped to reduce some of those tensions between urban and rural populations. In fact, I

myself have a 'rurban' constituency. Two-thirds of the area is rural in nature, only holds 237 of the people in my constituency. The other 35,000 or so live in one-third of the constituency, which is very much an urban area.

In July of 1992 the final report of the commission was thrown out, and a special select committee of the Legislature comprised of seven MLAs – four Tories, two New Democrats, and one Liberal – was established. Opposition parties refused to participate in the select committee, objecting in principle to the process of politicians drawing their own boundaries. That was, I think, a very good move on behalf of who was the Official Opposition at the time, the New Democratic Party, and the other opposition party, which at that time was the Liberal Party. So what happened at that point, then, was that the people left on the committee were Tory MLAs. They were Bob Bogle from Taber-Warner as the chair, Stockwell Day from Red Deer-North as the vice-chair, Pat Nelson from Calgary-Foothills, and Mike Cardinal from what was then Athabasca-Lac La Biche.

The committee held no public hearings but listened to nine invited consultants and 18 other groups. The committee's recommendations for constituency boundaries were presented in November of 1992 and were based on the average populations drawn from the 1991 federal census figures for Alberta. Some problems with that, Mr. Chairman, as you can see: no public input; a little in-party decision-making was made. What happened as a result of those decisions: the elimination of Calgary's only New Democrat-held constituency and the creation of four special consideration districts with an average deviation of 42 percent below the provincial quotient, two of which happened to be the seats of the chairman and the vice-chairman of the committee at the time. It also raised Calgary's and Edmonton's seat numbers by one each to 20 and 18 respectively. The provincial quotient there was then 15.4 and 11.3 percent respectively. With the additions Calgary and Edmonton were, on average, over the provincial quotient, and 33 primarily rural constituencies fell below the quotient by an average of 11 percent.

Charges at that time were made by the opposition parties of gerrymandering, and they began in earnest in late 1992 . . . [interjection] No. I'm going to speak for this 20 and probably another 20. So get a coffee, sit back, and relax, because it's very important to put this information on the record.

It's interesting that that particular member would be raising a white flag when I'm talking about gerrymandering, which is what the all-Tory committee actually did with the decisions they came out with in 1992. If you would like me to continue talking about Tory gerrymandering, I could do that, or you could stop interrupting me. I'll give you the choice.

There's a little bit to be said about gerrymandering. Let's talk about where that name comes from and the kind of precedents that are around it. Gerrymandering is the political legacy of Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry, who in 1812 redrew the boundaries of his electoral area in such a way as to ensure his re-election. [interjection] You see, it gets worse. You should have given up a long time ago.

The resulting shape resembled a salamander, Mr. Chairman, and pundits coined the word by combining the names of the man and the reptile, so Elbridge Gerry and salamander: gerrymandering.

If we think it's a joke to talk about gerrymandering in this province, Mr. Chairman, I would refer people to look at a map of the boundaries of the Premier's own constituency.

There was a constitutional challenge from the town of Lac La Biche, that was subsequently withdrawn as a result of those decisions in 1992, and the Electoral Divisions Statutes Amendment Act, 1993, was proclaimed in force on May 18, 1993. For urban people it resulted in some small boundary changes; for rural people,

more significant changes. To attest to its constitutionality, they referred the act to the Court of Appeal of Alberta, and while the court was deliberating, a general election based on the new boundaries was held on June 15. That was the first election that I was elected in.

The Conservatives formed a majority government, taking 51 seats and about 45 percent of the popular vote. The Liberals and NDs won 55 percent of the popular vote but only 24 seats. So a Legislature with rural overrepresentation decided the question of whether or not rural overrepresentation should continue. In other words, the government said: we've got the control, and you can't have it. Forty-five percent of the popular vote and the government won 51 seats; 55 percent of the popular vote and both oppositions won 24 seats. That brings to question the idea of proportional representation or some other form. If you're not going to give people an equal vote, then we should take a look at some of the other options.

I know that some of these comments are going to be quite unpopular tonight, and I expect to see them pop up in some rural papers throughout the province. I'm quite happy to defend the position that votes should be equal for people in this province and that the government should be bound and the committee should be bound by how the Supreme Court defined "equal" in this context, and that's with deviations allowed. If that's the decision that's made with this committee, then certainly, Mr. Chairman, we need to talk about how rural ridings get representation and what kind of resources the MLAs representing those ridings get in order to adequately be able to represent the people in their ridings.

8:50

The judgment was ultimately delivered on October 24, 1994, and the court was very critical of the electoral divisions that had been established, claiming that the very brief report of the select committee had offered no detailed explanation for the specific boundaries. While it acknowledged that effective representation sometimes requires the formation of a constituency of a below-average population, it reaffirmed that "there is no permissible variation if there is no justification [and that] the onus to establish justification lies with those who suggest the variation." That was a direct quote. There was "little justification in the materials supplied by the Legislature," they stated. They stated:

The Legislature offered no reasons, but essentially adopted the recommendation of the Select Committee. Before us, Alberta equated the Committee's reasons with those of the Legislature. We did not know with any certainty or detail what those reasons are.

So they made all these decisions and couldn't back it up with anything substantive.

No transcripts of committee meetings were provided to the court. While it was the primary task of the court to pronounce upon the constitutionality of the approved boundaries, the court had no option but to conclude: "It is impossible for us to say that the effort here meets a Charter challenge when we do not know with any precision the reasons for the boundaries under review." So when you make decisions in a vacuum and provide no back up, this is the kind of decision that the courts are bound by. So very interesting and very reminiscent of how this government has continued to operate in other areas after this decision was made.

So the court claimed, and I quote one more time, that the practical necessities raised by the principle of effective representation did not, alone, guide the hand of the legislators. On the contrary, what seems to have motivated this scheme at least in part was the acknowledgment that, whether or not some disparities were warranted, change would be made slowly so as not to offend unduly the political sensibilities of some electors. The boundaries before us, at least in part, seem to be a response to widespread protest from those Albertans who live in farming communities.

The court then took Mr. Bogle to task for advocating the retention of one of the smallest divisions in the province, which by happenstance was that for which he was the sitting member at that time. While Bogle had argued that the sudden reduction in the level of representation would greatly displease his constituents, the court ruled that the comfort zone of a vocal portion of the electorate was not a valid Charter consideration. The court went on to conclude that the fact that a significant number of Albertans did not like the results of an equal distribution of electoral divisions was no reason to flinch from insisting that they take the burden as well as the benefit of democracy as we know it.

On that note, Mr. Chairman, I will conclude for this time. I will finish my remarks after the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona speaks. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to speak to one particular part of Bill 31. All of us agreed that that particular section is one on which we will have some debate. This deals with the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. This is the act that is revised only every 10 years, so it is important that we pay some attention to the kind of revisions we want to make to it. Otherwise, we will have missed the chance for another 10 years and won't be able to return to it until the year 2011 or so. The reason for having to wait 10 years is that the Electoral Boundaries Commission changes are tied to the decennial census, which takes place every 10 years across Canada, and only the population changes that are indicated by that census serve as the basis for redrawing the boundaries by the commission.

In any case, I am pleased to address this bill, Bill 31, in its debate in the committee. As usual, there was prior consultation on the contents of this bill. I will therefore restrict my comments to only the one legislative change, contained on page 6 of the bill, which really calls for a repeal of the existing section 5(1) and the substitution of a very short sentence which reads, "A Commission is to be appointed on or before June 30, 2002," which is next year, roughly seven months from now.

This change, this amendment, certainly results from a request I made last June when I first wrote the Premier asking that the date for the appointment of an Electoral Boundaries Commission be moved up. In that letter I also asked that an opportunity be provided for a full debate on electoral boundaries including such important considerations as the appropriate number of seats in this Assembly as well as the population variances that were to be allowed between constituencies.

To my letter I received a reply from the Justice minister. The Justice minister indicated that the government would be prepared to move up the date on which an Electoral Boundaries Commission would be appointed. He suggested that it be done by way of a miscellaneous statutes amendment in the fall sitting. Earlier this fall I again wrote the Justice minister. I told the minister that while I appreciated his willingness to move up the date for the appointment of the commission, the position of the New Democrat caucus was that it should be done by way of a stand-alone bill. A stand-alone bill would provide an opportunity for a much more wide-ranging and open-ended debate on this important matter than a miscellaneous statutes amendment would.

Since then, more discussion took place between the Justice minister, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and myself. What resulted from this was a decision to move up the date for appointing a commission while allowing a more wide-ranging debate than is

normally allowed when debating a miscellaneous statutes act.

So I'm appreciative of this opportunity to engage in this debate this evening. I encourage other members to engage in this debate as it continues tomorrow afternoon. While the actual amendment is a very simple one, it will begin a very important process. Let's face it: changes in the boundaries commission affect all of us. As elected members we have a direct interest in the outcome of the electoral boundaries process that will be initiated by this amendment. Because of our direct interest in the outcome, it is all the more important that the commission making decisions be at arm's length from the current members of this Assembly. In this respect Alberta's current law does pass the test of fairness. That wasn't always the case in the past, but now it does.

Sitting MLAs are not allowed to serve on the commission. Two members are appointed on the recommendation of the Premier. Two members are appointed on the recommendation of the opposition leader in consultation with the third party. The commission is chaired by an impartial person such as a retired judge. All of this to me seems quite fair.

In discussing the matter of electoral boundaries, I want to touch briefly on three issues. First, the number of seats in this Legislative Assembly. By approving this amendment, we will be saying that 83 is the appropriate number of seats as we go forward into the next two elections. I'm not at all convinced that we need that many seats in this Assembly. Let me suggest why. If we compare Alberta to Canada's other large provinces, we have significantly more members per capita, per 10,000 or per 20,000. For example, the province of Ontario only has 103 members in its Legislature despite having a population four times as large as ours. B.C. has 1 million more people than Alberta and has four fewer seats in its Legislative Assembly. I am disappointed that the government did not consider reducing the number of seats in this Assembly in this particular redistribution. At least we should have considered opening up the issue and debating it. The number of seats we presently have could be reduced to 75 or even to 70 without compromising effective representation.

9:00

I know some members will say that their existing constituencies are already sufficiently large or much too large. However, modern communication technologies provide us with so many more options for interacting with our constituents than was the case in the past. Moreover, constituency size is an irrelevant matter. Recently I spoke to the leader of the Ontario New Democrats. He represents a northern constituency that comprises 35 percent of the landmass of the province of Ontario. Translated to Alberta, that single constituency would be half the size of Alberta.

This brings me to my next concern, the population variances allowed within constituencies in this province. Alberta's rules are at the very outside of what the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms allows in terms of population variances. Alberta's rules allow population variances 25 percent above and 25 percent below the average of all constituencies. Moreover, there is a provision for up to four constituencies to be up to 50 percent below average in population. This is a considerably greater variance than that allowed in other provinces. For example, the province of Saskatchewan only allows a variance of plus or minus 10 percent for all but two northern constituencies. The province of Manitoba allows for variances of plus or minus 15 percent except for a few northern constituencies. While the provinces of B.C. and Ontario do allow variances of up to 25 percent, they do so without the exceptions Alberta allows. So relative equality of voting power is an important principle in a democratic society.

I am disappointed again that the government has not chosen to reduce the population variances allowed under Alberta's law. I believe that a variance of plus or minus 15 percent, with perhaps an exception for ridings located above 55 degrees north, would be more fair than what exists now. There are better ways of addressing the challenges of effectively representing geographically large rural ridings than diluting the voting power of urban residents. For example, this could be accomplished by providing extra money for travel for rural MLAs or extra funding to allow them to operate more than one constituency office in their areas.

I believe the government lacks boldness in not addressing the above issues, for once the boundaries commission completes its work, constituency boundaries will be set in stone for the next 10 years. That is why I want to conclude my remarks by making a bold proposal to consider even more fundamental changes to how members of the Assembly are elected. I believe that the time has come to seriously consider reform of the voting system itself. Under the existing system of first past the post, citizens do not get what they voted for in terms of the composition of this Assembly. Political parties that are elected with a minority of votes routinely receive a majority of seats in this Legislative Assembly. How many Albertans are aware that in two of the past four provincial elections the Progressive Conservatives did not secure even 45 percent of the provincial vote? Yet in those 1989 and '93 elections the Conservatives ended up with large majorities in this Assembly.

Even in the recent elections this past March, the Conservatives received just over 60 percent of the provincewide vote, yet ended up with 90 percent of the seats in this Assembly. If seats in this Assembly were based on each party's share of the provincewide vote, then there would be 31 opposition seats in the Assembly rather than the existing nine seats. Instead of 75 Conservatives there would be only 52. Instead of only seven Liberals there would be 24. Instead of only two New Democrats there would be seven. Because they have 90 percent of the seats in the House, the Tories and the government act as if that percentage of the electorate supported them, but that's false. Even in this most recent election over 38 percent of Albertans voted for parties other than the governing Conservative Party, yet in most cases those votes did not translate into seats for those opposition parties in this Assembly.

Proportional representation is an idea whose time has come. More and more democratic societies are using some form of proportional representation to elect their parliaments and legislatures. Canada and the United States are the only two remaining holdouts. New Zealand now uses a proportional representation voting system. Britain uses proportional representation for its regional assemblies in Scotland and Wales. Australia uses proportional representation for its Senate elections. Every single country in western Europe uses some form of proportional representation, as does the European Parliament.

It is time that Albertans got what they voted for at election time in terms of representation in this Assembly. That is why I'll conclude by giving members a bit of a heads up. Next spring I plan to introduce in this Assembly a private member's bill that proposes to develop a made-in-Alberta proportional representation voting system. I welcome the opportunity to debate such a voting system in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to continue the remarks that I previously started. I was talking about the judgment

of the Alberta Court of Appeal that was delivered on October 24, 1994. If we remember, the election in that time period was June 15, 1993, so the decision came some time after the election. What they concluded was that they recognized that they had the power to cause major disruption in the electoral process, and the court then decided to withhold any Charter condemnation and restrained itself from insisting upon a correction of electoral boundaries. Faced with the possibility of invalidating the 1993 election results, the court said, and I quote: We do not see the democratic value in creating a political crisis. End of quote.

So they were dissatisfied with the unjustified boundaries used in 1993 and called for a new and proper review before the next general election. Clearly hinting at the political make-up of the all-Conservative special committee that had established the 1993 electoral boundaries, the court called for a review that would be "insulated from partisan influence" – that part's a quote – and would be free of "traditional political games, like gerrymandering or log-rolling."

So we come to the Electoral Boundaries Commission as it was amended extensively in 1995. The act provided a more balanced appointment procedure involving opposition parties and equal representation from cities and country, and that is the proposal we are looking at for this time. It specifies the factors to be considered in drawing boundaries and sets the population of proposed electoral constituencies at a maximum of plus or minus 25 percent variance from the average. As we will see as this game unfolds before us next spring, once again those very interpretations and definitions of what plus or minus 25 percent variance from the average means will be debated, and the government will have a position that I think will not be supported by many people in this province.

9:10

The new commission held two rounds of extensive and well-attended public hearings in 1995, and the final report was presented to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in June of '96. The commission attempted to measure the difficulty of representing a constituency. Recognizing the need to protect rural interests, they concluded that the scale of difficulty should be the prime indicator of the allowable deviations in population in the interest of effective representation. Of course, because there are only 83 constituencies – or perhaps many people would argue, as the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona just did, that 83 is too many – our caucus would support that. We had a bill in '93 or '94 that asked for a reduction in constituencies, so we would also be happy to look at fewer rather than greater, but because of the way the boundaries are decided and the large increases in population in Calgary and Edmonton, it's hard to resolve the issue by adding more urban constituencies.

What happened, then, in '95 is that the commission proposed adding two, one each for Calgary and Edmonton, and was forced to eliminate two of the four special constituencies, Cardston-Chief Mountain and Chinook. That was an interesting time in this Legislature, Mr. Chairman, as ministers – ministers – were lobbying for position. By adding the extra constituencies in the urban centres, the commission believed that it adequately resolved the imbalance in the representation. The commission said that it was satisfied that urban city populations were not currently underrepresented to any significant degree, but it was interesting that they went on to say that they believed the interests of approximately 68 per cent of Albertans who live in urban centres were well served by the 68 per cent of Alberta's MLAs who represented those cities in the Legislature. But once again this is completely open to interpretation, Mr. Chairman, because the commission counted the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster as urban since Lloydminster is identified as an urban

center. So the MLA for Vermilion-Lloydminster is regarded by the commission as part of the 68 per cent representing urban interests within the province, which I think is open to challenge at any level, but that's what happened there.

To give them credit, though, the government re-examined the act that set the rules, and at that time the MLA for Calgary-Buffalo, who was Liberal Gary Dickson, worked extensively on this and said that the government had no intentions of further amending the current Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. He stated that he thought "the government's sense is that they've tinkered sufficiently with the boundaries to buy some time to at least avoid a further court challenge." He found "the government's use of the 25 per cent variation particularly preposterous and the combined effect of rural and urban differences significant." He stated: "They've taken an element of flexibility that the Supreme Court, in the Dixon case, attempted to afford legislators and they've shamelessly exploited it until it has become the norm." He stated that "with section 17 of the boundaries commission act, they've tried to entrench it, without qualification." He stated that "it's a question of where all city constituencies are up to 25 per cent above and all rural districts are below 25 per cent to pass muster." He was in support of a plus or minus 10 percent level and made an interesting observation. He stated that he gets "very angry when people say that an urban MLA's job is easier," that at the school south of his constituency office, "there are 24 languages spoken." When he publishes anything, "it has to be in five different languages."

So, Mr. Chairman, I think urban representation is underrepresented in terms of the kinds of challenges that we face here. Certainly I know the caseload for files for social assistance and WCB cases in my offices are significantly – significantly – higher than they are in rural centres. While they have problems of travel logistics and access logistics, we have problems of huge caseloads.

So at that time many of the Conservative members put forward their positions on why they should have fewer people to represent. What the Alberta Court of Appeal stated was that each year the problem worsens, it impacts significantly on the right to vote of urban Albertans, and that this cannot be permitted to continue if Alberta wishes to call itself a democracy.

So we would say that the degree of difficulty of representation is really a bogus issue, because there are points of view on each side that are solvable if the Legislature had the will to put their minds to it. Once again we are appealing to the committee to take into account in its truest sense the words of the Alberta Court of Appeal. The problems with these nonurban and urban population increases and decreases significantly impact the right to vote for urban Albertans, and we can't state too strongly that this cannot be permitted to continue if Alberta wishes to call itself a democracy.

Mr. Chairman, we will be appointing one urban and one rural member to the committee. They are charged with the very heavy

weight of ensuring to the best of their ability that every Albertan has a similar weighting of their vote and taking on issues that are controversial and hard to solve but finding an answer that will meet the needs of Alberta not just today and tomorrow but for the next ten years until we see the revisions happening again.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and look forward to the comments from all members tomorrow afternoon, most particularly those comments from government members, private members, and cabinet ministers. Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 31 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that we now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 31 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are indeed making very good progress, and on that note I would move that the Assembly now stand adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow, Thursday, November 29.

[Motion carried; at 9:20 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, November 29, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/11/29

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure and honour that I rise to introduce two very special ladies in the Assembly today. The first one is someone who could see great potential in a skinny, 155-pound gas jockey at Exxon. She had enough confidence to become the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne's sweetheart, later wife of 26 years and mother to two children. The name of this valiant person is Liz VanderBurg.

The second lady that I would like to introduce today to the Assembly is also a woman who has proven that she can go the distance, that she is also valiant. She has been married for 36 years. She's the mother of three children and has nine grandchildren who all call the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky grandpa. She's indelibly printed on Mel forever.

These are women that have shown both vision and endurance, and I would ask that they both rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly today.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present three petitions signed by my constituents addressed to the Premier requesting the reinstatement of access by the War Amps to motor vehicle registration lists to be used in their fund-raising efforts.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to provide health care coverage for medical supplies for diabetic children under the Alberta Health Care Plan and provide financial assistance to parents to enable them to meet their children's necessary dietary requirements and cover costs incurred in travelling to Diabetes Education and Treatment Centres outside their own communities in Alberta.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise now to give notice that after Oral Question Period I will be introducing a motion under Standing Order 40.

Thank you very much.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly today the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta 2001 annual report.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today five copies of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Governance Act review. In doing so, I'm very grateful to the hon. Member for Highwood, who chaired this committee, and also I'm grateful for the assistance provided on the committee by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora and other Community Development and PDD officials who were involved.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I have five copies of a response to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to a question that was asked of me in question period on November 20, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a copy of a letter that I e-mailed to Mr. Mazankowski this morning requesting that he give advance briefing to our caucus just as he has given advance briefing today on his report to the Tory caucus.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first tabling is a letter from Marleen Cowan, president of the Riverside Meadows Community Association, opposing the proposed closure of the John Howard youth group home in Red Deer.

My second tabling is an e-mail from Gary Martin about Children's Services' cuts and urging the Minister of Children's Services to "stand up for what is right for society and not for what just makes a government look good."

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the required number of copies of a letter from the Lewis Estates Community League regarding the proposed casino project on the Enoch First Nations' lands.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter from Lise and Dave Riffel, who are very concerned that natural medicine is not covered by Alberta health care insurance.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would table copies of requests from constituents regarding the War Amps key tag identification program asking that they be allowed access to lists that they've had since 1947 so that they can undertake their program.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail that I received at the constituency office from Catherine Roth. It is urging the government to "uphold its commitments and reconsider funding the Welcome Home Community."

The second tabling this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, is the required number of copies of 20 requests from Albertans who want the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill "so that classrooms will no longer be overcrowded," to "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two tablings today. The first is an e-mail I received from Brent Jeffery wanting to know how it can be justified that starting teachers have a salary of \$35,372, and nurses at that same starting position have a salary of \$52,639.

The second is a letter, as well, that I received from Michael Benoit, and Michael wants to know where the Alberta advantage is in regards to teachers' salaries, and it's titled Tired of Lip Service and Being Treated Unfairly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table today the appropriate number of copies of a brochure of a conference being held tomorrow and the next day in Edmonton. The title of the conference: Protecting or Neglecting Groundwater? Whose Future Is at Stake?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the required number of requests from Albertans who ask the government to vote in support of the Liberal opposition's class size targets bill, "end the need for parents to fundraise for classroom basics," and to "ensure that Alberta can attract and keep the very best teachers for our children."

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 29 bright and cheerful students that I had the pleasure of meeting with prior to coming into the Assembly today. They are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Jill Atkins-Cyr, and also a few parents and, I might add, friends from my neighbourhood: Ms Lois MacLean, Mrs. Dawn Haack, Mrs. Debbie Claypool, Mrs. Searl, and

a special guest, the newly appointed Hon. Madam Justice Sheila Greckol.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

1:40

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a very special man. Emilio Woolsey is a seven year old and is a member of Champs through the War Amps program. He attends St. Lucy Catholic elementary school in Edmonton-Castle Downs. Although Emilio was born without his left arm, he has worked very hard to overcome his challenges. He has conquered his natural shyness and currently speaks publicly to other children, educating them about the Playsafe program. He has already accomplished three such presentations. Emilio today is accompanied by Madison, also his parents Claudia and Kirk Woolsey, grandma Shirley Helle, and two brothers, Kirk and Gerald. I would ask the Assembly to extend a warm welcome to those fine individuals. I'd ask them to stand, as well, in the members' gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and to introduce a very special person that helps both myself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and that is our legislative assistant, Brendalee Loveseth. She's sitting up in the members' gallery, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

MR. MASKELL: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you 66 students, staff, and parents from La Perle elementary school, one of the schools of excellence in my constituency. These bright, eager youngsters participated in the Race for the Riding program today and are enjoying a tour of this magnificent building at the moment. They'll arrive in the members' gallery after 2 p.m. Would you please give our visitors the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you. I wanted to introduce to you and through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Assembly a group of students from my constituency, from the Airdrie Koinonia Christian school. Unfortunately, they're not in here just yet, but I wanted to make sure that they and their main teacher, Mr. Paul Holmes, were recorded in *Hansard*.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly 23 grade 6 students from the beautiful village of Boyle in my constituency. They are accompanied by their parents and teachers, and I believe they are seated either in the public gallery or the members' gallery. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise again today to

introduce somebody that has been very special in my life as well as the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne. That would be our legislative assistant, Cheryl Koss. She might not be very tall in stature, but she's mighty in spirit indeed and I think one of the hardest working Leg. assistants in the building – I might be biased – and I would ask that Cheryl stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly our very hardworking, competent, and cheerful administrative assistant, who I share with the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky. I would ask that Stacey Leighton rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce someone who's a very good helper of mine, who has just been hired as my executive assistant. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask that Dale Monaghan please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature Graham Steel. He's a young man who's enrolled in the doctors' program at the University of Alberta, and I'd like to ask him to rise with Aaron Roth, who's been introduced before. Graham, we wish you all the best in your future in the health services sector in Alberta. Congratulations on your participation.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two different people. The first is a visitor from Saskatoon, Mr. Arnold Edwards, one of Saskatoon's most prominent business leaders. Would he stand in the public gallery? Mr. Edwards is a member of the second generation of a family business that is now in its fourth generation, the Saskatoon Funeral Home. His family makes enormous contributions to the economic, cultural, and political life of the prairie provinces.

My second introduction is Mr. Edwards' sister Alma, who is a longtime resident of Edmonton. Would she rise? Alma is an award-winning writer and a pioneer in western Canadian television programming. Among many achievements she taught drama and television at Victoria composite high school in the 1960s, helping to plant the seeds for that school's growth into a major arts education centre. Her greatest achievement has been raising her four children, one of whom is me.

Please give them a warm welcome. Thank you.

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you all of the other Leg. assistants, who work very, very diligently and hard for the welfare and

direction of the MLAs here today. They are busy listening on the intercom and just can't make it.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Within eight months this government has gone from recording the largest surplus in the history of the province to cuts in spending of over a billion dollars. A number of other provinces, like Saskatchewan and Manitoba, draw upon a fiscal stabilization fund to sustain services for health, education, and their children. My questions are to the Minister of Finance. Why do you refuse to be quality fiscal managers and set up a fiscal stabilization fund like Saskatchewan and Manitoba?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the path that this government has chosen is through fiscal responsibility. We believe that you cannot spend dollars that you do not have. We therefore go through a business planning process each year, which feeds into setting a budget. We also then follow through every quarter with an update to Albertans to let them know where things are going within the province.

Our goal since December of 1992 has been to present a plan that first of all eliminated our deficit – it is now against the law to run a deficit in this province – and, secondly, to pay off the accumulated debt that the province had built up over a number of years. We've stayed that path, and we've done it through a vehicle called the Fiscal Responsibility Act. That act governs us very, very dear and in fact is the one act that I give credit to for holding politicians' feet to the fire to stay the course and stay the plan.

What we have done with corrective actions, which I really wish the hon. Leader of the Opposition would pay attention to, is dealt with the fiscal realities that the whole world is facing today. Our plan was to deal with it in a managed process. We decided as a caucus and government that we would not put the long-term future of Albertans in jeopardy by doing what other jurisdictions have done by raising their debt level and running expenditures through their fiscal plan of this year that puts them further in debt. Our plan is a managed plan that focuses on the realities that are there in the global arena but also is backed up by our Fiscal Responsibility Act. We intend to follow that, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Provincial Treasurer: do I take it from that that stability is not part of the fiscal mandate of this government?

1:50

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, let's talk about stability. In August the province of Alberta was the only government jurisdiction in all of Canada that received what I call the triple crown. We received a triple A rating from the Dominion Bond Rating Service, along with Moody's, along with Standard and Poor's. We're the only government in all of Canada to do that. Part of the reason was because of the fiscal plan that we have laid out and stayed the course on.

Now, all of that being said, what that has done for the economy in the province of Alberta is ensured that our growth continues. We have a framework that is conducive to investment and development. It attracts private investor capital to this province, which creates

jobs, creates stability, and creates confidence not only from investors but from consumers. The result is that the economy in the province of Alberta is moving two times faster than any other place in the entire country. So confidence is here because of this framework, not because of the frameworks in other jurisdictions that the hon. leader is talking about but because of the framework that is here in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Provincial Treasurer. So the policy of this government is cut, spend, cut, spend, cut, spend instead of the prudent, stable management of our fiscal policy. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader, please. Hon. minister, please.

MRS. NELSON: I hope that the hon. Leader of the Opposition won't have a hissy fit when I give him the answers.

The situation in the province of Alberta is to manage the realities that face us in the economy. The alternative, which the Liberal leader would want, is for us to put us in debt, spend beyond our means, raise taxes, and not deal with reality. Albertans went into a contract with this government again this year and said: "Stay the course. Keep our taxes low, pay off our debt, and spend wisely." The corrective plan that we have put forward is in response to exactly what Albertans have asked us to do. This hon. member would like us to abrogate that responsibility and move away from it. We're not prepared to do that.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Children's Services

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of the government's mismanagement of its budget children's authorities are facing cuts that are forcing them to make decisions perceived by many to be shortsighted. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Is it good policy to force authorities to make decisions like the one that was made by a particular authority to terminate its contract with a fetal alcohol syndrome specialist who is a medical doctor with years of experience and give that contract instead to an individual with a two-year college diploma and no experience?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is citing a program which is under the local fetal alcohol syndrome co-ordinating committee, which is managed through selections of people representing a number of different authorities: the child and family services authority, the people that are on the health authority. A number of people are involved.

One of the great misnomers of the entire question period sessions from November 13 till today is that Children's Services has an exclusive right to the programs that are affecting children. So to supplement what is actually happening for children that have fetal alcohol syndrome, I'm going to ask my colleague the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to discuss some of the programs that are going on in that department that support children at high risk.

THE SPEAKER: I welcome and I will call on the hon. minister, but we're not here to discuss. We're here to answer questions on policy. The hon. minister.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the programs that are available for children that have fetal alcohol syndrome, I don't think that anybody in this

House is suggesting that they are not important. We do have a number of programs that we work on with other departments of government in developing a fetal alcohol syndrome initiative. One example of such a program is the Lakeland Centre for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. This is located in Cold Lake. What that program does is provide outreach services that serve the needs of individuals with fetal alcohol syndrome and their families in the communities in which they live. That's one example. There are many of course.

The point that I think needs to be made is that one cannot simply look at the Children's Services' budget and suggest that those are the only programs that are in operation. Nor is that the only source of funding. In a cross-government initiative we can devote resources from a number of different departments and get the best result for children in need with this particular situation.

DR. NICOL: It's a Children's Services' program that they're cutting, Mr. Speaker.

Back to the Minister of Children's Services: are you telling us that you have no standards set to determine who is qualified to make assessments, that it's up to the regional authorities totally in terms of how they set standards for doing assessments?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, Children's Services' standards are contained in the accountability document that is approved by the ministry on submission and agreement with each one of the authorities. They do have standards. They're expected to comply with those standards. We have also asked them through their service plans to come back and let us know those areas where they have made cost containment a priority so we're able to review those submissions. We have not received all of the submissions, although I understand most are on the way.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very satisfied that the local authorities understand clearly that priority must be given to the need to protect those children that are most needing care, not necessarily to engage in cost-containment strategies in any way that affects that particular area. It is still the priority for our government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Children's Services: are you telling this House that it is part of the standards and the guidelines that you give to the regional authorities that a person with a college degree and no experience has the capabilities to fully assess all of the needs of a child with fetal alcohol syndrome and make a proper recommendation of a diagnostic or remedial program?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not entirely sure I understand what the hon. member is driving at, but let me answer the question in this way, because there seems to be an allegation that the Ministry of Children's Services is not conducting due diligence on children at risk. For this entire week the hon. members have been challenged by me to bring the names forward of any child that's at risk. Only one name from the Leader of the Opposition has come forward, and I've addressed those concerns. So bring me the names.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Each year vulnerable children under government care or supervision are mistreated. Given human nature, Mr. Speaker, some incidents might be expected but surely not the hundreds of cases documented by the Children's Advocate and

recently confirmed by the Minister of Children's Services. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why is the department unable to keep safe young people that they remove from family homes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, much of what Children's Services has done has been redocumented in my response to the Children's Advocate report yesterday. Perhaps for further clarification the family law reform currently under way with the Minister of Justice will clarify some of these issues, and I would refer this question to him.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to advise the House that we are undergoing an extensive review of family law in the province to consolidate family law to make it more accessible to Albertans and to make sure that Albertans have a clear understanding of what family law is. The public consultation on that process is starting now and will be going on until the spring session. We hope to bring forward comprehensive review of family law in the spring session. That addresses directly the whole question of children in this province, because if people don't have access to good dispute resolution processes, if people don't have access to family mediation, if people don't have access to those sorts of issues, then family breakdown causes a lot of the problems, the root causes of some of the issues which the Children's Services department and, indeed, all departments of government have to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, it doesn't end there. Maintenance enforcement has probably about 61,000 children that it provides for by collecting maintenance on behalf of children and families. We have a mediation process in the family law area. So there are many, many programs which are addressed to the root causes of why children are at risk and how we can prevent children from becoming at risk.

2:00

DR. MASSEY: It's all very interesting. These are children the government has in care. Why is the department unable to keep them safe once you take them out of their homes?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact it is a good question, because it really focuses on what happens when a child is taken into protective custody. What happens is that they are placed, frequently with their siblings, in homes where they are both part of either a temporary or permanent guardian relationship. Many of the children who made allegations of abuse while in care related to abuse by a sibling, their own; abuse by a parent on a visit, their own parent; and abuse under many circumstances. Indeed, when we are concerned that there may be abuse by a parent, we have visitation with social worker supervision. A child care worker is present, but Children's Services is not in the bedrooms of the nation, albeit maybe at times we should be. Quite frankly, these children are supervised to the best of the ability and due diligence of the workers and the parents, with every bit of training and faith and capacity. I truly hope that nobody in this House would ever suggest that our workers weren't doing a good and proper job.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the lack of quality placements is at the root of many of these cases, when can we expect some action from the minister?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are always looking for people who will become good foster parents and will be engaged in looking

after children. We are engaged in a number of programs not only to advertise for people to become part of our team and to be trained, but we are taking extensive recruitment through different parts of the province.

It's been exceptionally difficult this year because many of the children who have been coming into care – and I've cited this in the House before – for example 31 percent in one of our authorities, have been children over the age of 11, children whose parents have given up on them. The root of the problem, I would suggest, is not the government and the kind of care we're providing. The root of the problem stems from things which are occurring in families, where a family breakdown is concerned, and that is a problem that's much beyond the breadth and depth and responsibility of Children's Services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mazankowski Report

MR. MASON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the leader of the New Democrat opposition asked a question of the Minister of Health and Wellness and received in response a torrent of abuse but no answer. Today I wish to repeat the question to the minister in the hope of a calmer, less confrontational, clearer, and more forthcoming answer. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: how much money is this government planning to spend to promote, publicize, or otherwise communicate the recommendations of the Mazankowski report?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. member to budget debates. That is not the purpose of question period.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, the minister's dodging and obfuscation can't save him. I ask the minister again: how much money, how many taxpayers' dollars is his government going to spend publicizing the recommendations of the Mazankowski report? This is not a budget question.

MR. MAR: Same question, same answer, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the Mazankowski committee is appointed by the Premier and reports to him, I ask the Minister of Health and Wellness: who is responsible for health policy in this government, he or the Premier?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that policy is developed through a very clear process in this government. It goes through our standing policy committees. It goes through our caucus. It goes through cabinet. These are decisions that we reach as a caucus, as a team. I don't know how the hon. member's caucus works. It's perhaps easier for them to meet. But that process is clear, and the responsibility for policy clearly rests with the government on this side of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Heritage Savings Trust Fund

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency of Whitecourt-St. Anne many comments have been made to me just recently about the fair market value of the heritage fund. It's declined to \$11.8 billion in the second quarter from \$12 billion in the first. My question is to the Minister of Revenue. With the

uncertainty in the markets today, sir, what do you expect the fund to drop over the balance of the year?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As he rightly said, we've seen over the past number of months the volatility of the marketplaces, and that's reflected in a drop in value of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. But we do actually project, in the forecast going forward, to see some stabilization. We now have revised our income forecast for this year to be \$175 million. We still see a prudent approach to diversifying your portfolio in stocks and bonds, in real estate as the best long-term strategy for maximizing the return.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is to the same minister. With the provincial shortfall that's expected in revenues – and we've talked about it during this fall session – is now the time to dip into this fund to replace these shortfalls in this budget year?

MR. MELCHIN: Mr. Speaker, we have not been dipping into the principal of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. It has been there, and Albertans have continually said that we should retain it and see that it's there for future generations. However, we have used over \$25 billion of income that this fund has generated over the last 25 years to benefit Albertans substantially for their programs, for repayment of debt, for capital works projects, and it continues to provide income every year for the needs of all Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question, again to the same minister. There seems to be lots of confusion out in the public regarding the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. How are you letting Albertans know about the good news, and how this fund is being managed?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a lot of good news to tell about the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. You know, when you go around and talk to people, there's a high awareness of the fund, but I do acknowledge that there's a low awareness of the value of that fund. It's a \$12 billion fund, and part of the challenge we have is seeing that Albertans are educated and know about its management, the income that's derived, the benefits that derive from the fund. Every year we announce quarterly reports, annual reports. We specifically try to go out and make sure it's very public. That information is sent out to all MLA offices. As part of the education we've also revamped the web site, www.albertaheritagefund.com. We would invite all Albertans to log on to that web site, acquaint themselves with the fund, its uses, its benefits.

A very significant part of this Legislative Assembly is an all-party committee that is there to oversee the fund, that is there to see that public meetings are also held on the fund. We've had just a tremendous annual meeting, the best we've had recently. It just happened to be in Whitecourt. A certain member, a former mayor, the previous mayor, and many of the citizens of Whitecourt came out: the best attendance. I would say interest in the fund is going up, and we'd compliment the Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne on his efforts there.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:10

Teachers' Contract Negotiations

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is predicted today that Edmonton teachers will almost definitely vote to go on strike. Now, a lump of coal is rich in carbon and rich as a symbol. This lump of coal is what the government wants to give Alberta teachers for Christmas. My first question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier hold over the Legislative Assembly so that we can all work to find a resolution to the current contract talks?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I would assume that this is what the hon. member is referring to. I would suggest that if the hon. member opened the package and had a little bite, he might recognize that it isn't coal.

Speaker's Ruling Items Distributed to Members

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're going to stop here right now, and I'm going to give the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar another opportunity to address his question.

The members have been coming to my office on almost a daily basis wanting to put things on every member's desk, and oftentimes there are no explanations. Yesterday we had complete confusion in this House when one member did not follow the policy of doing it. I received at least six to 10 notes saying: what is this ribbon? Today we have something with a piece of black coal. It's provided by one member to represent his constituency, but there's no explanation given, so there is confusion now.

All the time that was taken here to deal with this little matter in the question period we're going to add on to the end of the question period, and we're going to give the hon. member additional time in dealing with his question. In the future there will be less confusion with respect to these things being put on people's desks every day without going through a normal process and some explanation.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Teachers' Contract Negotiations (continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is predicted today that Edmonton teachers will almost definitely vote to go on strike. It would be very nice if this government would not give the teachers a lump of coal for Christmas but give them some candy instead. Now, my first question is to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier please hold over the Legislative Assembly so that we can all work together to find a resolution to the current contract talks?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment may want to supplement my answer, but it is not my understanding that this Legislative Assembly has any responsibility or should in fact be involved in a negotiation that is clearly between the school authorities in this province and the teachers that they employ.

MR. DUNFORD: The Deputy Premier is entirely right. I think we need to have a perspective on all of this. Negotiations are under way right across the province as we speak. ATA locals are doing what they're supposed to be doing, and that's taking items to a collective bargaining table. School boards are doing what they're supposed to be doing, and that is negotiating towards an agreement. We're doing what we're supposed to be doing, and that's providing for mediators

whenever we're called upon by the parties. And the newspapers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, and that of course is ratcheting up if there might be any potential controversy in any of these issues.

So, sir, I think as we head into the holiday season, just relax a little bit and enjoy a merry, merry Christmas.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Deputy Premier: if the government won't hold over the Legislative Assembly, isn't the Deputy Premier concerned that this sends out the message that the teacher couldn't care less about the teachers' negotiations?

MRS. McCLELLAN: I think the hon. member probably wasn't suggesting that the teachers didn't care about the teachers' negotiations.

I will only reiterate that this Legislative Assembly does not have a role in the negotiations, in my view, between duly elected school authorities, elected as recently as October 16 of this year, and the teachers that they employ. Secondly, I would remind the hon. member that in many, many, many questions we've been accused of interfering in those very negotiations, so I am hearing a bit of a conflict in this request today. Mr. Speaker, I believe that we all have a responsibility to allow those negotiations to proceed as they're supposed to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question will be to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. My final question is this: does the government have a plan to force the teachers to go on strike so that it can introduce legislation that makes teaching an essential service?

MR. DUNFORD: He's a mischievous little elf today; isn't he? The answer is no.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Feed Imports

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of importing corn from the United States and feed wheat from Ukraine into Quebec has been of concern to many barley growers and wheat growers in Alberta, who had such a poor growing season due to the drought this year. I know that many of my constituents are very concerned about the subsidized U.S. corn imports due to lower barley production and higher barley prices. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister advise what the government is doing to assist farmers who are caught in this predicament?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, certainly the department of agriculture has been monitoring this situation. The economics, of course, of bringing corn into the province on a regular basis is probably not sustainable; however, the issue now is probably not necessarily price but supply. Currently corn is trading on par with barley or very close to it. Cattle do need to be fed, and we do have a feed shortage. The fact is that it's a reality that if feed doesn't come in in whatever form from other parts of Canada or, indeed,

perhaps the U.S., we might have to move our cattle out, which in some instances we have had to do.

I should just inform the hon. member and other members that last year the Manitoba Corn Growers did file a complaint with the Canadian trade tribunal, and they did rule that although there was some dumping and maybe subsidization on pricing, it had not caused injury to prairie grain farmers. Therefore, there were no duties further charged, and the ones that had been collected were returned.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any challenge in this area from producers here, but we are going to certainly continue to monitor the situation and be concerned about the quality beef that we produce in this province, primarily barley fed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary to the same minister. It's been my understanding that the feed wheat coming into Quebec from Ukraine was subsidized. Has the minister been in contact with the Canadian Wheat Board to find out why the Canadian Wheat Board isn't protecting farmers from subsidized grain coming into this country?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I don't have any information that would suggest that the wheat coming into Quebec from Ukraine was subsidized. Ukraine is not part of the European Union, and as I say, I don't have any information that would suggest that it was. However, the Canadian Wheat Board is, of course, a federal government agency which markets product both domestically and internationally, particularly wheat and barley, for producers in western Canada. As all Alberta producers know, they must sell their product through the Wheat Board, and as has been noted on many occasions, Alberta farmers would like that changed. They would like to have a choice, and certainly we're working with the federal government and the Canadian Wheat Board to try and effect that choice.

MR. MARZ: To the same minister again, Mr. Speaker, my final supplemental: has the minister received any information, then, from the Canadian Wheat Board that would explain why the Wheat Board would miss such a golden opportunity to market grain in Canada rather than allowing wheat into this country from Ukraine?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've had a couple of meetings with the Canadian Wheat Board over the last six weeks, one in Alberta and one in Winnipeg. There's no question that I raised the whole question of marketing and how they market. I would say that primarily over the years the Canadian Wheat Board has done a reasonable job of marketing grain, barley, and wheat for producers on the international side. However, there is a real concern on the domestic market. It seems ludicrous to producers in this province that they can invest in a farm, have all of the intellect to plant a crop, shepherd it through its growing season, harvest it, and then all of a sudden they become what I would term almost idiots, not intelligent enough to market it.

So we have asked the Canadian Wheat Board to consider change at least in the domestic market to allow producers to market their grain domestically. This may be a way of solving this issue so that grain can be sold producer to client. What I was told is that there will be elections again in 2002 and for us to try to continue to elect people that have like-minded views to those of Albertans. So, Mr. Speaker, that's my recommendation to people.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

2:20

Health Care Spending

DR. TAFT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, health care spending in this province is in no way out of control. It's time this Minister of Health and Wellness gave some straightforward answers on this. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister deny that in the last fiscal year his department spent almost exactly the same amount per Albertan, adjusting for inflation, that it spent for each of the 10 years from 1983 to 1992?

MR. MAR: Well, that is quite a remarkable observation by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. Indeed, it would appear that his observation is out of step with provinces in other parts of Canada. I should note also that those provinces may have Liberal governments. They may be NDP provinces. We of course have Liberal Senator Michael Kirby drawing conclusions about the sustainability of the health care system based on its current spending patterns. We've had a former NDP Premier, Mr. Romanow, of course drawing certain conclusions about the sustainability of health care.

The fact of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that health care costs have gone up dramatically in this province. They were 24 percent of our overall provincial government spending some 10 years ago. They are now in the range of 35 percent. There are those that suggest that with the current expenditure increases, by the year 2008 it could reach 50 percent of our overall provincial government spending. I spoke with Minister Clement, the Minister of Health from the province of Ontario, just yesterday. He confirmed to me that 44 percent of Ontario's operating budget is spent on health care. That, of course, excludes capital spending, but on operating expenditures it's 44 percent. That is the reason why in the province of Quebec the Claire report has come out, why in the province of Saskatchewan the Fyke commission has done its work. That is the reason why the federal government has commissioned Mr. Romanow. It's the reason why the province of British Columbia is looking at strategies to look at the sustainability of their health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the statistics cited by the hon. member, but his conclusions I think are quite likely out of step with the balance of thought throughout the rest of this country.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My material was taken straight from the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

Will the minister deny that in the last fiscal year his government spent an even lower percentage of Alberta's gross domestic product on health than it spent on average for the 10 years from 1983 to 1992?

MR. MAR: Trying to express health care expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product is not a particularly useful exercise because of the size of the denominator, Mr. Speaker. So let us look instead at the types of services that are being provided. Let us look at the changing demographics. Let us consider what it is that people are paying for their health care system in the province of Alberta. To measure it against gross domestic product is not a particularly useful exercise.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's actually a standard measure.

Will the minister deny that in the last fiscal year his government's spending on health was just barely above the per capita Canadian average?

MR. MAR: Well, I think it is well recognized by this hon. member and most health economists that there is a certain connection between the age of your population and the per capita expenditures. When adjusted for age, Alberta remains one of the highest per capita spenders on health care in this country. So, Mr. Speaker, again, while I acknowledge the source of the information cited by the hon. member, his conclusions, in my strong opinion, are completely wrong.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

First Nations Gaming Policy

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in the community of Lewis Estates have expressed interest in the new First Nations gaming policy announced in January 2001. Their interest is due to the proposed casino on the Enoch First Nations lands adjacent to their community. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Will the minister please tell me how the policy works?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is quite correct that it was in January of this year that the First Nations gaming policy was announced. That policy came about as a result of negotiations between this government and Alberta First Nations in the year 2000. I think it's important to recognize that in Alberta we have a charitable gaming model, the only one in Canada, and the First Nations gaming policy is an integral part of that charitable model. First Nations gaming will be regulated by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission and will operate generally under the same terms and conditions as traditional casinos.

There are, however, some differences that are worth noting. The first is that the host First Nation will be designated as a charity through a distinct not-for-profit society. As such, there will not be some 180 charities per year that will be working at the on-reserve casino. Additionally, there will be a portion of the proceeds from slot revenue, some 40 percent, that will fund a new lottery fund initiative, the First Nations development fund. The terms of that particular fund are currently being discussed with the hon. Minister of Community Development, and ultimately the terms will be announced. That First Nations development fund will support the economic, social, and community development projects on the First Nations, including such matters as addiction programs, education, health, and infrastructure.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, thank you very much.

I would like to point out *Beauchesne* 428, which prohibits questions seeking information which is clearly available in published reports and the like.

Go on, hon. member.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the Minister of Gaming. In light of the recently announced gaming licensing policy review, what is the consultation process surrounding any new First Nations casino?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the key components of the review was to ensure that communities would have a prominent role in determining whether or not a casino would

occur within their community. In the case of First Nations proposing an on-reserve casino, expressed consent in the form of a band resolution is necessary. Additionally, there must be a land use designation supporting the facility provided to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission.

I might advise that no such applications can be received at this time. There is still a moratorium in place. It is proposed that it will be lifted in January 2002. Yesterday the AGLC went out to start its consultation with stakeholders with respect to operational policies that are necessary to be put in place prior to the lifting of the moratorium.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. If the Enoch First Nation were to submit a proposal for a new casino, would the views of my constituents in Lewis Estates be taken into account, including the infrastructure issues that approval of such a project will create in the area, such as the major roadway upgrades to 79th Avenue, otherwise known as Whitemud Drive, and to Winterburn Road?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, community support for the on-reserve casino will be community support from the reserve in question, once again reflecting the terms of a band resolution. Similarly, community support in a non First Nations area will be from that municipality. If there happens to be an adjacent reserve, the support of that reserve will not be looked to. Having said that, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission in certain cases might consider objections from adjacent communities if those objections deal with some matter that may materially affect the viability of a proposed casino.

Regarding casino development as such, it's up to First Nations to look after their infrastructure and servicing requirements, and this must be done in co-operation with adjacent municipalities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:30

Women's Shelters

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Taber and district family crisis centre spent years raising money and then building and furnishing a 20-bed emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence. The CFSA confirmed the need for the shelter and made verbal assurances of the availability of an operating budget. Since November of 2000 the ministry has avoided that commitment in a series of form letters. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Why did the children's authority stand by and watch these volunteers build a shelter that the authority knew it couldn't fund?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that there has to be a better framework for the shelter construction that is done by people throughout the province. The operative words in the hon. member's question are the words "verbal assurances." The board itself had not issued or agreed with the mandate of this particular facility. The hon. member that represents the people of this constituency has been on top of the issue, has met with those individuals that have built the shelter capacity. We have been discussing with the child and family services authority in Sun Country the best ways to manage the issues there now.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, many people feel motivated to build shelter

capacity in communities. We have significant development and planning in other parts of that constituency for shelters, and the dollar support for the operations is also significant. There are many other centres in Sun Country where they have not only planned but have actually looked at, designed, and plotted the budget capacity within the community. There are only so many shelters that we can support. We are very sensitive to this issue. We are working with the authority and looking at perhaps next year being able to support the planning.

The partnership for construction of shelters is with the community and the local child and family services authority. Mr. Speaker, in this particular instance this has become the trigger for our further examination of what the shelter construction policy should be and what we should do to encourage people to address the needs of women as well as children where they are victims of violence but not necessarily always through shelters, which may not be the total solution.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. To this same minister. We've had shelters in this province for over 20 years. Why hasn't the ministry developed an overall plan for women's shelters in this province? How many do we need? Where should they be? Why don't they know this?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there are indeed almost 30 shelters, 19 of which receive funding directly from this ministry. Some are funded in other ways, on First Nations reserves, for example, by the federal government. When we decentralized to the child and family services authorities, there was a hope that with not only the work done by those authorities in dealing with children and families that are affected by violence but also in the interpretation of the legislation for protection of victims of violence by removing the perpetrator of violence from the home, we would also make significant inroads in protecting families and, more than that, in getting families help and retribution where they need it. The policy that was in effect early in the '90s no longer seems appropriate, because we have a number of developments in the sexual assault centre. So we're looking at all of these aspects, and over the next year I hope we've got a framework that is agreeable to the members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: aside from increases specific to salaries, why have shelters been forced to continue to work under a 1985 funding model?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, a shelter by its very nature is a temporary solution. Fundamentally what our society has to look at is how we can reduce the violence that occurs in the homes of the people of Alberta and, in fact, necessitates shelters and necessitates other measures. I think the hon. member is fully aware of an additional dollar commitment made by this ministry this year and additional supports that have been made. Even during this period when throughout the ministries of government we are reducing by 1 percent, the shelters themselves have continued to receive support. I think we could engage in further discussion, but at this time that's all I have to answer it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Aboriginal Children's Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the aboriginal coalition of Edmonton held an emergency meeting. At that meeting, the coalition called for the name of the Ma'Mōwe Capital region to be changed to a nonaboriginal name. Ma'Mōwe means "all together" in Cree, and the government's recent actions are perceived by this coalition as a serious breach of that principle, as well as a breach of faith with the aboriginal community. All of my questions are to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. My first question: given that most of the cuts identified in the document tabled by the minister yesterday negatively impact agencies that benefit aboriginal children, can the minister please explain to this house why this breach of faith with the aboriginal community?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I indicated that of those early intervention reductions in the Ma'Mōwe region only 19 percent were directly affecting aboriginal children. We are dealing with a reduction that is modest in comparison with the overall budget. I would remind the hon. members of this House that we had a 35 percent increase in the budget of Children's Services over the last two years. The \$647 million represents an extraordinary increase, and on behalf of aboriginal people on reserves, we added in, after that 1 percent reduction, \$4 million.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Ma'Mōwe child and family services authority still is working together. The people that are represented on that board are very pleased to review the programs, and they remind me that many of these programs that have been reduced are programs which should have been affected because by their very nature they were not doing all they should be doing in the protection of children and in the encouragement of children to grow safe, secure, and independent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me ask the minister another question on the numbers that she quoted here. Can the minister please explain the statement in the document she tabled yesterday that only 6 percent of the early intervention program is being cut when the cuts in a total \$6.5 million early intervention budget for the Ma'Mōwe region are closer to 50 percent, not 6 percent?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, some key messages about the Ma'Mōwe cuts and just a correction to the hon. member. The document that I generously shared yesterday was not in fact tabled in the House, but at the conclusion of my remarks I will be pleased to table that so it would be here, the required number of copies for the record.

The reductions in Ma'Mōwe were effective in terms of dealing with some of the information technology needs, the travel, the freeze on the numbers of people that were employed in the Ma'Mōwe child and family services agencies, the administrative efficiencies. In fact, in the cuts that have been made, 22 agencies or programs were either terminated or reduced because they were not under the criteria ensuring that children, youth, and families were not put at risk. They were in fact superfluous in many cases to that design. Learn to swim programs by their very nature are very nice for children to have, but they are not programs that keep children from risk, from abuse, either neglect or the serious concerns we deal with under the child and family services authorities.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question: why is the minister failing to get the message that the unilateral cuts to

programs benefiting aboriginal children are unacceptable – unacceptable – to the aboriginal community? The minister seems to be deaf to the message.

2:40

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, at last count I've had 10 percent of the questions in the House in this session, and believe me: I've got the messages.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, despite stopping the clock for one minute, unfortunately there were a number of members who were not able to get their questions today, and I apologize for that.

Prior to the Clerk announcing Members' Statements, an hon. minister would like to revert in the Routine to tablings. Would there be support for that?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports
(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of my response to Written Question 5 that I wish to table.

Thank you, sir.

head: Members' Statements

Volunteer Wall of Fame

MR. LORD: Mr. Speaker, throughout 2001 many organizations across Alberta have been actively involved in promoting the International Year of Volunteers among the province's volunteer sector. I am sure that we have all watched and cheered as Alberta communities engaged in a major effort to raise the profile of volunteers and to raise the public consciousness of the role that volunteers play in all our communities, and an important role it is, indeed. In fact, I recently read a report indicating that if the efforts of volunteers in our society were ever to be quantified and measured, it is estimated that the amount of services delivered by our volunteer sector – if we had to pay wages for all this work that's so selflessly donated, the budget required for this might rival if not even exceed that of government.

Frankly, I don't think that we can say enough good things about the efforts of our volunteers across Alberta. Thus, it was very fitting and proper to have had a year dedicated to them. Now we are quickly approaching the end of 2001 and thus the end of the International Year of Volunteers. The efforts this past year have certainly succeeded in leaving us all with a greater appreciation of all the vital contributions that volunteers of all ages make to our communities as well as a desire to show our support for their continuing efforts.

So I'm very pleased to inform this Assembly and all Albertans that on this December 5 coming up, which is declared to be International Volunteer Day, the Wild Rose Foundation and Alberta Community Development will unveil a new volunteer wall of fame in the pedway mall of Government Centre to commemorate and highlight the effort of volunteers across our province in contributing to an increased quality of life for all. This is such an important event that our hon. Premier himself and the hon. Minister of Community Development will be presiding over the induction of 13 members, Alberta volunteers, to this volunteer wall of fame, the first to be entered into it. New portraits of outstanding volunteers will be added each year going forward.

As the International Year of Volunteers comes to a close, I would ask that this Assembly join me in congratulating the volunteers who will be honoured through the volunteer wall of fame and, indeed, join me in applauding all the wonderful and very important volunteers throughout our province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Forest Protection

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a number of years, in conjunction with groups like the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga, the Official Opposition has been lobbying the government to protect larger areas of Alberta's forests. Along with many Albertans we had great hopes for the Special Places 2000 program, but in the end we watched deadlines go by and listened to excuses about why areas could not be protected and how starting points had become the final product. There are acreages with more land than some of the areas protected under this program.

In various policy statements and documents the government has recognized the need for large areas of protected forests. The importance of ecological management is not something new. What the government can't seem to do, however, is find a way to get those words off the paper and into action. They do little bits and pieces here and there, but they have not made a real commitment to substantial habitat protection.

The Official Opposition does not want to put up signs that say: industry go home. We believe that development can be done in a reasonable manner. Sensitive areas must be protected, and the industrial footprint can be reduced. The only thing stopping the process is the lack of will on the government's part. We cannot afford to debate habitat protection for another 20 years while the trees are cut down and the rivers fill with silt and chemicals. We have the research, and we know what needs to be done. Albertans do care, and they expect action from their government.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Coal Industry

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about the coal industry in Alberta and its importance to West Yellowhead. Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in the world and the international fuel of choice for electrical generation. Alberta is blessed with an enormous amount of coal. Reserve estimates indicate that the province has enough coal to generate electricity at the current consumption rate for the next 800 years. Alberta has a competitive advantage over a number of other countries because Alberta's resources are widely distributed, have low-cost production, low sulfur content, and have a diverse technical characteristic that can compete in a number of domestic and international market sectors.

Our province's mines generate 90 percent of Alberta's electricity and in 2000 exported over 6 million tonnes of coal annually to 12 countries, mainly for steel production. In 1999 Alberta produced approximately half of Canada's coal production. Coal contributes substantially to the Alberta advantage through the major role that it plays in terms of energy, investment, trade, income generation, and employment. There are 12 active coal mines in Alberta, of which three – the Coal Valley, Luscar, and Obed mines – are in West Yellowhead. I am encouraged by the efforts to get the Smoky River coal mine back in operation under new management. The proposed Cheviot mine will also generate greater economic activity in the region.

I cannot stress enough the importance of the coal industry to the economy of West Yellowhead and Alberta as a whole. With our coal, oil, and natural gas Alberta's status as a key energy supplier in North America is assured well into the future. As a small token of the coal industry, you will find a small gift package on your desks. As we approach Christmas, you may get this in your stocking anyway.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Teachers' Contract Negotiations

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is predicted that Edmonton teachers will almost certainly decide to go on strike. Their decision will affect thousands of students and parents, yet the government has no valid plan to deal with the issue. I urge the government to hold over the legislative session so that a resolution to the teachers' contract dispute can be found before Christmas. If this government doesn't hold over the Legislature, it will send a strong message to Edmonton teachers that their concerns are not important.

I would like to point out that in 1999 at a Conservative Party policy convention it was recommended that the teaching profession become an essential service. In the last 100 years in Edmonton there have only been two teachers' strikes. This Conservative government has put its policy resolutions before the interests of the province's children. Maybe a decade from now students will learn how 2001 was the year they stopped being important. The government's current hard line of confrontation, not negotiation with teachers indicates that it wants to force them to strike so that it can have an excuse to legislate the teaching profession as an essential service.

Teachers work very hard because they love their jobs and the children whom they serve. Like anyone, they expect fair compensation for what they do. The government considers teachers to be essential, but it won't even sit down and talk to them. The government considers teachers to be essential, but it gives them no respect. I urge the government to stick around long enough to deal with teachers' issues. I urge the government to respect teachers and find a resolution to their problems rather than shackle them to overcrowded classrooms with inadequate resources. I urge the government to finally make teachers and public education a priority.

Thank you.

head: Projected Government Business

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, at this point in time we would ask the Government House Leader to share with us any projected government business that he may have.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would appear that for the first time in living memory the Order Paper is clear.

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, for the 12 days in this fall session we've had a dearth, a lack of points of order. Today it seems we may have up to four of them.

So let me first of all call on the Leader of the Official Opposition on a point of order.

Point of Order Decorum

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, I just want to take this opportunity to recognize that through this session and through your tenure here you've really tried to maintain decorum in the House. I broke that decorum this afternoon, and I apologize to you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order. You have two, so the first that you would deal with, in a note you sent me.

Point of Order

Notice of Motion under Standing Order 40

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed. I wanted to raise a point of order with respect to the purported notice of motion that was received today with respect to a Standing Order 40 motion. I rise under Standing Order 2 because I find that the Standing Orders and *Beauchesne* don't provide us with an awful lot of help, at least on a cursory review, in this area.

It has been the custom and practice of this House that notices of motions under Standing Order 30 and Standing Order 40, the two urgent Standing Orders, are normally delivered to the Speaker's office, as I understand it, prior to 11 o'clock on a given day. Then oral notice is given in the House, and then the notice of motion comes up under Orders of the Day.

Now, it is true that the Standing Order itself negates Standing Order 38 in saying that there is no written notice necessary for a Standing Order 40 notice of motion, and in fact no one expects written notice. But today we had a most unusual occurrence, and that is the receipt of a letter saying that there would be a Standing Order 40 notice of motion brought up, and then during Notices of Motions the hon. Leader of the Opposition stood and gave notice that he was going to bring forward a motion. But under most understandings of Notices of Motions it includes the content or the subject of the notice of motion. Otherwise it is not a notice of motion. It's just telling you that there's going to be one, and that is not what a notice of motion, in my understanding, means.

So I would ask you as the Speaker, under the provisions of Standing Order 2, if there are not other Standing Orders which cover it or in *Beauchesne*, which, as I acknowledge, I haven't been able to find in a cursory look, to outline for us the appropriate procedure to be used in this House. Quite frankly, I find the process that was used this afternoon with respect to the notice of motion highly inappropriate. I have absolutely no problem with the concept that urgent notices should be brought to the House and no problem with them being brought even at the time of Notices of Motions, even though the Speaker's office is usually given advance notice. The custom and practice has been that the House receives notice of this motion and members receive notice or at least the Government House Leader typically has received notice prior to the opening of the session during the day. That may have been just a courtesy in practice, and if that is the case, then I'd be interested in that being outlined for us, but it's in my view totally inappropriate to rise during Notices of Motions and give no notice of motion, only advise the House that there will be a motion, which is not under the definition of notice of motion.

THE SPEAKER: Shortly, the hon. Opposition House Leader.

MS CARLSON: Of course. Very shortly. Certainly the information in the notice of motion was immediately distributed to all members in the Legislature upon the Leader of the Official Opposition having given notice. We presumed that that was a common practice from previous presentations of these kinds of motions and find that there was nothing wrong with the process.

THE SPEAKER: Are there other hon. members that want to participate?

Hon. members, there are basically two Standing Orders that come

into play with respect to this. The whole objective of all of this is to waive the ordinary Routine of the day and abrogate it and then proceed to another order of business. In one case, under Standing Order 30, there's a required ruling by the chair. In the case of Standing Order 40 it's by unanimous consent of the House. So later on this afternoon, when the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is recognized, the Leader of the Official Opposition under Standing Order 40 will rise and very, very briefly provide a "case of urgent and pressing necessity." Then the chair will ask: is there unanimous consent to proceed? If one member says no, that's where it's ended. No debate, nothing else, done. So that's the process.

Now, in terms of the manner in which this has been dealt with, in terms of Standing Order 30 there's absolutely no doubt at all about the fact that there is a requirement to advise the Speaker's office two hours prior to that, but no such requirement is contained in Standing Order 40. In the past we've had Standing Order 40s when the chair has not been informed. The chair has been in the chair when this part of the Routine has been recognized. An hon. member stood up and basically said: I intend to later in the afternoon rise on a Standing Order 40 and to request unanimous consent of the House to consider an urgent matter of business. So we've had both of these and more and even in this session.

I do believe that with the last Standing Order 40 that was dealt with in this House, the chair, after recognizing an hon. member to proceed with it, had no knowledge of what it would be. In today's situation the letter arrived in the Speaker's office at 11:50, which was a courtesy. It was not required but was a courtesy. Then when the hon. member stood up early in the afternoon and basically indicated what it was, that was the point in time that the chair, like every other member, found out what the text of it was. That's a courtesy. That was not a requirement under Standing Order 40, because Standing Order 40s are negated very quickly by the need for unanimous consent. Needless to say, it works this way. If hon. members feel that they have been slighted because of a lack of courtesy or knowledge about what this would be, the chances of them giving approval to waive the Routine of the day would be negated pretty easily and pretty quickly.

So it would be a great courtesy, but it's not a requirement. That has not been violated today. We will wait a few minutes from now, when we recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to formally proceed with his Standing Order 40, and find what the response of the House will be when the question is on unanimous consent.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands. You wish to proceed now? Okay.

Yesterday the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands identified to the chair his desire to rise on a point of order, but the member was not sure whether or not the member wanted to rise on a point of order or a point of privilege. There was a consultation, but the hon. member wanted to have the benefit of the Blues or the *Hansard* before he would rise. So he advised the chair yesterday that he wanted to rise on a point of order today on a matter resulting out of the question period yesterday. That in itself is a bit unusual, but there are some mitigating circumstances in the background, and the chair will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Point of Order

Provoking Debate

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order pursuant to Standing Order 23(h). Standing Order 23(h) says that a member shall be called to order if allegations are made against another member by imputing "false or unavowed motives" or using "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create

disorder.” I also cite *Beauchesne* 417, that a reply in Oral Question Period should “deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate.”

In yesterday’s question period the Minister of Health and Wellness in response to a very legitimate question raised by my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona violated each one of the above citations. In his answer to the member’s first question the minister said and I briefly quote from *Hansard*:

The hon. member does not appear to be able to get his own facts straight on a number of occasions. We know that between him and his colleague who sits to his left, his far left perhaps – between the two of them they are not able to do a sufficient amount of research to provide us with a question on government policy as opposed to mere insinuation.

Clearly, these remarks are argumentative, they are insulting, and they are certainly designed to provoke debate. I therefore ask that the point of order be sustained, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have thought it prudent in a circumstance of this nature where no one is even aware of the point having been raised that notice might have been given to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness so that he might be able to speak in his own defence.

That being said, it would appear from what was read that there was nothing more than banter of the usual nature, and I would suggest that it’s nothing more than that and need not be sanctioned.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on this point of order.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hardly could the Government House Leader state that what occurred yesterday in question period was merely banter. The minister of health was very aggressive in his comments and certainly was targeting the member from whom the point of order was raised. I would ask that the Government House Leader withdraw the comment that it was mere banter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point of order. Please be brief.

3:00

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I was here for this discussion, and as I read the point that the hon. member is raising, it’s clear that the Minister of Health and Wellness was simply referring to the size of the caucus of the third party, with no dishonour meant. It simply says that there are only two of them, who are perhaps unable to do a sufficient amount of research. On the basis of that, I don’t believe there was any insult intended by that remark.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the last several days in the Assembly you’ve seen a lot of body movement by the chair during the question period. Members have observed that. In fact, members might have observed that on almost every question that has been raised in the last several days and on almost every answer given in the last several days. Now, there are exceptions to this. There are exceptions. Some exchanges have been top-notch, of total value, to be used as examples for the future, but there has been a tendency in the last several days to have questions seeking opinion and other types.

Now, I’m not going to spend a great deal of time dealing with

Beauchesne, but in *Beauchesne* 409:

It must be a question, not an expression of an opinion, representation, argumentation, nor debate . . .

The question ought to seek information and, therefore, cannot be based upon a hypothesis, cannot seek an opinion, either legal or otherwise, and must not suggest its own answer, be argumentative or make representations.

I can go on and on.

Now, the same rules basically apply, though, to answers as well, by custom and tradition and everything else. It’s also fair to say that there has been some intensity on the odd occasion in the last several days in some of the questions and the answers, perhaps in terms of the exchange that occurred between the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, who the chair in his own view thought was rather enthusiastic with his question, and then observed the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, who again the chair thought was rather enthusiastic as well. Perhaps the word “enthusiastic” is better than “aggressive” or something else. Let’s just assume that it’s all in the spirit of the time that we’re at, at the concluding days of a session.

I know that this may not be the best reading that people would want on Saturday mornings, but over the next couple of months let’s just take a good look at some of this stuff and see exactly how we might want to deal with it. Intensity is fine. The chair has the *Hansard* in front of him, and I would like to indicate as well to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands that the Minister of Health and Wellness did meet with me personally and did indicate that he was rather aggressive, but he was very concerned that an individual who’s not in this Assembly whose reputation was coming under question – now, that’s what his assumption was, and it was in that light that he was responding. So it strikes me that no one is purely innocent in all of this, and by the same token the chair will not find anyone purely guilty.

The hon. Government House Leader on the second point of order.

Point of Order Exhibits

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to raise a point of order under 501 to 504 of *Beauchesne* with respect to the use of exhibits by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but I will withdraw that point of order and follow the good example of the hon. Leader of the Opposition with respect to decorum in the House and thank him for his remarks instead.

THE SPEAKER: For the clarity of the House, was an exhibit used by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar? Okay. The chair would like to clarify again. The chair interceded at that point in time because there was absolute confusion, which was unfair to the Deputy Premier, who had the question directed to her, and I believe unfair as well to the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

From time to time people come and want to bring exhibits into this Assembly. There is a process, and sometimes we get maybe a little enthusiastic about these exhibits. So the process is important, but never once should the exhibit become then a problem for hon. members within the Assembly. No one suggests for a moment that the exhibit today provided by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead falls into that category, because it was done in good faith, but therein lies part of the problem.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Having said all of that, we’re now dealing with the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition and his application for a Standing Order 40 request.

Children's Services

Dr. Nicol:

Be it resolved that this Assembly address a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the need for a full debate on the cuts to the Children's Services budget, which threaten the well-being and future of Alberta's children.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard a lot of debate about and a lot of questions about the current status of children in the province in the past three-week period of our session. There have been a lot of issues raised, a lot of input provided to all members of this Legislature by constituents, by individuals, and by families. I think it's important, as we look at how we address the issues they're raising and in the context of the discussion here in the Legislature, that we look at, first of all, two different aspects of what we've seen arise during this week.

First of all, the issue comes up that the change in budgeting truly has affected services that are being provided to children. Even though they're in a transitional state, they're in a sense unexpected by the families and the children that have been getting these services on a past basis or in an historic manner. What we're looking at, then, is that the recipients of these services have sensed or felt that the change in service has directly affected their children, yet we've heard on numerous occasions in this House the minister insisting that no children are being affected within the context of the mandate that she sees for her department. So what we need to do here is really look at how that mandate for her department fits with both the historic services that have been provided under the auspices of her department and the expectations of families and children in our province in terms of what they can access through her department.

The second issue that I wanted to raise today and feel strongly that we should clarify for Albertans before the end of this session is the fact that on November 20 the minister spoke about a new response model, and it appears that what she's looking at here and basically saying is that her department is solely responsible for children who are in immediate danger as opposed to any of the preventative programs that have historically been offered through her department. So I think it's important especially at this time, as the government is preparing to undertake discussions and processes for the new budgets that will be coming forward to deal with our next fiscal year starting in April, that we clarify for Albertans the true status of what is the mandate and what is the responsibility of the Minister of Children's Services. You know, this is where we're looking at the kind of issue that comes up, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what we see as the responsibility of this department for the relationship between the children's authorities and the families and the children that are in those communities. They have seen the Alberta government, through its mandate, as a means to deal with the issues of stability that they can perceive both in caring for their children and for the role of children in their community.

So I think it's really important that we take time this afternoon and dedicate it to a clear debate of what is our option and what are options for delivery models for children's services in this province. It's really a critical issue, based on the calls that have been coming into the offices we've been in communication with, and it's important that Albertans understand if there is to be a change in mandate of that department.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. leader. I'll now ask the question under Standing Order 40.

[Unanimous consent denied]

3:10

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 31

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move Bill 31, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No.2), for third reading.

As has been previously outlined for the House, while we normally do not debate miscellaneous statutes, as they only get introduced with the unanimous consent of all three parties in the House, we have by special agreement agreed to debate the particular section of the act relative to electoral boundaries.

The provision in the act itself really does only one thing. It changes the date so that rather than having to wait until June of 2003 to appoint an Electoral Boundaries Commission, which would then have the result of the commission having a year under the act – seven months to bring in its initial report and five months thereafter to bring in a final report – to do a redistribution process, which would end up close to the time of the next election, we believe that with the census having been taken in the year 2000 and with the new information available and with the imbalance that's obviously there, it would be prudent and in the interest of all Albertans to do a redistribution earlier than as provided in the act and to therefore just change the date so that it could be done prior to the June 2003 date which would otherwise have been provided for. Of course, after the commission reports, then the report has to be brought to the Legislature, and there has to be a resolution of the Legislature. Then the report, if accepted by the Legislature, has to be translated into an act to go to a session. So it's really an 18-month process, at the least, and perhaps a two-year process. So it is very prudent in our view, Mr. Speaker, to deal with the issue by bringing in an amendment. We've chosen, with the good graces of the opposition, to do it by way of just changing the date to allow us to call the commission earlier, as provided for in this amendment made through the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act.

Now, I've had the privilege of reading the Blues from earlier debate, and there is some suggestion that other issues should be dealt with. I think that's probably outside the scope of the debate, but I will say this, Mr. Speaker. I have some history with redistribution, having been an active member of a political association since I was about 14 years old and having been involved in redistribution processes from outside this House on numerous occasions previously. I can tell all members of this House that the act that we have in place now is probably the best, in terms of setting up the parameters for a redistribution commission, that you could find anywhere. It puts the discretion in the hands of the commission to draw boundaries in an appropriate way, and it gives the commission very, very broad parameters and considerations in which to do it.

Previous acts in this province have tried to delineate how many seats should be urban and how many should be rural, have tried to delineate what was urban and rural, have tried to handcuff the hands of the commission in terms of how they draw the boundaries, but the act that we have now does not do that. It does not handcuff the commission. In fact, it gives the commission some broad guidelines with respect to what it should consider or what it may consider. Actually, it says, "shall take into consideration," and I think it's important to look at what it shall take into consideration. Essentially those parameters talk about what goes to the very essence of

representing Albertans in this Legislature: how you get in contact with them, how many people you have to contact, how far you have to go to do it, and how far you have to come to the Legislature. Things like:

- (a) the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,
- (b) sparsity and density of population,
- (c) common community interests and community organizations . . .
- (c.1) wherever possible, the existing community boundaries within the cities of Edmonton and Calgary,
- (c.2) wherever possible, the existing municipal boundaries,
- (d) the number of municipalities and other local authorities,
- (e) geographical features, including existing road systems, and
- (f) the desirability of understandable and clear boundaries.

The act doesn't tell the commission how to take those into consideration. It just says to the commission that these are relevant considerations to take into account when determining what boundaries there should be.

The only other thing I want to add, then, in the discussion – I do believe that we're doing the right thing by appointing a commission which is a bilateral commission. It has two members appointed by the opposition and two members appointed by the government and a chair who has to come from a specified category of people, as outlined in the act. So it's a very fair process. One of the things that we often get into is this discussion of the equality of a vote. I just want to very briefly dwell on this question of equality of a vote.

In Alberta we have a unicameral system; we have one House. Nationally, of course, we have a bicameral system with a House and a Senate. Quite often in Alberta we argue that the Senate should be effective, equal, and elected and that we need an effective, equal, and elected Senate because we don't have the population that Ontario has and therefore we don't have the representation in the House of Commons that Ontario has because we effectively do the redistribution basically on a population basis. Now, they have some parameters, as well, to vary that. But we argue vociferously from Alberta of the need to have an equal, elected, and effective Senate to bring the regional viewpoint into that discussion. Well, Mr. Speaker, how do we bring in the viewpoint of the region in a unicameral setting unless we take into account the very things that are set out in the act as direction to the commission to consider in terms of the various regions of the province having an effective voice in this House?

Now, I come from an urban constituency. I could argue that we should have an absolute equality of votes and that that somehow would improve the representation of the process, because each vote in the province would be equal. But, as you know, even if you did that on an absolute basis, it would only be so for a day, because populations move, constituencies grow, and constituencies change. So you'll never have absolutely equality of votes except for that one moment in time when you actually drew the boundaries to do it. Even then, you probably wouldn't be able to get it that accurate.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

There will always be an inequality of votes. The question is how big and for what reason. I think it's a perfectly valid reason in a province such as ours, where there is a balance of interests to be represented in the Legislature from all regions of the province and a need for all regions of the province to be heard and to have an effective voice. It's more than just counting up the numbers and dividing by the number of seats to arrive at equality of vote. Equality of vote has also got to be an ability for members to be effective representatives by being able to be in touch with their constituents, by being able to meet with all the representative bodies

in their constituencies, and by being able to properly get the information to assist them in bringing that information to the House.

That equality of vote is not just achieved, Mr. Speaker, by adding up the number of people in the province and dividing by the constituencies and saying that that provides an equal vote. It does not. The act which we have in Alberta is an act which I think – I'm very proud that we have it, because we've moved away from all the restrictions which the Legislature used to put on in doing a redistribution. We've given a commission a broad mandate. We've said: you should take into account as a first order of business "the requirement for effective representation as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms." We've provided for other parameters. We then let the commission of Albertans go through the province and hear representations from Albertans as to how Albertans believe the boundaries should be drawn, come up with an interim report and then go back and justify that interim report to Albertans, hear again how Albertans think that the boundaries should be drawn, and then come back to the House with an independent report.

It's a good process, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent act. The only thing that needs to be changed, in my humble opinion, is the date so we can get on with the job.

3:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to stand for a few minutes and discuss the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act amendment that's in the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. I want to, effectively, agree with the Government House Leader in his comments that in the context of providing, if you want to call it, nonpartisan guidance to the commission, the current act does a reasonable job of that. What we want to do, though, is also look at the structure of the amendment now, and I think I'll just kind of put on record some of the comments that might be useful, I guess, in the future.

I also want to thank the Government House Leader for his efforts. While we were developing this, he had a chance to meet with both myself and the leader of the third party opposition and discuss how it was going to be brought about, how it was going to be set up. I guess the suggestion maybe for the next time, because it's too late for this time now, might be to try and make this kind of an amendment – what we're doing here now is that this amendment is going to have to be made every time we want to have a boundary redistribution. What we should be doing is looking at some of the parameters that were in the act that we're deleting. Basically we should be setting a series of guidelines that just say that this should have been commissioned during the First Session of the Legislature sitting after a certain number of times after the previous one. So it becomes automatic unless for some reason, because we have very short Legislatures, we end up out of kilter.

You know, one of the main things that will be used in this is the census of Canada. That's being completed, will be available for them, hopefully, by early spring to use as a basis for their judgment. So what we should have been looking at, instead of putting a specific date in there, was just allowing it to occur on a regular basis during the First Session of a particular Legislature. But this serves our purpose now. It's good. It will get the commission started. It will get the process started, and it will provide for the information that'll come from the census to be the basis for it.

A couple of things that I want to look at in the context of how we charge that commission. I think one of the things that has to be

looked at is that the committee should see their mandate as something a little broader than just drawing a set of lines on a map, because as the Government House Leader mentioned, there are a lot of different aspects that come about in the context of how do we get effective representation, not necessarily just equality of representation, and the trade-off that has to occur here. You know, in a representative government there should be a degree of adherence to the concept of one person, one vote, or everybody's vote has the same weight if they choose to exercise it. That's part of the issue that in this process we can't address. What we also may want to look at in terms of our discussions about this whole process of trying to develop new constituency maps, moving into subsequent elections, is: how do we deal, as well, with encouraging people to exercise that vote? But that's not the mandate of this change, Mr. Speaker. We should deal with that in another debate.

In the context of the mandate we're giving to this commission, what we should look at is: how do we make sure that they act in a way that will be acceptable to most Albertans? We have to make sure that some degree of equality is adhered to in the vote, but we also want to make sure that representation is accessible. We've heard a couple of comments about that already from the Government House Leader. One of the things that we have to make sure of – this act is going to facilitate elections for possibly the next two or three elections. As we go about putting those lines on the map today, what we've got to do is kind of look at whether or not they will be fair representative constituencies as we move over this eight- to 10-year period. To do that, what we need to look at is where communities are growing, where communities are not growing as fast, things that come up about where the new economic development initiatives are likely to occur.

I think Fort McMurray has to be really a prime example of that in the sense that the expanding oil sands development up there is very labour intensive. So what we're going to be looking at is that as these new projects come on, there will be a high probability of increases in population in that area. In effect, that constituency probably should start a little bit below the average. Where we look at other constituencies that are going to remain stable, they can be a little above the average.

I would hope that part of the process that the commission looks at is kind of the transition that is going on in Alberta in terms of where changes are occurring, where changes in growth patterns are coming about. The opportunities that are coming up in some of our communities do portray long-term growth, and we should be making sure that we don't end up with the situations like we've had in southwest Calgary. Those constituencies are now unbelievably big because the subdivisions that the city had approved, the subdivisions that were being talked about, hadn't been incorporated into designing the constituencies when we did it two elections ago. So as those subdivisions were developed, we ended up with very high population constituencies in our current election. If the process that we went through previously, two elections ago, would have looked at where subdivision approval had already occurred or was being sought, some of the issues like how cities are growing, then we could have looked at possibly adjusting those boundaries.

I know that in my own area, Mr. Speaker, the city of Lethbridge, historically a lot of our growth has been into the west Lethbridge component, but if we're going to look at where the subdivisions are occurring now, a lot of them are occurring in the southeast corner of the city. So what we should be doing is looking at those subdivision approvals instead of just saying: well, the growth is going to occur in west Lethbridge. It may not now because the city has undertaken some infrastructure development that will really facilitate growth out into the southeast quadrant as well. So we don't want to necessarily

just project a constituency that would say that population growth is going to go where it has historically.

Another thing that we want to look at is that as the committee goes out into the community and talks to Albertans, they'll get a sense of how the communities feel about their representation. Even though it's not written directly into the mandate of the commission, it probably would be very appropriate, as they develop constituencies, to address the issues that the Government House Leader brought up in the sense of: how do we have effective representation? It would be extremely helpful to the Members' Services Committee if they would convey to the Members' Services Committee some of the criteria that they used in determining what constitutes effective representation, accessible representation, because then what we need to do is marry together their analysis, or their thought processes, with a new model of constituency funding from the Members' Services Committee.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, I don't intend to suggest here in any way that this commission take over any of the responsibilities of Members' Services, but what we need to do is make sure that if the commission is using a set of criteria when they look at what is accessible representation, effective representation, then those criteria be included in their report. So when we develop models, then, of actually facilitating the individual who is elected to represent that constituency, we need to provide them with the resources that are consistent with the kinds of parameters that the commission put in place.

What we need to look at also is the approach that comes up with a debate about whether or not we should focus on consistency of constituency or a broad-based constituency. I would suggest that the more diverse we can make the constituencies, the more the representative who is elected from there will have information presented to them that represents the pros and cons on both sides of an issue. If we make a constituency and if we create the boundaries so that we really have a homogeneous community within that constituency, there's no opportunity for the representative to do a little of the balancing that's necessary to have government that represents all Albertans. The individual interest groups, the individual single-issue communities that are there have their opportunities through the structure that we have in terms of input to committees in the Legislature, through input to, say, provincial party platforms, through input to the open consultations that are conducted by the government.

When we're dealing with issue-specific or uniformity-type issues, that should not be a criterion that we look at in terms of trying to put lines on a map. We want to make sure that that line on the map is easy to represent, not easy in the sense that it's an homogeneous issue but easy in the sense that it facilitates gathering of the information and bringing into the debate that goes on here all of the pro and con arguments that are necessary for us to evaluate the aspects of the piece of legislation that deals with that concern. If an individual can hear about all of the issues in their community, they get a chance to feed back to their community members issues that are either important or not important.

In a way, Mr. Speaker, I have that in my community in the sense that Lethbridge is an agriculture service centre as much as a government service centre, you know, in the sense of health care, education, and government support. It's also an agriculture service centre, and being the Agriculture critic I communicate a lot with the interest groups in the community and across Alberta. When I go back to deal with my constituency, which is inside the city of Lethbridge, I can address with them the issues that are important to

the community around them so that we can get a real balance of how things work. If we can make sure that within a constituency there's a diversity of ideas, to me that facilitates good representative government more than having one representative stand up here and speak only on behalf of one constituent group where that constituent group is an issue-based group.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the issues that I think we have to look at and make sure that we're basically able to go through and, when we're done, say that within the boundaries that will be created, what we've got is a degree of the concepts of equality of the individual in a democratic system, but that equality has to be tempered by the ability of the individual to have their information presented in the debate. We also have to look at it, you know, in terms of: can that elected representative actually effectively consult with their community members with the breadth, both in terms of geography and in terms of interest, of all of the members of their constituencies?

In many ways representing a constituency where you have a very broad base of socioeconomic characteristics is just as hard to represent as a community that has a lot of distance characteristics in it. You know, you may have to drive from one end of a constituency to the other and take a couple of hours at it, but when you get there, the message is going to be fairly similar, so there's not a lot of background work that needs to be done. If you're in a more compact, less dispersed constituency, you may end up having to deal with an awful lot more subject matter issues, so the ability to represent them takes just as much effort. So what we need to do is make sure that these kinds of considerations are all part of the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I put them into the record so that when the commission gets established, I hope what they'll do is take the prerogative to read *Hansard*, look at the guidelines that are listed in the act, and listen to some of the discussion that went on here so that they get a full understanding of, I guess, the perceived responsibility that we're passing on to them to make sure that over the next eight to 10 years we have effective representative government established once again in the province. We're fully aware of the discrepancies that are occurring now in some constituencies because of the growth factor and changes in demographics. So I think that on that basis I would like to recognize that the government is introducing this now instead of waiting until the normal guidelines would have come about in the current act. I support that idea that they're moving it forward, getting at it. Let's get this process under way, and let's support this commission so that we can effectively find out where our constituency boundaries will be.

The issue that does come up is the earlier we do it, the longer the constituency will be in place before it gets changed again, so the more important it is that they look at both the forecast and the projected dynamics that may occur so that they effectively establish constituencies that will be just right halfway through the term of the next set of constituencies. In effect, they could be a little unbalanced now, a little bit unbalanced 10 years from now, but in the midpoint they'll be perfect.

With that, Mr. Speaker, we wish the commission well. We put our trust in them, and we'll wait for their results. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak briefly on Bill 31, and I'll be restricting my comments to the proposed amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act. I will try to focus just on one main point, and that is the view of

Alberta New Democrats that some sort of proportional system of representation is required in order to better represent the actual wishes of the people in Alberta.

We appreciate that the government has agreed to permit this debate. It was certainly the position of our caucus that a comprehensive bill dealing with electoral boundaries ought to have been introduced either in this session or in the spring sitting, but I think what's been proposed by the Government House Leader today is a reasonable compromise, and I'm pleased to speak to the bill.

3:40

There are a number of things that we were looking to do which were dealt with by the leader of the New Democrats in his speech last night. They include more balance between rural and urban constituencies, and of course in Alberta we have much wider variances permitted than in a number of other provinces. We think that that could and should be narrowed from a 25 percent variance to something more like a 10 percent variance. That is something that the city of Edmonton has done in its ward system. I participated there on the committee that drew up the ward boundaries. It's certainly a difficult job, and I'm sure it would be a much more difficult job when you're considering the whole province. We were able, as some other provinces are able to do, to get the boundaries such that the population variance did not exceed plus or minus 10 percent. I think we could do that here as well.

We also wanted to address the size of the Assembly and ask the question: do we need all 83 seats in this Assembly? I think there is a strong move towards downsizing government, but I think it generally starts below the legislative level in most governments' practice. So that's something I think we should be discussing as well.

I really want to talk mostly about proportional representation. Certainly if the number of seats in the opposition were based on the proportion of popular vote in the last election, we would see that there would be 31 members of the opposition in the House as opposed to the nine today. For that reason alone, I would expect the government would not favour this proposal, Mr. Speaker, but that, indeed, is how it's conducted. [interjections] Now, I know that this proposition excites some of the hon. members beyond belief, but in fact it is the case that some sort of proportional representation system is the norm in parliamentary democracies in the world, in the western countries in particular, and it's . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: In the civilized world.

MR. MASON: Well the hon. member here says, "In the civilized world," but I believe that Alberta is civilized.

I think it's clear that the type of system we now have tends to perpetuate governments, and it tends to overstate their strength in the Legislative Assembly. This Assembly is a perfect case in point, Mr. Speaker.

In most countries in Europe except Britain proportional representation is the norm. It is, I think, something that can be combined with a system of constituencies such as we currently have. It doesn't have to just be members drawn from a list in direct proportion to their party's popular vote. There is something called a mixed-member system. I believe that it's in practice in Germany and some other countries, Mr. Speaker, in which approximately 75 percent of the seats in the Assembly are allocated to geographic constituencies in the same fashion as we now have. The remaining 25 percent are drawn from a list depending on the popular vote and are allocated so that the total number of the seats in the Assembly approximately equals the popular vote of each of the parties in the

House. So that is something that I think should really be discussed as part of the political future for Alberta. We have a democratic system of which we are rightly proud, Mr. Speaker, but it can always be improved, and it can always be made more democratic.

A recent survey by the Canada West Foundation, hardly a socialist think tank, showed that almost 7 in 10 people in Alberta supported making the electoral system more fair. Electoral reform is on the minds of Canadians, Mr. Speaker. They're no longer satisfied that our system is as democratic and as open as it possibly could be, and you don't have to look any further than some of the proposals that were put out 10 years ago, for example, by the then Reform Party which really engaged Canadians in a big way on the whole question of how decisions are made and how the democratic machinery operated in our country. They talked about recall and talked about referenda and talked about, as the hon. Attorney General and Government House Leader talked about, the triple E Senate, which is an idea whose time has come and gone.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Canadians and particularly western Canadians are intensely interested in the issue of electoral reform, and I think it behooves us to look more broadly at this question than simply, as the government is proposing, having a one-line entry in the miscellaneous statutes act establishing a commission. We certainly are in favour of an early drawing of boundaries, but the government is assuming in its proposal here that Albertans are comfortable and happy with the status quo when it comes to our electoral system, and I think that that's not so, as the Canada West Foundation study clearly shows. Albertans want to see parliamentary reform. They want to see parliamentary change. They want to see electoral reform in this province and indeed right across the country.

So with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude. We would really urge the government to consider during the term of its office establishing a broader commission which would look at the electoral system in Alberta as a whole, with a broader mandate to consider more than just drawing where the lines on the map ought to go. It ought to in our view consult with Albertans as to which type of electoral system they would like to see, what size of provincial Legislature they would like to see, and indeed how the functioning of our Assembly could be made more open to the public and, in a sense, reformed and democratized further. So I would urge the government to consider that proposal sometime during the term of its mandate.

In the meantime I would wish the commission the best of luck in drawing up fair boundaries that will serve Albertans as well as they have so far. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly enjoy the opportunity to speak to the electoral boundaries component of the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act. I think this is integral to democracy in Alberta, and I would certainly like to hear the comments of all members of this Assembly as to how we as an elected legislative body could represent all the constituents of Alberta to the best possible degree.

Certainly one of the objectives of this particular amendment act is to change the date, and we are changing the date when the commission must be appointed to June 30, 2002, instead of the proposed date of July 1, 2003. Certainly I welcome this suggestion, support this suggestion because it is with this redistribution of the constituencies that we will have, hopefully, better representation.

3:50

Now, we do know, Mr. Speaker, that an election is a fundamental component of representative government. It provides effective representation from the population, and in Alberta the foundation of this process is made up of the 83 electoral divisions. When we have elections, we do it on the basis of one vote for one person. In assuming that, we assume that every Albertan's vote is equal to any other Albertan's vote, but unfortunately that is not the case. I only have to look at the results from the last list of electors in the last election. When we compare, for example, the constituency of Athabasca-Wabasca and the number of names on their election list, as of May 2001 at 12,598, and we look at the names on the electors list for Calgary-Shaw, as of the same date at 49,380, then we have quite a disparity.

We also have to look at this. For the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to drive from the southern end of his constituency to the northern part of his constituency, he does have quite a chore. [interjection] He does indicate that he sometimes requires a dog team, and if he'd like somebody to accompany him on one of those trips, I'd be most willing to, yes.

This in itself, Mr. Speaker, does pose some of the problems that we do have and the challenges that will be facing the commission when they do look at this whole issue of redistribution. Certainly in some parts of the province we have regions where there's a very sparse population. In order for those people to have the same representation as, for example, people in Calgary-Shaw, then how does this member travel throughout his constituency? At the same time, how do we address the issue that there was roughly a 3.9 to 1 ratio of voters in Calgary-Shaw to those in Athabasca-Wabasca? These are challenges that the commission will once again face when they do their redistribution.

Certainly our boundaries are going to be determined by population. It is going to be determined by area. I think that somehow, Mr. Speaker, the commission will have to look at ways that we can address these problems. In the case of Athabasca-Wabasca, one of the solutions, perhaps, could be to make an allowance where this constituency could be provided with more funds so that there could be more offices in different areas and to have those offices staffed. As well, you know, I think the commission faces enormous challenges when we look, for example, at the rapid growth in Calgary and how some of these constituencies were determined in – I believe the last time was 1996. They have grown incredibly since that time and certainly do not follow along the recommendation that we look at these and review how we address redistribution every second election here in Alberta.

Now, then, we also have, when we look at elections here in Alberta, a deviation figure, and this deviation figure certainly is quite large when compared with other provinces. I see that section 17(1) allows the population of a proposed electoral division to be as much as 25 percent above or below the average population of all the proposed electoral divisions. This is quite high, but again to maintain the number of electoral divisions at 83, perhaps this figure could not be altered too much. Now, also, in section 17(2) it allows up to four of the proposed electoral divisions to have a population that is as much as 50 percent below the average if the commission is of the opinion that at least three of the five criteria apply to that proposed electoral division.

I guess this brings us back, Mr. Speaker, to the issue: what is the average, and how is that determined? It seems to be an increasing difficulty that the commission will face, because we have seen certainly a greater move to urbanization of the province over the last decade, and there doesn't seem to be much of a trend to get away from this.

So those are a few comments that I wanted to make in regards to this particular Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act.

I also would wish the commission every success in addressing the challenges that all members who have spoken so far have outlined, and I certainly think that with their good work all Albertans will be well represented.

I thank you very much for this opportunity to speak today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to make a few comments about Bill 31 and in particular the electoral boundaries component. It seems to me that we can look at and have traditionally looked at representation from two perspectives. The first perspective is a delegate model of representation, where citizens send people to this Legislature as their delegates and expect that the representative, the MLA, will reflect their wishes in his or her behaviour in this Assembly and in the way they deal with matters. We spend a great deal of time as MLAs under that model trying to be good delegates. We hold town halls, we send out questionnaires and opinionnaires, and we monitor carefully the kinds of telephone calls that we get and the e-mails that we receive. We log them, and we keep track of public opinion. We watch local newspapers for what's being said, and we try to keep our antennae tuned in to what the community is saying in order that we can in this Assembly try to reflect those wishes in our behaviour.

There's a second model, however, and that's a trustee model. There's been very little attention paid in any of the reviews that we've had to a trustee model and, I guess, with good reason. A trustee model of representation is one where we would be acting more on our own convictions and attempting to put forward principles that we believe in and act on them regardless of current popular opinion, and that's what makes the model very, very difficult for the context in which we work, where a delegate model is the norm. I said that it's a difficult model, and we've seen a couple of examples in the House this last week where MLAs were acting more in tune with the trustee model than the delegate model.

4:00

We saw it when the Minister of Finance and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke in opposition to I think it was Bill 207, the tool tax exemption. The tool tax exemption is obviously a popular notion in the community and has widespread support, yet we heard the Minister of Finance and the Member for Edmonton-Riverview saying: "Just a minute. It may be the popular thing to do, but is it really sound policy at this time?" They went on to indicate a position that was quite different, that paid attention to the economics of the proposal and paid attention to what it meant for the tax system if that bill were proceeded with. I'm sure that it wasn't easy for them to stand and to take that position. So a trustee model makes it much more difficult. It also means that members have to have thought through very carefully their own philosophical and political stances and be ready to defend them.

It's apparent that the Electoral Boundaries Commission has in the past done everything they can to further a delegate model of representation. It's highly weighted in favour of a delegate model. They've made some improvements, but again they were done to, as I said, improve that delegate model. The last commission put forward a rather interesting matrix. They took six factors and tried to assign a numerical weight to each of those factors and then to come to a total that ranked the constituencies in the province in terms of how difficult it was for the member to represent them. Those factors have already been mentioned: the geographic area, the

population that the constituency contains, the density of the population, the number of households, the number of elected bodies that have interests in the constituency, and the distance of the constituency points from the Legislature.

It was an interesting exercise and one that I think was long overdue to try to bring together some quantitative analysis to the decisions about the making of electoral boundaries. I found it interesting, for instance, that Edmonton-Mill Woods under that model is the easiest constituency in the province to represent. You can cross my constituency in five minutes if you're driving slowly. In terms of the number of organizations that we have to deal with, they are ones that other MLAs in the city also have to deal with. So it resulted in a ranking of constituencies from the easiest to serve to the most difficult and, I think, was an attempt to provide a rationale for the work of the commission.

They also indicated that they could have looked at some other variables and added to the model. That was the number of communities that could only be reached by air, for instance. They didn't include that. They could have looked at the number of special interest groups that a constituency has. These are concentrated in some areas with respect to interest groups that have concerns with water or interest groups that are concerned with agriculture or livestock and interest groups that are concerned with the environment, but they rejected additional variables, indicating that they thought it would add clutter to the model that they had presented. It's something that I hope the new boundaries commission will re-examine, that they'll look at that matrix and might consider adding more variables to it, because I think it takes us past the one person, one vote argument that has so often bogged down electoral boundary reform and brings to it a wisdom and dimension that I think are sorely needed.

The easiest model, of course, would be to look at a trustee model, and then it wouldn't matter. As long as they're roughly close, I suspect, in terms of population, people would be happy. But given the direction that we've taken in the past and what seems to be popular interest in fairness with electoral boundaries, I suspect it's something that's not going to happen.

I'm pleased that the commission is going to undertake the work, and as other members have indicated, I'll await with interest the results. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aw.

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, the rest of the members should've clearly listened to what their House leader was telling them about the deal for this afternoon.

I am pleased to be able to rise and speak to one particular section of Bill 31, which is the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001. The agreement was that although there isn't usually a debate around miscellaneous statutes, members of the opposition, of course, could speak for up to 20 minutes on the miscellaneous statute dealing with moving up the date for the establishment of the Electoral Boundaries Commission.

A number of other people have already spoken on the need for this commission to be charged with being fair and equal. The Government House Leader and Minister of Justice had also urged us to try and stick to the point being put forward in the miscellaneous statute, and that is that, in fact, we'd be looking at an earlier date to establish the Electoral Boundaries Commission rather than waiting

until the legislated time of 2003. This would allow us to establish the commission by June of 2002, thereby giving us more time to look at electoral boundaries and prepare for any changes that might come prior to the next election.

I think that in Alberta there is a great need to address the perception of fairness and of equality. It's fairly well known that the votes are not equal here. A vote in one riding is not equal to a vote in another riding. We have a disparity of more than two, so in some ridings a vote is worth more than two votes compared to a vote in another riding. When we are looking at an increasing suspicion from voters or even an apathy and unwillingness for them to participate in an electoral system, things like perceived fairness and equality become even more important. If they don't believe that their vote is going to count for anything, it's very difficult to encourage them to vote. As I said, we do have between a 25 and a 50 percent deviation here.

An earlier date for establishing the Electoral Boundaries Commission allows for consideration of a number of things, obviously the number of ridings. I think there's a good argument to look at having fewer ridings and therefore having a larger population base that each MLA is responsible for representing, and I'll come to why.

4:10

Part of what this earlier date is allowing the commission to look at is the criteria for determining the number of ridings, and we've got a lot of things in that mix, the traditional considerations, or the geographic size of the riding and the population. Now we have come to look at percentage of deviation, which was certainly the consideration in the '95-96 boundary commission, and that commission also started to look at other complexities of representation. As a matter of fact, in their press release at the release of the commission report they talk about "a conceptual model to objectively measure the degree of difficulty each member for an electoral division encounters in representing his or her electoral division." It is a degree of difficulty, and there are differing difficulties in different ridings.

Part of what the last boundaries commission looked at was a matrix. They chose 10 quantitative considerations for qualities matching criteria set out directly or indirectly in the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, and then they quantified this to numbers, and they worked it out in a whole mathematical scheme.

So I think that by establishing an earlier date for the commission to come together, we're allowing the commission to have more time to consider those complexities. I hope they do, because it is a time of more complexity.

They had looked at things in the past, as mentioned by the House leader when he introduced this miscellaneous statute for debate: the distance to travel, the time or distance to cross the riding. Some of those have already been considered. I've heard my rural colleagues comment on how difficult it is to represent ridings that have more than a couple of towns of equal size. I agree. That probably is difficult. I can counter with saying: yes, and I likely have to spend an equal amount of time dealing with different business revitalization zones and different organizations like that that require time and attention and their own political ability to manage and lead in their communities. So I'm only dealing with one city hall but four business revitalization zones, probably comparable on a matrix to someone trying to deal with four towns of more or less equal size.

I think we have to look at the balancing of interest between the complexities of representing rural ridings and balancing the interest between the rural centres and constituents who really are out in the country, farming activity, oil and gas activity. On a matrix what would be equivalent for me to be looking at? Probably the number

of different ethnic and language groups in the riding, perhaps the number of community leagues or nonprofits and charities that are in my riding and are all expecting time and attention from me. Of course, I think we need to be looking at the challenges that are presented by different levels of income, wealth and poverty, in areas, because that certainly affects your ability to represent, to make yourself available to people.

An earlier date for this commission to start to meet allows for consideration of other criteria. We have the issue spoken briefly about by one of my colleagues of predictable changes in population. We have some areas in rural Alberta who are losing population, others who are gaining population. The same thing in my riding. There has been a tremendous amount of infill housing, for example. We've had a change of about 5,000 constituents in the last couple of years with infill housing. That was predictable. When you looked at the plans from the city of Edmonton and the designed ARPs, area redevelopment plans, that was predictable, and it could have been anticipated that there was going to be an increase in that riding. So hopefully with the additional time this commission will be able to look at how to better plan for those changes of population.

Balancing that are also changes in technology. There is still a desire from some constituents, certainly, to meet face to face, but increasingly I think constituents are making use of technological advances like e-mail and computers. They're very happy to correspond certainly with me by e-mail. They don't want to come in and see me; they want to correspond by e-mail. It's fast, and they have a written version of something. That's how they want to do it. There's also technology like videoconferencing and 1-800 numbers. All of that helps us to be more accessible and available to our constituents. Certainly computers I think have made a huge difference in my riding.

We're also needing to look at issues of urban sprawl and, as I mentioned, urban infill plans. I think it is quite possible, and I would certainly encourage members of the commission to look at reducing the number of MLAs in the Alberta Legislature and having us work with . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: How many? What's the number?

MS BLAKEMAN: I don't know. That's the job of the commission, to look at that and figure it out.

Certainly in my discussions with representatives in other provinces – I mean, in BC they're representing 75,000 people in a riding, and they didn't seem the least bit flapped by it. I spent some time talking to different representatives there to find out how they were doing it. You know, they had more staff in their offices. They made better use of things like long-distance telephone lines; travel, aside from them driving themselves in their own cars, better access to travel across the province. It was certainly doable. So maybe what needs to happen out of this are recommendations from the commission to, I guess, Members' Services Committee to have a look at what's possible in constituency budgets. So you're reducing the number of MLAs in total but increasing the constituency budgets to allow people to hire more staff or take advantage of technological advances that would allow them to serve more people.

So I think there are lots of possibilities. Certainly as a member of the opposition in Alberta I approach this with trepidation. I trust and I know that the system is set up to make sure that this is a fair process, that there is no gerrymandering. Certainly there are fears about that; I'm not going to pretend there aren't. We've already gone through a process here in Alberta where the boundaries that were chosen were considered inappropriate under the court system and there was a request to re-examine it. In fact, that happened.

That was the '95-96 Electoral Boundaries Commission, and we've got their report here to look at. They're the ones that have come up with a number of these variables and how they approached it with a mathematical precision in trying to be fair.

So I'm willing to support the earlier date to establish the commission. I think that's important. I certainly wish them the best of luck, and I urge them to look forward. We're setting this for the next 10 years. I think technology will be very important. I encourage them to take all possibilities into consideration.

I know there are others following me waiting to speak, so I won't belabour the point at all. I hope that if the commission has an opportunity to read this and understand why we were supporting the earlier date, they're able to take advantage of the concerns and the hopes and the desires that I'm putting forward.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

4:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to add my voice to the number of hon. members of this Assembly who have expressed an interest in the boundaries commission getting an early start on their work. Certainly I would like to see, in my view, an eraser taken to the entire electoral map and the process of the election.

Alberta, I would remind all hon. members of this Assembly, has had a rather unique tradition and proud past as far as proportional representation goes – and I will discuss this in a minute – but one has to be very, very careful with each constituency. I would like to see 65 constituencies. I think we have far, far too many MLAs in this province. I think we could get by with 65. I don't think we need this number of constituencies with telecommunications the way they are today, Mr. Speaker, with the fax machine. We even have the RITE line. It's just not necessary. Other provinces, certainly Ontario comes to mind where I understand they have exactly – I could be wrong on this – the same number of MPPs as MPs they elect to Ottawa, or if it's not precisely the same number, it's within one or two.

Now, the gerrymandering that can occur is a reality. In the last redistribution 10 polls in the Bonnie Doon area were moved from the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They were moved. People asked me: why are we no longer in the constituency? Well, historically there was a large number of Liberal votes collected in those polls, and suddenly they were moved, Mr. Speaker. It was to give the Conservative candidate in this case a better chance of winning. The constituency was reduced.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, under 23(h), (i), and (j). I think there's a great deal of latitude being allowed in debate this afternoon, and by agreement I'm not concerned with the latitude or the fact that much of the debate isn't directly relevant to the section of the act being amended. But I think it goes way too far for the hon. member to suggest that this House in previous years, in passing the act which created the electoral boundaries, did so in a manner to gerrymander, I think was the term that he used, or in fact to take Liberal voters out of one constituency and put them into another constituency. That really is an affront to all members of the House at that time, and I think that by inference that's reprehensible to the members of this House.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order. I would refer the Government House Leader to the judgment of the Alberta Court of Appeal that was delivered on October 24, 1994, where the court was very critical of the electoral divisions that had been established, claiming that the very brief report of the select committee had offered no detailed explanation for the specific boundaries. So I would state that this member is completely within his mandate to be making the claims that he is.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, suggestions that decisions made outside of this Assembly would come under some veil of electoral irregularity are rather serious statements, and one would only hope that one who makes such statements would be doing more than providing opinion with respect to such statements and actually be in a position to back them up. Now, the chair, to his knowledge, is unaware of any statement by anyone, any court decision or any other statement outside of this Assembly ever, to suggest that there has been voting irregularity in the province of Alberta.

Certainly there is an independent officer appointed by this Assembly responsible to this Assembly called the Chief Electoral Officer, there's an all-party committee that supervises the work of the Chief Electoral Officer, and all reports of the Chief Electoral Officer are in fact filed in this Assembly, as is the work of the Chief Electoral Officer. To the chair's knowledge never once has there ever been a suggestion made by the Chief Electoral Officer that in fact such events have occurred.

So might I just ask for caution by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar with respect to certain comments?

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Precisely, the fact is that there were 10 polls that were removed after the 1993 election, 10 polls west of Connors Road.

AN HON. MEMBER: Don't go there.

MR. MacDONALD: I'm sorry. Every hon. member can look up the election results and count the number of votes that each respective party got in that election. That is just a fact, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Now, getting to my . . .

Speaker's Ruling Improper Inferences

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please, please. I mean, there's no advantage, hon. member. This particular chair has had three different constituencies in seven elections. In fact, at the time the hon. member was talking about, I think that this particular Speaker had probably 30 polls changed from one constituency to the next. This particular candidate at the time had to deal with the cards given to him. Never once did anybody come to this particular candidate and ask him: well, would you like to get rid of those 30 and get these 30? No, I don't think so. We all marched according to the documents given to us.

That's why I say: please, let's be cautious in our statements in here. Do we want the Chief Electoral Officer or somebody else to start sending letters to the Legislative Assembly lambasting an individual member of the Assembly for his statements in the Assembly? That will happen, but we don't need it.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between the 1924 election, the Edmonton by-election, and the 1955 provincial general

election this province, I would like to remind all hon. members, adopted a relatively complex and unusual system of both preferential and proportional voting. It's not that long ago. It's only two generations ago in this province that we had proportional voting. All constituencies except for Edmonton and Calgary were single-member constituencies. In single-member ridings electors marked their ballots in order of preference, and if no candidate received a majority of votes cast as the first preference of the electorate, the bottom candidate in the field was dropped.

MRS. NELSON: So what? Who cares?

MR. MacDONALD: Now, the hon. member says: "So what? Who cares?"

There was a system before in this Assembly of proportional representation. Not only would I like to see the boundaries commission look at different boundaries – that's fine – but also look at different ways of selecting members for this honourable Assembly. I see no problem with this. If you look at the makeup of the Assembly, there was Social Credit, there were Independents, there were Liberals in this time period, there were Veterans, and there were members of the Labour Party. They were all elected. I look at the election results from the vote last winter. You see that there is the Alberta First Party, the Alberta Greens. What I'm saying is that perhaps if there were a larger number of political parties represented in the Assembly, we would have a better government. There would be more voices heard. Why should not the Social Credit, if they get a certain percentage of the vote, be allowed a voice in this Assembly? Why should not the Alberta First Party be allowed, if they get a certain percentage of the vote, at least one voice in this Assembly? The Alberta Greens: if they get a certain percentage of the vote, why should they not be able to send someone to this Assembly? I think we would have a much better Assembly.

4:30

Now, we had in this province, Mr. Speaker, incredibly at one time, between 1959 and 1963 – and I'm sure this is going to please some people in the province – no recognized Official Opposition leader, but we do now fortunately. If these parties were in the Official Opposition or members of the opposition benches, I don't see what harm that would do. It would strengthen democracy, and this is what we need to take a look at. It's been part of our history in the past.

I think in conclusion I would again like to remind all hon. members that such systems of proportional and preferential balloting were relatively popular here in western Canada in the 1920s and again in the 1930s, but few other jurisdictions retained these methods of selecting representatives as long as Alberta did or applied them so broadly. Many political scientists, Mr. Speaker, generally agree that the popularity of both preferential and transferable ballots is connected to the widespread distrust in western Canada of the power of political parties. So perhaps we could lessen this distrust if there were more parties with representatives in this Assembly. The political history of Alberta is full of many individuals, stirring campaigns, and interesting experiments in democracy.

I think that at this time it is an excellent opportunity to have a look at preferential voting. It is used in many European jurisdictions. The first one that would come to mind, Mr. Speaker, is Switzerland. If this committee would have a look at this system of electing hon. members to the Assembly, I would suggest that in the time that we're allowing it, the extra year we are allowing it to do its work, it perhaps should entertain a complete change to how we select members to this Assembly, and we should select less members to this Assembly.

Thank you.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just make a couple of comments, and then I'll sit down. I know probably most people don't want to listen to any discussion on electoral boundaries. At least people in my constituency have never once brought up the issue between the times that the boundaries are reviewed. It seems like the only time we'd get into the comments that keep coming back every once in a while is when we have the opportunity to even mention electoral boundary reviews. I think it's worth noting that not everyone has the same point of view, and the ones that always seem to object to the boundaries being redrawn or making accusations that they're falsely drawn are those that don't have the majority in this House.

I know for instance, Mr. Speaker, when I first became elected in a by-election, we had had one of the longest serving MLAs in Little Bow for quite a number of years, and the previous member talked about how there needed to be more parties. Well, if my memory is correct, my former MLA served probably in no less than four. One he created himself; one was one of the old original governing parties, the Social Credit; also the Independent Party; and then he saw the light, apparently, in about 1989 and crossed the floor, I believe it's called, and sat as a member of the government. Following that time, of course, he went on to other things.

When I became elected, our constituency was about half the size of what it is today geographically. I find it interesting and I get a little bit upset, maybe not a little bit – I get awfully mad – when people suggest that there should be fewer MLAs and that they have a hardship dealing with special interest groups in a city two blocks from this very Legislature Building.

I would like to remind a lot of people here, maybe even some of my own city colleagues, that my riding is probably, give or take, the seventh or eighth largest in the province, but it's not big compared to my hon. colleagues from Highwood or Livingstone-Macleod, from Cardston-Taber-Warner or Drumheller-Chinook, from Strathmore-Brooks. They're all about the same, but actually when you look at it in terms of the overall province, they're quite gigantic, because it covers off an area basically from Airdrie south to the American border and from Saskatchewan over to B.C.

I found it interesting at the last electoral boundary review – and if anyone ever felt that some of the information in the backgrounders to that was contrived by us, it definitely wasn't. They had indices of the things that affected effective representation for an MLA, things like the number of elected boards that each of us represents, the number of municipalities, of local governments. I was quite amazed that with the small population my riding has in comparison to Calgary-Shaw and some of the larger ones in Edmonton and Calgary – when you factored in all the various elected boards that I was charged with helping to represent, the distance, the number of miles – other than my colleague from Athabasca-Wabasca my riding was apparently the second hardest to represent in this entire province. I didn't really think too much of it. I just thought that was part of the job. I didn't really get in a fit about whether or not I had 5,000 more or less than somebody in a city riding. I just thought it was kind of normal that a lot of people would expect to have to travel and drive like I do 13 weeks out of every year, to cover the mileage that I put on the truck. Thirteen weeks: that's a quarter of the year.

That's really amazing to a lot of the grade 6 students, which I know, Mr. Speaker, you'd appreciate. Many of us go to the social studies classes where they study federal and provincial and municipal governments, and they want to know what we do, because they think that all of us fly around in a jet from here to there. They are really amazed that we sit here as often as we do and that many of us have to travel five hours one way to get back home.

So I wanted to add those comments, not that it's going to make

any difference to some people's minds. Just the fact that if anything needs changing, maybe it's the whole legislation that requires us to review these boundaries after every second general election. I've never yet had one constituent in Little Bow ask us to change the boundaries. It never comes up. And if there is a piece of legislation that needs to be changed, this is it. Maybe we could rescind it.

[Motion carried; Bill 31 read a third time]

4:40

head: Royal Assent

MRS. MCCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor will now attend upon the Assembly.

[Mrs. McClellan and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: All rise, please. Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

THE SPEAKER: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois Hole, CM, and Mrs. McClellan entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

HER HONOUR: Please be seated.

THE SPEAKER: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has at its present sitting passed certain bills to which and in the name of the Legislative Assembly I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

THE CLERK: Your Honour, the following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed.

- 16 School Amendment Act, 2001
- 18 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001
- 21 Electronic Transactions Act
- 22 Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001
- 23 Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001
- 24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001
- 25 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act
- 26 Trustee Amendment Act, 2001
- 27 Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001
- 28 Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001
- 29 Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001
- 30 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No. 2)
- 31 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No. 2)
- 207 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, 2001
- 208 Alberta Official Song Act
- 209 Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001

[The Lieutenant Governor indicated her assent]

THE CLERK: In Her Majesty's name Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. McClellan left the Chamber]

[The Mace was uncovered]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as we await the return of the hon. Deputy Premier, let me just make several comments, and the pages will continue the work that they have to do.

First of all, let me congratulate all of you on the excellent work that was done in the calendar year 2001. I think the hon. Government House Leader was a bit modest earlier this afternoon when responding to the question from the Official Opposition House Leader as to the order of business for next week. The hon. Government House Leader basically said: well, the Order Paper for the first time in a long time is actually empty. In my memory I don't ever recall when the Assembly actually rose on the last day of session with an empty Order Paper. The table officers and I had a discussion, and we're going to undertake some historical research to see exactly how many times this has actually occurred in the Legislative Assembly in the province of Alberta since 1905. Such an accomplishment is absolutely unique, and of course it comes as a result of excellent leadership by the House leaders on the government side and excellent co-operation from the opposition House leaders. You cannot accomplish this without the two working together.

I might also point out that with the three additional private members' bills that were approved here yesterday, we now have arrived at 25 private members' bills which have received third reading in the province of Alberta since 1993. To my knowledge there's probably not one parliament anywhere in the world that can say one or two in the last eight years. This one can say 25. That makes it very, very unique.

Today we had another historical first. This has never happened before in the history of this Legislative Assembly, going back to 1905. For the first time in our history – hopefully, as well, it'll be the last time in the history of our Assembly – today an hon. member rose, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, and actually introduced guests who were listening via the Internet. That is unique, and I repeat: I hope that will be the first and the last time in the history of this Assembly in this province that that actually is going to happen.

If all of the hon. members go back one year from now, at this time in the year 2000 some members were tired and in anticipation of an upcoming, quote, provincial election. Some members were tired and nervous about an upcoming provincial election. Some people in this Assembly today were not members of this Assembly and were out wherever it was trying to organize, plan, create something for a provincial election. Since that time, you hon. members have had little time for rest. This has been a fast, fast moving 12 months. Quite frankly, it has been nonstop when you consider the events of last fall, the events of January, the events of February, the events of March, the events of April, and right through the whole thing. I ask you one thing: get some rest.

In the last few days I have been looking at all these agenda that various caucuses are setting aside for their various members for meetings in the month of December and the month of January and the month of February. There's no rule, there's no law in Alberta that Members of the Legislative Assembly must work 12 and 14 hours a day, seven days of the week, 52 weeks of the year. That's not a law; that's not a rule. That's a thing that you create for yourselves. I strongly ask you to consider that after these last 12

months you need to get some rest, and you need to get some time for yourselves. So please take advantage of that.

As the hon. Deputy Premier returns to the House, may I wish all of you the best for peace, health, joy, and family in this upcoming season.

The hon. Government House Leader.

4:50

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I take the

opportunity to wish all members of this Assembly a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and ask that we all take your advice to heart and in so doing move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn pursuant to Government Motion 16 agreed to April 24, 2001.

[Motion carried; pursuant to Government Motion 16 the Assembly adjourned at 4:51 p.m.]

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- No.3 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001
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- No.8 Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment Act, 2001
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- No.15 Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2001
- No.16 School Amendment Act, 2001
- No.17 Insurance Amendment Act, 2001
- No.18 Health Professions Amendment Act, 2001
- No.19 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001
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- No.21 Electronic Transactions Act
- No.22 Builders' Lien Amendment Act, 2001
- No.23 Regulated Accounting Profession Amendment Act, 2001
- No.24 Regulated Forestry Profession Amendment Act, 2001
- No.25 Victims Restitution and Compensation Payment Act
- No.26 Trustee Amendment Act, 2001
- No.27 Provincial Court Amendment Act, 2001
- No.28 Agricultural Operation Practices Amendment Act, 2001
- No.29 Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation Amendment Act, 2001
- No.30 Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2001 (No.2)
- No.31 Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2001 (No.2)

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- No.Pr.1 Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001
- No.Pr.2 Burns Memorial Trust Act
- No.Pr.3 Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act
- No.Pr.4 Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001

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- No.202 Insurance Statutes (Gender Premium Equity) Amendment Act, 2001
- No.203 Residential Care Housing Committee Act
- No.204 Medicare Protection Act
- No.205 Municipal Government (Farming Practices Protection) Amendment Act, 2001
- No.206 Regional Health Authorities Conflicts of Interest Act
- No.207 Alberta Personal Income Tax (Tools Credit) Amendment Act, 2001
- No.208 Alberta Official Song Act
- No.209 Highway Traffic (Bicycle Safety Helmet) Amendment Act, 2001
- No.210 Alberta Personal Income Tax (In-Home Care and Dependant Tax Credit) Amendment Act, 2001
- No.211 Citizens' Initiative Act
- No.212 Matrimonial Property Amendment Act, 2001
- No.214 Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act
- No.215 Health Insurance Premiums Act Repeal Act
- No.218 School (Class Size Targets) Amendment Act, 2001
- No.219 Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001 (No.2)

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